FAILSAFE NETWORK
Helping you learn from things that go wrong

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Pros and Cons of Problem Solving

In classes, I always discuss problem-solving and why we need it. I tell everyone that they are gifted problem solvers. I know this because they have jobs. Their employer would not hire and invest in them if they weren't talented problem solvers. The ultimate goal of problem-solving is to overcome obstacles and find a solution that best resolves the issue. We need problem solvers. This is the way we're wired. And it is good, most of the time.

Like when…

The carpet runner at work is flipped up…

You go to get a cup of coffee and discover an empty coffee pot…

Reviewing project documentation that has holes and is half complete ….

and on and on …

One example I use to demonstrate our bent on problem-solving is when I tell them the first one with the answer wins a gift card. I say, "A bat and a ball cost $1.10 in total. The bat costs $1.00 more than the ball. How much does the ball cost?" Someone always blurts out, "The ball costs 10 cents." This is a great example of our problem-solving nature. I say, "No, I'm sorry, that was the wrong answer." Shortly after, someone says, "The ball costs a nickel." Which is correct. Then we discuss it. If the bat was $1 more than the ball and the ball was 10 cents, then the total would be $1.20, and how slowing down just a little, helps people figure out that the ball costs 5 cents and the bat $1.05. It's a quick example of the difference between problem-solving and understanding a problem. We must slow down and let the evidence speak to us to learn from things that go wrong. This will result in profound learning and be evidenced by a change in the way we think.

But people, aka Problem Solvers, don't like to slow down. They like to address problems as fast as possible, resisting the need to slow down to understand an issue.

We have many different terms to describe what I'm talking about. You may be familiar with the term process thinker, which focuses on how to achieve a specific and defined goal, while a systems thinker tends to focus on how different processes impact one another.

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We need both, but there's something else that comes out when we are on a quest to solve problems, learn, and change the right things - and that's blame. Human beings are also wired to blame. I think it goes hand in hand with problem-solving. The carpet was flipped up because someone else did it. The coffee pot was empty because someone else drained it and didn't make another pot. In our minds, we had nothing to learn from those issues. We need to fix them. Unfortunately, when I blame a coworker, I am done thinking about it. Just like the bat and ball cost $1.10. I'm wrong, but I don't notice because I'm off to the next thing. I solved my problem. Well, I think I did; I really haven't. I missed the problem and added to our issues by engaging in blame. Blame will aggravate our problems, not solve them. We must ban blame if we seek to understand why something happened. If we truly desire to learn from it.

Blame is inversely proportional to understanding. It's impossible to blame and understand and vice versa. The moment someone blames 'them,' they quit trying to understand. Blame also brings shame and a culture of fear. It undermines trust. Problem solvers use Blame as a tool to solve problems to help us fix an issue and get on to the next thing. But blaming never really helps fix anything.

Failure is the greatest phenomenon in life. It is screaming at us to learn and change the way we think if we will listen. It's time to take a different approach. It's popular these days to say we're a learning organization, but saying it doesn't mean it is true. A change always follows learning in our actions. Saying we learn and then doing the same things is evidence of deceiving ourselves and not learning.

Failsafe offers a process that helps organizations and individuals listen, learn, understand, and change the way we think. That is what latent cause analysis is designed to do.

Albert Einstein understood learning results in a change in our thinking. He said, "The world as we have created it is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking."