

# SOLUTIONS THINKING SAVVY

## Ideas + strategies to produce problem-solving people



Tanya Lacy, Director of The Coaches Consortium, Creator & Founder of Intercept Coaching System

**Developing problem-solving savvy in your people is an opportunity to produce new perspectives and momentum for your franchise. Every franchise wants people who contribute within the bounds of the system. So how can solutions thinking savvy be coached into people so it sticks? Here are Tanya's tips.**

### Start with yourself

'Bring me the solution, not the problem'. An expression used by many business leaders who have invested in franchise systems. While asking for solutions from your people may be a positive step, are you fostering an environment that's truly aligned with this request? Are you problem-solving yourself? As a leader, you set the example by which culture is modelled.

### Setting things up to succeed

We have found over years that certain **elements** of a business leader's own approach **limits the execution of business strategy** from their team.

Expectation is one such limitation that is often overlooked. What are your expectations as a leader? Are they realistic? Are they too high? Do your unmet expectations turn to frustrations? If so, what's the impact of frustration? Do you move into telling mode rather than asking? Is your business held under your power or is it a business of empowerment?

If you're leading your business to succeed, it is key to-

- (1) Relentlessly take stock of your own expectations of others.
- (2) Understand the impact of your own approach and how it's emulated.
- (3) Do you ask or tell?

### Power vs. Empowerment

I won't spend too much time here; apart from saying that 'telling' is a power trip and 'asking' is a journey to empowering your people. Asking is key to growing a problem-solving people culture. If you like this concept, this

is something Intercept covers in depth in its one to one and group programs.

### Developing problem-solving people

The single best skill you can develop in your business is the ability for **everyone to be able to ask questions**.

Without this skill infused in your culture, each and everyone will always be **assuming** based on **his or her own belief system**. **Think about that.**

Have you ever walked into a retail outlet and have a sales person try to sell (tell) you something that does not solve your problem?

The 'sales person' in this scenario is single-mindedly interested in telling you what they have to sell rather than asking you about what you are looking to resolve.

Now apply this back to within your own business.

Does your business listen effectively? Do you? Answer this sincerely.

If you don't listen, is it fair to expect your people to listen?

Don't underestimate the domino effect.

### Tell vs. Ask

Consider the tell vs. ask model. Why? Because problem-solving requires excellent listening. To elaborate, if the business leader is a good listener/questioner/listener and the staff copy this, then the staff becomes good questioners/listeners/questioners.

Through this, they connect with the other person to ensure they truly understand the problem at hand, and then they can set about solving the problem with the product or service that your franchise supplies.

### Thinking laterally & linearly

Think of a cobweb stretching across a doorway. Some people have the capacity to think in cobwebs. They can draw linkages very quickly from one topic or issue to another. Now think of a ladder. Some people have the capacity to think in ladders. Linearly. Up or down the logical steps to where they are going. Both of these methods of thinking are skills. While creative people benefit from having lateral thinkers in the team and lateral people benefit from having creative thinkers in the team, problem solvers use **both** linear and lateral thinking.

### Thinking in the gaps

Problem-solving capability and 'savvy' is actually the art of seeing the unseen and thinking 'in the gaps'. That is, seeing where the gaps are. Think about the franchise system you are in. Think about the founding strategy. What solution was being delivered to the market or what problem was being solved when this franchise was founded? The thinking behind the business was problem-solving thinking.

Here's an analogy: someone walks into a hardware store to buy a drill bit. While they may be purchasing a drill bit for their drill, the problem they are solving is that they need a hole. How to get the hole made is the problem in need of a solution.

True innovators think in gaps and filling holes. They don't just see the problem and leave it. They actively see ways to fill the gap, to solve the problem. This gives them a framework or context to work within.

Asking questions assists to clarify the true nature of the problem.

**“A problem well stated is a problem half solved”**

– Charles Franklin Keetering

**Think inside a box, to think outside one**

Here’s another scenario: you want to increase the average sale value per customer in your business. You’ve asked your people to think laterally, however they haven’t been successful. By re-framing the problem within a more specific criteria and giving them the power to be creative within that criteria, they create a solution.

Why? Because pre-framing the question gives their mind a specific space to focus within and develop creative thoughts from.

Something like, “How would you go about increasing the average sale without putting any prices up? Without spending any money?” Automatically, the question steers the staffer’s mind into challenge mode. They then go about problem-solving within the limit of the criteria and produce a new, creative solution.

**Be supportive**

Control freaks keep out! When you are encouraging people to be problem solvers, you must be positive about each suggestion made. If not, initiative is discouraged, enthusiasm quashed. The secret is to be supportive by asking more and more questions until the most suitable ‘do-able’ solution arrives. In this way you are coaching the best out of their hearts, minds and mouths and they are learning to capably create and contribute.

**Kings and Queens of Questions**

In both our client and coach groups, we highlight that ‘he or she who asks the questions leads’. In our experience at Intercept, questions of seven words or less are most powerful. Check these: ‘What is it you wish to resolve? What have you tried so far? What have you got in mind? Are you open to exploring alternatives? Where did this link to our outcomes? Where do you want to take this? How will you know when you’ve succeeded? How can we improve this? How did you arrive at this answer? When can you

revisit this? When can you consider some alternatives by? When will you have this done by? Who benefits? Who can drive this?’

**“He or she who asks the questions, leads.”**

– Tanya Lacy

While these questions are simply an indication, you can see how questions can take you forward in a number of different directions.

New perspectives arise from questions and old perspectives are intercepted.

**7 Tips to grow problem-solving people in your franchise**

**INTERCEPT**

- (1) Excuses** – create rigour in your conversations
- (2) Broad brush statements** – ask specific questions
- (3) Limited thinking** – ask for the solution
- (4) Complacency** – expect the root cause to be found
- (5) Repeated problems** – isolate, contain resolve
- (6) Unrealistic expectations** – communicate reality
- (7) Negative conversation** – ask forward positive questions

**How questions create the culture**

Other than being lateral or linear, questions can also take you backwards or forwards, negatively or positively. At Intercept, our graduate clients learn the importance of pre-framing questions so the general trajectory is **forward and positive**.

Too many conversations take place that are backward looking and negative. Cultures that are vibrant focus on forward moving and positive (possibility) questions, rather than backward looking and negative (limiting) questions.

I recall trying to synchronise diaries once with another very busy person. As we were on the phone, I was hearing: ‘no, no, that time won’t work, that won’t work, and then I asked the

question: “What will work?” and as soon as I asked this question, we found the solution.

**What are the barriers to growing problem-solving people?**

Fear of failure, fear of looking stupid, fear of ‘getting into trouble’, fear of stepping on toes. You can overcome these barriers with a supportive curious approach.

Ask questions that help people see the limitations in their own thinking. Then set criteria, standards and positive outcomes you expect. Problem-solving can work within a system if you set criteria. Allow people to be creative within the criteria.

**Remember**

As a leader, ask questions of your people. This sets the example.

What do you think? What would you like to do here? What’s missing?

Problem-solving solutions can remove pain and create wealth. All we have to do is program our habits to see gaps. In seeing the gaps, we can then move to seeing solutions. If you coach your people to more deeply listen and ask questions, you will see incredible shifts in the conversion of business.

Here’s why: as we support the resolution of other people’s problems, we are of great value to them. The value we create exceeds any concern including that of price point. So long as the problem is going to be solved and so long as improvement is made from the current problem, time, energy, money or effort will always be invested.

**Summary**

Problem-solving intercepts stagnation, creating positive forward action, generating positive energy and sentiment. Because economies rise and fall on positive or negative sentiment, problem-solving is the best opportunity communities, industry sectors, economies and nations have to thrive. In my view, of all the skills to build in your people, problem-solving savvy is the ultimate. Grow problem-solving savvy, and before your eyes you will see the confidence and contribution grow. Watch the results and prosper from your efforts. ❖

**About Tanya Lacy...**

Tanya Lacy is a founding Director of The Coaches Consortium, a franchised business system delivering the powerful Intercept coaching program. With over a decade of delivering the Intercept Experience to companies, Tanya shares valuable insight, having worked with business leaders.  
[www.tanyalacy.blogspot.com](http://www.tanyalacy.blogspot.com)

For further information on the Intercept program visit [www.thecoachesconsortium.com](http://www.thecoachesconsortium.com) for franchise enquiries for coaches and business operators.

