Problem Solving

Six-Step Problem-Solving Process

Step One: Define the Problem: "What is the problem?"

- How often does the problem occur?
- When does it occur?
- When doesn't it occur?
- Where does it occur most often?
- Who tends to be involved with the problem most often?
- Keep in mind the problem may change in scope as you examine it more closely at each step. As you discuss what the problem is ask: How do we know this? Work from data and not from assumptions or opinions. Obtain "before" and "after" measures.

Step Two: Identify the Causes of the Problem: "Why is this happening?"

- Identify the root causes of the problem. Ask the team WHY up to five times for each suggested cause. Remember the 4 "Ps": People, Plant, Policies, and Procedures.

- After identifying the causes, you may need to redefine the problem (or goal statement). You may also discover other problems which you were unaware of that may be addressed using this same process.

Step Three: Brainstorm Possible Solutions.

- Keeping the data and root causes of the problem in mind, brainstorm potential solutions.

- Remember the basic rules of brainstorming: no discussion or evaluative comments, keep it moving quickly, piggy backing is encouraged, and have fun with it. Encourage creativity. Combine, refine, and build on ideas. Find out what other organizations in similar situations have done. If possible, allow for even more creative ideas to emerge.

Problem Solving

Six-Step Problem-Solving Process (continued)

Step Four: Select the Best Solutions.

- Establish criteria for selecting a solution.

- Evaluate the potential solutions against your criteria.

- Once solutions have been selected, ask each other: "What could possibly go wrong if we do this?" If there is no way to counter serious obstacles, the team may need to think of other more appropriate solutions.

Step Five: Implement the Plan.

- Develop a plan for implementation, including measures, and how progress will be monitored. If approval is required, implement after approval is obtained.

- It may be preferential to implement on a pilot basis or small scale at first.

Step Six: Follow-Up, Evaluate, and Monitor Progress.

- While you can not begin this step until after the solution is implemented, it is very important to develop a follow-up plan.

- You also need to decide how you will study the effects of the changes and you need to plan to make improvements as needed.

Problem Solving

Worksheet

Define the problem:

_____
_____
_____

What are the causes:

_____
_____
_____

What contributes to the problem:

_____
_____
_____

SOLUTION	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES

Problem Solving

Worksheet (continued)

ACTION PLAN TABLE				
WHAT	**WHO**	**TARGET DATE**	**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**	**WHEN COMPLETED**