

The Problem is Not the Problem

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When we have problems, most of us immediately invest our energy into the search for answers, often without fully understanding the problem, or focusing energy on doing something constructive about it. As the cute quote from Jack Sparrow goes: “The problem is not the problem. The problem is your attitude about the problem.” Jack was more right than most of us realize. Your attitude toward a problem determines if you truly understand the problem, and if you are in the right frame of mind to find a solution.

Here are some questions you should ask yourself when faced with a problem, which will help you clarify your attitude toward the problem. Are you focused on who is to blame? Are you reliving the consequences of the problem over in your mind? Do you find yourself repeatedly angry that the problem exists? Do you feel wounded or helpless with respect to the problem? When trying to deal with the problem, do you find yourself constantly returning to wishing the problem didn't exist or would go away? If you said yes to any of these, then the problem you have is not the problem, but rather your attitude toward it.

It comes down to realizing what you can and can't control, and expending energy and effort where it is useful. For example, let's presume you are a professional piano player and the problem you have is that you broke your finger. In that scenario, most people would spend their time angry at who, or what, broke the finger, angry about not being able to play the piano for a few weeks, feeling helpless about their current situation, or simply wishing their finger wasn't broken. Every one of those activities is a complete waste of energy and doesn't make anything better.

I use that reference because when I broke my femur from one end to the other, I spent several months angry, afraid, and lamenting the situation I was in. For all those months, my leg never healed one bit. It was not until I let go of the anger and fear, to focus on the future, and what I would do after the healing was done, that the healing even began. Now, I am not pitching any new age spiritual healing, but I am confident that our mind can either focus on the solution to a problem, or be angry and lament the existence of a problem, but it can't do both.

This applies to communities as well. I have worked in many communities that have lost a major employer. In many of those communities, the consequences of losing that employer can be devastating as jobs, a secure tax base, and economic spin-offs dwindle. Some communities look for new opportunities right away. Many of the really progressive ones look for new and diverse businesses and industries to attract to their communities before they lose a large employer and experience the consequences. Those types of communities recognize the problem will not be

the loss of that one large employer, but is currently their reliance on one large employer for their economic stability.

The communities that fail are the ones that focus anger on what caused the closure, or the jobs that were lost to the community as a result, or spend their time saying there is nothing that can be done, or dreaming about that same major employer opening back up. Some communities could change their town slogan to: Still waiting for (insert employer here) to re-open...someday. They never actually get on with doing something about creating new opportunities, let alone figuring out how to prevent such devastation in the future. They either don't understand the real problem, or fail to move past the anger and get on with doing something about it. The problem is not the problem, but your attitude about the problem.

Our world and our economies are changing rapidly. New forms of energy, new technology, online shopping, the obsolescence of jobs, and a host of other issues are wreaking havoc on many of our communities and small locally-owned businesses. Many of us don't know what to do, so we spend energy complaining, worrying, and hoping. None of those things addresses the problem. The real problem isn't that it is occurring, but whether or not we are prepared, and equipped with the tools, to do something about it.

This syndicated content is provided by Doug Griffiths, best-selling author and chief community builder at 13 Ways, a company with a mission to push communities to face their challenges to find their unique path to success. For more information visit www.13ways.ca, or we can start the conversation at info@13ways.ca.