



Growing up, I remember *loving* TV.

The argument could be made that shows from long ago had purpose, values or meaning...

They had up to 10 minutes less in commercials...

They didn't "meddle" in our business; when they did, it often made the news before we watched.

The other thought about TV from years ago is this: they wrapped up the problem by the end of the show. It was an incredible feeling in your gut when they would post, "To Be Continued..." at the end of a show. It rarely happened! Somehow, those producers took every day, real-life issues... and they SOLVED them in just 22 minutes.

We long for solutions. We live in a sound-bite world that craves instantaneous results. It's easy. It's convenient. The hard work and heavy-lifting are often done by others. It's quick. It's scripted – they take an imperfect reality and design the straightest line possible between two points... it's not realistic, but it's in our heads. It plants seed that say:

- I shouldn't have to work this hard.
- I shouldn't have to have this many questions.
- I shouldn't have to think about resolutions... they should just happen, "After the break."

If only life were so simple.

What I wanted to do today was throw out a few thoughts on Solutions-Based Thinking... the principle that says, "I only get so much energy for any one problem: I can squander it through complaining or I can multiply what little reserves I have: praying, strategizing, putting an issue to group-think, generating an Action Plan that has WIN-WIN outcomes... oh, and ACTING: we must take action."

We often hear in the human resources world to "staff our weaknesses."

Maybe you begin by trying to build your team a bit: beef it up.

Maybe you begin by leveraging your strengths: "I'm great at teaching, but awful at discipline..." "I'm great at holding my boundaries, but horrible at delegating..."

Do a self-assessment on every major task you're facing (emphasis on major tasks).

Many of us put difficult assignments off because they know (and won't admit): *we're just not good at it.*

I have a member of my Church who's the world's worst at self-care. They won't go to the gym, the doctor or dentist. When they asked me why they're sick all the time and having to miss so much of life, I asked if they really wanted to hear the answer. With permission, we agreed to a few sessions with a Life Coach for them. Together, they have cleared out so many of the major, overwhelming burdens they were facing. (And they've actually been to see a doctor; still working on that dental appointment!)

So my first thought is to #1: **ASSESS WHAT'S NOT WORKING.**

How can you and God solve this problem together? What if God's given you all the tools in the toolbox you'll need... right at your disposal? The "big problem" on your desk may not be that "big" at all.

#2: **DON'T LET THE NEED FOR PERFECTION RUIN THE GOOD THAT'S RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU.**

Maybe you've heard, "If we had waited until we could've afforded that goal, we would've never even started." For some, the goal might be kids or a degree, a new appliance – even a new car or house! Truth be told: we allow our IDEALS to hold back a lot of opportunities for REAL progress way too frequently.

Have you ever heard someone wisely say, "Progress is progress!" Think in terms of a diet. If I had aimed to lose 1 lb. per week 1 year ago, I would have lost over 50 lbs. by now! Instead, I said, "Oh, it's not Monday, so I can't technically start a diet today." I excused an extra dessert or a biscuit... and I'm nowhere near my goal. I once rationalized, "I've been on this diet for a whole month, and I've only lost 5 lbs.!" Such justifications delay the inevitable and make the present reality that much more complex.

Instead, ask Thomas Jefferson's question: "Why put off till tomorrow what you can do today?" What 1 (even if) small step might you be able to look back on and be proud that you took – even if "not perfect" or 110% the aim? What 1 task can you knock out? When cleaning a house, they train us to start with the kitchen sink: when you see ONE thing accomplished, it can have a ripple effect and impact more and more and more. What ONE thing can you do today that's progress, even if not perfection?

#3: **ASSESS THE CONSEQUENCES.**

Sometimes, we skip steps, overlook problems, ignore issues... we can even pass by huge opportunities. When we're at our best, we might see that NOT taking action is actually going to cause MORE stress than it will to avoid the problem. There's a saying, "Where there's smoke, there's fire," and it rings true. If you're a parent or pet owner, you know the realization of consequences very well. Imagine a scenario where your kids are making all kinds of noise... they're right upstairs and you can hear loud music, shouting, potential fighting... and then all the noise goes SILENT. How long will you presume that silence is a nap... how long will you allow your kids to be TOO quiet? Many parents have opened the door to a perfectly clean room: it paid off: *my kids are perfect*, you might say. But the next time, those same kids have made your home look like it's barely survived a home invasion: paint on the walls that you didn't approve, clothes hanging from the ceiling fan... and the makeup. They've not only gotten into the makeup kit and nail polish, they've found scissors and tried to open up a salon. Your kids' hair may grow back, but what a shame – all thanks to that silence. It's your decision. Silence often makes your problems get worse... up to you. RARELY does the principle of "ignoring the problem" make it go away.

What are the steps you NEED to be doing? What are the problems YOU are creating by NOT taking action? Can you afford to NOT act, to NOT make amends, to NOT make forward progress?

#4: **WHERE IS THE COMMON GROUND?**

I'm finding in this life... there's way more we have in common than we hold as difference. When I launched a new church in Northern Virginia, our worship leader and I landed on the name, "Common Ground." WHY? We were right outside of Washington, DC, in a time of national divide and stalemate. Nothing was getting through; nothing was happening. Everyone bragged about holding the other side hostage. That scenario is as lose-lose as they can get. It's not biblical, it's not faithful, it's not helpful.

If I could go inside each of our minds, I would program our hardwiring to be much more solutions-based thought process. I'd take out the blue wire of stubbornness and connect it into the slot for strategic thinking. So many insist they hold the last word or the idea that they must win every prize – often, to the detriment of the entire organization. Yet nearly EVERY issue HAS a solution: statistics are on your side.

Look around. Who can you bring into a problem that might help gain traction and help you move forward? Instead of seeing all the problems, why not exercise some of that excess energy towards solutions? Why be the chronic complainer? Why not aim to be the oil for the squeaky wheel? Why not bring others along with you? Why not imagine the IDEAL and then work it backwards, asking: "If I know what point B is, and I'm at point A... how can I begin to close the gap between these two spaces?"

I once had a "work attendance" problem with a younger staff. I watched what worked: yelling, nope. Weekly lunches, yes - sometimes. Daily coffees, sort of – but all had a shelf life. I learned the hard way, "gimmicks don't work." I realized: if I think they're not rising up to my expectations, I'm going to have to make steps towards them and insist they make steps towards my expectations (but with instruction). The more I shared my time with them, the more I watched their sense of investment grow. Leaders have to be WITH the team, not perched apart in an Ivory Tower. I've had employees ask, "Help me understand my slice of the bigger pie – I want to know what I'm doing right (or wrong)."

When we grew in our understanding of the organization's goals, we not only found common ground... we found the missing progress we had previously found elusive. I often brought coffees for everyone and maintained the "rewards" when everyone met 'x' expectations: leave-early Fridays, start late Mondays, coffees, lunches, etc. The point is that the goal became much less about gimmicks and much more about aligning to the vision. When we're all aimed in the same direction, we exponentially increase our odds of actually hitting the same target.

As I write this today, I'm sitting at my kitchen table while 1 student in my home-schooling enterprise is still asleep, one's watching a video and another is working on work sheets. The dog keeps ringing the bell to go outside, my church is in a shut-down due to COVID-19, our leaders are discerning how to keep the Stock Market from crashing – let alone how to respond effectively to a tiny medical speck of infection that has spread across the globe.

Pandemics REQUIRE creative, solutions-based thinking. If you're an employee at any Church, you have now experienced a complete shift in your ministry. Somehow, in 1-2 days, this virus crisis went from "I'm not sure how we're going to handle that," to "it's here and we're closing everything all at once." For that matter, toilet paper went from funny memes to literally not being on ANY shelf.

I'm not sure what you can do to be a resource for your family, but here's the deal: they only have ONE of you. So let me lift up self-care. Go for a walk, listen to a song, read a book, watch a show, and read over your dashboard. Keep an eye on your breathing, heartrate, soul... keep an eye on your faith. God is greater than anything, but are you still professing that in word, thought and deed? Are you still believing what your heart confesses – to the one before whom all secrets are disclosed? Are you washing your hands, covering your cough/sneeze, monitoring your symptoms, etc.?

By way of creativity, I saw this morning where a distillery in Pennsylvania said, "We're going to stop making alcohol for ABC sales and convert our business into what the community needs most: hand sanitizer." He ended up retaining employment for his employees as he decided to make a product in

high-demand and short supply. He brought in a neighboring small business for their bottles. He saw a problem and worked hard to partner a solution to something we all need: germ killers (even more, though – HOPE)! This gin maker is now supplying hand sanitizer... and he's doing it all for FREE. He's accepted donations, but he's not charging for his product. This is a pretty neat solution from a guy who was prepared to shut-down, no less.

What problems are you seeing? Kids at home, educational needs, loneliness, work-life balance, survival of your church or a specific ministry, program or initiative...? I can't solve it "silver-bullet" style, but I WILL say: you're not alone, we're all in this predicament together, and there IS a solution to your problem. Deep breath, everyone: let's take a deep breath and step back 3 giant paces.

I've seen small churches using larger churches for recording space.

I've seen pastors who hate recording themselves get creative: online spaces for reading Scripture, singing songs, offering times for prayer, etc.

I've seen children's leaders reading bedtime stories to their students to help with normalcy.

I've seen para-organizations giving away their services for everything from worship videos, livestream platforms, online giving solutions, etc.

For every problem, there's likely a solution.

We get only so much energy: we can spend it complaining, sad and crying...

Or we can shift our mindset: *what solutions can we come up with to remedy this problem?*

How can I best put my creative foot forward?

How can I think in terms of strategy?

How can I think in a solutions-based way?

Here's 1 idea: in the comment section below, post an idea you've put into practice (or seen implemented) as a direct result of this pandemic. The bigger the impact, the better, but every good idea should be shared – post it up!