

How to Move Your Own Cheese and Learn the Art of Strategic Problem Solving?

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Do you think or feel entrapped by the challenge of being a mice in someone else's cheese cave with no control on the movement of the cheese? How can one solve this? Strategic problem solving is about identifying the underlying issues that roots a problem to surface. Many times, the underlying issues are overlooked and the prolonged time taken to overcome them could result in many unexpected circumstance of events that can affect the wellbeing at an individual and organizational level. A CPD Talk session was held on 10 June 2017 titled as ***"You Can Move Your Own Cheese – Strategic Problem Solving"***.

The talk was delivered by Dr. Diana Jayasuri in an active learning lab style specifically designed to identify internal abilities one could leverage on to identify the underlying issues that roots any problem encountered with by creating a set of new circumstances and realities from within. This laid the pathway to discovering how one can move one's own cheese without being trapped in someone else's cheese cave and instantly develop one's very own strategic problem solving method via creative means.

The talk begin with a video introducing the world's most expensive cheese that is sold for US\$500 per pound. The most interesting discovery from the video was that the cheese was not made from the ordinary ingredients that many of us are exposed to, it was made from donkey's milk in an intricate way using delicate methods that makes it unique and luxuriously tasty – for which the price is paid. The main question that arise was what caused this cheese to be created.

Thought provokingly, the origin of the cheese making idea was a result of a poor farmer in Siberia who became creative in the search of meaning to find value for the milk his donkeys produced as he experienced the problem of not knowing what to do with the milk they produced. The act of his creativity and search of meaning led to him solving the problem he had experienced – exquisite luxurious tasting donkey cheese! This video brought forth the realisation of not being blinded in confronting a problem. It paved a unique path of learning that ***to solve a problem it is key to find the meaning that we need to derive from the problem and use our creativity to solve it*** – a unique blend approach of strategic problem solving that creates a set of new circumstances and realities from within ourselves.

The idea behind the talk's title was inspired by two books i.e. Who moved my cheese by Dr. Spencer Johnson and I moved your cheese by Dr. Deepak Malhotra. In the former book, it introduces the parable of four characters who live in a maze and spent their time in search of cheese. Cheese here is a metaphoric resemblance for "What we want or look forward to?". As the story continues with the characters having to deal with unexpected change whereby the Cheese are moved from the usual place it's located, the characters learn how to deal with change of reality that they face by looking for the Cheese in new locations in the maze, and this learning awakens the understanding that "Change happens", "We should anticipate Change", "We need to monitor Change", "We need to Change with Change", and "We need to be ready to promptly change again and again".

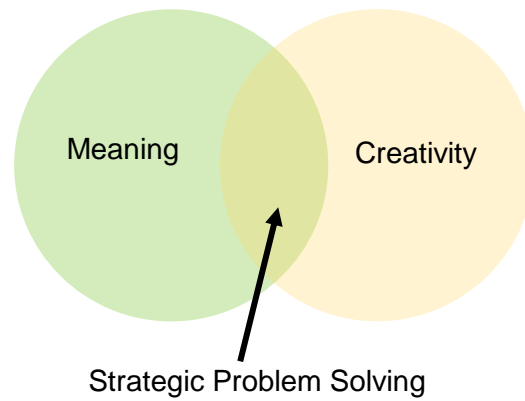
In the latter book, it extends the fable with three extraordinary and adventurous characters who refuse to accept the reality that the Cheese are moved from the usual place it's located to new locations in the maze. These characters strikingly escape from the maze and reconfigure their approach to finding Cheese outside the maze, thus creating new realities of Cheese availabilities for them. This learning awakens a profound learning that "The problem is not that the mouse is in the maze, but that the maze is in the mouse".

The talk was designed to reflect the learnings of both the books in a practical way to enlighten that **one can navigate strategically to solve a problem faced through a unique personalised approach as one likes by creating a set of new circumstances and realities from within oneself**. This learning was reflected in a group activity that was played by the talk attendees. The quest was to find a hidden message in a newspaper advertisement – simply said, "Why do companies invest widely in illustrative advertisements with catchy taglines to sell a product or a service or even an idea?".



The talk attendees trying to find a hidden message in a newspaper advertisement

This group activity taught the importance of understanding the intention and underlying messages that advertisements have behind the glossy photos and catchy taglines. Amusingly, the hidden message was realised at the light of the moment when one is able to relate a story to the advertisement and tie it to a meaningful message - one that touches the heart. It was a simple ice breaker that taught the importance of relating to the abstract messages and understanding why advertisements are impactful in creating new circumstances and realities within a consumer and serve as a purchasing pull factor.



The key takeaway of the talk was to understand that the realm of strategic problem solving lies in the subset of finding the meaning that we need to derive from the problem and use our creativity zest to unleash it and solve it by creating a set of new circumstances and realities within ourselves as we are able to relate to the heart of the matter and become engaged to solve it.



The around the floor discussion that triggered the discovery on whether a problem is really a problem

However, during the around the floor discussion, it was discovered that ***before we even begin to find the meaning that we need to derive from the problem, we first must be able to understand whether what we are facing is in actual fact a problem.*** Thus, the general rule of thumb is to ask ourselves, "Is a problem really a problem?". At many times, we tend to label circumstances encountered as problems - when it is not really a problem. The easiest way to identify if a problem is worth being labelled as a problem is to practice asking the 5 Whys Method to get to the root of the matter and clearly understand if it is really a problem or simply a petty concern.

Note:

The 5 Whys Method is used when a problem occurs, you drill down to its root cause by asking "why?" five times. Then, when a counter-measure becomes apparent, you follow it through to prevent the issue from recurring.