

Three little-known problem-solving tools that will help you to become an outstanding project manager



HOW TO START TACKLING THOSE HARD
PROBLEMS SUCCESSFULLY, REDUCE YOUR
STRESS & ACHIEVE RECOGNITION AS AN OUT-
STANDING PROBLEM SOLVER

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It is not the situation that makes you outstanding, it's the actions you take

Welcome

Hello, I'm Joseph Kasser and I'd like to thank you for downloading this eBook. So, thank you!

Actually, by downloading this eBook you seem to be someone who takes actions rather than waits to be handed things. It also shows that you are ready to do something about your situation, namely get out of it.

I may be able to help you, especially if you read the book because, I've been a successful professional problem-solver for more than 40 years as an engineer, systems engineer, project manager, author and academic. I wasn't always that way, there was a time when I was stressed out facing impossible problems, but slowly, over the years, I developed tools and techniques for dealing with them and reduced my problem related stress levels. One day I realized that I was seeing solutions when other people were seeing problems and I realized that I was operating in a different paradigm. I was using a systems approach and they were not. I published these tools in academic conference papers and books that a few people actually read, and refined them as my students took them into their workplaces and reported on their results.

I'm now in my third career which focuses on coaching and mentoring as well as teaching and writing. By the way, I'm not always as serious as I look in the picture.



In this eBook, I'm sharing 3 problem-solving tools that you can use immediately to make changes that will get you moving in the right direction, so you grow and thrive in your career over time as well as reducing your stress.

Seriously, let me ask you two questions?

1. What if you could reduce your stress and frustration when faced with problems?
2. What if you could gain access to undocumented knowledge and other people's experiences?

Well guess what? If you want the answers, you're reading the right eBook.

Once you've read this eBook, I have a gift valued at \$499 for you that will dramatically change your results when it comes to using these tools to tackle your problems. It's a way to have your questions about you can apply these tools answered for FREE.

Introduction

Who this eBook is for:

- **You**, if you want to learn how to solve problems in a systemic and systematic manner.
- **You**, if you find getting up in the morning is tough because you know it is going to be another bad day at the office.
- **You**, if you find yourself doing anything except dealing with the problem because you don't know what to do about it.
- **You**, if your life at home is stressful because you are holding it all in, trying not to upset your partner and children.
- **You**, if you want to learn how to turn the situation around since it does not have to be this way.

I've been there, it was hard, frustrating and time-consuming. But I worked my way out of that situation by thinking and acting differently as I'll explain in a few pages.

Who this is not for:

- You, if you leap out of bed racing to tackle a problem.
- You, if you are blaming other people for your situation.
- You, if you are looking for a quick fix.
- You, if you aren't willing to learn a different way of thinking.
- You, if you want to continue doing project management in the same old way and achieve different results.
- You, if you can't take responsibility for your own success

THEN these tools are NOT for you.

It is not the situation that makes you outstanding, it's the actions you take

It's not your fault

You were taught to create a project plan, but you were not taught to manage a project

You were taught the mathematical tools (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division) to solve numerical problems, but you were not taught the basic problem-solving tools you need to solve those daily problems that keep surfacing.

Why am I doing this?

I want to help project managers who want to

- Complete their projects on time and within budget.
- Realize their potential to be outstanding problem-solvers.



- Stop having bad days at the office.
- Stop having bad evenings and weekends at home.
- Have the time to enjoy life.

You'll learn the following 3 key tools you can implement immediately to start tackling those hard problems successfully, reduce your stress and achieve recognition as an outstanding problem-solver.

- 1) The first thing to do when someone *brings* you a problem.
- 2) A little-known secret for the first thing to do *when you understand the* problem, which guarantees that you will solve it with minimal stress in the shortest time.
- 3) A little-known tool that will let you *formulate any problem* so you can solve it with minimal stress in the shortest time.

Here's why you need to know what I know

A long time ago in a land far away, I was facing problems at work which were stressing me out. I dreaded going into work, I even developed an allergy to the building. I could not cope, so I was fired. The strange thing was that when my boss told me I was fired, I felt relief, I didn't have to face those problems anymore and my stress vanished. I wasn't worried too much about finding a new job and found one a week or so later, which was one of the best



jobs I had in my career. Over the next year or so I started to think differently about problems and I developed tools and techniques that let me:

- Reduce work-related stress to zero.
- Get outstanding performance reviews and significant raises.
- Get a reputation for being outstanding in systems and software development in NASA and other organizations.
- Save NASA \$1,500,000.
- Receive awards and certificates of appreciation from clients, customers and my employers including NASA's Silver Snoopy award.
- Be a father to three red-headed children as well as a husband.
- Not only enjoy my hobby of amateur radio, but develop and sell software for amateur radio as a second job.
- Publish lots of peer-reviewed papers.
- Get a Master's degree; taking classes two nights a week for two years and doing the assignments in my lunch time.
- Do the coursework for my Doctor's degree taking classes two nights a week.
- Mentor and coach a few of the people who worked for me.
- Facilitate a nine-month long course for the Institute of Certified Professional Manager's (ICPM) Certified Manager Examination, such that eight of the nine applicants were able to pass all three elements of the exam

Once you've read this eBook, I have a gift valued at \$499 for you that will dramatically change your results when it comes to using these tools to tackle your problems. It's a way to have your questions about these tools answered for FREE.

at their first attempt **at the same sitting**. At the time most applicants sat one element of the exam at a time.

Are you still doing things the hard way?

Can you relate to any of these?

1. Do you have problem and can't think of a solution?
2. Do your stakeholders want you to accomplish the impossible?
3. Do you hardly listen to your partner and/or the children because your mind is focused on the problems at work?
4. Is your tolerance level low?
5. When you try to enjoy your hobbies, do you find your attention span is so short that the joy has gone?
6. You can't read a book or watch TV for the same reason?
7. Is your blood pressure climbing and is your health suffering due to workload stress?



Comments about tools and teaching



Mathias Halkjær Petersen

I really enjoyed your teaching at NUS - It was a quite memorable course that I often think back on in my professional career"

BI Consultant hos Universal Robots A/S
Odense, South Denmark, Denmark



Pascal Bohulu Mabelo

I have learned approaches and tools mostly used in the technology and software spheres, which I shall tweak and re-package for application in infrastructure projects. As a management consultant, I shall also use most of the "Thinking" approaches to guide my clients in solving complex problems.

Author, Large Infrastructure Expert, Lecturer
Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa



Jack Ring

Joseph is outstanding in the field of systems design and engineering not only as a practitioner but more importantly as an innovator of ways of educating others about the concepts, methods and benefits of the practice. I am familiar with the works of more than 40 educators and mentors in this field and can say without equivocation that Joe is in the 3% who make 90% of the difference. Listen to this man.

Systemist at Educe LLC
Gilbert, Arizona, United States

Results are not typical

Now I don't know you, your situation or how well you can implement what I teach. Most people don't even get around to doing what I teach because they never learnt it. It isn't a silver bullet, it takes perspiration, persistence, patience, and time and, there is always a chance of things not working out

I'm not going to give you a solution without understanding your problem. But I can discuss three tools that will enable you to tackle problems most project managers will meet

The three tools

1. The first thing to do when someone brings you a problem



Stay calm, look and listen

Let me tell you an interesting story about George and I. George was my supervisor who kept bringing me new jobs in my first job as a systems engineer, 10 years before I became a project manager. He was stressing me out by overloading me. Each new task was an interrupt. I'd to drop what I was doing and start the new task. After a while I realized that he usually forgot what he had told me to do. So, from that time on, when he gave me a new task I **stalled** for a few minutes, thought about it, prioritized the task, put it in my to-do list and completed the current work. When he occasionally asked me how a task was progressing, my answer was "almost finished". Then I stopped working on the current task

and swiftly completed the one he had asked about. He was happier and my work-related stress level then dropped to zero.

STALL

The first thing to do when someone brings you a problem is don't panic, STALL. STALL is an acronym for:

- Stay calm
- Think
- Ask questions and analyse answers
- Listen and look
- Listen and look

You have two ears and eyes and only one mouth. Use them in that ratio to

- Ask questions, don't just accept what you hear. Use the Kipling questions (who, what, where, when, why and how).
- Think about the symptoms being described to you.
- Use systems thinking to perceive the situation from a number of perspectives to get an understanding of the situation.
- Use critical thinking to infer what needs to be changed to tackle the problems
- Separate assumptions from facts.
- Ask how much time you really have to deal with the problem. The lower the urgency the lower the stress.
- Find out how important it is to deal with the problem. It may only be important to the person bringing you the problem.
- Verify your understanding of the problematic situation so you will be solving the right problem

You might also calm yourself with deep breathing exercises before taking any action.

If you're wondering how you can use this, here's how:

Remember your last doctor's visit. The GP asked you a series of questions about your problem. Each answer was followed by another question until the GP had solved the problem (diagnosed what was probably wrong with you) or decided further tests were required and sent you to a specialist to gather further information or apply a better understanding of the medical situation.

You didn't realize the GP was using the STALL tool. You can use STALL in the **same** way next time someone comes to you with a problem.

2. A little-known secret for the first thing to do once you understand the problem, which guarantees that you will solve it with minimal stress in the shortest time

After I retired from university life, I took the time to write text books based on the postgraduate courses I had developed, because when I was teaching, I kept hearing my-self tell the students, "And you won't find that in the text books". What began as an idea for one book ended up being four with more on the way.

But I missed mentoring, teaching and the 'aha' moment when the student understood the concept. My tolerance level was decreasing, my stress level was increasing, because I knew he had a problem reaching out. I tried marketing my courses in cooperation with a training company to lever on their expertise, but the courses hardly sold. My tolerance level was getting even lower, and my stress level was getting even higher until I finally remembered the first thing I should have done when I understood the nature of the problem.

Talk about physician, heal thyself; it should be teacher, practice what you teach! They tell me that when you get old, memory is the second thing to go.



I'll sniff one out for you

The first thing I should have done when I understood the nature of the problem was

Find someone who has faced the problem before and learn from them

Learn

- What worked in their situation.
- How their situation and your situation differ.

Then adapt what they did to your situation. Do not just copy it. Go beyond systems thinking to infer what needs to be done. Copying their unadapted solution is generally a recipe for disaster and loads more stress.

I was facing a marketing problem. I researched marketing trainers and selected the best one that would meet my needs. I took the training course which made me see things from a totally different perspective and understand the difference between what universities offer and what I needed to offer. I changed my marketing method and am now teaching and coaching a few motivated project managers, transforming their lives.



Here's how to apply this

If you want to learn a sport well, get someone who excels at it AND can show you how to achieve your potential in that sport.

If you want to, get someone who excels at ... AND can show you how to achieve your potential in ...

If you are drowning in problems associated with project management, get someone who excels at solving those types of problems **AND can show you how to do the same.**

And if you think this is obvious, why haven't you done it already?

Its not the situation
that makes you out-
standing, it's the ac-
tions you take

- Most things are obvious in hindsight.
- You have done it; then if you are reading this eBook, you have probably picked the wrong person.



3. A little-known tool that will let you formulate any problem so you can solve it with minimal stress in the shortest time

It is a tool that

- Turns your impossible problems into manageable problems.
- Makes you confident about the solution.
- Gives you a written plan for solving the problem, so you know what to do and how to do it.
- Reduces your work-related stress.
- Increases your personal time.

It is the

Problem Formulation Template

The Problem Formulation Template is the following five-part template:

1. The undesirable situation.
2. The assumptions about the situation, problem, solution, constraints etc.
3. The Feasible Conceptual Future Desirable Situation (FCFDS).

4. The problem.
5. The solution.

The Problem Formulation Template is more complex and complicated than the previous tools so it is explained in more detail.

The parts of the template

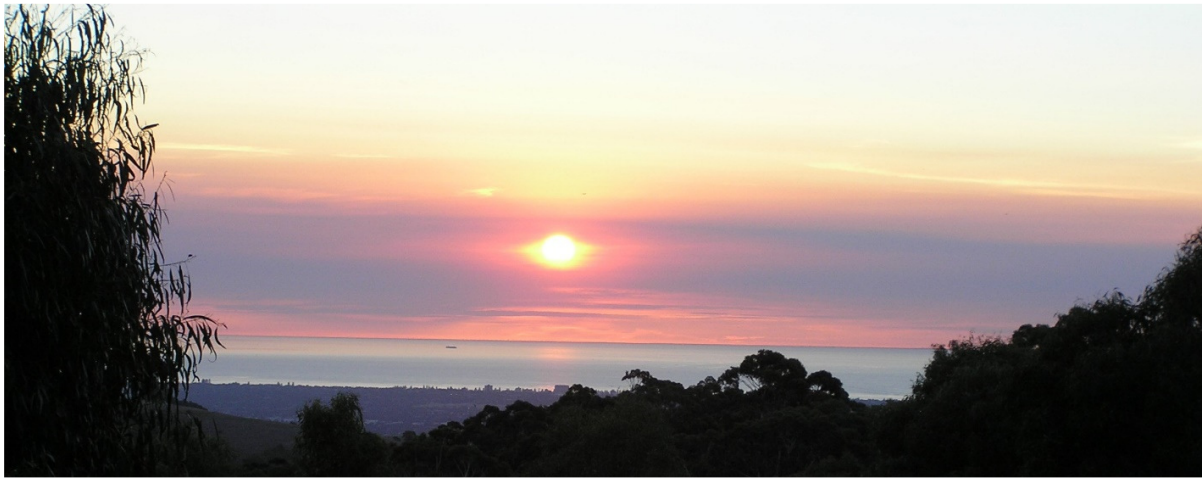
1. **The undesirable situation** contains the facts ascertained from various sources including the results of using STALL.
2. **The assumptions** about the situation, problem, solution, constraints etc. documenting these is important, because it prevents unnecessary work. For example, if an assumption is wrong, you may be creating a solution to the wrong problem, or trying to create a solution that is not feasible.
3. **The FCFDS** is a description of a conceptual future situation with the undesirability causing the current problem and perhaps some improvements.
4. **The problem** is what you need to do to make the transition from the undesirable situation you are facing to the FCFDS. You conceptualize this process (**what**) to convert the FCFDS to reality by working backwards from the FCFDS to the undesirable situation by asking yourself, “what did I do to get to this situation? You then document it as a forward process in which each step has a measurable objective.
5. **The solution** is how you will do/did each step. The solution evolves. For each **what** step of the process, you conceptualize the best **how** to perform that step of the process, then actually perform the transformation process to realize the FCFDS.

It is not as difficult as it looks, once you have seen some examples and tried it a few times. For example:

Simple project: making a cup of coffee

1. **The undesirable situation** is the need to make the boss a cup of coffee.
2. **The assumptions** are the ingredients and other resources are available. If these assumptions are not valid, you will not be able to proceed.
3. **The FCFDS** is the boss is drinking her coffee and is not complaining about it.
4. **The problem** (what to do), working back from the FCFDS is

1. Situation FCFDS: boss is drinking the coffee; prerequisite action: you had to give the coffee to the boss.



2. Situation: you are giving the coffee to the boss; prerequisite action: you had to stir the mixture in the cup.
3. Situation: you are stirring the mixture; prerequisite actions add sweetener and creamer.
4. Situation: you are adding sweetener and creamer: prerequisite action: you ensured the hot coffee was in the cup.
5. Situation: the hot coffee is in the cup: prerequisite actions ... And so on, for the remaining steps to create the cup of hot coffee. You can imagine them.

Once you have the process listed backwards, you then document it as a forward-looking process starting from the undesirable situation and ending at the FCFDS. In many instances there is more than one way (how) to do the process (what). For example, consider the solutions for giving the boss a cup of percolated coffee and a cup of instant coffee.

5. **The solution** (for percolated coffee)

1. Put water in percolator
2. Put coffee in percolator
3. Turn on the percolator
4. Percolate the coffee
5. Pour coffee into cup
6. Add sweetener and creamer



7. Stir the mixture with a spoon
8. Give the cup of coffee to the boss on a tray
5. **The solution** (for instant coffee)
 1. Put water in kettle
 2. Boil the water
 3. Put the hot water in the cup
 4. Add the coffee
 5. Add sweetener and creamer
 6. Stir the mixture with a spoon
 7. Give the cup of coffee to the boss on a tray

Complex project: marketing a coaching and mentoring programme

My situation as described above is more complex, and the problem formulated in the Problem Formulation template was something like this.

1. The undesirable situation

- I know I need to market my courses but have no idea how to

- I need to learn how to, but how?

2. Assumption

- Somebody has already had the problem of needing to market something without knowing how to, and has found a way to solve that problem (the second tool)

3. The FCFDS

- I have more than enough students to keep me happy teaching, mentoring and learning from them

4. The problem (what to do - working back from the answer) – listing prerequisite actions

1. Situation: the students are enrolled in the course; prerequisite action: show the enrolled students how to access the class web sites and provide them with the passwords and other relevant information.
2. Make sure they actually enroll and pay the enrollment fee.
3. Select suitable student candidates.
4. Market the course successfully to attract worthwhile students.
5. Decide exactly what I want to offer and find out if there is a market for it based on what I will learn in the marketing course I took.
6. Take a course in marketing and learn from it.
7. Select the right trainer/coach.
8. Find a few trainers/coaches. Remember, the generic solution to problem of needing to learn something is find a good teacher.

5. The solution (how to do it – working forwards)-1

1. Find a number of potential trainers/coaches by doing an online search
2. Select the right trainer/coach.
 1. Work out selection criteria and importance of each (e.g., total package, cost, schedule, etc.)
 2. Make decision.
3. Take a training course in marketing.
 3. Pay fee by bank transfer.

4. Join the live sessions, do the homework and participate in the Facebook group.
4. Decide exactly what I want to offer and find out if there is a market for it.
5. Market the course successfully.
 1. Rewrite course description and syllabus.
 2. Identify needed marketing and course delivery tools.
 3. Learn to use tools.
 4. Use the tools.
 5. Market the course.
6. Create the modified course.
7. Select suitable student candidates from the “multitude” responding to my much-improved marketing.
8. Make sure they actually enroll and pay the enrollment fee.
9. Show them how to access the class web portal.

Here's how to apply this

I don't know what your problem is so you could start with something like

1. The undesirable situation

- There is a problem with the project which will most probably escalate the cost or cause a delay.
- This is causing you work-related stress and frustration because you don't know how to get out of the situation and move on.

2. The assumptions

- Somebody has faced the same problem and has found a way to solve it.
- You have the expertise solve the problem or know where to get it which is why you were stuck with the problem.

3. The FCFDS

- The project is back on schedule with minimal cost escalation.

4. The problem (working backwards from the answer)

- The problem has been solved.

- Implement your solution.
- Adapt their solution.
- Find out how they solved their problem.
- Find out who successfully faced the problem before.
- And so on back to the undesirable situation.
- Reorder the problem steps and think through the details of how you would accomplish each step.
- Write them down in chronological order and you will then have a written plan.

5. **The solution** (how to do it – working forwards)

- Now design the process for **how** to do each **what**.
- I don't know your situation or your problem so I can't complete this section of the template for you now.



The real opportunity for you

I've shared with you three little-known tools to get your problem-solving moving in the direction of lasting success:

1. The first thing to do when someone brings you a problem
2. The first thing to do when you understand the problem, which guarantees that you will solve it with minimal stress in the shortest time
3. The tool that will let you formulate any problem so you can solve it with minimal stress in the shortest time

So, here's something to think about. What if you

- Could solve your problems in a systemic and systematic manner.
- Can't wait to get to the office and move the project along.
- Get a reputation for being outstanding.
- Reduced your work-related stress to zero.
- Had plenty of time for family, friends, continuing education, professional society activities and hobbies.

And could turn your life in this direction this in a stress-free way in the next 10 weeks or so.

The good news is...

- **It's not about** whether you believe you can do this right now.
- It's about whether you can take one step now, and learn the rest as you go with some help along the way.

What you need to change

You need the three 'right's

1. The **right** way to think about your problems
2. The **right** set of problem-solving tools
3. The **right** HELP

So, what now?

Make the right choice

As I see it, you have 3 choices:

1. You can put this eBook away; go to your next task and forget everything you've just read. But it also means you go back to your old life like
 - Getting up in the morning is tough because you know it is going to be another bad day at the office.
 - You find yourself doing anything except dealing with the problem because you don't know what to do about it.
 - Your life at home is stressful because you are holding it all in, trying not to upset your partner and children.
2. You can take the three tools I have taught you today and work out **how** to use them by yourself. In that case, I wish you luck.
3. But if you really want things to be different, and turn your life around, then I have a gift for you

The \$499 gift

Here now is the \$499 gift I promised at the start of this eBook and here's what it offers:

I'm happy to help **you** to develop a plan FOR FREE to solve your problem and start to become an outstanding project manager in a relaxed, stress-free, step-by-step way.

I offer this service because **I'm now a coach and mentor, specialising in helping project managers** who are unhappy with problems eating up their spare time and destroying family relationships **start to** restore their balance in life, **become outstanding problem-solvers** and gain control of their situation in 10 weeks or less

It's my third career.

Take action now

Book a FREE call with me today. During the 45-minute call I will help you in 3 ways



1. I will listen as you tell me about your biggest challenge right now
2. I will help you solve it
3. I will help you to set out a step-by-step plan as to how you can reach your end goal WITHOUT adding to your worries

Who this is for...

- You, if you need help with a problem.
- You, if you want to be an outstanding project manager.
- You, if you now realize there is a better way.
- You, if you really want to transform your situation.
- You, if you are able to take responsibility for your actions and your results.
- You, if you are open to new ideas.
- You, if you are committed to changing the way you think.
- You, if you are determined to succeed.

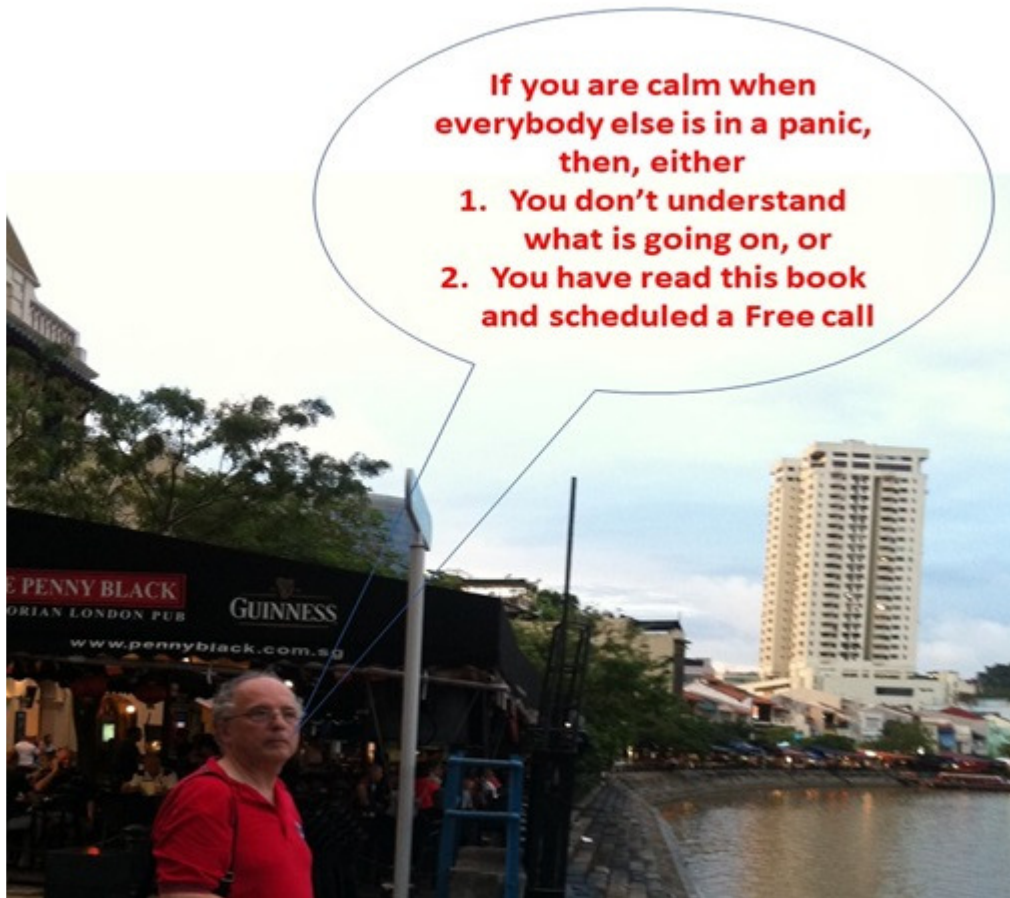
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