

The Problem

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By Robert Fritz

This is a distinction I've written about, talked about, and driven home for years: there is something fundamentally limiting about the problem mentality. This point was brought home to me again this past week when I was leading a workshop for a group of performance coaches. They were a terrific group of folks. They were dedicated to their clients, and they had a lot to offer in the form of life experiences. They had reach high levels professionally, many of them were taking the prospect of their own personal development seriously, they were delving into deeper aspects of themselves, and they had an altruism that could only be admired. But, they were problem solvers.

Now, all of them had read my books. They had read about the contrast I make between problem solving and creating. Yet, their natural tendency was to work with their clients as problem solvers. So, even though I've made this point thousands of times in different forms, it occurred to me that it might be good to give it a go once more.

Problem solving is not creating. What is it? **When you are problem solving you are taking action to get rid of something you don't want:** the problem, the unwanted situation, the conflict. **When you are creating, you are taking action to have something come into being:** a desired outcome, a goal, a creation. Taking action to get rid of something is the opposite of taking action to give birth to something.

Our society is all about problem solving. What do the politicians talk about? All the problems. There's a reason for this. Problems seem to mobilize people quickly. During times of war and crisis people who may not usually agree with each other can quickly join together for what seems to be a vital cause. If the politician can name the problems, the assumption goes, then he or she must have the best "solution," and, therefore, should be elected. It's easy to talk about what needs fixing because so much does. But the synthetic mobilization of people through problems is always temporary.

It's a matter of motivation and structural dynamics. What motivates people joining together? The intensity of the problem. Once they take action, even if the action doesn't work particularly well, there is less intensity of the problem. That leads to less future action, because the motivation to act has weakened. The cycle is always the same: more intensity leads to action which lessens the intensity which leads to less future action. You **can't use problem solving to build anything long term.**

One of the great shifts of orientation, one that I wrote about in my first book *The Path of Least Resistance*, is from a reactive-responsive orientation to a creative and generative one. In the first, the prevailing circumstances drive us, and we have one of two limited choices: to react or to respond. In either case, **circumstances are in charge.** In the orientation of the creative or generative, **our choices are the dominant factor, and circumstances are simply the context.** Current reality is our starting point on a journey to the outcome we desire.

Most management systems are about reacting and responding to circumstances, and about problem solving. Most companies haven't figured out the difference between a problem orientation and an outcome orientation. Because of this, they waste enormous resources, including time, money, human talent, and on it goes. When an organization makes the shift to an outcome orientation, big changes happen. Many of the problems go away. **The ones that remain are put into proper perspective, and always dealt with as part of a larger creative process in service of the desired outcome.** People become more creative, flexible, inventive, and effective. A company like LaFrance Corporation has been working this way for over twenty years, creating

one success after another, and building one of the best organizations in the world. And the people who work in that environment learn how to shift from a problem mentality to the creative orientation. This spills over into their personal lives, as they learn how to build their lives through the most powerful and successful process for accomplishment in history: the creative process.

It is easy to organize around problems. You don't have to think. The problem (the circumstance) drives motivation, focus, and even the types of action you would take. If we said the problem was there weren't enough skilled people, get more skilled people. If we said the problem was that the staff isn't getting along, get them to get along. And some people talk as if they are doing something more profound when they use terms like "root cause," as if, once we found the root cause of a problem, we would be in a better position to solve it. Solving all your problems doesn't mean you will have what you want. This should be both obvious and a revelation.

Furthermore, when you are creating a desired outcome, a lot of the problems you might have had go away or become irrelevant. This is because when we establish structural tension, the dynamic that exist between the current state and the desired state, the mind begins to focus on new and original ways to create the goal. When people say they don't have enough time and money to do what they want, what they mean is to do those things in traditional ways. The creative process drives innovation, and what motivates that creativity is the impossibility of using tradition methods in achieving our goals.

Here's a place where the difference between a problem mentality and an outcome mentality is enormous. Health. The traditional medical approach is to solve problems. Getting rid of illness is not anything like creating health. If you have optimal health as a goal, and you act in accordance to that goal, many of the illnesses that plague most people will not manifest themselves. With all of the intelligence and brilliance that exist in the medical profession, why has creating health not become the major approach? Mindlessness is the enemy to many good things.

Your life is not a problem to be solved. It is a creation in process. And as psychologist Carl Jung said toward the end of his career:

"All the greatest and most important problems of life are fundamentally insoluble... They can never be solved, but only outgrown. This "outgrowth" proved on further investigation to require a new level of consciousness. Some higher or wider interest appeared on the patient's horizon, and through this broadening of his or her outlook the insoluble problem lost its urgency. It was not solved logically in its own terms but faded when confronted with a new and stronger life urge."

And this is why a newer and stronger life urge, as Jung puts it, enables people to create. They care about what they are creating, and problems fade as a new era emerges.

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