Pathstream

How to Be the Problem Solver Everyone Wants on Their Team

Pathstream Webinar Series

Today's Goals

01 Practice identifying different kind of problems

02 Share strategies to develop problem-solving skills

⚠️ Please add any questions you have in the Q&A feature. You can even add questions anonymously.

Types of Problems

Routine

Routine problems occur regularly and predictably. The solutions are well-known and standardized, and they can be handled using existing procedures. They don't involve complex decision making or analysis even though they are important to solve.

Example:

A Routine Problem at Work

The customer service team at an online retail company receives an average of 50 inquiries per day about order tracking and delivery status. These inquiries typically involve customers asking for updates on their package location or estimated delivery date. In most cases, that information can be found in a system that all the associates are trained to know how to use. The team needs to efficiently address these requests to maintain customer satisfaction and manage their daily workload.

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Types of Problems: Routine

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Standardized solutions

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| Regularly occurring | Standardized solutions | Familiar and important |

Types of Problems

Complex

Complex problems don't have a single obvious solution. They need to be understood so that the root cause can be addressed. Often, complex problems arise when different routine problems occur simultaneously.

Example:

A Complex Problem at Work

A customer calls the online retail company with a question about their order's delivery status. The call center agent doesn't see the order in their system, and without access to the order **they can't answer the customer's questions**. The agent recognizes that this issue probably points toward a bigger underlying problem, since **they've never seen it before**. The agent tells their supervisor, who **suggests they connect with another team to gather more information**.

| No obvious solution | Unfamiliar | Needs to be understood first |

Types of Problems: Complex

Example:

Another Complex Problem at Work

A company is experiencing an alarming rate of employee turnover. The departures are across different departments and levels of seniority, affecting team productivity, project timelines, and overall company morale. Management is struggling to identify clear patterns or reasons for the exodus. The high turnover rate is now impacting the company's ability to deliver on contracts with its partners.

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Out of the ordinary	No clear, single cause	Problem must be analyzed before it can be solved

Types of Problems

Ambient

When routine or complex problems recur over a long period of time, they can become ambient problems. Ambient problems often become part of the status quo. In order for ambient problems to be solved, they first need to be recognized, named, and assigned ownership. Since these problems lack a clear owner and are difficult to identify, they often go unaddressed.

Types of Problems: Ambient

Example:

An Ambient Problem at Work

Over the last five years, team morale has dropped. Productivity isn't the issue; even though their workload has increased, the team has kept up with leadership's expectations. Many of the systems they use were created when the team was smaller, and people often complain that processes are flawed but no one does anything to change them. In general, it feels like some energy and enthusiasm has been lost. Some of the newer employees don't even know that it didn't used to feel this way.

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An Ambient Problem at Work

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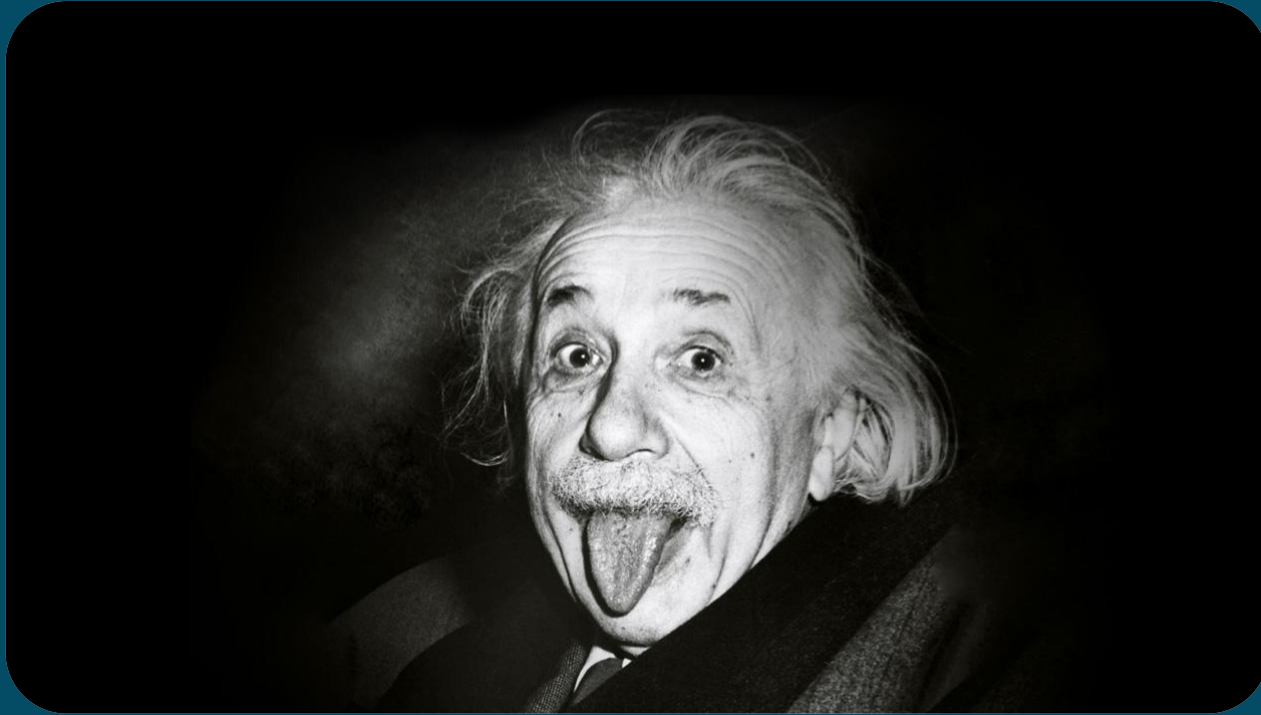
| Persistent, suboptimal state | Lack of ownership | Seen as status quo |

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Many problems we can solve are made even more difficult due to:

1. **Decision Fatigue**

2. **Status Quo Bias**

3. **Lack of Ownership**

4. **Perfectionism**

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1 **Decision Fatigue**

The mental exhaustion that occurs after making a series of decisions

2 **Status Quo Bias**

The tendency to value familiarity over change

3 **Lack of Ownership**

Not fully experiencing one's own agency

4 **Perfectionism**

When progress is stunted by a fear of failure

Which do you face most often at work?

1 **Decision Fatigue**

The mental exhaustion that occurs after making a series of decisions

2 **Status Quo Bias**

The tendency to value familiarity over change

3 **Lack of Ownership**

Not fully experiencing one's own agency

4 **Perfectionism**

When progress is stunted by a fear of failure

So, how do we address each of these issues?

1 **Decision Fatigue**
The mental exhaustion that occurs after making a series of decisions

Tool: The Eisenhower Matrix

1   **Make a list of all the tasks you need to complete, in no particular order**

Tool: The Eisenhower Matrix

(1) **Make a list of all the tasks you need to complete, in no particular order**

Make annual dental cleaning appointment for Lucy
Buy decorations for Dougie's party on Saturday
Add filters to email inbox
Prep presentation for the meeting tomorrow

Tool: The Eisenhower Matrix
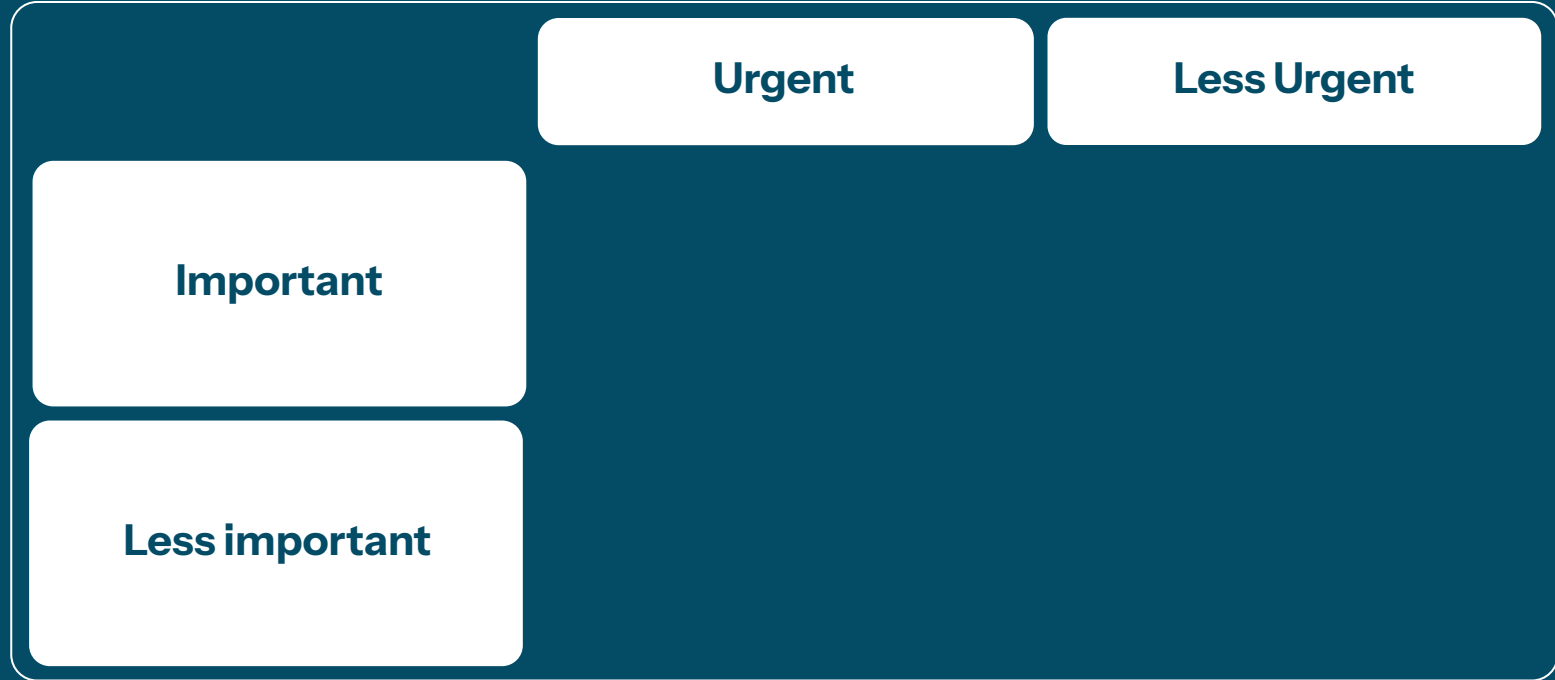
2 **Populate the matrix with your tasks**

	Urgent	Less Urgent
Important		
Less important		

Tool: The Eisenhower Matrix

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	Urgent	**Less Urgent**
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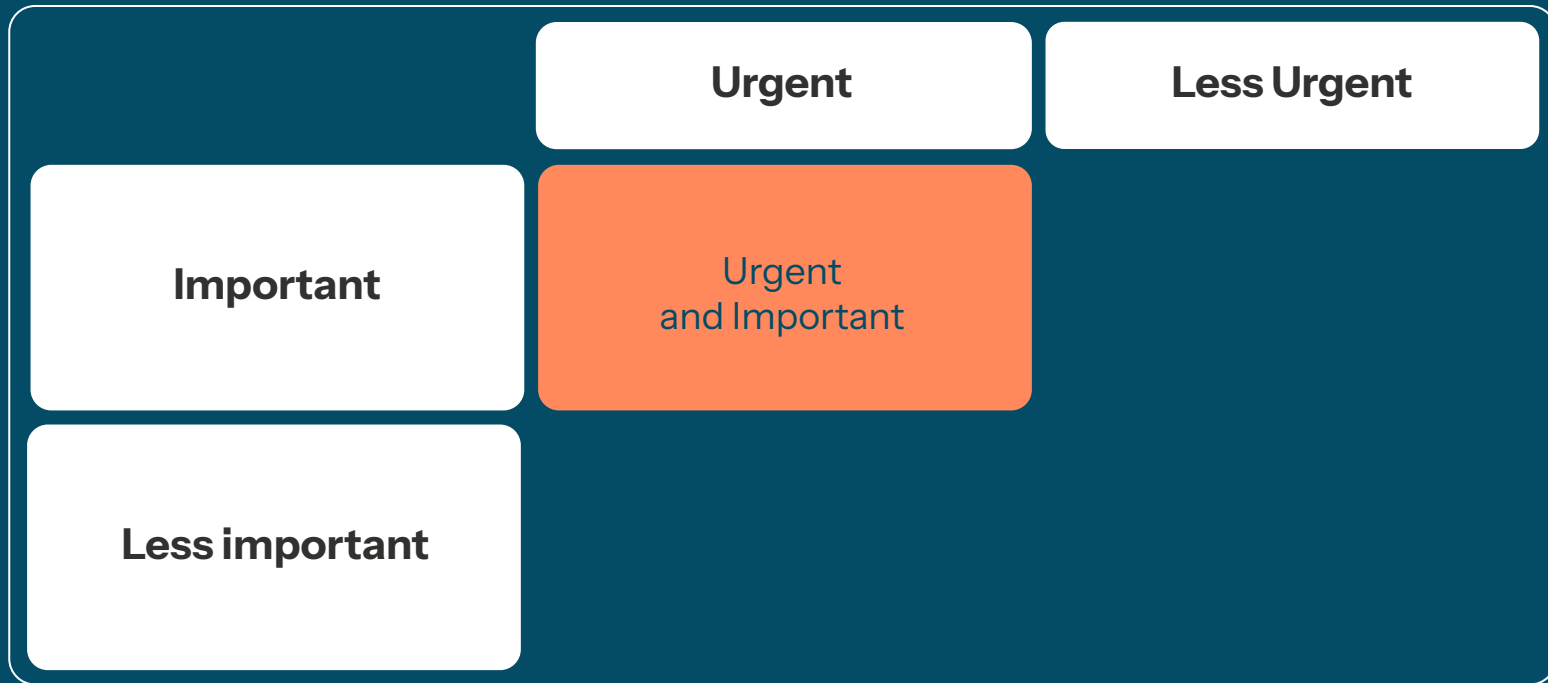
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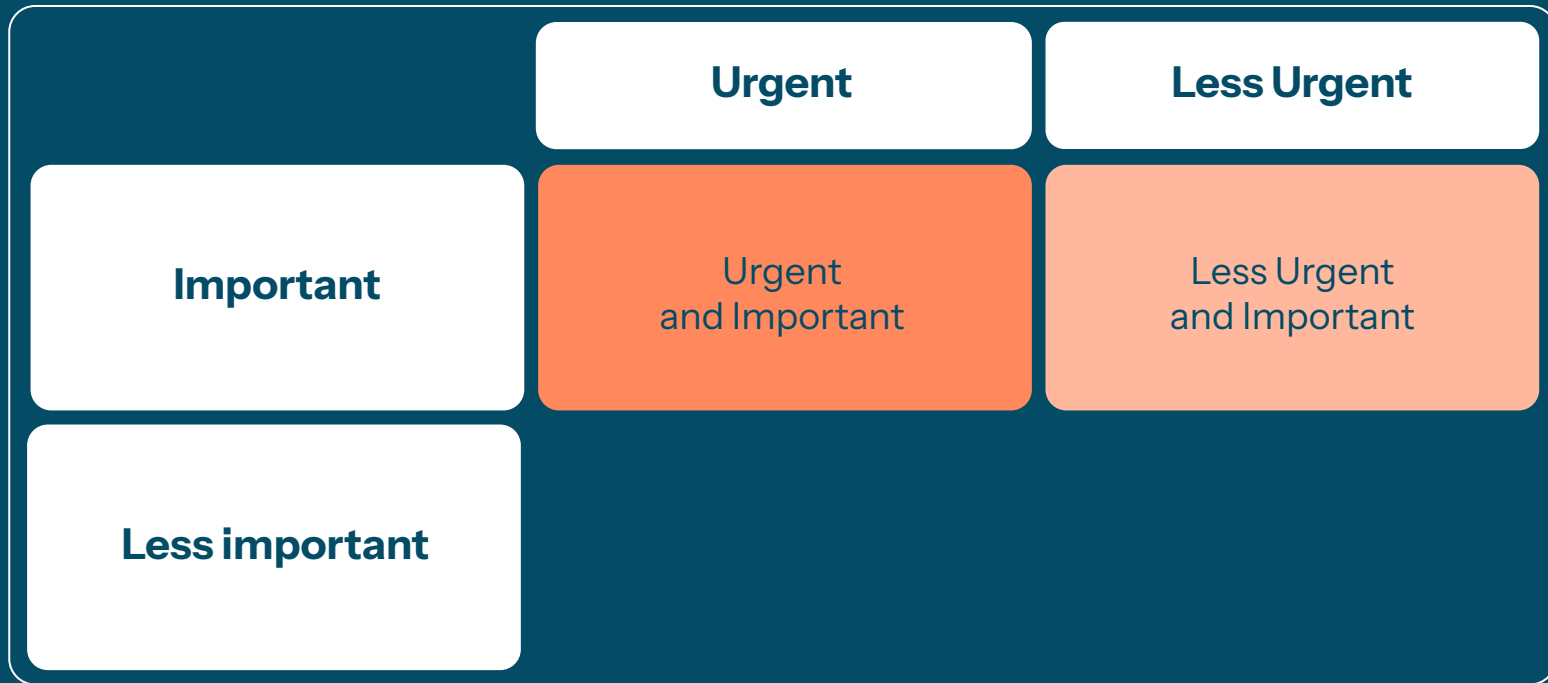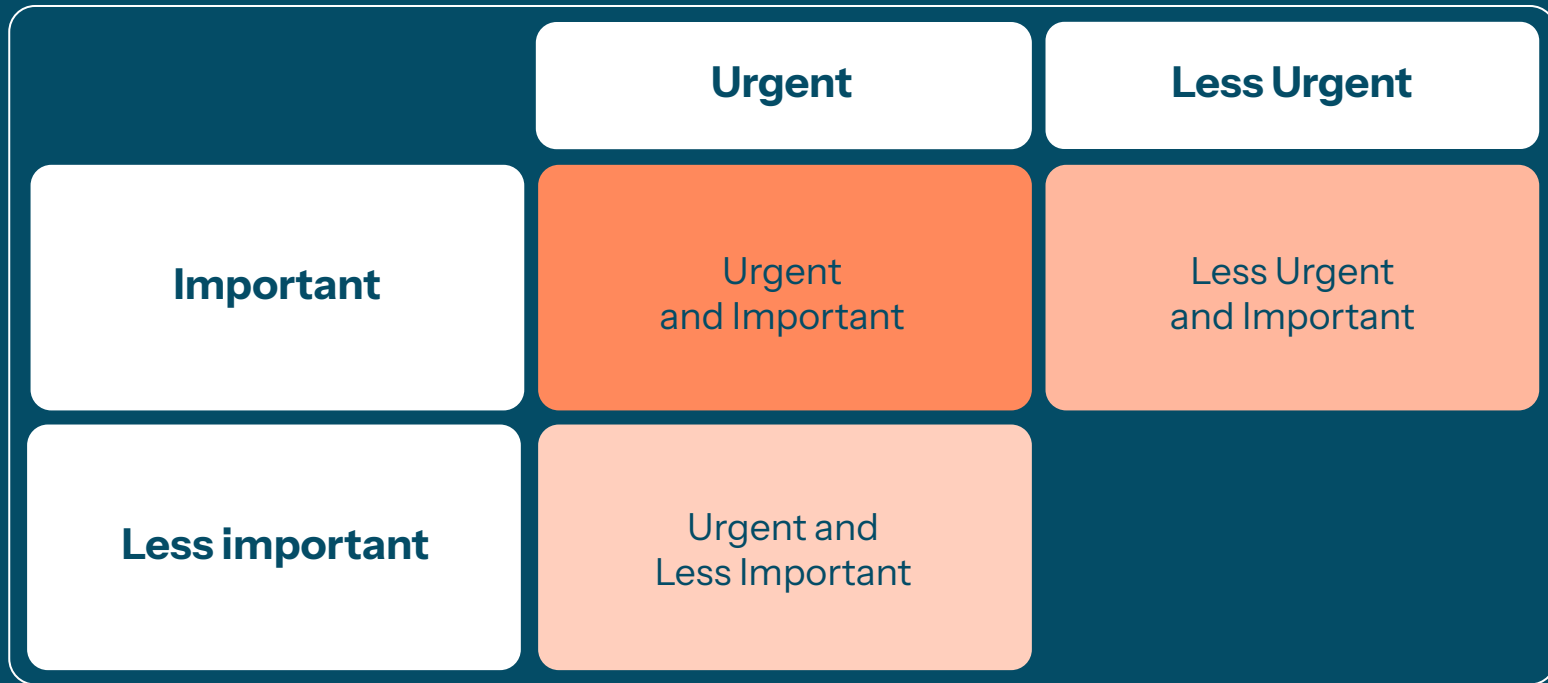
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(2) **Populate the matrix with your tasks**

	Urgent	Less Urgent
Important	Urgent and Important	Less Urgent and Important
Less important	Urgent and Less Important	Less Urgent and Less Important

Urgent tasks
require immediate attention.
There are clear consequences
if urgent tasks aren't completed
within a short time frame.

Tool: The Eisenhower Matrix

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require immediate attention.
There are clear consequences
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Important tasks
don't *necessarily* require
immediate attention, but
they are essential in order to
complete longer term goals.

Tool: The Eisenhower Matrix

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	Urgent	**Less Urgent**
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Less important	**DELEGATE** Buy decorations for Dougie's party on Saturday	~~Add filters to email inbox~~

Tool: The Eisenhower Matrix

Decision Fatigue
The mental exhaustion that occurs after making a series of decisions

The Eisenhower Matrix
to organize your tasks by urgency and importance to make decision-making easier.

So, how do we address each of these issues?

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Tool: Pros and Cons list

In Action: Before deciding to keep an existing vendor, create a detailed pros and cons list comparing them with new potential vendors based on cost, quality, and service.

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Current Vendor	
Pros	**Cons**
• Cost ($89/month) accounted for in budget • Employees have been trained to use their product	• Cost will jump to $159/month if we need to have more than 10 user accounts (we're at 8) • Two of the products main functions (data analysis and visualization) aren't useful since we do that in-house

New Vendor	
Pros	**Cons**
• Cost would be $129/month for up to 25 users • The interface is more intuitive and integrates more smoothly with our other systems	• Current employees would need to be retrained. • In the short term is more expensive, but likely less expensive in long term.

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Framework: Levels of Problem-Solving

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Find a practical and viable solution to the problem.	The agent works with the IT team to fix the software glitch and implements additional manual checks to ensure billing accuracy. They gather feedback from customers to ensure the solution is effective and practical.

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Find a practical and viable solution to the problem.	The agent works with the IT team to fix the software glitch and implements additional manual checks to ensure billing accuracy. They gather feedback from customers to ensure the solution is effective and practical.
Take initiative to implement the solution or develop the breakthrough.	The manager takes charge of the project, coordinating with the IT and finance teams to develop and implement the automated system. They ensure all team members are trained on the new system and monitor its performance.

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Tool: Asking for feedback or advice

Before you make your request, ask yourself:

"What do I want feedback on?"

And: ***"Who should I ask?"***

Tool: Asking for feedback or advice

"What do I want feedback on?"

Focus on:

- **Skills** you practice at work that you' like to improve on, such as leadership, communication, time management, and problem-solving.

- **Tasks** that you perform on a regular basis at work and/or areas you'd like to get better at, such as customer service, inventory control, quality assurance, safety compliance, or project coordination.

- **Recent events or milestones**: Have you just completed a project? Have there been any issues at work lately that would be worth discussing?

Tool: Asking for feedback or advice

"Who should I ask?"

Ideally, you should ask for feedback or advice from someone who knows you well in the context of work, and has had a chance to observe you perform the skill you are focused on.

Or perhaps it's someone you look up to, either because of their own skill set or because you aspire to a similar position.

Tool: Asking for feedback or advice

"Who should I ask?"

Preface your question with some context that helps the other person understand why you're approaching them at this time. For example, you might start with:

"I've really enjoyed working with you on [specific project], and ..."

"Now that [specific project] is wrapping up, I'd like to take some time to ..."

"We've been working together for some time and you know me well in [specific work context]."

"I've noticed that you have a lot of experience with [specific area, e.g., project management, client relations]."

What we did today:

01   Practice identifying
different kind of problems

02   Share strategies to
develop problem-solving skills

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