Tell Me Your Problems

Summary
Using a problem in your past that did not turn out as expected, apply the standard problem-solving method to discover where you went wrong and rewrite your history.

Primary Workplace Readiness Skill
Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

Secondary Workplace Readiness Skills
Creativity and Innovation
Conflict Resolution
Customer Service Orientation
Career and Life Management

Vocabulary
- Problem-solving process
- Decision making
- Cause-and-effect relationship
- Critical thinking
- Brainstorming
- Solution
- Revise/improve solution
- Artifact
- Research

Context Questions
- How can problem solving set you apart from your peers or coworkers?
- How can you demonstrate your ability and willingness to solve problems, in a job interview?
- How is being a problem solver beneficial to your employer?
- How is following a problem solving method beneficial to your employment?
- How do problem solving and critical thinking interrelate? How do they differ?
- When problems arise at work, what are some resources that can help?
- What are some common ways to solve problems in the workplace?
- How does the scientific method vary from the more general problem solving steps listed in this activity?
- What can you do to make yourself a better problem solver?
- What additional workplace readiness skills are closely related to critical thinking and problem solving? Which are needed to complete this activity?
- What are some alternative models for problem-solving and decision-making methods?
- Why is it good sometimes to fail?

Guidelines
1. Think of an interpersonal or communication problem you once had that did not turn out as you expected. Write it down in the simplest terms. Recommendations: It would be better if this was a work-related problem, so think of any problem arising from a group you belong to, a volunteer group, a sports team, whatever. It is easier if you focus on something you regret. As an alternative, go to this site to help you identify a more personal kind of problem: Solutions to Real Life's Most Annoying Problems.
2. Describe how things turned out.

3. The following is the standard problem-solving method. There are alternatives. This one is based on the scientific method. Use it to rewrite history by applying the problem-solving steps and give yourself a better outcome:
    a. Identify or define the problem
    b. Identify the causes of the problem
    c. Collect and consider facts and opinions—brainstorm solutions
    d. Select the best solution
    e. Implement or enact the solution
    f. Evaluate the solution—reflect and improve
4. For help in applying the problem-solving model, go to this site: Over Fifty Problem Solving Strategies Explained.
5. If you used an alternative problem-solving method, describe which technique you followed to arrive at a solution.
6. Provide an artifact: for example, a sketch or diagram of your problem and solution and the steps you followed, or any technique you followed to help you apply a step. Detail setbacks and obstacles. A flow chart diagram works well.
7. Submit final documentation:
    - Detailed, written summary of the original problem and solution. If this was a problem that ended negatively, provide the original outcome and what you would have done differently.
    - Complete the "Reflection" questions below.
    - Provide the artifact summarizing your problem-failure-solution.

Evaluation
See rubric

Reflection after Completion (may be a questionnaire or included as part of the proposal)
- Which steps of the problem solving process did you leave out at the time you made a bad decision?
- What were the consequences of your bad decision?
- Did the consequences teach you anything? Did failure?
- How had the outcome of your bad decision motivated your change or evolution?
- Which additional workplace readiness skills are related to this exercise?

Notes:
It is recommended that you avoid presenting or sharing problems of a sensitive personal nature, especially those involving relatives or relationships or even crimes. This is not the occasion to tackle honest solutions to these types of problems, especially in matters of the heart or problems that are ongoing. Interpersonal relationships are important, but for the sake of this exercise, these types of problems should be restricted to workplace or professional conflicts. Remember, this activity is not about finding solutions, it is about applying the problem-solving steps and analyzing the results.

Example:
Event: As a high school freshman, I ran for class president and lost.
a. **Identify or define the problem:** My lack of preparation and popularity led to my loss.
b. **Identify the causes of the problem:** I assumed running for class office was a popularity contest and I did not take it seriously. I also overestimated my popularity.

c. **Collect and consider facts and opinions:** I did not consult with anyone prior to the election and I did not advertise my candidacy. My speech was also poor and poorly delivered. I should have researched running for class office and talked with the counselors running the election or even an upper classman who had held office. I should have also researched the responsibilities of class president and highlighted those tasks within my election speech.

d. **Select the best solution:** Looking back, I probably should have sat out of the election, or at least prepared better.

e. **Implement or enact the solution:** It would have been better if I helped someone else get elected so that I could better prepare in the future and perhaps ran for president or another office as an upper classman.

f. **Evaluate the solution**: At the time, the loss was an embarrassment. The way it affected me probably prevented me from running for office again. But it did teach me a lesson. The first was about preparation. I might not have won anyway, but I could have spent time preparing properly and I wouldn't have come away looking so bad. Lack of preparation is the most obvious reflection of poor work ethic and lack of professionalism. It disrespects the people who might have voted for me. And it was all up to me, my preparation. I could have at least asked more questions. One thing I've learned is that it might be my nature to jump right into things without worrying about the negative outcomes. I've learned to ask more questions and to ask the right questions. Answers are never that hard to come by. But I've learned to spend more time preparing, especially for presentations. They still make me nervous, but I'm a lot less nervous when I know what I'm talking about. It also taught me that most of life's endeavors have nothing to do with popularity and that anything gained from popularity alone would be a hollow victory.

Example Reflection Questions with Answers:

- **Which steps of the problem solving process did you leave out at the time you made a bad decision?** I think I left out every step. I didn't know running for office was a problem to be solved. Certainly I had no strategy. I did not know that I should have gathered resources to improve my chances.

- **What were the consequences of your bad decision?** Embarrassment and fear of future rejection.

- **Did the consequences teach you anything? Did failure?** I learned to prepare and to take professional aspiration more seriously. I also learned to deliver better presentations. I learned that I am a bit of a risk taker, but risk can be better managed and reduced. I also learned to devalue popularity.

- **How had the outcome of your bad decision motivated your change or evolution?** Now I set short and long-term goals for professional accomplishments. I have expectations and ambition to succeed. I think that part of professionalism is respecting others by respecting my role. It has little to do with competition. I focus on doing my best and a lot of that has to do with my level of preparation.

- **Which additional workplace readiness skills are related to this exercise?**
  - ➤ Creativity and Innovation
  - ➤ Conflict Resolution
  - ➤ Customer Service Orientation
  - ➤ Career and Life Management

Artifact Example:

Idea/Decision	Preparation	Win/Lose
• Run/Don't run for class president • Pros and cons • Estimate current support and how to gain support • Personal reasons for running	• Question counselors/ upperclassmen who ran berfore • Understand responsibilities of office • Form talking points for speech and practice	• Reflect on success or loss • Set a new goal • Offer to help student government • Apply lessons learned to running later or for some other office

Differentiation:
1. Technology use—use word graphic design software to create the artifact
2. Multisensory options—include online research, project finished drawings/images
3. Community connections—identify problems within your community to which you can apply the problem-solving method
4. Small-group learning—brainstorm ideas, research together, collaborate in teams, and choose the best ideas or one to complete
5. Vocabulary strategies—word wall and matching, match words or phrases under each term in the skill area, "creativity" and "problem solving"
6. Student organization of content—final product should include
   - Detailed, written summary of the original problem and solution. If this was a problem that ended negatively, provide the original outcome and what you would have done differently.
   - Completed "reflection" questions
   - An artifact summarizing your problem-failure-solution.

Resources:
- Over Fifty Problem Solving Strategies Explained, John Malouff, Ph.D., J.D., University of New England, http://www.une.edu.au/about-une/academic-schools/school-of-behavioural-cognitive-and-social-sciences/news-and-events/psychology-community-activities/over-fifty-problem-solving-strategies-explained
- Top 10 Solutions to Real Life's Most Annoying Problems, Adam Dachis, Lifehacker, http://lifehacker.com/5781093/top-10-solutions-to-real-lifes-most-annoying-problems
- Project Management Skills for New and Aspiring Project Managers, http://www.project-management-skills.com/problem-solving-techniques.html
- Learn About Quality, http://asq.org/learn-about-quality/problem-solving/overview/overview.html

- The 4 Most Effective Ways Leaders Solve Problems, Glenn Llopis, Forbes, http://www.forbes.com/sites/glennllopis/2013/11/04/the-4-most-effective-ways-leaders-solve-problems/#732aa6e92bda
- The Psychology of Problem-Solving, Edward Oneill, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vg936IW9i7Q