

## Problem Solving Strategies Guaranteed to Fail

**Short-term rather than long-term solutions.** When a problem persists, it may be that you are focused on short-term answers. You're trying to feel better in the moment, rather than planning long-term solutions that may be difficult at the moment. The classic example is giving in versus setting limits for a misbehaving child. When you give into the child's unreasonable demands, the sudden drop in noise level may be rewarding at the moment. But down the line, there will be a lot more tears and tantrums. The long-term solution would be to set limits and endure the momentary unpleasantness while a tantrum burns itself out.

**Numbing.** This solution focuses on blocking the pain. Alcohol, drugs, TV, computer addictions, escapist socializing, compulsive risk-taking, over-spending, binge eating, and compulsive sexual behavior are just a few numbing strategies. While numbing helps you temporarily escape your feelings about a problem, nothing gets solved. In fact, the problem is usually getting worse while you run away.

**Trying to change others.** The fallacy here is that people change. They do, but not because you want them to. You may complain and blame. You may get angry. Nothing happens. The more you try to push or coerce others to solve your problems, the more helpless you become.

**Waiting.** This future-oriented strategy assumes things will get better at some future date – after the children are raised, after you retire, after your boss retires, after your promotion, etc. The unfortunate thing about waiting is that you do nothing to solve the problem in the present. You feel more hopeful perhaps, expecting time to fix things, but there's no guarantee. Meanwhile, your problem remains unresolved.

**Setting phony prerequisites and irrelevant goals.** Before you finish an important task (like writing a thesis or dissertation) you write a family recipe book. Before you take a class that will advance your career, you must purchase a new desk and design your perfect office. None of the phony prerequisites are relevant or necessary. They sabotage your plans.

**Over-reaching.** Your plan to solve the problem is so complex, and requires so much energy, that you collapse before ever really starting. The plan is based on an ideal, an impossible standard that some part of you knows you can never reach. In fact, subconsciously, that's why you are over-reaching and expecting so much of yourself. This way you will never have to face change.

**Going under, so you can be rescued.** This problem-solving strategy requires that you let things get really bad. Unconsciously, the plan is to appear as if you're drowning emotionally – overwhelmed, going down. Then someone who cares will hopefully step in and take action. Trouble is sometimes they don't. Or they try, but don't know how to help. Or it's just too late. No matter the outcome, you are weakened and helpless rather than strengthened and experiencing your own power.