



## Puzzle Pieces

I love puzzles.

Give me a good crossword or a brain teaser, and I'm thrilled. My husband and son hate telling me jokes because they know that, instead of just sitting back and enjoying the punch line, my mind is spinning in an effort to figure it all out. And, as I type this message, there is a huge jigsaw puzzle on a jerry-rigged stand in my living room that I've been toying with as therapy to combat the craziness of my schedule.

As I said, I love puzzles.

But, not everyone does.

Okay, I get it. Puzzles -- of the crossword or jigsaw variety -- don't excite everyone, and so many choose to stay away. On the other hand, there are puzzles that we all face daily -- pesky problems at work, for instance. In these instances, shying away from problem-solving, whether doing so intentionally or not, can lead to more trouble than it's worth.

So, in this month's edition of *EA Insights*, let's explore ways we tend to misstep in the face of the brain teasers that arise in our work and personal lives. My hope is that, by shining a light on some of our usual -- and often ineffective -- approaches, you can see that puzzle-solving need not be a daunting activity after all!

All the best,

*June*

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## Got Problems? 5 Missteps You're Likely to Make

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Got problems?

Exactly, who doesn't?

We all face challenges at work, at home, and elsewhere daily. What is pivotal is not whether we *have* challenges; it is what we *do* with the challenges we have. The way we grapple with the problems that arise often means the difference between successful resolution and continued heartache.

So, how do we tend to address the puzzling situations that confront us?

### Misstep #1: We Ignore the Problem.

This misstep is the "Ostrich Approach" to dealing with



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## "Quotes"

*"When you blame others, you give up your power to change."*

~Robert Anthony

*"Avoid problems, and you'll never be the one who overcame them."*

~Richard Bach

*"Some habits of ineffectiveness are rooted in our social conditioning toward quick-fix, short-term thinking."*

~Stephen Covey

*"There are times when fixing things quickly is the only option: when you have to channel MacGyver, reach for the duct tape, and cobble together whatever solution works right now. If someone is choking on a morsel of food, you don't sit back, stroke your chin and take the Aristotelian long view. You quickly administer the Heimlich maneuver."*

~Carl Honore

*"The reason people blame things on previous generations is that there's only one other choice."*

~Doug Larson

*"We often preoccupy ourselves with the symptoms, whereas if we went to the root cause of the problems, we would be able to overcome the problems once and for all."*

~Wangari Maathai

issues. Response: "Problem, what problem?"

In the face of a challenge, some deny that anything has gone awry. Not all ignoring is done intentionally, though; it also is possible that a blind spot is behind the nonresponse. Unfortunately, either way, the problem isn't dealt with because there is no immediate recognition that a problem exists.

### **Misstep #2: We Avoid the Problem.**

You might term this misstep the "Bob and Weave Approach" to addressing challenges. Response: "Okay, there's a problem, but we'll get to it later."

Here, the existence of the issue is acknowledged, which is a good first step. The misstep comes when nothing happens after that. Cries of busyness, bad timing, the problem not being as big as suspected, or the sensitivities involved in the situation allow us to bob and weave, duck and run, and put off until tomorrow...whenever that is...something that could, and probably should, be addressed today.

### **Misstep #3: We Attribute the Problem to Someone Else.**

You might use "Not Me" as the identifier here. Response: "It's not me/us, it's them!"

Interesting, this misstep could involve the *ignoring* or the *avoiding* we saw earlier; these contribute the "It's not me" portion of the response. What distinguishes this misstep from the earlier ones, though, is that things don't stop there. There's a Part 2 involved, with a finger of blame that's turned on someone else -- the infamous *them*. Unfortunately, the time and effort invested into outlining the shortcomings of others ends up being valuable, irretrievable, time and effort that could have gone into coming to grips with the aspects of the challenging situation that are within our own realm of control...and correction.

### **Misstep #4: We Attack a Bogus Problem.**

The approach here is to "Fight the Symptoms" when a problem surfaces. Response: "What do you see? Okay, fix that!?"

Again, the positive here is that some action is being taken. The negative is that this energy may be exerted on wrong, or only partial, fixes. Without taking a step back and analyzing the situation, it is not uncommon to begin swinging and punching, but hit nothing or hit the wrong something. When this occurs, frustration follows, and that actually can cause a significant setback instead of the intended progress.

### **Misstep #5: We Engage the Problem...Temporarily.**

This is the "Low-Hanging Fruit" method of addressing challenges. Response: "Is there a quick fix?"

This is not to malign quick fixes categorically. Sometimes that's all you need. The challenge arises when a quick and easy solution is sought to a problem that requires more. It essentially is putting a Band-Aid on a gusher. It may hold it for a minute...just a minute...but the problem's not resolved. There's been a failure to engage in a focused and strategic effort to overcome the matter, or the commitment's lacking to arrive at a long-term, incremental resolution to an issue that itself wasn't birthed overnight. Stopping at a quick fix for a deep-rooted problem is almost certainly promised not only to see the situation reappear but also worsen.

There you have it. Those are the typical missteps we engage in when problems occur.

What's next? Well, knowledge may be power, but applied knowledge yields progress. Translation: It takes effort to transition from simply understanding the *typical* responses, to understanding *your* typical responses, to understanding how to *overcome* your typical responses, to actually digging in and taking the right steps to *move forward*.

So, whether you're prone to ignoring, avoiding, blaming, misidentifying, or quick-fix seeking, and all that goes with any of them, help's available at **Executive Advantage**. We're here to assist you in pinpointing and remedying that business and/or career challenge. **Contact us today**. Partnering in problem-solving is what we do!

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At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

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"People who are angry at themselves sometimes blame others."  
~Jeanne Phillips

"Don't ignore big problems, and don't try to pretend that problems are smaller than they are."  
~Gina Raimondo

"There is no quick fix. At the end of the day, you still have to do the work[.] \*\*\* You have to change your life."  
~Al Roker

"You can blame the other guy..., or you can look at yourself and say, 'I must have contributed to this.'"  
~Nick Saban

"I think sometimes in life we want to ignore the problems... and just think about the good. I believe in positive thinking and affirmative living, I also think it's really important to remember..."  
~Kerry Washington

"If you get your ego in your way, you will only look to other people and circumstances to blame."  
~Jocko Willink

"Problem-solving becomes a very important part of our makeup as we grow into maturity or move up the corporate ladder."  
~Zig Ziglar

