

# Problem Solving Inventory Results

The results of the *Problem Solving Inventory* will help you identify your particular style. You will also see how that style may make it easy or difficult for you to make career transitions. Identifying your problem-solving style is an important step in developing a plan for making satisfying career choices.

Your results focus on three factors that describe your style:

- **Confidence in Problem Solving**
- **Tendency to Approach or Avoid Problems**
- **Control over Behavior and Emotions**

Each factor will help you understand more clearly how you cope with problems in general, and especially how you are dealing with making a career transition.

Remember that the inventory does not measure your actual skill in problem solving. It reports your own perception of your style. A very important point to keep in mind is:

Your problem-solving style is not "carved in stone." It IS changeable.

## SUMMARY OF YOUR RESULTS

Get a quick overview of your results by looking at the summary below.

- Click on each Comment in the table below to better understand your results and to see a list of action steps that can help you make career plans and decisions. You may want to print a copy of your results or take notes for future reference.
- As you read the paragraph that describes each of your scores, ask yourself the question: Does this fit for me? Sometimes, the description will feel like a very accurate description of how you see yourself. Other times it may seem less accurate. The descriptions are based on what years of research have indicated that most people with those scores will experience, but there are always some exceptions.
- If you want to see how a particular problem-solving factor can affect a person's career transition and other life decisions, click on "case study" in the right-hand column below.

Scale name	Score	Comment	Example
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<b>Confidence in Problem Solving:</b> Tells you about your self-assurance when you are involved in problem-solving activities, or your belief in your ability to effectively cope with difficult situations.	21	You tend to believe and trust in your own problem-solving ability.	Case Study
<b>Tendency to Approach or Avoid Problems:</b> Tells you whether you tend to attack problems head on or to try to escape dealing with them.	56	You are reporting a strong tendency to avoid problems, either by forgetting about them, procrastinating, or reacting quickly without thinking.	Case Study
<b>Control over Behavior and Emotions:</b> Tells you the extent to which you believe that you are in control of your emotions and behavior while solving problems.	30	You tend to reflect a lack of control over your emotions and behaviors while coping with problems.	Case Study

## Your Results for Confidence in Problem Solving

You are reporting confidence in your problem solving. Based on countless life experiences, you have developed a general belief about yourself to handle problems confidently. Your score does not necessarily mean that you know how to handle all problems, but rather that you feel confident that one way or another, you will be able to deal with problems confidently and in a successful manner. In general, people who feel confident in their problem-solving tend to experience more progress in resolving problems, experience less stress, depression, and anxiety.

### Case Study: Jeff

Jeff's score on the Confidence in Problem Solving scale indicates that he feels confidence in his problem solving. Jeff had been working for a large manufacturing firm as a line manager. His company was recently downsized and he found himself out of work at age 46. Although Jeff was angry that he was given so little warning about the dismissal, he was also confident he could find something else to do that might even be more satisfying. In fact, Jeff saw this situation as a unique opportunity to make a career change and check out some other career options. Within a week of his dismissal, Jeff had lined up a number of informational interviews, had reworked his resume, and was actively making progress toward resolving his career problems. For most people, like Jeff, having confidence in one's problem solving typically results in making progress in coping with a problem.

# Your Results for Tendency to Approach or Avoid Problems

You are reporting a strong pattern of avoiding problems. Thus, you may typically avoid thinking about your problems and often may not collect information to understand them more clearly. In addition, you may not examine your feelings regarding a problem situation. Sometimes you may act very quickly when confronted with a problem and then later regret decisions that you may have made or actions that you have taken.

In terms of a career transition, you may find it difficult to motivate yourself to become involved in the career planning process or you may not collect enough information about the different career alternatives you are considering. It is also possible that you may very quickly decide on a career but then later discover that you know very little about this particular occupation.

## ACTION STEPS

- Examine Your Use of Approach and Avoidance Strategies
- Identify Your "Excuses"
- Move into Action and Feel Good about Yourself!
- Collect Information
- Attend a Career Workshop
- Work with a Professional

### ■ Examine Your Use of Approach and Avoidance Strategies

From your scores, it appears that you use both approach and avoidance strategies in your problem-solving style. It may be helpful for you to identify and evaluate times during the last year when you both approached and avoided problems. Think of two situations in which you used approach behaviors and two where you used avoidance behaviors. Then answer these questions about each.

1. What caused you to use this strategy?
2. How did the situation turn out?
3. How did you feel about yourself?

Here is an example to get you started:

Situation in which I used avoidance behaviors: I knew my manager was looking for me to ask me if I would coordinate the United Way drive for my division. I really didn't want to do it. I hate asking people for money. So I tried to avoid him, so he wouldn't ask me to do it.

1. What caused you to use this strategy? I just didn't feel that I could directly say to him that I didn't want to do it. I saw no other alternative.

2. How did the situation turn out and how did you feel about yourself? My manager caught me in the hall and said he had been trying to talk with me for over a week. He wondered whether I had been on vacation. When I said that I hadn't been away, I think he thought I had been sloughing off my duties and just not making myself available.

### 3. How did you feel about yourself? I felt pretty bad about the way I had handled it.

After you have answered these questions, ask yourself: What have I learned from these situations that will help me through the career transition process? Specifically, what approach behaviors did you use in the past that you can apply to problems facing you now? Also, it may be helpful to identify any negative consequences that might result from avoiding your career transition. Then you can plan activities to ward off such consequences.

#### ■ Identify Your "Excuses"

Think for a minute about "excuses" you make to avoid dealing with your career transition. When you don't want to do a particular activity related to your career change, do you ever find yourself saying such things as:

- I will do it tomorrow.
- I don't think it will do any good anyway.
- In the end, this won't work anyway.
- You never know what will happen when you make a change like this.
- I am too busy right now to focus on this change.
- I need to wait a few months when I will have more time.
- If I wait, things may get better in my current job.

Obviously, such excuses only avoid or delay progress on your career transition. But, you can begin to move forward simply by becoming aware of when you make self-defeating excuses. Once you realize you are making excuses, you can begin to take small, manageable steps that will move you toward your career goals. These steps are listed in the following action step.

#### ■ Move into Action and Feel Good about Yourself!

Sometimes the hardest thing for people who have a tendency toward avoidance to do is simply to get started doing something. You are already a step ahead in that you are going through this career transition material. Now you just need to continue taking action.

### 1. Choose one activity from the list below that you can commit to doing in the next week.

- Identify your career-related interests and skills, by taking the Interests/Skills Checklist that is part of this Career Change Package.
- Identify your career-related values, by taking the Work/Life Values Checklist that is part of this Career Change Package.
- Find out more information about occupations that might match your career interests by using the Links and Resources section of this site or by visiting a local career center or public library.
- Develop a list of people with whom you can do informational interviews (your goal here would be only to learn more about a particular line of work).
- Write a new resume or update the one that you may already have.
- Have someone with expertise in critiquing resumes give you feedback on your resume.
- Have a friend conduct a "mock interview" with you during which you practice your interviewing skills and your friend gives you feedback on your strengths.

2. Write down on a piece of paper how you can give yourself positive reinforcement for following through on the one activity that you have selected. Treat yourself to a special food? Buy yourself a small gift? Go to a movie you have been wanting to see? The point is to reward yourself for actively approaching the steps needed to make a successful career transition. You will also have taken an important step in changing your problem-solving style.

3. Now, for each upcoming week, select one or two different activities that can get you closer to your goal. Remember, select a way to reward yourself too. Feel free to add other activities to the list such as going to a local chamber of commerce meeting in order to network with people who could give you employment leads.

### ■ Collect Information

Information about yourself and careers is critically important in making a career transition. People who avoid problems often lack information. Identify one activity you can do this week to collect more information and take you one step closer to successfully making a career transition.

Here are some suggestions:

You might find it helpful to collect more information about yourself as a good step toward approaching your career decisions. For example, you might reflect on what you enjoy doing (interests), what you are good at (skills), and what gives meaning to your work (values) by taking the Interests/Skills Checklist and Work/Life Values Checklist that are both part of this package.

You might benefit from taking the *Career Factors Inventory* (included in this package) which will give you information about your need for career information and self-knowledge. This information might help you to examine what types of careers you might enjoy.

Set up an informational interview to collect more information about a career choice you are considering. For more information on informational interviews see the Take Action Links and Resources section of CareerHub.

Try spending some time on-the-job ("job shadowing") with a person who is in a career field you might enjoy.

### ■ Attend a Career Workshop

Many career centers, public libraries, and community colleges hold career workshops to help people with their career transition processes. You might explore whether such workshops are offered in your area. Career workshops tend to be structured, walking participants through a series of activities that will help them learn more about themselves and the work world, and to help them identify additional action steps that can be taken to accomplish specific goals.

### ■ Work with a Professional

Although taking some of the action steps listed above should help you learn to increase your use of approach behaviors and decrease avoidance behaviors, some people find it helpful to work with a professional counselor. Counselors can help you identify why you are having the reactions you are and help you design specific ways of better coping with life's problems. Your problem solving style is changeable, and a counselor can help you find

ways of taking more control and finding the career choice you want. If you need help finding a counselor, see the Finding a Career Counselor section of this site.

## Case Study: Sal

Sal had avoided problems his whole life. He remembered as a child running away from any conflict he could. Often he just procrastinated for so long that the problem eventually went away, or somebody intervened for him. But now he had real problems in his workplace that did not go away. His boss had become a tyrant and created a very negative work environment. His co-workers referred to it as a toxic environment and with the passing of each month, more and more of his colleagues left. True to style, Sal tried to avoid thinking about the problem. He tried to tell himself that things were really not that bad. He had started using marijuana at night to help him forget about the problems at work, but of course, the next morning they were still there. Eventually, Sal started seeing a counselor through his church. His counselor helped him see how his tendency to avoid problems was actually creating other problems for him. He and his counselor developed a plan for getting him out of his negative work environment and into a new one, and for giving up reliance on drugs. They began by working on his resume and having him conduct informational interviews with people who were non-threatening to Sal. Sal started seeing himself differently and slowly with each new step, he saw that he could be successful in approaching his problems.

## Your Results for Control over Behavior and Emotions

You are reporting a strong lack of control of your emotions and behaviors while solving problems. You may find yourself so emotionally charged that you are unable to focus on the problems at hand, and thus feel as if you neither understand the problem nor know what to do to resolve it. Sometimes people with this problem-solving style feel lost--as if they are just "muddling" through but not getting down to the real problem. Research indicates that when people become too emotionally focused, they often do not move ahead with the steps necessary to actually solve their problem.

### ACTION STEPS

- Learn from Past Times of High Emotion
- Test the Power of Relaxation
- Keep Your Cool
- Work with a Professional

- Learn from Past Times of High Emotion

The goal of this action step is to help you become more aware of your problem-solving style as it pertains to your emotions, and then apply what you learned to your career transition.

Think of 2 incidents in the past in which you were so charged up emotionally in solving problems that you lost sight of the problem. Then answer the following questions:

1. How did your emotional reaction get in the way of solving the problem?

2. What behaviors did you use to gain control of your emotions?
3. How can you apply what you learned from this situation to your current career transition?

Here is an example to get you started:

Example:

Incident 1 (briefly describe what happened): I found out my child was using drugs and I really freaked out.

1. How did your emotional reaction get in the way of solving the problem? I just yelled at Steven. It made him grow more distant and I feel it caused me to lose the connection I had with him when he was younger.

2. What behaviors did you use to gain control of your emotions? I calmed myself down and thought about what specific things I could do to make this situation better. Then I developed a list that included talking to the people who run the local drug information center and having a more rational and emotionally controlled talk with Steven.

3. How can you apply what you learned from this situation to your current career transition? A big problem I know I have is flying off the handle and not really sitting down calmly and planning how to handle a problem. I am sure there will be times during this career transition when I just lose it emotionally. I have to remember that I need to slow down the process and carefully think through my options.

#### ■ Test the Power of Relaxation

Many people find it very helpful to practice some form of relaxation exercise when they find themselves too emotionally charged to focus. By relaxing the body and mind fully, they are able to see things more clearly and determine what is most important for them to do in their current situation. There are many different types of relaxation exercises. Some focus on your body and muscles; others focus on your breathing. Some can be done in only a few minutes; others take much longer. Many books and tapes on relaxation training are available at bookstores.

Here is one technique you can try to see how these relaxation exercises work. Plan on spending about 10 minutes on this one.

Get into a very comfortable position. Some people prefer to lie down on the floor; others prefer to sit in a comfortable chair. Try to keep your eyes closed and your body relaxed. Focus first on your breathing; take deep long breaths. Feel the air coming in and going out. Do not let your mind think of anything else but your breathing. As you breath in say the words "my life is like a river" and when you breath out say the words "flowing to the sea." Breath in and breath out, each time focusing your mind on just the feeling of your breathing and the words "my life is like a river....flowing to the sea." Picture a calm river or brook, flowing to the sea, unimpeded by obstacles. Again, do not allow other thoughts like what you are going to make for dinner to intrude on this time. Focus only on getting your body and mind as relaxed as possible. After 10 minutes, gradually come back from your "meditation."

If this exercise helped you to relax, you might do it 3-5 times a week especially at times when you are feeling tense.

#### ■ Keep Your Cool

People use a variety of other methods, in addition to relaxation techniques, to stay calm and in control of their emotions when solving problems. What follows is a brief list of some of these strategies. In the next week try out one or two of them, especially when you are feeling out of control or stressed about your career transition.

- Exercise
- Prayer
- Meditation
- Deep breathing
- Counting to 10 before acting or responding
- Writing in a journal about your thoughts and feelings
- Talking to a calm friend about your options in the particular situation
- Drinking a soothing cup of herbal tea
- Shopping
- Seeing a movie
- Taking a long walk with a friend
- Taking a long, hot bath

#### ■ Work with a Professional

Although taking some of the action steps listed here should help you gain more control over your emotion and behaviors, some people find it helpful to work with a professional counselor. Counselors can help you identify why you are having the reactions you are and help you design specific ways of better coping with life's problems. Your problem-solving style is changeable, and a counselor can help you find ways of taking more control. If you need help locating a counselor, see the Finding a Career Counselor section of this site.

## Case Study: John

John had quit his job working for a major manufacturing company because he found it far too stressful. He tended to get emotionally distraught over daily hassles in the company. Three years ago he started a home-based business. Now with a downturn in the economy of his local community, John feared his failing home-based business was going to lead him into bankruptcy. He found that he couldn't think of anything else. He was obsessed with worry. He kept thinking about how his parents had lived through the Great Depression and had always impressed upon him the need to keep a good sized "nest egg" in case things ever started falling apart. But he had no nest egg. He had invested it all in the business three years ago. John could not sleep; he was too agitated to really focus on what he could do to make his situation any better. He felt more out of control than he had ever felt. Eventually his wife told him he had to get some professional help. He went to a counselor in a nearby town. The counselor worked with him on relaxation training and on learning how to gain control by taking small steps toward solving a problem. For example, once the counselor brought up the concept of debt consolidation, John set up an appointment with his bank's loan officer. For John, working with a counselor was a way that he could begin to make some changes in his problem-solving style so that he could cope more successfully with the challenges that faced him.

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