



# Unit 13

## Managing Workplace Violence

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Describe what workplace violence is
- ✓ Identify some warning signs of violence
- ✓ Apply the cycle of anger



## Unit 13

# Managing Workplace Violence

### What is Workplace Violence?

#### Defining Violence

The actual definition of workplace violence can depend on the company and the area where the company operates. For example, some states classify sexual harassment as workplace violence, while others don't. Likewise, some organizations have separate workplace violence and sexual harassment policies.

Typically, the definition of workplace violence encompasses:

- Verbal abuse (such as yelling)
- Psychological or emotional abuse (such as name-calling or threats)
- Physical abuse (such as hitting or pushing)
- Sexual assault

It is important to remember that no matter what form violence takes, whether it's yelling, threatening, or physical assault, it is essential that your organization have a policy to prevent and respond to such incidents.

A crucial step in developing a workplace violence policy is determining just what workplace violence means to your organization, and therefore determining what your policy will cover.

#### The Cycle of Violence

In most cases, workplace violence is like a thunderstorm, building slowly before exploding. The process often begins with frustration. If the frustration isn't alleviated, it often turns to anger. Then, that unaddressed anger becomes violence.

Our goal for the first third of this workshop is to work on some tools that can help us interrupt the storm. Problem solving tools, communication strategies, anger management processes, and de-stress routines can all help alleviate anger and frustration, preventing the cycle from reaching the stage of violence.



## The Warning Signs

There are many signs that may indicate that a person is on the path towards committing a violent act. These can include:

- Ñ Threats (direct or indirect)
- Ñ Harassing or obscene phone calls
- Ñ Suicidal or homicidal threats or gestures
- Ñ Expressions of hopelessness, despair, belligerence, or defiance
- Ñ Talk of violent behavior or fantasies
- Ñ Frequent profanity
- Ñ Challenging or intimidating comments
- Ñ Paranoid thoughts or delusions
- Ñ Delusions in general
- Ñ Hallucinations (particularly those where the person feels that they are being commanded)
- Ñ Signs or history of substance abuse
- Ñ Physical assault or intimidation of people or property
- Ñ Inappropriate use or possession of a weapon
- Ñ Obsessing with/stalking another person
- Ñ Easily upset, short-tempered, inappropriate emotions
- Ñ Sudden personality changes; from extroverted to introverted, or becoming very withdrawn
- Ñ Deteriorating appearance (i.e. personal hygiene)
- Ñ Deep grudges and resentments
- Ñ Belief that everyone is out to get them
- Ñ Obsession with public acts of violence or violent figures
- Ñ Obsession with fairness and equality
- Ñ Frequent misinterpretation (i.e. sees disrespect and injustice everywhere)

Now, we're not saying that if someone starts cursing a blue streak you should call in the cavalry. These signs can be present for all kinds of reasons, and are easy to see in retrospect, but you are trying to look ahead, not behind. If you notice that a co-worker's behavior changes, their temperament seems different, or if someone pulls out a knife in the lunchroom, then action needs to be taken. Simply mention your concerns to your supervisor. They have the tools and the resources required to help the person and to keep your workplace safe.

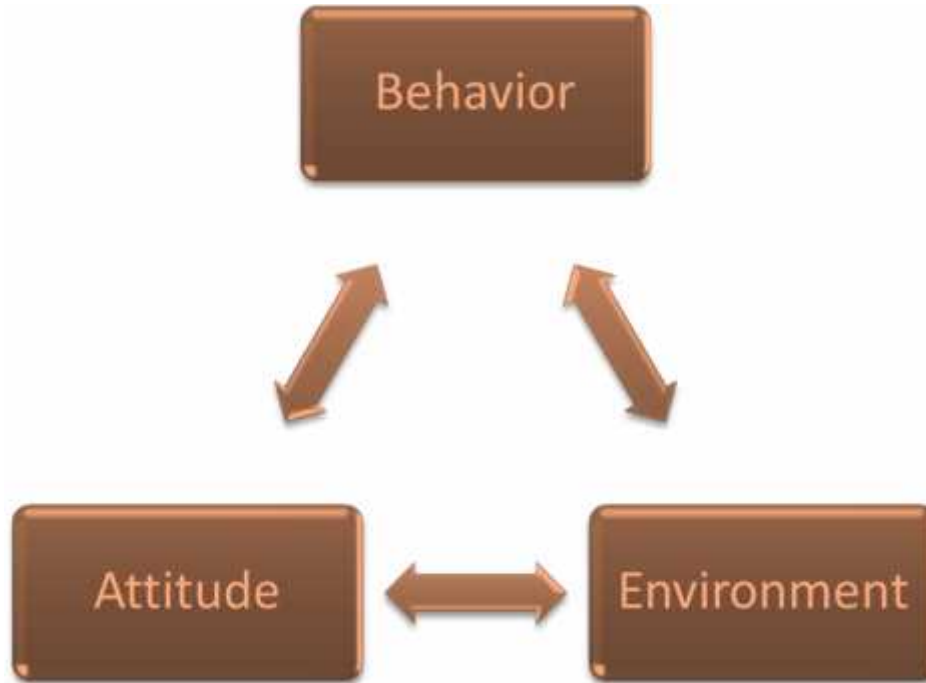
## Understanding the Behavior Wheel

### The Behavior Wheel

Psychologist Albert Bandura has developed a theory called the **behavior wheel**. This wheel provides the answer to the timeless question, "Why do people act the way they do?"



Bandura's wheel looks like this:



This wheel shows us how our attitude, behavior, and environment all influence each other. Note how the arrows go both ways: our environment affects our attitude, but our attitude also affects our environment.

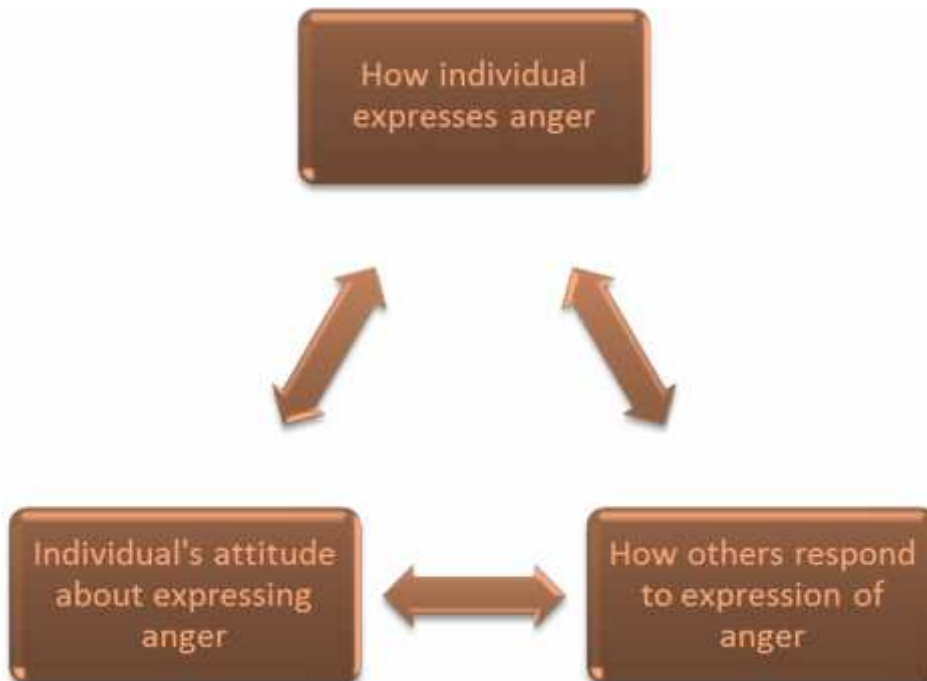
### Case Study

Let's apply this wheel to a drug addict. One traditional approach is for the addict to simply quit. However, even if the addict's behavior changes, his attitude may still be that drugs are OK, and he may still associate with drug users. These factors will affect his behavior, contributing to him using drugs again. However, if his environment and attitude change, his behavior will be more likely to change.



**Anger and the Behavior Wheel**

Dr. Lynn McClure has applied the behavior wheel to anger:

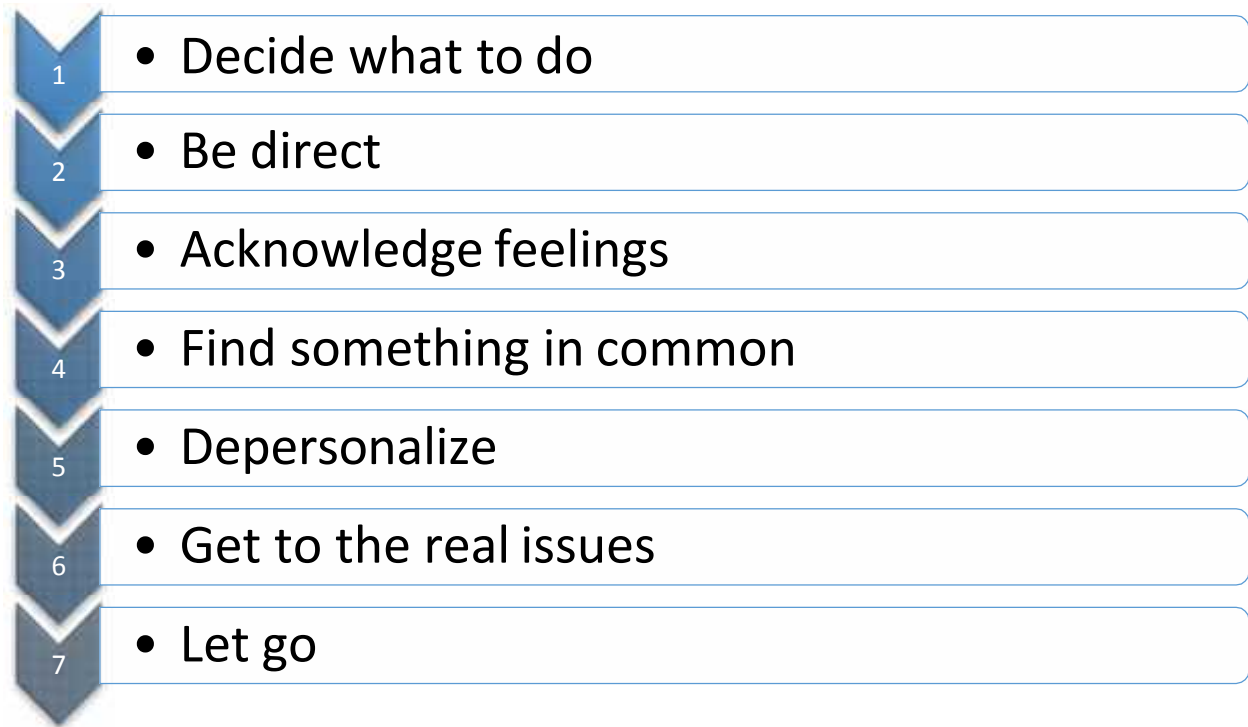


Understanding this cycle of behavior, attitude, and environment is crucial to managing anger.

## The Anger Management Process

### The Seven Steps

Dr. Lynn McClure has identified a seven-step process to manage anger. This process can be used whether you're angry or whether you're responding to someone else's anger.



The first step must always be deciding. Then, the other steps can be performed in any order.

### Step One: Decide What to Do

Before you try to resolve the situation, ask yourself three questions:

- Ñ Do I want to work it out?
- Ñ Does the other person want to work it out?
- Ñ Is it appropriate for me to be involved?

The answer for all three questions must be yes or the process will not work. However, both parties don't have to be 100% committed. Even if they both are only willing to resolve the problem to get a project done, for example, that's still a level of commitment that can be built on.



## Step Two: Be Direct

Once you have decided that you need to address this situation, it's time to start the process. Your next step should be to address the problem in the proper way, to the right person.

For example, let's say you've just seen your work schedule for next week and you're not impressed with the amount of evenings you're working.

Some improper ways of dealing with this (that are not direct or appropriate):

- Yelling at your supervisor
- Threatening to quit
- Complaining to your colleagues

The proper way to deal with this would be to approach your supervisor and talk to them calmly and logically. You want to lay out the issue and some solutions.

For example, you could say, "I saw that you posted the schedule and I wanted to talk to you about it. I noticed I'm working the most evenings again. I'd like to switch some of those shifts with Karen, since she likes the evening shift better. That would work better for both of us."

By dealing with the problem in this way, you're addressing the issue before it escalates to anger and violence. You're also setting a good example for your co-workers. Having solved this problem will probably make you feel better about yourself and about your job, thereby making work a happier place for you. (If we apply the behavior wheel, this improved attitude will spill over to your behavior and your environment.)

## Step Three: Acknowledge Feelings

Another key skill in managing anger is acknowledging the other person's feelings. This step does two things: it helps the other person calm down, and it can help you understand their point of view.

Acknowledging anger doesn't mean explaining it away. An answer that starts with, "We have to do this because..." tends to make the angry person angrier and it makes them feel like no one is listening.

Let's take the scheduling example again. Let's say you said to your supervisor, "I saw that you posted the schedule and I wanted to talk to you about it. I noticed I'm working the most evenings again."

If he or she said, "Well, I have to do that because of company policy," you would probably get angry or defensive, even if you had already calmed down after you saw the schedule.



A better way for the supervisor to respond would be to say, “Yes, I can understand why you’re angry about the schedule. It certainly doesn’t seem fair.” This sort of response would be more likely to calm the angry person and make them feel as though their opinion counts.

**Step Four: Find Something in Common**

If you can find something in common with the person, rather than emphasizing differences, you will be well on the way to solving the disagreement. (After all, solving the problem is all about finding a mutually acceptable solution. The process is a lot easier when you know that you and the other person are on the same team.)

For example, let’s say you and a team member have had a disagreement over a project you’re working on together. An easy commonality would be that you’re working on the same team, towards the same goal. This common goal may be enough for both of you to start resolving the disagreement.

**Step Five: Depersonalize**

If you’re on the receiving end of someone’s anger, it is essential that you depersonalize their emotions or actions so that you don’t become angry as well. This can be very hard to do and does require some practice.

It’s very easy to misinterpret things and take things personally. You must first determine if this is professional feedback or a personal attack.

Professional feedback...	Personal attacks...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on your performance at work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on you as a person</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is intended to help you grow as a professional</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is intended to make you feel bad or guilty</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can help you learn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Usually have no valuable advice</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Should be accepted as constructive criticism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tend to make you angry</li> </ul>

If this is professional feedback, you need to focus on how the feedback can help you grow, rather than mistakes you have made in the past or emotional interpretations you received from the conversation.



If this is a personal attack, think about how seriously you should take the incident. Is it worth causing a scene and damaging your professional reputation? Is there a mature way that you can handle this? Another good way to depersonalize is to think about what their attack says about them, not about you.

Example: You are in your supervisor’s office for your monthly review. He says to you, “You know, you might get a raise if you weren’t such a slob.”

Let’s say you took a moment to analyze his comments before allowing yourself to get upset. You think about your desk: how its surface is always neat and how you organize it every morning. He certainly can’t be referring to your work environment.

But then you take a look around his office. It looks like a landfill, with papers, CD’s, and even garbage everywhere! You feel a little bit sorry for your supervisor; it seems clear that he’s the disorganized one and is taking his insecurities out on you.

To ensure that this is the case, you can try to turn his personal attack into professional feedback. You could say, “I’m sorry you feel that way, Jim. What areas do you think I need improvement in?” This way, you have not only managed to depersonalize his attack, but you have also turned it into a learning opportunity.

**Step Six: Getting to the Real Issues**

Earlier we discussed how frustration can build into anger, which can then escalate into violence. Often, the event that triggers anger or violence is not the original issue that caused frustration. It is important to identify the real issue so that the problem can get solved.

**Case Study**

Let’s look at an example. Gina and Cindy are working on a project together. All of a sudden, Cindy explodes, yelling, “You’re so stupid! I’m never going to get this done if I have to work with you.” Gina is shocked; she and Cindy have always worked together well in the past.

Gina moves through some of the anger management steps within a few seconds.

<p><b>Step One: Decide what to do.</b></p> <p><b>Gina wants to work it out and she is the right person to do so. But, does Cindy want to work it out?</b></p>	<p>Gina: “Cindy, I’m sorry you feel that way. Can we talk about this?”</p> <p>Cindy: “Sure.”</p>
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<b>Step Two: Be direct.</b>	Gina is doing this by speaking to Cindy.
<b>Step Three: Acknowledge feelings.</b>	Gina: "I can tell that you're really upset."
<b>Step Four: Find something in common.</b>	Gina: "We've always worked well as a team in the past, and I'd like to continue working as a team. We do need to get this project done."  Cindy: "That's true."
<b>Step Five: Depersonalize.</b>	Gina thinks to herself, "I haven't done anything different today, so I think Cindy is upset about something else. This isn't my fault. I can grow from this by helping her through the issue."
<b>Step Six: Get to the real issues.</b>	Gina: "I don't feel like you're angry at me. I feel like there is something else going on. I've noticed you have been distracted the past few days. I'd really like to help you."  Cindy: "I'm really sorry for calling you stupid. My husband and I have been having problems, and it's really affecting me. I'm very angry at him."

Now that Gina knows what the real issue is, it's easier for her to depersonalize and help Cindy work through the real problem, or to help her find the appropriate resource. This process has probably helped Cindy calm down and let go of some emotional baggage.

When you do talk to the angry person, make sure you:

- Ñ Speak to them in a calm manner.
- Ñ Don't blame or judge.
- Ñ Choose a quiet, private place free of interruptions.
- Ñ Follow Step Two: be direct and discuss the issue in an appropriate way.



# Role of Communication and Problem Solving in Anger Management

## Communicating Better

### Building Your Message

#### The Importance of Communication Skills

Often people who are most angry are people who haven't developed their communication skills to the level they would like, and as a result they feel frustrated and misunderstood. Poor communication skills can actually contribute to their being repeatedly misunderstood, and improvements mean that they can express themselves better and be understood.

#### I Messages

We are most likely to retain the goodwill of the person we're standing up to if we stick with our own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, and avoid direct or implied criticism of the other person. One way to do that is to stick with "I" messages, expressed in a matter-of-fact, non-judgmental tone of voice.

You Message	I Message
You talk too loudly.	I have sensitive hearing.
You should send out an agenda.	I'd like to know what we're going to discuss in the meeting tomorrow so I can bring the right information with me.

You can use this same type of message when you are giving feedback about someone else's behavior. Remember, the feedback needs to be non-judgmental, but it should be specific and direct.

#### The Assertiveness Formula

There is also a formula for assertiveness:

Step	Goal	Example
<b>Step 1</b>	Non-judgmentally describe a specific behavior of the other person.	When you...
<b>Step 2</b>	Describe, as specifically as possible, the effects this behavior is	The effects are...



	having, or the practical problems it is causing in your life.	
<b>Step 3</b>	Describe how you feel as a result, without using the expression, “you make me...”	I feel...
<b>Step 4</b>	Describe what you want, preferably after you give the other person a chance to state what they think might be done.	I prefer/would like...

**Example:** “When you leave your papers all over my office, it causes it to be cluttered and I feel disorganized and upset. I would like it if you could pick your papers up when you are done.”

When you are stating feelings, remember these tips:

- Ñ State feelings, not evaluations
- Ñ State feelings, not solutions
- Ñ State feelings directly

**Test your knowledge**

Rephrase the following statements using the four-step model.

**You missed that deadline! I want to fire you right now!**

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**You are late again. You’re always late, and making me look bad!**

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## Asking Questions

### Questioning Skills

The right questions provide structure to your conversation. Here are some general guidelines:

- Ñ Ask one question at a time, instead of trying to get to everything at once.
- Ñ Phrase the question in simple, easily understandable words and terms that don't intimidate your conversation partner.
- Ñ Keep your questions brief. Questions that are more than two sentences in length are too long; break them up and ask them as two or more questions.
- Ñ Keep your phrasing positive. Reframe negative questions to make them more positive, which will encourage conversation.
- Ñ Use open questions to get more information, rather than relying on closed questions.
- Ñ Follow up on incomplete answers by probing for more information.

### Planning Your Questions

You can plan for the conversation ahead of time and decide what kind of question to ask depending on what your goals are. You can design your questions to help you with any of the following:

- Ñ Get information
- Ñ Gain consensus
- Ñ Focus conversations
- Ñ Begin closing the conversation
- Ñ Gather opinion

It is helpful to have some good questions ready that relate to the conversation that you are planning.

**List some examples of good questions.**

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## Three Keys

There are three keys you can use to frame your conversation in the best way possible.

### Intent

Set your conversation up in the best way possible by giving other people the benefit of the doubt. This means that you assume that their problem behavior or attitude was not their goal, and that they are approaching things with positive intent.

If you fail to give credit to them for having positive intent, you may inadvertently set a conversation off track and contribute to the other person becoming defensive or angry.

### Identifying Criteria

Criteria and expectations are important, and they are things that you are measuring during an interaction. You use them to decide whether an idea is good or not, and to set up benchmarks. These criteria become even more important when different points of view are creating a problem between two people, or workplace teams, and so on. Salaries, job security, and engagement are some of the things that commonly create problems in the workplace. If you are finding that a conversation is going off track, try to figure out why the others in your conversation are supporting or coming out against something. Then you can problem solve and generate solutions that meet a suitable arrangement for both of you.

### Non-Verbal Expressions

Whether you are someone with a tendency to frown or smile has a big effect on the direction of a conversation. Are you aware of what your body language says about you?

## Basic Problem Solving Tools

### The Three-Phase Model

#### About Problem Solving

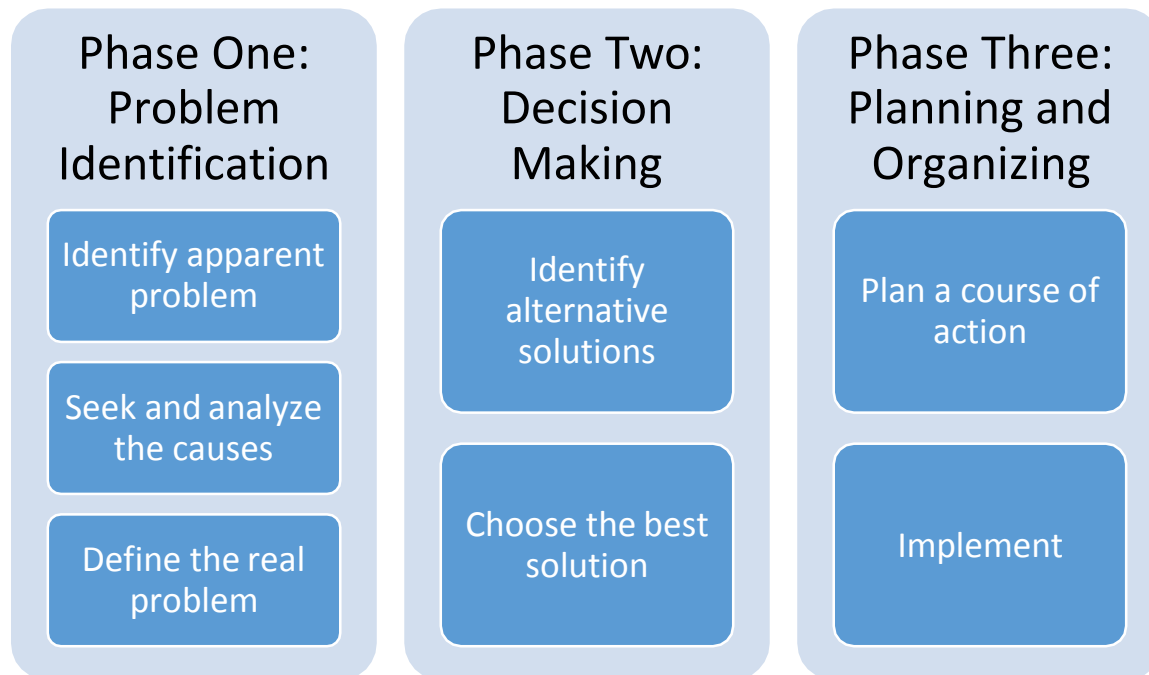
Often anger results from some sort of unresolved issue... in other words, a problem that needs to be solved.

Whenever you read a book on problem solving, this model, in some form or other, is sure to be there. It may have six steps rather than seven, or it may have five steps. However, the model doesn't really change...just the authors' ways of breaking it down.

As you work your way from problem to solution, you are actually shifting your focus.

- Ñ When you define a problem, you ask yourself: What is my problem?
- Ñ As you try to analyze the root causes you ask: Why is it a problem?
- Ñ When you are generating options, you ask yourself: What are some ways I can solve my problem?

### The Problem Solving Model

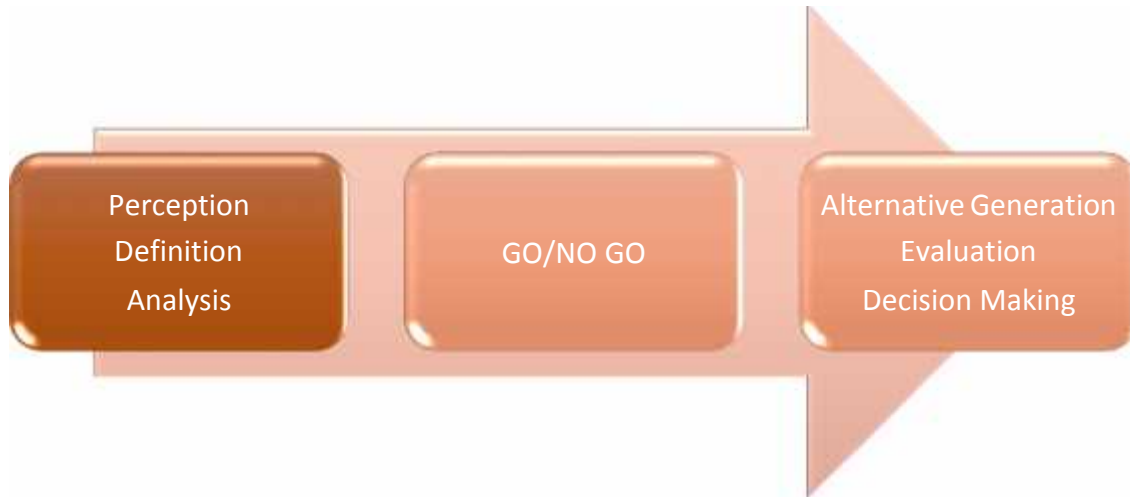


This model doesn't just work on paper: it applies across a range of problem solving activities. It is the very basis for informed and consistent problem solving. If you are someone who loves tools, this is your basic tool.

We often don't spend enough time in defining a problem, and that in itself is a problem. Don't be in too big a rush to get the solution worked out: make sure you know what you need to know. Then, make a commitment to continually check back with the first stage to make sure the problem is the same.

## Another Perspective

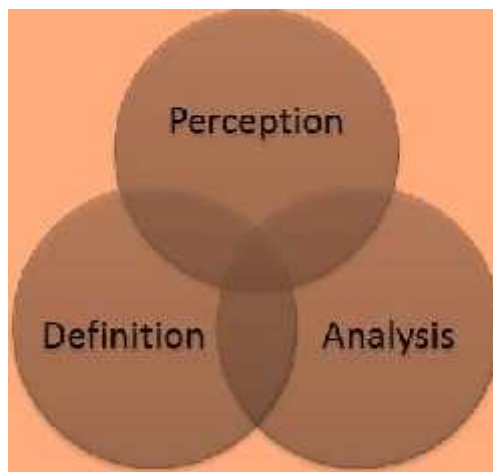
Here is another way of breaking down the three phases:



We recommend that you spend most of your time on the first block: perception, definition, and analysis. As we've mentioned already in this course, we often don't spend enough time in defining a problem, and that in itself is a problem. Don't be in too big a rush to get the solution worked out: make sure you know what you need to know first. Then, make a commitment to continually check back with the first stage to make sure the problem is the same.

## Keeping an Open Mind

Part of the problem solving process is re-evaluating and evolving. This will ensure you reach the best solution possible. Consider how perception, definition, and analysis overlap:



## Solving Problems the “Right” Way

Don't let people try to convince you there is one “right” or “best” way to solve problems, or to solve a particular problem. Problem solving is all about applying educated trial and error. With so many different kinds of problems to deal with, there is no system that works in every situation. Many solutions are possible, and some are better than others.

Your skill as a problem-solver depends on your expertise with the tools and your knowledge of how to use them. You know you don't always solve problems step by step. Sometimes you have a solution before you know what problem it solves. For example, you decide to move your bed against another wall and you find out the next morning that the sun doesn't wake you up so early.

However, for many situations, having formal steps to follow can help you create flexible, workable solutions.

### Phase One

#### About Phase One

Let's take a look at the first phase of the three-phase model.



Here is a breakdown of each step in the problem identification process. In all three steps, your focus is on the problem itself. Only afterward will you start thinking about solutions.

## Perception

You ask yourself: Is there a problem? Where is the problem? Whose problem is it? This is the sniffing, groping, grasping stage. It includes whatever you do to get a handle on the problem.

What are the symptoms? Funny noises in the engine, an unhappy look on your employee's face, or a change in the productivity rate? You've got to find out what the problem is.

The purpose of this phase is:

- Ñ To surface an issue.
- Ñ To make it okay to discuss it (legitimize).
- Ñ To air different points of view.
- Ñ To avoid perception wars.
- Ñ To get group agreement to work on the problem.

Steps in this phase include:

- Ñ Legitimizing the problem; make it okay to discuss it.
- Ñ Asking, "How does the problem feel?" and, "What's the real problem?"
- Ñ Identifying the best, worst, and most probable situation.
- Ñ Identifying whose problem it is.

## Definition

Here, we state the problem as a question. Our goal is to grasp the general idea of the problem and then draw the rope tighter to get a more specific idea of the problem.

Steps in this phase include identifying:

- Ñ What is the problem?
- Ñ What is not the problem?

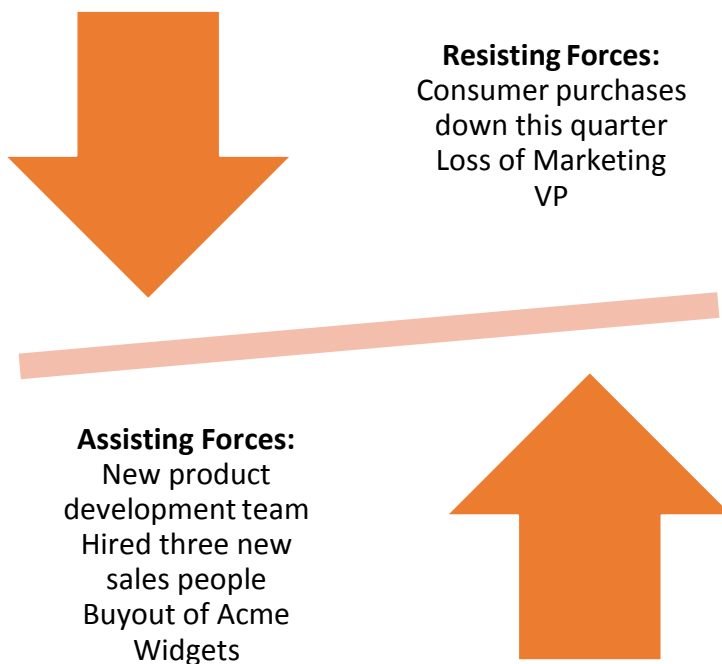
## Analysis

Now that we have a general idea of the problem, we will use analytical tools to define it even further. Steps in this phase can include the following.

**Ask basic questions**, such as who, what, where, when, why, and how.

**Break it down into smaller pieces.** For example, if we know that the problem is that revenue is down, we can break it down into possible areas of cause: manufacturing, shipping, or sales.

**Use force field analysis.** This is a structured method of looking at two opposing forces acting on a situation. Simply draw a line on a piece of paper. On one half of the line, list the forces that are working to solve the problem. On the other half, list the forces that are stopping you from solving the problem. Let's say that revenue is down this quarter. Our force field might look like this:



Move from **generalizations to specific examples** as a way of testing what the problem is or is not. For example, you could say, "Our company has really been doing poorly all year." We could further identify how the company has been doing poorly; let's say that the production department in particular has been less efficient, costing the company money. Then, we can look at what aspect in particular is doing poorly.

**Ask the expert.** Find a person who has dealt with this sort of issue before.

## Phase Two

### About Phase Two

Until the three steps of problem identification have been covered, don't proceed to phase two (decision making).



If people don't agree on the problem, they will never agree on a solution!

### Creative Thinking Methods

Here are some tools you can use to come up with ideas.

## Brainstorming

Draw a circle in the middle of a page and write down your problem. Then, draw lines from that circle and write down some solutions. Don't worry if they're wacky, impossible, or silly; this is a time for creative thinking, not critical thinking. Capturing the range of ideas is what is important here.



## Checkerboard

This is a more organized form of brainstorming and can be particularly helpful for people who don't like how chaotic a brainstorming session can become. With this method, you organize your thoughts into a table. We still want creative thinking rather than critical thinking, but this method may help you develop ideas.



Here is an example of a checkerboard.

Main Solution	Possible Specific Solutions		
<b>Create safe passage between building and parking/bus stop</b>	Have security escort night staff to their cars or bus stop	Rearrange shifts so that people come and go during daylight hours	Set up a buddy system with employees
<b>People missing work in snowstorm</b>	Set up 50% of staff with ability to work from home during storms	Arrange for temporary shelters so that staff can stay overnight	Provide incentives for employees to put winter tires on their vehicles and learn safe winter driving
<b>Threat of strike is rumored</b>	Set up contract negotiations well before contract expires	Approach union and ask to speak with them	Set up contingency plan to ensure business continuity in the event of a strike

Next, cut up solutions and move them around, or use your computer. This can help you organize your ideas and generate even more solutions!

### Research and Report

Look at what others have done. Do some research and prepare a report. What lessons can you learn from this information?

### Evaluation

Now that we have some solutions in mind, it's time to evaluate the solutions to see which ones are feasible.

- ✎ Sort solutions by category. This can be similar to the checkerboard above, just with some critical thinking applied.
- ✎ Identify the advantages and disadvantages to each solution.
- ✎ Identify what you like about each idea and what you don't like.
- ✎ Number your ideas in order, from the one that seems the most feasible to the one that seems the least feasible. This is useful for small problems.

## Decision Making

Once you have evaluated the options, it's time to make a decision. Here are some ways you can do it:

- Ñ Get a consensus from the group on the best solution.
- Ñ Don't limit yourself to one option; you may find that you can combine solutions for super success. (This is called the both/and method.)
- Ñ To make voting easier, you may want to eliminate the solutions that the group as a whole absolutely won't consider.
- Ñ Try to focus on agreements during all voting.
- Ñ Use straw voting: Take a quick, non-binding yes/no vote on the current solution as proposed.
- Ñ Try negative voting: Rather than asking who is for a solution, ask who is against the proposed solution.
- Ñ Back off! The group may need some time to evaluate the options before making a decision.

## Phase Three

### About Phase Three

Our last phase should be planning how to implement the solution and performing the actual implementation.





## Planning

For the planning portion, start by breaking the task down into smaller portions. Then, for each mini-task, plan the following information:

- Ñ What needs to be done?
- Ñ Who will do it?
- Ñ What resources will we need?
- Ñ How much time will it take? (Set a deadline!)

Once all the smaller tasks are planned out, you will have an idea of how long the main solution will take to implement. You may also want to make sure that the above questions are answered for the main task.

## Implementation

Implementation is a cycle of three activities:

- Ñ Figuring out what you are going to do
- Ñ Doing it
- Ñ Reacting to what happened or getting feedback

Sooner or later, you have to try out your solution!

## Solution Planning Worksheet

It can help to lay out what you are planning to do. Here is an example of a solution planning worksheet.

**Problem:** Revenue down 10%

**Solution:** Develop new product

<b>Task 1</b>	<b>Engineering will design product.</b>	
	<b>What needs to be done?</b>	Product needs to be designed.
	<b>Who will do it?</b>	Jim and Sue from Engineering.
	<b>What resources will they need?</b>	Unknown. They should have all resources in house; we will make sure they know we can assist in obtaining more resources if necessary.



	<b>How much time will it take?</b>	Targeted completion date: Dec. 31
<b>Task 2</b>	<b>Prototype will be created.</b>	
	<b>What needs to be done?</b>	Prototype needs to be developed.
	<b>Who will do it?</b>	Sam from Manufacturing, Jill from Engineering
	<b>What resources will they need?</b>	May need testing group; we will help provide this
	<b>How much time will it take?</b>	Targeted completion date: Feb. 28
<b>Task 3</b>	<b>Product will be manufactured.</b>	
	<b>What needs to be done?</b>	Product needs to be created.
	<b>Who will do it?</b>	Joe from Manufacturing
	<b>What resources will they need?</b>	All resources in-house
	<b>How much time will it take?</b>	Targeted completion date: Dec. 31

**The Problem Solving Toolkit**

There are some techniques we can use to help us at every stage of the problem solving process.

**The Lasso**

Can we tighten up our definition of the problem?

- Ñ “How can we improve communication in our group?” What do we mean by communication?
- Ñ “How can we get our work done more efficiently?” What do we mean by efficiently?

**Is/Is Not**

The Is/Is Not technique lets us eliminate assumptions and emphasize facts. For example, someone says, “The telephone system isn’t working.” You might ask them to list what isn’t working and list what is working. Perhaps all functions are affected, or perhaps only incoming calls have been affected.

## Graphics

A diagram allows us to see things visually. For example, think of personality types, which can be depicted visually as well as verbally. For some, a graph is more beneficial than a score or a label. For others, one type of categorizing is better than another type of categorizing.

## Basic Questions

Who, what, where, when, why, how?

## Criteria

In many situations it can be very helpful to have already determined what the criteria will be for your best solution. For example, let's say that you and your spouse are going out to celebrate your anniversary. Where are you going to go? Well, rather than the old harangue about: "Where do you want to go?" and, "I don't care. It's up to you," how about developing criteria ahead of time?

Some examples:

- Ñ The place must have a liquor license, since you want a glass of wine with your meal.
- Ñ It shouldn't cost an arm and a leg, yet you don't want the fast food joint just down the road. A cost of \$20 to \$30 per person is another criterion.
- Ñ You want a place where you can have chicken and your spouse can have seafood.
- Ñ It shouldn't be more than 50 miles away, since you both have to work tomorrow.
- Ñ It should take reservations. You don't want to go to all that trouble and then find the place has no table for you.

Now you can brainstorm, but the brainstorming will be modified or restrained, since you've already identified the criteria that the restaurant must meet.

## Force Field Analysis

Force field analysis examines restraining forces (forces that discourage the problem) vs. sustaining forces (forces that encourage a problem). Take an example like John arriving late for work.

What are the restraining forces?

- Ñ Boss is angry
- Ñ John is behind with his work



- Ñ Parking spots all gone

What are the sustaining forces?

- Ñ Gets to sleep an extra 15 minutes
- Ñ Takes the kids to the babysitter
- Ñ Misses traffic on way to work

Then the question becomes, how can we weaken the sustaining forces and strengthen or shore up some of the restraining forces?

### **Legitimizing Problems and Positions**

Problems are okay. Everyone has problems. They are a fact of life. Human beings couldn't live without change and stimulation in their environment, and problems provide that change and stimulation. So it's all right to have a problem as long as you are willing to do something about it. In our society we often think that having a problem is like admitting failure. Some of us refuse to admit we have problems, or we ignore or hide them.

### **Task Information**

Now that we've been through the problem solving process, let's apply it to an anger problem.

### **Problem**

Gina and Cindy are working on a project together. All of a sudden, Cindy explodes, yelling, "You're so stupid! I'm never going to get this done if I have to work with you." Gina is shocked; her and Cindy have always worked together well in the past.

### **Phase One: Problem Identification and Definition**

- Ñ Identify apparent problem: Cindy has some sort of issue with Gina.
- Ñ Seek and analyze causes: There is some other stress in Cindy's life that is making her more emotional.
- Ñ Define the real problem: Cindy is having problems at home.



**Phase Two: Decision Making**

- Ñ Identify alternative solutions: Cindy can try to deal with the problem on her own, seek the support of family or friends, or seek professional help.
- Ñ Choose the best solution: Up to Cindy; we would suggest professional help.

**Phase Three: Planning and Organizing**

- Ñ Plan a course of action: Get the names of three therapists from her doctor, interview each, and decide who is most suitable. Keep all appointments and track progress in a journal.
- Ñ Implement: Start by making the doctor’s appointment.

**Skill Application**

**Apply the problem solving steps we just discussed to your pre-assignment problem.**

**Phase One: Problem Identification and Definition**

**Identify Apparent Problem**

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**Seek and Analyze Causes**

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**Define the Real Problem**

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**Phase Two: Decision Making**

**Identify Alternative Solutions**

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**Choose the Best Solution**

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**Phase Three: Planning and Organizing**

**Plan a Course of Action**

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- Ñ What does it look like?
- Ñ Do you associate any sounds with your sanctuary?
- Ñ What does your sanctuary feel like?
- Ñ What does your sanctuary smell like?
- Ñ What are its emotional components? (Safety, calmness...)

**Outline your sanctuary below.**

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### **Relaxation Techniques**

It's essential that you learn to relax if you want to reduce your anger levels. If stress seems to be wearing you down and you are having trouble bouncing back, you may need to consult your doctor. However, for the usual day to day stressors that we encounter, here are some quick, easy ways that you can lower your stress levels quickly.

### **Deep Breathing**

Loosen your clothes, close your eyes, mentally relax your body, and take ten or more deep breaths. Your goal is to breathe into the bottom of your lungs (where the oxygen is readily absorbed), not the usual upper lung breathing we do. Put your hand on your stomach and feel it move as you inhale to make sure you are getting the air in good and deep. We call this **diaphragmatic breathing** because you are using your diaphragm muscle to breathe. When people are experiencing anxiety, they are most often breathing into the upper area of their lungs rather than the bottom.

Each time you exhale, count silently: "one," after the first breath, "two," after the second breath, etc., up to at least ten. If you lose count, or find yourself working on thoughts as they pass through your mind, start your count over again. When you are finished, you should feel more calm and relaxed. (Your blood pressure will go down temporarily too.) If you're in a meeting, on the phone, or dealing with a customer, count in your head.

## **Visualize**

Use positive imagery to boost your mood. In your mind, picture a place that you love. Feel the sunshine on your face, or the breeze on your skin. See the things that you love to see in great detail. If you are getting ready for a presentation or an interview, visualize yourself performing it perfectly. This way, when you get to the event your mind thinks you've done it before, so it will be even easier than the last time you did it. (This is a technique used by athletes and performance coaches.)

## **Music**

Music has the power to soothe, or to give us energy. It actually has healing power. Find a type of music that relaxes you and play it when you need to calm down. When you feel tired and listless, play some rousing music (rather than relying on caffeine or other stimulants) to give you a pick-up.

## **Acupressure and Massage**

Holding a fingertip to the point of most pain or tension and pressing very hard into the offending muscle for up to a minute can avert a headache or relieve tension. Have a friend or spouse learn how to do massage therapy and/or acupressure on tense muscles, since daily treatment is better than once or twice a month.

## **Laughter**

Laughter is the best medicine of all. A good belly laugh can lower blood pressure, slow your adrenaline, and reverse the stomach acid that comes with negative responses. Be on the lookout for jokes and cartoons you can share with family and friends. For a smaller dose, find a cartoon or picture that always makes you smile and post it near your desk. (Just make sure it's appropriate for all audiences!)

## **Replace Worry with Problem Solving**

Focus on what you can do, and then go ahead and do it. Chronic worriers tend to focus on what they cannot do, what should be happening, or how things are going wrong. Replace worry with problem solving so that you identify where you can step in. Then, stop waiting for the perfect time and do it.

## **Resilience**

Each stressful experience that you have prepares you to deal with one in the future. The more resilient you become, the less of an impact each of these events has on your mind and body. Lots of us go to



great lengths to avoid stress, and although avoidance initially feels like you are doing alright, the reality is that stressful things come up in our life all the time. The better we are at handling them, the more resilient we become, and the healthier we can be.

Each stressful experience leads us into a cycle of confusion and anguish. If we stay with those feelings in an attempt to minimize the impact the stress will have on our life, things actually get worse. But if we make a decision to deal with those circumstances by problem solving and adapting, we develop resilience and can enjoy life more and be more successful.

As you encounter more stressors in life (and we all do), we can rely on the experience we've had in dealing with negative circumstances in order to cope. We get more effective at managing that cycle of confusion, anguish, problem solving, adapting, and moving on.

## A Systems Approach

Violence expert Norman Keith proposes a nine-stage plan to help organizations prevent workplace violence:

1. Develop a violence prevention policy and program
2. Develop risk assessment processes and checklists
3. Maintain due diligence when hiring
4. Check workplace design
5. Review workplace practices and procedures
6. Check security systems and personnel
7. Implement worker training
8. Develop emergency response plans
9. Review and audit the program