

PROBLEM SOLVING 101

Here are the basic elements that can be used in problem solving:

Title: Here the problem is stated in broad terms for reference and identification purposes. It should be broad enough to identify all elements of the problem to be solved; hence the title may need to be reformulated once the final solution is agreed.

Identification of the Problem: Here the problem must be stated in its entirety, which may take a couple of iterations while dealing with “Facts Bearing on the Problem.” It should clearly state the goal to be achieved, otherwise, how would you know if the problem would be solved by the proposed solution?

Assumptions: Here you include all of the assumptions that need to be taken into account. The less assumptions the better and if the need for one is not clear, leave it out.

Facts Bearing on the Problem: Here you describe in summary form all of the facts to be considered in discussion of the problem. Sometimes this is done in group discussions, such as a “brainstorming” session. No opinions, emotional feelings, unsupported facts are allowed. Also, do not include reasoning or analysis of the facts, as that comes later. Facts should be arranged in logical sequence. You may also want to include symptoms of the problem as a check to see if the proposed solution will also “cure” the symptoms.

Discussion of the Problem: In this section the discussion lists all the possible solutions to the problem, based solely on the assumptions and facts stated above. Nothing else, or any new facts or assumptions can be introduced here, unless you go back and start over. The discussion of the problem should lead logically to the solution.

Conclusions: The conclusions, and there can be more than one, are to be brief and specific. Do not summarize the main points of the Discussion and call it a conclusion. Conclusions are to be factual statements that are supported by the previous information.

Recommendations: This section is the final section and can contain multiple recommendations, each clearly stated. Taken as a group the recommendations must completely solve the stated problem. Because of the unique situation associated with a fellowship of Believers the recommendations cannot ignore the human element and the need to be considerate of people’s feelings, Christian love, etc. Perhaps this is the most difficult part of the equation when attempting to solve a problem. However, that is not to say that feelings, per se, should rule the solution when one is dealing with the betterment of the fellowship. Some feelings are just that, feelings, and have no basis to support them. On other occasions feelings can be based on incorrect information, or miss-understood information. This is why it is so important to develop all the facts that deal with the solution to the problem, i.e., so there is a sound basis for proceeding with implementing the recommendations.