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## **“What Is A Problem?”**

**Or The Solution Is Too Often The Problem!**

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**Problems are where the action is. Having no problems would be deadly dull. Being unable to solve problems would be deadly crippling. But being able to master problems is part of the reach towards happiness. Take a look at the revolutionary ideas in these two sections. You will be amazed.**

### **What is a Problem?**

Is there such a thing as the anatomy of a problem—the generic case that will help us understand and solve all problems?

Sure!

A problem has two parts, a desire or aim and something opposing that desire. There has to be two parts, otherwise it is not a problem. Cancer is not a problem if you want cancer, see?

That's why you see so many happy, smiling faces in the slums of India. Being poor isn't a problem if you don't desire to be rich!

Remember the T-shirt print joke: "I don't have a drink problem. I drink. I fall over drunk. No problem." If that's what you really want, there really is no problem. Excess drinking is only a problem if you want to stop and can't.

Then there are two parts to the situation: the genuine desire to stop and the overwhelming urge to drink.

Of course we want only good things for ourselves; things that bring happiness and success. So if we have a bad circumstance that's always a problem, because we want better for ourselves and our loved ones.

This leads to the unfortunate common belief that a "problem" is just one thing—the unwanted half.

That's not true. It's a 2-part thing.

### **Is that important?**

Sure, it's VERY important. Because if we focus on only one thing, we are only including half the input data in our solution.

Not only that, but focusing on the bad half is not the way to go. This is very surprising to people when I coach them. But it's nevertheless true. We are taught to focus on the "problem" and look for "solutions"

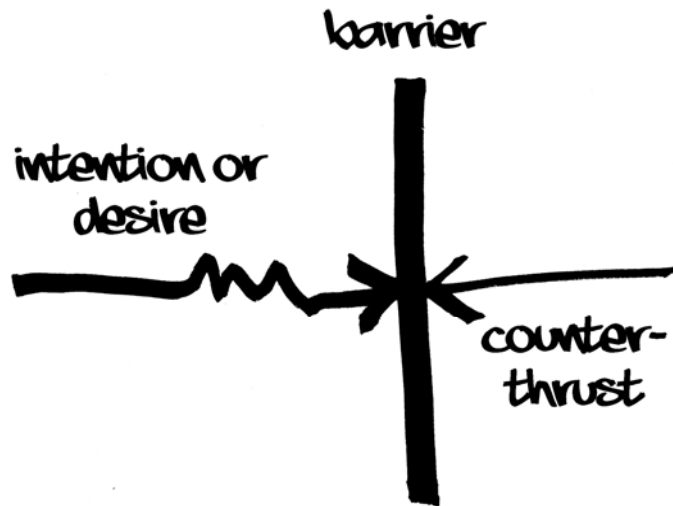
You have a disease—let's take the cancer example. If you focus only on the tumor, you are probably going to lose! As I said this is a 2-part circumstance. So there's health on one side and cancer on the other.

Now if you focus on the health side, you can win. Better nutrition, detoxing, emotional clean-up, strengthening the immune system in every which-way are all valid means of re-enforcing what you do want, rather than getting bogged down in what you don't want.

I'll come back to this theme of focusing only on what you want again in more detail later. It's the most powerful way to blow apart problems I know.

In the meantime, just see the basic anatomy of a problem as a composite of an intention (desire, purpose, want) and the conflicting element that blocks it. Both parts have to be present, otherwise there is literally NO PROBLEM!

Take a look at this sketch:



This is the anatomy of a problem, in schematic. It shows the familiar “stuckness” (can’t think what to do, can’t decide which way to jump, feeling of frustration). Oftentimes we think to ourselves “If only I knew what to do, I would do it and get rid of the problem”.

We try to think of actions that will get us round the barrier. That is what we mean by a so-called solution.

But it may not be as simple as that. In fact, if we just look for solutions, we could be digging ourselves deeper into difficulties.

### **The Solution is another problem.**

Something else that is not taught a great deal: most “problems” are actually solutions to things. Somebody wants the problem, surprising though that may seem.

If the “problem” is helpful, it’s going to be next to impossible to “solve” it—because that would create another problem, do you see?

I met a woman once who openly argued that she wanted to be overweight and unattractive, to avoid men pestering her. Problem? No—THIS WAS THE SOLUTION! The problem turned out to be abuse and molestation as a child.

If a woman in a wheelchair controls all those around her, getting sympathy, extra attention and power to dictate her demands, I think a physician or healer is going to have a very hard time looking for ways to solve this woman's disability. A miraculous new cure that works on many other people may not work on her. Her "problem" is a solution to something that most people cannot manage in their lives—getting their own way all the time.

Let's not get gender biased and let's suggest the same idea for a man. Males are notoriously bad at communicating their feelings. Sometimes they are in a great deal of emotional pain but cannot talk about it. So a man turns to drink. His drunken rages and violence are not a problem to him, that's only a problem to the wife and family. His problem is inner torment and the desire to be rid of it. So he drinks as the solution; drink is not the problem (for him).

That's why trying to help a drinker can be very unrewarding.

You're trying to take away his solution, not the actual problem!

### **So beware in your interpretations.**

Brilliant psychologist Virginia Satyr understood this in a powerful way when she developed her specialty of Conjoint Family Therapy. After years of wise intervention in family quarrels and ills, she began to understand that a sick person in a family may be (perceived as) necessary for that family. It was a solution (to something). So when she helped a schizophrenic recover, the gain was often neutralized by the fact that someone else in the family would develop the same affliction.

Exactly as if it was something the whole family needed or wanted. Somehow the "problem" was the solution they needed!

That's why she decided treating people alone was not really viable. To "cure" someone was often just to make someone else suffer. So she worked on ways to get the whole family to change their dynamic; thus there could be conjoint healing.

### **Comparison are odious**

I encountered this as a keynote philosophy when I was at med school and a passionate investigator of all things Zen! I joined the university judo team and wrote Japanese, zen-style poems (I actually won International 1st prize, an all-expenses paid trip round the world in 1967).

This isn't the place to go into the whole subject but just the act of flinging out the desire to compare things (and so create dissatisfaction) was a miracle transformation for me.

If you don't compare and so create wants and deficiencies, you create fewer problems for yourself. If you are broke, it's not a problem! Not at all!

UNLESS—you want to be richer. Then this meets the anatomy of a problem; there is a want or intention (be wealthy) and a counter-intention or conflict, which is being broke.

If you can accept most things, you'll have fewer problems. So be tolerant! By the way, this does not mean don't strive for improvement. It means don't be discontented with what you've got. Just work on it and fix it...

### **“Show Me” The Answer (no, show me IS the answer!)**

The following remedy, developed by my friend and colleague Susan Flood, despite its deceptive simplicity, has huge potential for sorting out even major areas in a person's life. It should be taught to all counsellors, especially psychiatrists and psychologists.

It actually relies on another important principle, which is derived from the writings of Count Alfred Korzybski. His famous aphorism "The map is not the territory" is a way of saying that inner (mind) reality and the outer (real) world are NOT the same. We suffer only from our inner representations or "maps". We do not suffer from the outer reality at all.

If we lose someone and we grieve, the upset is entirely within us. None of it exists in the physical actuality beyond our skulls.

This is important because we can change the inner reality, without messing about with the real world in doing so. We can alter how we feel, without needing to alter any of the circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Thus we can repair hurts; counselling can take place; the magic of Transformational Psychology becomes effective.

## Representation

Susan's technique is to use small objects to demonstrate or represent the solid realities of a mental concept being worked with. We talk here of the "substance", (the solidity or actuality) and the "meaning" (that is, the mental equivalent and what we think about the stuff—what it means to us).

Thus a car is solid "stuff", so is a block of wood that we pretend to be a car, but the *idea* of a car and the freedom concept it holds for most of us would be the inner meaning.

Going back to Korzybski's brilliant insight, the idea of a car is the map and, since we don't have a car, we use a pretend object (the territory) to say "Let that represent the car in this demonstration".

By depicting events and people in this way - and how we react to them - laid out on a table top, we can gain immeasurably greater insights into the mechanics of our problems and so help them vanish.

The "stuff" being represented need not be solid physical objects, however. It is equally valid to introduce "honesty", "sexual attraction" or "can't communicate" in the demonstration. The idea of honesty is the map, the object we choose to represent it becomes the territory.

I hope this is clear. If not, re-reading it a few times may be worth it. It's important!

## Show-Me Kits

Any collection of objects will do. We can use elastic bands, paper clips, bottle tops, sugar lumps and so forth. I call this a "show-me" kit. A handful of coins will do fine at a pinch!

This is the one I use at home:



A woman's handbag, incidentally, makes a wonderful portable show-me kit. It usually contains lipstick, nail file, comb, eye-brow pencil, brushes and the like, all of which can be pressed into service to represent "husband", "boyfriend", "the boss", a hobby, time frame, how we FEEL about the boss and so on.

### Break It Down Into Parts

Each part of life's situation or aspect of the problem that is being worked on is laid out separately. So, for example, it is not sufficient merely to lay down a comb and say "That's the problem". What parts does the problem have? Who are the people involved? What is *unknown* about this situation? What communication is missing? and so on.

Set all these out, using a different object for each mental construct.

Susan points out that a relationship may have as many as six different games running in it. These need to be teased apart and viewed separately.

You will find that merely examining the problem in detail is therapeutic. Often, the real difficulty surfaces quite early and resolves rapidly.

Generally, of course, the individual will have to work at this for some hours or days.

## Guiding

If you are doing this with someone as a counsellor, you may need to prompt a little and keep the client focused on what matters, especially in regard to the next section. Mostly we leave the person to work it out for themselves. On no account try to give your idea of what solution might be, no matter how tempting to do so; that won't help as much as you think.

It is having the individual LOOK at the problem which produces the beneficial effect. That's why putting down the "mass" is so effective. It has to be confronted.

It is interesting that later on the person remembers most vividly what the resolution was, in terms of the show-me kit objects. The significance is remembered as the mass. It's a sort of *aide memoire*. The client might even begin to think "This is a lipstick situation again!"

## What Is Unknown Is Where The Success Lies

There will be parts that are confusing and difficult to represent in this way. The individual may tend to avoid these as being too difficult. This would be to misunderstand what is being attempted. These difficulties, or the helpless "i don't know" snarls, are the exact areas being sought.

Solving or clarifying THESE areas is what brings about the resolution of the difficulty.

John Holt puts it well, in his book "How Children Fail" (Penguin 1990), *"The fact is that problems and answers are simply different ways of looking at a relationship, a structure, an order. A problem is a picture with a piece missing; the answer is the missing piece"*.

So we get the person to take apart the unknownness, piece by piece. What elements is this difficulty or blankness composed of? This is the all important question that gradually reveals the missing factors. Once the unknownness of the problem has been eliminated, it will be seen to resolve.

"Resolving", in this sense, can mean:

- unwanted conditions simply disappear or
- the parts re-align in a harmonious and stress-free relation
- a troublesome mental image picture filled with pain will drop away or vanish, taking the negative emotion with it



## Now For An Example

Susan quoted me the case of a woman, a wife and mother of two children who was struggling to come to terms with the meaning of her life. Like many married women who begin to question themselves, she seemed to be devoured by her family responsibilities and have no real life or identity of her own.

When asked to demonstrate all this, she set out the players, one mass for each person and several more representing different aspects of her difficulty. She moved the parts around and around, looking for insight. But she then set around in a circle *all the things which were not part of her relationship with her husband or children.*

This one simple act revealed to her something she had never grasped, which was that she had many interests and outlets that were *nothing to do with the family.* She was greatly surprised and interested in what, to her, was a sudden revelation.

She was able from then to delve into many of these interests and recover some of her self-esteem. Other subtle and unlooked for changes also came about; the children, instead of being a nuisance, suddenly appeared as her allies in dealing with father. The husband himself wasn't "resolved" much at all but her life changed most remarkably. Now the three of them could work together, to accommodate father's demands and make light out of a situation that had hitherto seemed so overwhelming and destructive to her.

The flowers, hugs and apologies began to flow.

## Cold Cure

Susan also has success curing colds using this method. Most so called "colds" (upper respiratory tract infections) are triggered, not by viruses (which abound everywhere) but by emotional upheavals, especially events which represent loss. The virus merely moves in and starts its mischief, once the ground had been readied.

She gets her clients to demo the existing mental environment, locating which are the key issues and gets those broken down and fully viewed, using the demo kit, until they vanish or realign harmoniously.

Remarkably, at this point the cold too often vanishes!

## Part 2. Creatively Dealing With Problems

There is an extremely powerful approach to life's problems, which is to sit with the individual and have them think-up (invent, imagine, create) "a similar kind of problem" to the one which is bothering them. Have him or her come up with other trouble variants that are at least as complex and major as the one that's bugging them.

It is one of the most powerful procedures I know of and is capable of reducing the person's pain and distress enormously. Yet it does not require an enormous insight into the workings of the mind to use effectively.

We are harnessing the person's creative energy and not delving into negative areas of experience in the way that, say, regression therapy does. As a positive gain rather than a negative gain procedure which cannot easily be overrun, it can be used on a very wide variety of people and problems.

This makes it an ideal tool for what I call the car qualified practitioner (a "have a go" helper, not a professional; you know, the kind of conversation you could have with someone while driving along in a car).

When directed against an individual's fixed condition, (divorce, cancer, broken leg, etc), or even other long-term problems that the individual wants to get rid of, the person goes very thoroughly and immediately into session. He or she has an intense interest in getting rid of the problem and is almost invariably willing to talk to the practitioner/counsellor.

One reason for this willingness, is that the individual does not have to dig out or reveal any damaging truths about themselves. Another reason this procedure is peculiarly suitable to car qualified work.

Here we are exercising a person's creative ability to mock up or create mental structures, which can be done for ever, rather than trying to eliminate negative emotional energy from unpleasant memory. So it cannot easily be overdone, as some techniques can.

It enables the spiritual being or mental composite to rise above the mass of negative energy *without viewing it in detail*. It simply moves the crushing weight of disempowering burden off the case.

## Action

Start by asking the person for a description of the problem. Encourage talk by saying "Tell me about it".

Ask *"How could that be worse?"*

Get the individual to tell you how far away the problem seems to be. If it is overwhelming, the person will be sitting right in the middle of the mass of the problem and will not perceive any distance between self and it. Then, as the remedy is run, the mental mass of the problem will begin to move away and the individual will perceive that it is gradually moving further off.

The mass of the problem doesn't seem to get any smaller in doing this, but being more distant, it feels less important or threatening. The neuro-linguistic programmers noticed a long time ago that if you moved the mental construct of something away from yourself, its force or impact on you is diminished.

When you have worked the problem mass out to a good distance, i.e. several yards, ask the person to give you some solutions to the problem. This is an interesting experiment. He or she will soon notice that the mass is moving back in again!

So have him or her invent some more problems and the mass will move out safely once more. Point this out and warn the person against "solutions".

Very quickly the person will come to realise that having to "solve" a problem glues it firmly to you.

More exactly, this mechanism of moving a problem mass out by inventing problems, and then solutions bringing it in, shows us that worry is what moves a problems mass in on an individual. Worry is composed of fear of unknown bad consequences. Worry is about trying to find "solutions" and the fear that we cannot "solve" the problem.

The real answer is to move the problem right away.

If a woman is pained by desertion of her husband, "solutions" can seem very scarce (they are!) But if she creates more problems, like having cancer, no legs, being blind and so on, pretty soon the absent husband won't seem such a big deal!

Really, it's that easy and that humane!

## The End Result

The best end result to look for is that the person no longer has any need to solve or handle that particular problem. In other words, in ordinary parlance, it has ceased to be a problem. It doesn't need a solution if it is no longer a problem.

It is inadequate to run the process to the point where the person says "I can now handle it" or "I have just thought of a solution". Although this may be quite acceptable to the person concerned, the skilled car qualified operator would know that that an effective remedy has not yet been attained.

Only leave it at this stage if time is against you. Otherwise finish it up thoroughly.

Once the problem is gone, there may be another problem coming into view. But that is the end of *that* problem.

The truth is we need problems. Life would be very boring without them. What we don't need is huge unsolvable problems that freeze up our thought processes.

## Summary

Procedure for the creative problems process is as follows:-

1. Have the person state the problem or condition he or she wants to get rid of (not "solve", notice).
2. If not stated in problem form, (two opposing halves) the stated condition is not a problem.
3. Ask the individual how that problem could be worse.
4. Now have the person invent similar problems to that problem (at least as bad as).
5. Help the person, as needed, to invent such a problem.
6. Ask how the new problem(s) could be worse.
7. Ask a person to invent a problem at least as bad as new problem.

8. Repeat, 5, 6,7, at least ten times.
9. Ask the person how the original problem how seems to him or her.
10. Repeat 3, to 9

### Note

There is an important point here which may be easily overlooked which will drastically reduce the efficacy of this remedy.

When you have got the person interested in an invented problem, their attention will now have shifted to the new problem. At that point, we then say invent a problem of comparable magnitude to **that** problem, we mean comparable or similar to the one just invented, and not the original problem.

It is very important not to put the person's attention back on the original problem too soon in this way. We run many steps of 5, 6, 7, etc., before we now check how the original problem seems.

It will not work effectively, if the person simply invents a problem comparable to problem A and another problem comparable to problem A and another problem comparable to problem A and so on....

He or she must invent a problem comparable to problem A which we will call B; next invent a problem comparable to B which we will call C; then invent a problem comparable to C which we will call D; and so on...

In this way, the original problem is moved out from the person.

You will also find, interestingly, the character of the invented problems begins to alter. This denotes a change in perception of the nature of the original problem too. This is what we are looking for.

Incidentally, when you ask the person to review the original problem on step 9, you want them to look newly at it and not tell you reflexly what his or her attitude was before you sat down to work on it.

Emphasise "How does the original problem seem to you NOW?"

If the problem is still a problem, repeat 3 to 9 again.

## When To Intervene

You can help the person invent problems and even invent a few for him or her, or make suggestions of ways in which it could be worse, to get the person moving. For example, he or she suggests "I'm poor, I don't have enough to eat" but can't think how it could be worse, suggest having no hands, or perhaps leprosy.

However, you must not fall for entirely inventing for the person; this remedy has to come from the person's own creative thinking, otherwise it is ineffective.

A good tip however, is to get them to invent problems that are bigger than the original problem.

Pretty soon, any problem in life can be made to seem less than it is or even completely unimportant

Sincerely,

Keith Scott-Mumby

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