

# Four Tips for “Beefing Up” Your Problem-Solving Tool Box – Part Two

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*This is part two of a four-part guest post contributed by Fred Nickols, Managing Partner of Distance Consulting LLC. All four parts focus on improving your problem solving efforts.*

## Tip #2: Be clear about all of your goals and objectives

Ultimately, the aim of problem solving is action. To engage in problem solving is to search for a solution. A solution is a course of action that produces the solved state. To actually solve a problem is to implement the solution that has been found and demonstrate that it works. Solving problems requires *intervention* as well as *investigation*.

Intervening in complex organizations requires of us that (a) we are clear about ***all*** our goals and objectives and that (b) we carefully think through the likely effects of any actions we are contemplating.

Figure 2

Do We Have It?	No	I Achieve	II Avoid
	Yes	III Preserve	IV Eliminate
		Yes	No
		Do We Want It?	

Actions taken in an organizational context often “ripple” outward from the point of intervention, sometimes having unforeseen and unintended consequences. Our goals and objectives, therefore, are typically multi-dimensional; that is, we seek to eliminate some conditions, and to achieve others. There also are conditions we seek to preserve or avoid. (See Figure 2, the Goals Grid).

If we don’t want something that already exists, our goal is typically one of eliminating it. If we want something that doesn’t exist, our goal is ordinarily one of achieving it. Four categories of goals and

objectives can be derived from the interplay of our perceptions and preferences: *Achieve*, *Preserve*, *Avoid*, and *Eliminate*.

For any problem situation, it is useful to ask the following questions as a way of clarifying *all* your goals and objectives:

- What are we trying to *achieve*?
- What are we trying to *preserve*?
- What are we trying to *avoid*?

- What are we trying to *eliminate*?

These same questions are also useful in examining any contemplated course of action. For example, if you've decided to solve the problems with a legacy accounts payable system by replacing it with a popular commercial version, you are well-served by asking the questions above in relation to that new accounts payable system.

