

The Official Campus by the Sea Problem Solver Guide

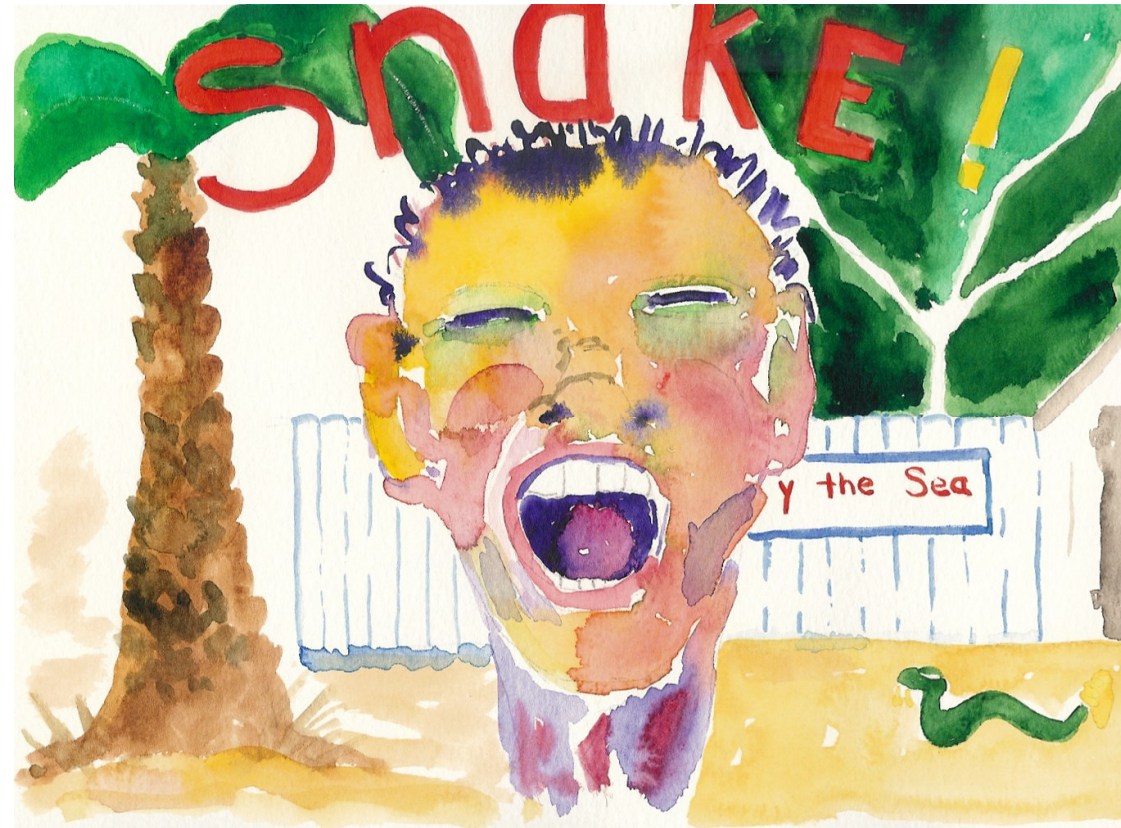
Introduction

As fate would have it, the higher one moves up the organizational ladder, the more complex the problems become. If there is any good thing to say about this predicament, it is that problem solving is a learned skill. What follows is the first-ever Campus by the Sea Problem Solver Guide for managers of all types. Organizational executives, student leaders, and even parents will find this easy to use twelve-step approach useful as you try to identify, analyze and maybe even solve a few of the tough issues that end up on your plate. Based upon over sixty years of problem solving experience by CBS leadership, this little tool will revolutionize your life. And if revolution is not what you are after, then keep it on your coffee table as a conversation starter.



Rule #1

Name the problem. This will help objectify the issue in your mind.



For the director of Campus by the Sea, the InterVarsity conference center on Santa Catalina Island, rattlesnakes are a public relations problem. One lonely diamond back slithering through the camp at high noon does more to deter repeat business than a million dollar advertising campaign for Disneyland. The snakes, however, have lived on the desert island for eons. A juicy field mouse and a shady rock are their primary concerns, not PR.

Rule #2

When describing a solution, analyze why it works.

The first attempt to keep snakes out of Gallagher's Cove, where Campus by the Sea is located, came with the introduction of wild pigs to the canyon in the mid 1930s. Rattlesnakes are creation's introverts. Solitary, nocturnal and clothed in camouflage skins, their goal in life is to hide in their surroundings. When discovered by anything bigger than dinner, their alarm system goes off, warning the intruder to back away. Pigs on the other hand are nature's extroverts. They live in lively herds and snort, squeal and grunt when they walk. Like snakes they are nocturnal. When darkness falls, the oinkers emerge to rummage through the canyon to root for worms and grubs, sending serpents scurrying for the hills.



Rule #3

Good solutions often have unexpected benefits that over time can outweigh their intended purpose. Make note of these.

Campus by the Sea was established in 1951. The camp leadership discovered that pigs would eat anything including buckets of useless kitchen slop. Therefore, the swine sentries were rewarded daily with table scraps for their brave service. When children expressed interest in seeing the local wild life, expeditions were organized to the upper canyon feeding trough. The cute piglets who scampered around the sows were a favorite of the crowds. Villainous vipers were traded for happy hogs. For problem solvers, it doesn't get any better than that.



Rule # 4

This is a biggie. Success has a way of breeding its own set of new problems. As a rule, the new set is usually more complex than the old.



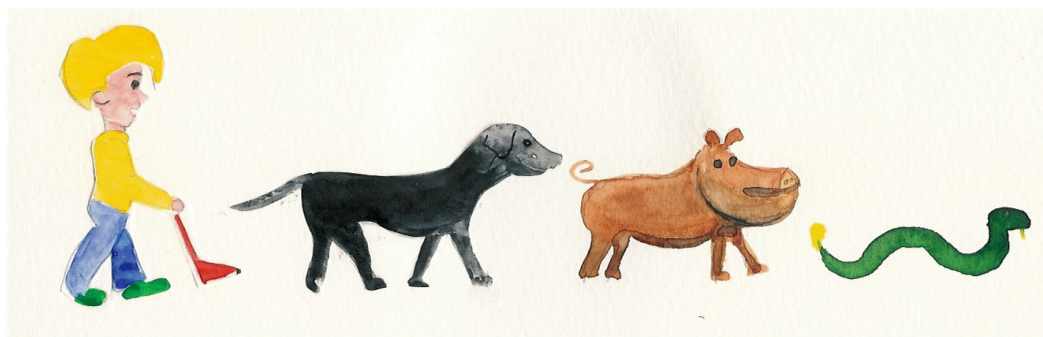
Without any natural predators on the island and given the smorgasbord of culinary delights they were served, the porker population began to grow. First there were twenty five, then there were fifty, and then by the late 1970s over seventy-five pigs filled the small canyon. As the herd grew in size, it also grew in boldness. One homeless piglet was adopted as the camp mascot and named “Wilma.” Unfortunately she grew up, attacked campers and had to be deported to the far side of the island. (See Rule #4.) Other piglets foraged in cabins during the day looking for bags of potato chips. Camp staff erected make shift “pig doors” to keep them out. (See Rule #1.) At night the big boars roamed their numerous trails, fought off amorous competitors and mated under the cabins. Bleary-eyed campers complained. My four-year-old daughter was convinced the beasts lived in the toilet and refused to use the outhouse for a week.

Rule #5

Look for problem-solving patterns. If a solution worked once, you will be tempted to use it again. Be careful.

If pigs were keeping snakes out of camp, maybe something was needed to keep pigs out of camp. The logic was consistent, and the unintentional solution was “Cinder” the dog. The big black Labrador was introduced to the cove as the family pet of the managers. His friendly day-time disposition made him an immediate hit with the children. (See Rule #3.) His aggressive night-time bark sent the pigs packing. Everyone was happy again... for awhile. (See Rule #4.)

Unlike cats who can be trained to use a litter box or who bury their own messes, dogs do it wherever they have the urge. So Cinder did. Inevitably some hapless camper would step in “it” during the night. Camp leadership realized they had a new problem to address. (See rule #1.) A grounds crew member was assigned to clean up after Cinder each morning. Pooper Scooper in hand, the grounds crew fellow took care of Cinder’s business while Cinder kept pigs at bay who in turn kept snakes out of sight. A most elegant solution if ever there was one.



Rule #6

Elegant solutions tend to evaporate over time due to conditions beyond the control of the problem solver.



One dark September night, Cinder squared off with two angry boars. He lost. They gored him. Though he survived the attack, his days were numbered. He was eventually given a purple heart and reassigned to a backyard on the mainland. Within weeks of the guard dog's departure, the pigs were back with a vengeance. They were everywhere.

Rule #7

Problems are like snakes. Some are poisonous and can kill an organization. Others just frighten the daylights out of a director, but they are harmless. Work with the poisonous ones first.

Rule #7B

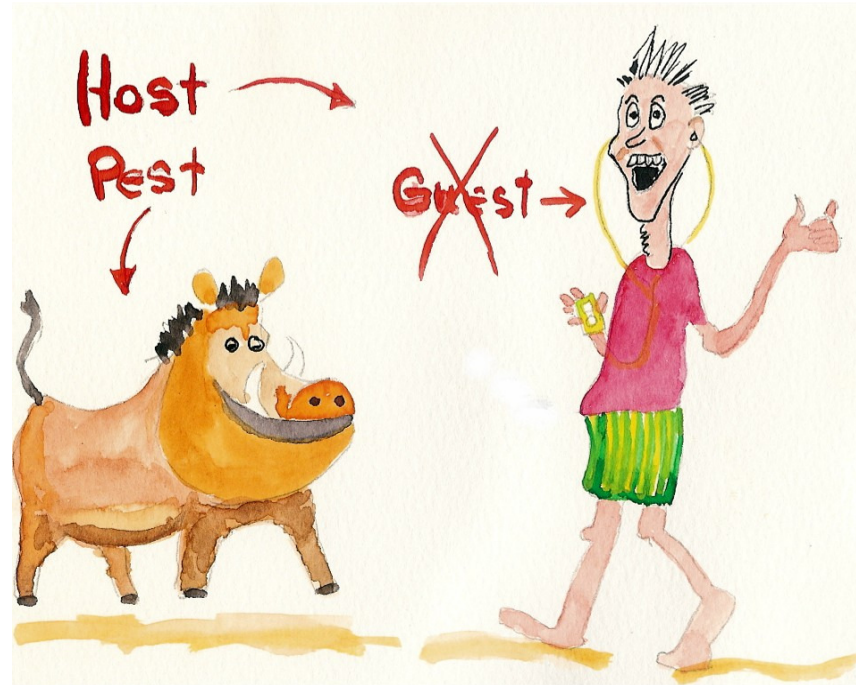
If ignored long enough, all snakes become poisonous



Between 1980 and 1990 Campus by the Sea was involved in a million dollar building project. Camp directors were focused upon construction, fund raising and staff recruitment. All the while the pig population kept growing but there were more important matters to attend to.

Rule #8

When considering bold new solutions, take into account the historical and contextual factors.



Early camp directors attempted to displace the snakes from the cove. From 1950 to 1980 the rustic conference center had a capacity for 100 people and was used only during the summer months. By 1989, it had become a year-round facility for 250 people. As the usage of Gallagher's Cove increased, so did the need to control the environment. Directors in the early years viewed the island wild life as the permanent hosts and themselves as seasonal guests. By the mid-1980s the roles were reversed and the wild life quickly became the unwelcome pests. That change of perspective opened the door to new solutions.

Rule #9

When considering bold solutions, seek out the wisdom of your supervisor. She may help you consider the implications of your plans and maybe even keep you out of jail.

Campus by the Sea is closed each Winter for repairs. With Cinder gone and the pigs back, camp staff finally realized more drastic measures were called for. A plan was conceived. The date was set. One foggy morning in January, their last supper was distributed while camp staff lay in wait. When the pigs appeared at the trough, staff opened fire and massacred half the herd. The other half got the message and took to the hills. Carcasses of the animals were buried along with any reports of the sickening solution.

The previous camp director had recently moved to a new assignment. Supervision of the camp was in transition and the bold solution had been cooked up at the staff level. Thankfully the animal rights activists never heard of the plan. It should be noted that there was precedent though. The Island Company (the CBS landlords) followed similar procedures with an over-population of goats. A herd of 10,000 was reduced to 1,500 in five years. In retrospect, InterVarsity leadership should have been consulted first. I think we would have approved of the plan, but we might have also sought the involvement of the Island Company in its execution.

In the Spring of 1989, campers returned. Oblivious to the events of the winter, many commented on how peaceful the cove

seemed that year. (See Rule #4.) They also noted how dry the island had become. (See Rule #6.) California was in the fourth year of a serious draught. Everything was desperate for water, including rattle-



snakes. With Cinder gone and the pigs in hiding, guess who returned to the canyon in search of moisture? This leads me to:

Rule #10

Some problems are unsolvable. Do the best you can to minimize their impact.



Because scores of children were present each week that summer, and because other snake solutions had been eliminated, a new policy evolved: Identify and Kill. (See Rule #2.) Over the years campers had been taught to yell, "Snake!" whenever they saw one. Camp staff were then dispatched to dispose of the critter. Rarely, however, in the years before 1989 did guests to the camp see one.

Each summer Campus by the Sea hired thirty to forty college-age people. Depending upon their interests and skills, they were assigned to the waterfront patrol, kitchen detail or program counselor team. The bottom of the staff pecking order was the grounds crew. They were stuck with cleaning latrines, clearing trails and hauling trash. Their only identifying marks were their permanently sweat-stained tee shirts. The summer of 1989 became their moment of glory. (See Rule #3.) When the terrified campers yelled, "Snake!" a grounds crew member came running to the rescue. Armed only with courage and a long-handled shovel our hero decapitated his prey. That summer they killed an average of one snake per week. Like wild west gunslingers, some notched their shovel handles. Their fame grew. One resourceful crew member was hiking a mountain trail one evening when he encountered a rattler blocking the trail. He found a large rock, climbed the tree above the snake and dropped the rock on the viper. Then he drug his quarry home, skinned and ate it for lunch the next day. Junior high boys held him in awe.

The bravado of the grounds crew exacerbated the public image problem, however. (See Rule #1.) Camp directors were concerned that word would get out that CBS had become a snake pit. Staff were encouraged to use discretion in talking about the activity around campers. Grounds crew members were encouraged to not parade their trophies through camp followed by every wide-eyed child. Eventually the summer passed, the rains finally came, and snakes returned to the upper canyon.

Rule #11

Problems are like onions. They often have numerous layers. Use a group process to gently peel back the layers. Ninety per cent of the effort to finding good solutions is understanding the root causes.



That fall camp leadership had a chance to reassess the situation as a team. One factor that contributed to the convoluted solutions was the changes in camp leadership. Since 1950, camp directors changed every five to eight years. Each director tried to address the immediate problem be it snakes, pigs or Cinder. Few leaders had knowledge of the forty-year historical process. Few were aware of the effects that the growth of the camp had upon their perspectives of the problem. The result was that many solutions addressed symptoms, not root problems.

Rule #12

Problem solving is spiritual work, therefore pray.



As a Christian leader, you, like the apostle Peter, have been called to feed and care for the flock of God. It's not your flock, and you are never to care for it alone. The Lord Jesus promises to be with you. Lean on him and he will provide whatever resources you need to carry out the responsibilities he has given you.

Finally, recognize that the ultimate reward for a problem solver is never the elegant solution. Rather it is the growth that takes place in us and others as we face difficult issues. It is the harvest of the fruit of the Spirit and the expansion of Christ's kingdom. It is the joyful companionship of the Lord Jesus himself. You see, there are things in life that are more important than solving problems. The problem is simply the means to an end.

Postscript

The story that you have just read was written in 1998. Soon after, the Santa Catalina Island company decided that they had to do something with the growing population of pigs and goats. The animals were contributing to the erosion of the hillsides. Some of the goats were killed. Others were rounded up and sent to the mainland. They are now used to eradicate brush from unwanted areas. (see www.goatsrus.com)

The fate of the pigs was not so fortunate. The animals were trapped and systematically killed by professional hunters. The canyon above Campus by the Sea was a major staging ground for the operation.

And the rattlesnakes; well we have not seen many lately so they are not a problem. However, if you are a juicy field mouse, then that is another story.

