

10 Tips for Problem-Solving & Critical Thinking in the Workplace

► The United States Department of Labor describes problem-solving and critical thinking as “the ability to use knowledge, facts, and data to effectively solve problems.” Problem-solving and critical thinking play a crucial role in the workplace.

Employees demonstrate the ability to discover solutions, think through issues, and make decisions in a brief time. They demonstrate creativity by thinking out of the box and discovering innovative ways of accomplishing team goals. The United States Department of Labor in their “Skills to Pay the Bills” curriculum states, “Employers say they need a workforce fully equipped with skills beyond the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic to grow their businesses. These skills include critical thinking and problem-solving, according to a 2010 Critical Skills Survey by the American Management Association and others.”

Below are 10 tips for problem-solving and critical thinking in the workplace.



1. Understand the Steps in Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving

- State the problem or question.
- Gather information.
- Review the information.
- Examine the information gathered.
- Make a decision.
- Share the results with others.

2. Ask Basic Questions

- What is it about?
- What happened?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- Why did it happen?
- How did it happen?

3. Practice Self-Awareness

- Understand your biases.
- Question your first instinct.
- Do not jump to conclusions.
- Recognize what you do well and what you need to improve.

4. Think on Your Feet

- Be able to find solutions quickly.
- Think through problems that come up.
- Make decisions.
- Take a step back and evaluate decisions before moving forward.

5. Be Creative

- Try new ideas.
- Find new solutions.
- Look for new ways of doing things.
- Use new methods to solve problems.

6. Make Decisions in Stressful Situations

- Remain alert and calm.
- Reframe the problem.
- Prioritize.
- Move toward the goal.

7. Pay Attention to Detail

- Look at every part of the problem.
- Think through fine points.
- Think of all possible solutions.
- Maintain efficiency.

8. Expand Your Technical Skills

- Take classes to build knowledge.
- Find opportunities to gain experience.
- Talk with professionals.
- Discover volunteer opportunities.

9. Build Critical Thinking Skills

- Play games that require critical thinking skills.
- Put puzzles together.
- Think ahead.
- Actively volunteer to solve problems.

10. Improve Your Knowledge

- Take time to think.
- Read books on improving critical thinking.
- Learn something new every day.
- Focus.

Employers are seeking individuals who possess these skills. Work toward improving your critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Solving issues that arise at work is important in becoming more productive. Employees should be able to work on the job without someone telling them exactly what to do, how to do it, and why they should do it. Problem-solving and critical thinking are essential skills for employees to be successful in the workplace.

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