KT Kepner
Tregoe

Using Short-Form Potential Problem Analysis

It's no secret that thinking about things that could go wrong is a part of our everyday lives. Using short-form Potential Problem Analysis can help focus your thinking on the task at hand and what you can do to ensure its success. This informal, quick use of Potential Problem Analysis saves embarrassment and prevents future firefighting.

Use short-version Potential Problem Analysis when you're under time pressure. Ask questions like:

- What could go wrong?

- What would cause it to go wrong?

- What can I do to stop it from going wrong?

- What will I do if it does go wrong?

Acting on the answers to these questions will help protect the action you're about to take.

Consider the following example: You must rush-ship a product to the customer. What might go wrong with the rush shipment? The shipping department might not realize it's a rush order. Why might this happen? Two new employees, who are still learning your mailing system, misread the label on the shipment. What can you do to prevent this? Call the new employees and tell them to expect a rush shipment package. What will you do if they don't realize it's a rush order and they send it via regular mail service? Call the customer and warn them that the package will be late. You may also choose to compensate them for the lost time.

Another situation where quick Potential Problem Analysis can be useful is when a change outside your control comes to your attention. For example, you learn that a key employee will be absent for three days. By quickly jotting down potential problems, you may find that actions like "immediate rescheduling" are necessary.