

# DEALING WITH WORK PROBLEMS

*by Kenneth Williams, Ph.D.*

Goals: To enable the person to...

- do what is most important
- in the most effective way
- in the shortest reasonable time
- making the best use of resources
- with the fewest problems for self and others
- and to do the work as unto the Lord

## Some Issues to Consider

1. Work problems are usually symptoms of problems in other areas, such as:
  - a. Relationships—at work and elsewhere.
  - b. Physical health.
  - c. Emotional well-being.
  - d. Spiritual vitality.
  - e. The task.
  - f. Other issues.
2. Motivation is a critical issue. See “Motivation Problems in the Work.”

## Suggested Steps in a Solution Process

1. Assess the situation.
  - a. The question to ask is “what?” Avoid asking “Why?” at this stage.
  - b. Try to determine the “what is” vs. “what should be.” Consider effects on the work, on the person, his or her family, coworkers, etc.
  - c. Try to get agreement with the person on the facts before moving on.
2. Diagnose the situation.
  - a. The question to ask is “why?”
  - b. Review possible causes. Develop and use a checklist of issues you think may be affecting the person. You may show this to him or her and get his or her ideas. Ask for other causes you may not be aware of.
  - c. Write your tentative diagnosis.
  - d. Discuss your tentative diagnosis with the person. You may want to go over it with your supervisor first.

- e. Try to come to agreement on the main causes, even though you may not have identified all of them.
  - f. Agree to begin working on what you do agree on. You may have to leave some issues until later if you don't agree.
3. Determine a solution strategy.
- a. The question to ask is "how?"
  - b. Consider, "In what ways can this person be helped, personally and in the task?" "What resources are needed? Are they available? If not, where can I find them?"
  - c. Set specific, time-related goals. Goals usually come from a clear statement of the gaps between what is and what should be.
  - d. Explore possible options with the person for achieving these goals.
  - e. Choose options that seem viable, and try to achieve agreement on them.
  - f. You may come to the conclusion that it's unfeasible to try. Problems may be so deep that the investment not worth it, or adequate resources may not be available. The person may not be willing to accept the options, to do what is necessary, or to accept help. Discuss this with him or her, and explore what options are available in light of this.

At this point you may decide that the only viable solution is to remove the person from the task and the situation.

4. Implement the solution strategy.
- a. Discuss it thoroughly with person first. Make sure he or she understands the strategy, and all of its implications. Try to get agreement on the strategy.
  - b. Express your concern for his or her welfare, but that this doesn't mean you can let work or others suffer.
  - c. Timing is important. If the person is going through a serious personal crisis, don't try to begin a major program to try to make him or her more productive. Wait until the crisis has abated.
5. Evaluate the strategy and revise as necessary.
- a. Once the strategy has begun, schedule regular evaluations, and revise as needed. This may need to be done over a long period, with checkups at increasing intervals as improvement occurs.
  - b. Look for positive and negative consequences of the strategy, e.g., on quality and quantity of the work, and on attitudes and relationships. Watch for unforeseen complications and undesirable side effects on the person, others, and the work.
  - c. Be sure to clearly acknowledge any improvement noted, and affirm him or her as appropriate.

\*For simplicity masculine forms are used to designate both male and female.