



By Richard D. Czerniawski

THE PROBLEM IS ...

I recently participated in a Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu seminar. The professor conducting the workshop asked if we knew what the problem is. He answered his question with the remark, "The problem is that you're fighting the wrong problem." Ahhhh, that most certainly is a problem.

When we try to solve the wrong problem in Jiu-Jitsu, we get ourselves into trouble. It could mean losing a superior position, our opponent reversing us, or, worse yet, submitting us. We must solve the right problem, for if we don't, we squander precious resources and cede the advantage to our competitors.

It's no different in business than in Jiu-Jitsu. We must be mindful of solving the right problem, the one that will enable us to capitalize on an opportunity or resolve an obstacle to growth. When we begin work with clients, our first step is to help them identify the right problem and then prepare an action plan to solve it.

If you are solving what you believe is the problem yet continuing to lose ground or failing to achieve your objectives, then you know that you are addressing the wrong issue. Unfortunately, this is after the fact, following a loss of resources, time and, perhaps, market position.

So, we need to find ways to get onto the right problem from the start. In Jiu-Jitsu, we learn through experimentation—trial and error. We attempt to resolve a situation, and when we find that we have worsened our position, we go back and figure out why and how we might handle it in the future.

In the business world, we might employ "consequential thinking." Specifically, ask "what might be the outcome from any action or plan of attack we contemplate?" It is probably best not to identify with one outcome but a plethora of potential outcomes for each one from the "worst" case, to "most likely" case, to "best" case scenario. You might even assign probabilities to each. If you find that it leaves you with more questions than answers and a limited likelihood of achieving your objectives, then don't attempt to fight that problem. Dig deeper to find the right problem or issue.

Another approach is to ask, "why will this action or approach help our brand?" Don't ask once but three times! And, if need be, ask more—7 times 7. Asking "why" will help us go significantly deeper with our critical thinking.

What gets us into trouble is taking action without engaging in "consequential" and "critical thinking" regarding whether we are solving the right problem. It is exacerbated by not learning from

the outcome. But then, that's another issue!

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