Problem-Solver's Quickstart Kit

A Companion to The Lost Keys: Unlocking the Art of Problem-Solving

Step 1: Admit the Problem Exists

■ Have I acknowledged that there IS a problem (even if it's small or silly)?

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■ Am I pressing harder on the remote when the batteries might just be dead?

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■ Have I stopped trying to 'muscle through' and started thinking methodically?

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Step 2: Define the Problem Clearly

■ What exactly is NOT working?

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■ Where and when does the issue occur?

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■ What IS working as expected?

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■ Can I explain this problem to someone else without confusing them?

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Step 3: Break It Down

■ Can I break this into smaller sub-problems or steps?

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■ What's the simplest thing I can check first?

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■ What's the 'low-hanging fruit' here (e.g., is it plugged in)?

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■ Am I solving symptoms instead of root causes?
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Step 4: Challenge My Assumptions

■ What am I assuming is true without proof?
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■ Could the problem be in an area I've 'already checked'?
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■ Have I considered at least one out-of-the-box possibility?
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Step 5: Apply the Five Whys

■ Why is this happening?
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■ Why is THAT true?
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■ Why did THAT occur?
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■ Why is that condition present?
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■ Why did the root cause happen in the first place?
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Step 6: Test & Adjust

■ Have I tried one small test (instead of guessing wildly)?
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■ Did I adjust based on the test results?

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■ Am I tracking what I've already tried, so I don't repeat steps?

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■ Am I ready to pivot if the obvious solution fails?

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Step 7: Think in Systems

■ What other parts of the system could this problem affect?

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■ Could a quick fix break something else downstream?

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■ Have I considered both short-term AND long-term impacts?

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Bonus Reflection

• What's one recent problem you solved well—and why did it work?

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• What's one problem you tend to 'brute force' that could use a smarter approach?

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