

Problem Solving: The Surest Way to Establish Credibility & Gain Influence

Have you ever dealt with a head-scratching, complicated problem, and you weren't sure how to solve it? I have... Here are my story and seven steps to solving unsolvable problems – if you follow them, you'll gain credibility and increase your influence...

The anticipated announcement was made: The large beverage company I worked for agreed to purchase two competitive beverage companies. The incoming water and juice brands were fantastic and complementary acquisitions to our existing portfolio.

However, the acquisitions came with complications and created internal competition. Each acquired company had its own sales team and developed its business plan. My role was similar, focusing on my company's legacy brands.

During my tenure, I'd established strong relationships with the bottler. However, my influence slowly eroded as the new sales teams began integrating. The new team members leveraged exciting incentives, expensive dinners, and premiums to woo the bottler. Excluding me, they tied up meeting times and market visits. Our mutual bottling partner became enamored with the shiny new penny and took their eyes off the ball.

Execution of all the legacy brands began to slip, and total sales stagnated. I discovered that the newly acquired companies only contributed 10% of the bottler's total revenue; all of the legacy brands I represented contributed 90%. I determined that our problem boiled down to focus; we wouldn't make our collective business plan if we didn't re-calibrate our focus on the 90%. At the same time, we needed the newly

acquired brands to flourish.

I began considering my alternatives. The only solution I could think of was to fight fire with fire. I'd need to double my efforts. Get back in the game with more attractive incentives, fancy dinners, and premiums to woo the bottler's attention back. I wasn't entirely comfortable with this approach but believed there was a solution somewhere. I didn't know where.

I was stuck...

I prayed to God and asked for wisdom to meet the challenge and identify a game-changing solution.

Then it happened... Inspiration hit...

I remember watching my all-time favorite movie, the 1959 Academy Award-winning Ben-Hur. There's a scene when the movie's main character, Judah Ben-Hur, observed a chariot race practice. The chariot was pulled by a team of four strong and fast horses. However, the chariot driver lost control of the horses as the team ran wildly down the track. Just before the chariot approached a curve, Ben-Hur commented that the chariot would never make the turn.

And he was right... The horses ran straight through the turn and off the track. When asked how he knew that the chariot would run off course, Ben-Hur told the owner he raced in the Roman circus. Based on his experience, he observed that the horses were strong and fast. Still, they weren't positioned to leverage their individual strengths. They were running as individuals, not as one. Ben-Hur rearranged the horses with the slower, more steady horse on the inside to anchor the team during turns and the fastest horse on the outside. The owner said, "Show me." Ben-Hur raced the chariot around the track in record time without incident to the owner's amazement.

The parallel was striking to me. We have a strong team of people representing our brands to the bottler. I wondered,

“What if we worked together and everyone achieved their goals? What if I harnessed the team, positioned them by strength, and we ran as one?”

Said another way, if you can't beat them, join them.

After some internal alignment and planning, I invited 15 new brands and bottler representatives to a groundbreaking “Brand Partner Summit.” Our objective was to build trust, open lines of communication, initiate collaborative planning, enable dynamic execution, make the plan, and most of all, stem internal competition.

The meeting's theme was “Running as One.” We began our time together horseback riding in the Smokey Mountains, a chance for everyone to connect outside the office and get acquainted. After the team-building exercise, we gathered for a Roles and Responsibilities dinner—all of the individuals shared how they added value to the company. The next day, I opened the Summit with the Ben-Hur chariot practice movie scene and asked the team to consider how we begin to run as one. Participants started making connections and collaboration recommendations as we reviewed each other's business updates, priorities, and plans.

Ultimately, the Brand Partners concluded that our initiatives needed to be integrated into a comprehensive monthly Sales Plan. The Sales Plan captured and communicated all of the execution priorities allowing the Brand Partners and our bottling partner to be on the same page.

The Sales Plan solution mitigated internal competition, collaboration improved, execution excelled, and everyone hit their business plan. We ran as one. So much so that our Brand Partner Summit and Sales Plan were deemed a best practice and adopted by other parts of the company.

If you're faced with a problem like I was, I recommend you follow my seven steps to solving challenging problems:

1. **Define the Problem.** Articulate the problem in writing. Distill the problem into its simplest form. For my above example, the problem was focus. Identify the implications and consequences of not solving it. Also, ask repeatedly why? that is a problem. This will help identify root causes.
2. **Provide Context.** What is the history of the challenge you're trying to solve?
3. **Believe There is a Solution.** Have the attitude that all problems are opportunities and can be addressed. Be creative, use your imagination, and brainstorm with others.
4. **Identify Alternatives.** It's always best to determine multiple solutions and evaluate which one will best solve the problem.
5. **Develop a Recommendation.** Based on your alternative evaluation, allow the best one to surface.
6. **Plan and Act.** Once the recommendation is made, put a plan in place and execute it.
7. **Pray.** I highly recommend praying and seeking God's wisdom when faced with problems or decision-making for the person of faith. The Bible says, "Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track. Don't assume that you know it all". (Proverbs 3:5-6 The Message)

The surest way to gain credibility and increase your influence is to solve problems. If you define the problem, provide context, believe there is a solution, identify alternatives, develop a recommendation, plan and act, and pray, you will become a leader who makes a positive difference.

Do you want to discover more about establishing credibility and gaining influence to make a positive difference? Please visit my website, prestonpoore.com, today!

Cheers!

Preston