

How Do I Solve a Personal Problem?

Read the article first. This worksheet accompanies [How to Make Problems Navigable | Dialectic and Deconstruction Solutions](#) at ThoughtsFromATherapist.com, which walks through the three disciplines of DDS: deconstruction, dialectics, and solution design. Search “problems navigable” on the site to find it. The full method, its engine, and finished blueprints live at SolveSomething.com.

DDS was built to make large problems navigable, and the same structure lives at every scale: a family, a couple, one person’s week. This sheet runs it on a personal problem. Choose one that keeps returning, at home, at work, or in a relationship, and that is not an emergency. The mess contains the signal, so start by writing it the way it lives in us. A few words per space is enough.

DISCIPLINE ONE Deconstruction

We cannot solve a symptom. Trace the problem upstream until the distinct drivers appear, and stop the moment actionable leverage appears. Too shallow gives us nothing to act on; too deep is true and paralyzing. When the problem is bad people, the only intervention is punishment. When the problem is broken incentives, redesign becomes possible.

Was this problem caused by another problem?

Is the thing I call the problem a solution to something else?

DISCIPLINE TWO Dialectics

At the root we usually find two values that both matter. Each one protects something essential. Holding the tension is not neutrality, and it is not a bland middle. Sometimes one side is more accurate, and the honest move is to say so.

DISCIPLINE THREE Solution design

A solution is defined by whether it can be carried. A small blueprint names the driver it addresses, who carries the cost, the feelings it will stir, whether now is the right time, a first step, and a kill switch: the sign it is failing. Every solution creates the next problem.

UNDERNEATH Fault and responsibility

The problem may not be our fault. The solution is still ours to hold if we want to move forward. Responsibility does not mean blame; it means ownership of what happens next.

A WORKED EXAMPLE: A COUPLE FIGHTING ABOUT MONEY

MESSY VERSION	We keep fighting about money.
DECONSTRUCTED	It is usually not a math problem.
THE TENSION	One partner is protecting security. The other is protecting aliveness.
THE DESIGN	A budget with untouchable savings and guilt-free spending.
WHY IT HOLDS	Neither person has to lose in order for the relationship to win.

Blame has an emotional advantage: it locates agency somewhere else. Solutions return some of it to us. Blame produces shame. Structure produces movement.

Deconstruction

Find where to actually enter.

SAY IT MESSY

The problem the way it lives in me right now, frustration and all.

FIRST CHECK

Are we solving
the same
problem?

If someone else is involved, what do they think the problem is? A couple arguing about the holidays can be arguing about two problems: whether to go at all, and which family comes first.

WHAT I THINK THE PROBLEM IS

WHAT THEY THINK IT IS

UPSTREAM

Trace it back

Ask what drives this, then what drives that. Stop at the first rung where I can act.

THE SYMPTOM

WHAT DRIVES IT

WHAT DRIVES THAT

AND THAT

THE RUNG WHERE I CAN ACT (STOP HERE)

IS THE PROBLEM A SOLUTION?

Calling food poisoning “throwing up” leads us to stop the vomiting the body needs. What might this problem be protecting, or solving, for me or someone else?

UNDERNEATH

Fault and
responsibility

Both columns can be true at once.

WHAT WAS NOT MY FAULT

WHAT IS STILL MINE TO CARRY

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Dialectics and a small blueprint

Name the two values in tension, then design something that can be carried.

THE TENSION

Two values that both matter

Freedom and safety, autonomy and belonging, security and aliveness, efficiency and humanity, or our own pair.

VALUE ONE, AND WHAT IT PROTECTS

VALUE TWO, AND WHAT IT PROTECTS

HOLDING BOTH

If one value won completely, what would be lost? Is one side more accurate here, and can I say so honestly?

BLUEPRINT

The driver

Which driver this solves, and which drivers I am leaving for later.

BLUEPRINT

The cost

The value weighting I chose, and who carries the cost.

BLUEPRINT

Emotional weather

Who will feel relief, and who will carry a burden? Including me.

BLUEPRINT

Readiness

Is now the right time? A good idea at the wrong time is still a poor solution.

BLUEPRINT

First step

Small, specific, and dated.

BLUEPRINT

Kill switch

What would show me this is failing and needs redesign?

After the solution

Every benefit has a consequence, and every solution creates a problem.

THE NEXT PROBLEM THIS CREATES

Name it now, so it does not return later as backlash.

INFLUENCE

The part I can carry

Spend energy where it has the influence we intend. Sort each piece of the problem.

MINE TO DO

SHARED: WHO, AND HOW WE WILL DIVIDE IT

ONLY MINE TO WATCH, NOT TO FIX

CHECKING BACK

A date to look at the kill switch, and what I noticed.

DATE:

WHAT HAPPENED:

KEEP, ADJUST, OR REDESIGN:

Solutions create solutions. Working one problem through leaves us practiced at solving, and the next effort does not begin at zero. For larger problems, the DDS engine and finished blueprints are free at SolveSomething.com.