

## What's the big deal?

A problem is nothing more than the gap between a current situation and a desired situation.



Problem solving is just a matter of closing that gap – right?!?.

Not so easy. The ability to effectively problem solve is frequently challenged by not being clear about the desired situation (goals, vision), a similar lack of clarity about the current situation, and/or an inability to develop creative solutions that bring lasting improvement.

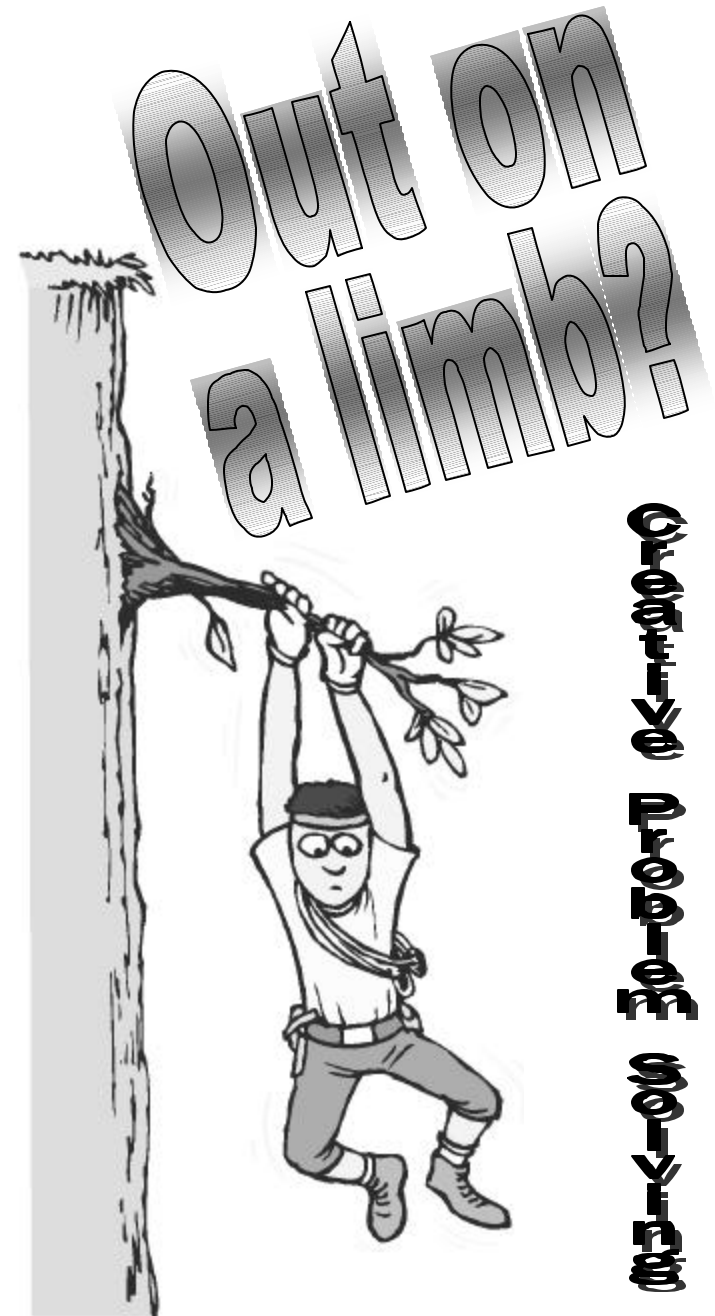
Redpath and Associates LLC empowers communities and their supporting organizations to excel by building on our clients' core assets. We foster transformation by providing application of, and training and coaching in: exceptional and innovative approaches to marketing, communications, event management, customer service, leadership, cooperation, creativity, board governance, and management. Our clients and associates benefit from our culture that is committed to learning, excellence, integrity, respect, innovation, and concern for future generations.

Marketing  
Public Relations  
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**A pocket guide to Creative Problem Solving for Communities and the organizations that serve them.**



# A quick guide to Creative Problem Solving

Your brain is a miraculous, powerful, problem solver. But even the best brain is often confounded by any of a myriad of influences: over-familiarity with the issue, habit, jumping to conclusions, fixing the wrong problem, and being rushed to accept the first seemingly good answer, to name a few. Following is a brief guide to avoiding these constraints on your great mind.

When challenged by a sticky or recurring problem engage in a creative problem solving process. Disciplining yourself to a proven process will frequently bring exciting results.

At each stage of the process gather as much input as possible withholding judgment on it. Then focus down to the most applicable information.

## Creative Problem Solving Process

- Analyze the Problem
- Redefine the Problem
- Generate Ideas
- Select & Evaluate Ideas
- Implementation

### 1. Analyze the Problem

Often, what appears to be a problem is a symptom of a somewhat different problem or is the wrong problem entirely. By analyzing the problem, we become clear about

what the current situation is, and what the desired situation is. Then the gap between the two can be identified and worked on.

Do some good detective work using basic questions; who, what, where, when, why, how. Ask each question many times from different perspectives.

### 2. Redefine the Problem

Define the problem in terms of the current situation and the desired situation so that the problem - the gap - is targeted for solution.

#### Questions are Your Friends

Who? What? Where?  
When? Why? How?  
What else? What if?

### 3. Generate Ideas

Time to close the gap! Follow the rules for classical brainstorming or use another idea generation tool. Generate lots of ideas without passing judgment. Often the best solution comes well into the process, after it seems that all possible ideas are exhausted.

### 4. Select and Evaluate Ideas

This is another area where the process often breaks down. Before selecting and evaluating ideas, decide on what criteria you will base your determinations.

Again, develop as many possibilities as possible and then focus down on a few criteria that make the most sense.

### 5. Implementation

Apply creative processes to developing your plan of action. Be sure to build in feedback so that you can adjust your plan for optimum success.

#### Classical Brainstorming

##### Two Principles

- Defer judgment
- Quantity breeds quality

##### Four Rules

- Criticism is ruled out
- Freewheeling is welcome
- Quantity is wanted
- Combination and improvement are sought

#### Consider using a professional facilitator

Frequently your problem solving will be more effective if you retain a neutral professional to facilitate your process. Redpath and Associates is experienced in this process and our only stake in the outcome is your success. We can facilitate your creative problem solving sessions, train your staff in creative problem solving, or consult with you to assist in solving your problems.