

Life and Business - It's All About Problem Solving

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Abstract / Teaser:

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It's true: what sets humans apart from all other forms of life is our ability to solve problems, contrary to the standard answer that says it's because we have opposable thumbs. In fact solving problems is all we do—even if we use our thumbs to implement the solution—and we solve problems for one reason. Humans solve problems to meet their needs and fulfill their wants, thereby [reducing stress](#) ^[2] (or anxiety).

So what does that have to do with business? Last we checked, every corporation in the world exists to make money, but there is a more underlying function that businesses perform.

Businesses exist, and always have, to meet human needs, and meeting human needs is best characterized as a problem to be solved. Consider that the history of business and economic development is synonymous with the history of finding ever more ingenious ways to travel, be entertained, control the length of grass in the yard, find a mate, get rid of your old furniture and so on. (Think jet airplanes, iPods, lawnmowers, match.com, eBay).

As businesses, we're always trying to push the envelope of innovation to meet human needs better, whether that entails a low-end solution and price reduction, or whether it entails a higher-end solution for which customers are willing to pay a premium. In either case, or even in the case of business-as-usual, there's one thing you can always count on, if for no other reason than that nothing stays the same and everything always changes, including a corporation and its many functions and activities: we can count on there being problems to be solved.

In this sense problems are good, not bad as the word implies, because they are the necessary

atoms of evolution (human, plant and animal). There's no escaping problems in a world that changes constantly—at the subatomic level, in the realm of the natural environment, in markets and certainly in the strategies and operations of a corporation. Therefore, if there's one overarching competency for corporations to possess, one that lies most squarely at the center of what a company has to do well, that competency is problem solving.

We might add that in a world where consultants are constantly branding methods, and honing lenses through which to view the business at hand, a problem-solving orientation can sustain a workforce through these various programmatic gyrations and iterations. All the tools, techniques and methods, and the names that go with them (like Lean Six Sigma, Continuous Improvement, Kaizen and so many others)—are nothing more than repackaged programs for solving the business problems of the day.

BMGI understands the problems businesses face, and we know where the problem-solving power ends and the packaged programs begin. In fact, we make a nice living partnering with clients to drive Six Sigma and Lean deployments in many industries, and we've done so for many years. But as anti-consultants, we recognize that the particular change framework for Lean Six Sigma, as well as the tools Black Belts wield, have now become commoditized. Inasmuch as TQM was once pronounced dead, so, to, will Lean Six Sigma. But as you'll see, Lean Six Sigma's molecules are far from dead; they've been living, and will live, for quite some time.

The question is: who will be the great practical thinkers and problem solvers to lead us into the next economic era? How will we solve the problems we now face, or will be facing in the next five years?

We won't do it just because we have an operational-excellence program, or because we've adopted Lean Six Sigma, or because we have a vision and some strategies. We'll do it only if we know how to recognize problems, define them, analyze them and bring the very best tools and knowhow to bear on the solution. Having compendiums of tools and techniques alone, or having a Lean Six Sigma program, doesn't make one a world-class problem-solver. Something more is needed if a business is to better meet human needs with profitable products and services that take their customers' pain and stress away (that's why they pay you—or us). In turn, this enables you to take your own pain and stress in business away, and it might even vaccinate you against the constant stream of new acronyms, systems and programs the consultants claim will transform your organization.

We all know at our cores that only an organization can transform an organization, maybe with some help from the outside when needed. BMGI understands this and has realigned its services and its people to help others solve their problems—and reduce their stress.

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