

Introduction to Problem Solving Skills, Page 7

Video: Problem Solving: Job Skills

Duration: 6 minutes, 46 seconds

WHY DO YOU THINK PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT?

CRAIG BATES: I don't know why any of us would be here if we weren't solving problems. You can't have any processes that don't have any problems. It's just inherent in doing anything. It's how you recover from those problems, how you prevent them that is part of everybody's job. It's almost a given that you need to have problem-solving skills.

WHAT PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS DO YOU LOOK FOR IN POTENTIAL HIREES?

CRAIG BATES: I might give them a little bit of a case of what I've been talking about. Because again, we're looking at people who are dealing with automation and other machines. Give them an example of something that might give you a problem in a machine. And one of the first things in our line of businesses is, are the parts going into the machine all of the same? You get out of a machine what you put into it. I might ask them, if we have a small variation here, is it going to matter on a piece of automation? Well, it obviously is. And I'm looking for that answer.

HOW MUCH DO COMPANIES RELY ON EMPLOYEE PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS?

ANTHONY GIGLIO: Repeating that, getting to know what they're doing, getting to understand as well as they can how the machines work, what their input materials are, how this all works to make a good product, and being observant. Those are the kinds of things that I would point out. Offering that information, as I just said, when people come looking for it, or even if people don't come looking for it, is very important.

A couple of other things that I've thought about are, employees should never act on their own good ideas without approval. So changing the process, even if you're thinking that it's certainly going to make things better, is almost never a good idea. Every place I've worked for the last many years, the products have been complex. And those complex products have a lot of thought, and a lot of engineering, and a lot of development behind them.

Another point about what I would offer to the new worker is to not only to not make unauthorized changes, but to follow the standard procedures as best they can. Here we use calibrated tools, measuring devices in many places. Well, that's really important. And if you know that the measuring device that you're using is broken or you know that it needs to be calibrated, it shouldn't be used. So we really count on people to follow the rules, to use the calibrated tools and equipment, use the standard procedures that are out there. Because those are what folks think have the best opportunity to make a high-quality product.

WHY IS PROBLEM SOLVING AN IMPORTANT SKILL?

LEO GIBBONS: Well, we make tantalum and niobium metal products, and they're pretty expensive. So if we've got a problem in the plant, it usually translates itself into bad quality, increased scrap. And those are costly problems for us. It also means that we're not shipping the product to the customer on time if we are making material that's not coming out well. Being a manufacturing company, the roles of the guys on the factory floor making the product is critical. So it's important that they stay engaged, and stay current, and want to contribute every day to making us a success.

We use a lot of teams here to solve problems. We need operators on those teams. And the better operators welcome the chance to solve problems and realize that it's putting the company in a better spot for long-term employment if they're part of the problem-solving solution. We have entry level positions all the way up to electron beam furnace operators, which is the most complex job we have on site. We post jobs as we grow, as people leave.

And we're always looking for people who have demonstrated skills in the lower entry level positions so that we're confident that as we move them into higher level jobs, they are going to do well and they're going to contribute. So people need to keep in mind that what they're doing now may not be what they're going to do in the future. And supervisors are looking for people who have good skills to advance. So the better operators will not only help the company, but they'll help themselves personally. Because obviously, the more complex jobs pay more money.

WHAT PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS MAKE AN EMPLOYEE MORE VALUABLE?

JOHN WITKOWSKI: One thing I like to tell folks is, it's not about the knowledge that you have or know about the process. A lot of times, people feel like, I'm not the process expert. Actually, you're probably the most valuable person to have on the team. Because those of us that are so familiar with the process every day tend to overlook some of the obvious stuff that could happen. So a fresh set of eyes and someone that's new the employee that's going to ask a question which some people may perceive as being dumb, it's not a dumb question.

It helps to have somebody that's new and doesn't know and starts to ask those type of questions to get you to think. So sometimes, somebody that has absolutely no knowledge of the process at all, you want at least one person like that on the team that can ask those questions, challenge the norm, and get people to think, well, maybe that's right, or maybe that's this. I always tell folks, don't ever feel you can't contribute to the problem-solving methodology.