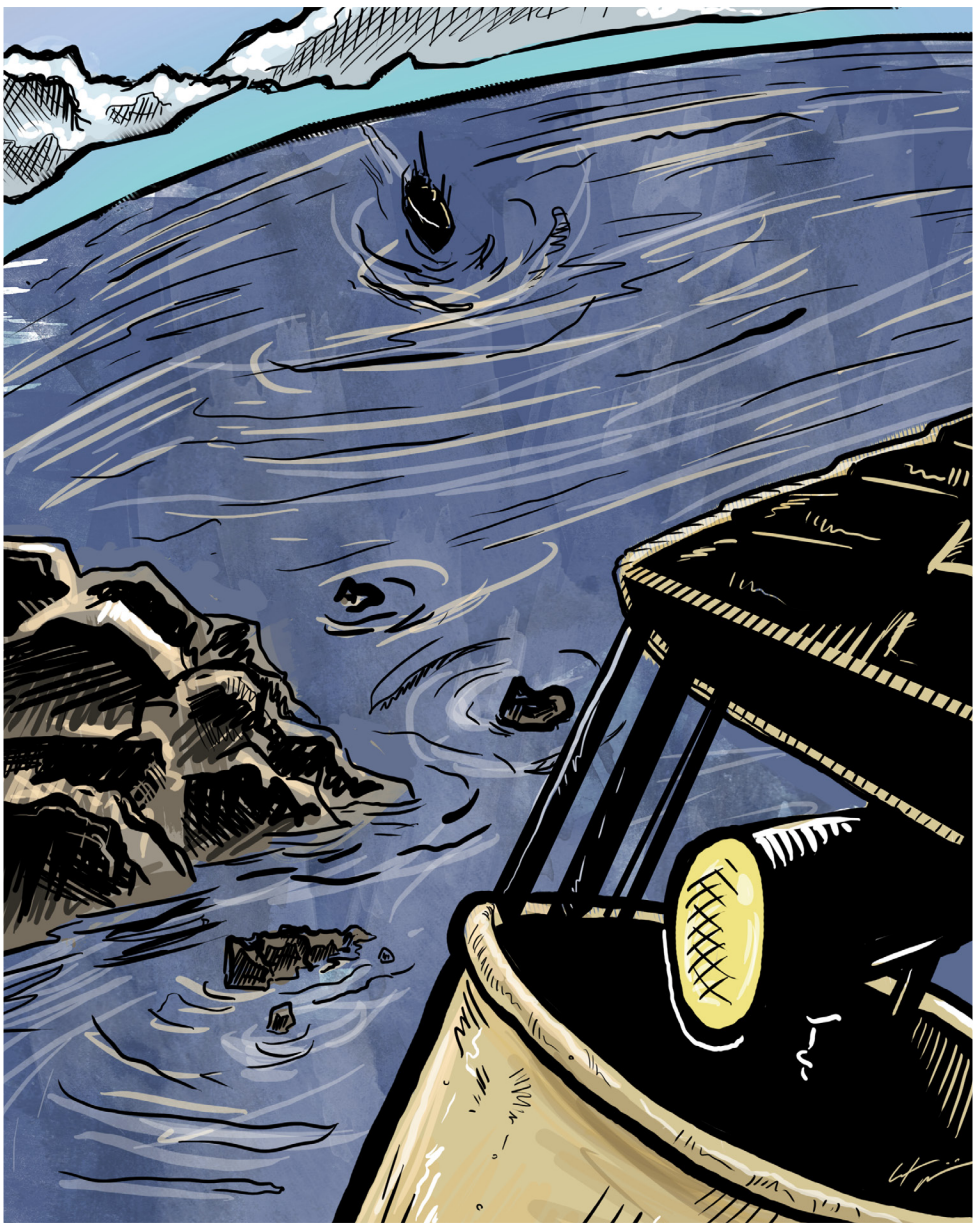


# FROM STORMY SEAS TO SAFE HARBOR



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Using Creative Problem Solving in Your Personal Life .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Quick CPS Guide .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Casting a Wide Net: .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Identifying a Goal, Wish or Challenge</i>	
<b>Dropping Anchor: .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<i>Testing for Ownership, Motivation and Need for Creative Thinking</i>	
<b>Plumbing the Depth: .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>Gathering Data and Generating a Problem Statement</i>	
<b>Looking Below the Surface: .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<i>Examining the Problem Statement</i>	
<b>Diving for Hidden Treasure: .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<i>Generating Ideas</i>	
<b>The Prize Catch: .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<i>Selecting and Strengthening the Solution</i>	
<b>Full Steam Ahead: .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<i>Plan for Action</i>	
<b>Appendix .....</b>	<b>30</b>

## **Using Creative Problem Solving in your Personal Life**

Creative Problem solving (CPS) can be used very effectively by a group of people or by an individual. This guidebook provides some direction for using CPS to address personal goals, wishes or challenges.

The CPS process uses Divergent then Convergent thinking to work out a creative solution to a goal, wish or challenge. The guidelines for Divergent and Convergent thinking are included in the Appendix. It is important to note that the two thinking approaches are NOT used concurrently, they are used separately. Only after the Divergent thinking has been completed, is Convergent thinking applied. In this guidebook, the stages which require Divergent thinking or Convergent thinking will be clearly identified.

This guidebook is detailed and may seem overwhelming – however, the more you use CPS – the more natural the process will become. You will find many applications for the CPS process in your personal and professional life. The cyclical nature of Divergent then Convergent thinking will become automatic and you will find yourself becoming more creative and resourceful in your approach to problem solving.

## **Quick CPS Guide:**

The CPS process has three main stages. The first is Exploring the Challenge which takes the individual through the process of identifying a goal or a wish. After this step this stage evolves through a process of gathering relevant data and pinpointing the challenges associated with reaching the goal/wish.

The next stage in the CPS process is to Generate Ideas to address the challenge. The final stage brings the ideas through the process of evaluation to action. This stage is Preparing for Action. There are 7 steps to the process and they are distributed through the three stages as listed below.

### **Stage I: Explore the Challenge**

- **Step 1: Identifying a Goal, Wish or Challenge**
- **Step 2: Testing for Ownership, Motivation and Need for Creative Thinking**
- **Step 3: Gathering Data and Generating a Challenge Statement**
- **Step 4: Examining the Challenge Statement**

### **Stage II: Generate Ideas**

- **Step 5: Generating Ideas**

### **Stage III: Prepare for Action**

- **Step 6: Selecting and Strengthening the Solution**
- **Step 7: Plan for Action**



## **Casting a Wide Net**

*Identifying a goal, wish or challenge*



# **Casting a Wide Net**

## **Step 1:**

### **Identifying a Goal, Wish or Challenge**

#### **Divergent thinking**

In order to help give you a direction for your Creative Problem Solving opportunity, it is essential to first have a clear sense of your goal, wish, or challenge. The questions and prompts listed below will help you to explore and identify an issue that really needs work.

#### **DIRECTIONS:**

Look over the questions and prompts that are below and start jotting down some points that come to mind. Put the document aside and revisit it later. You may find that while you have not been actively thinking about it – you have actually been mulling over it in the back of your mind. Review the questions again, modify, and add to your notes as you wish.

As you go through your day, consider the opportunities for change. If you find yourself thinking, “I wish....”, or “It would be great if...” – make a note of that thought.

If you find yourself dealing with an issue or challenge that has been addressed unsuccessfully many times in the past – make a note of that challenge.

Finally – Let your mind envision the future and the “ideal” as you would define it and consider what milestones have to be realized along the way.

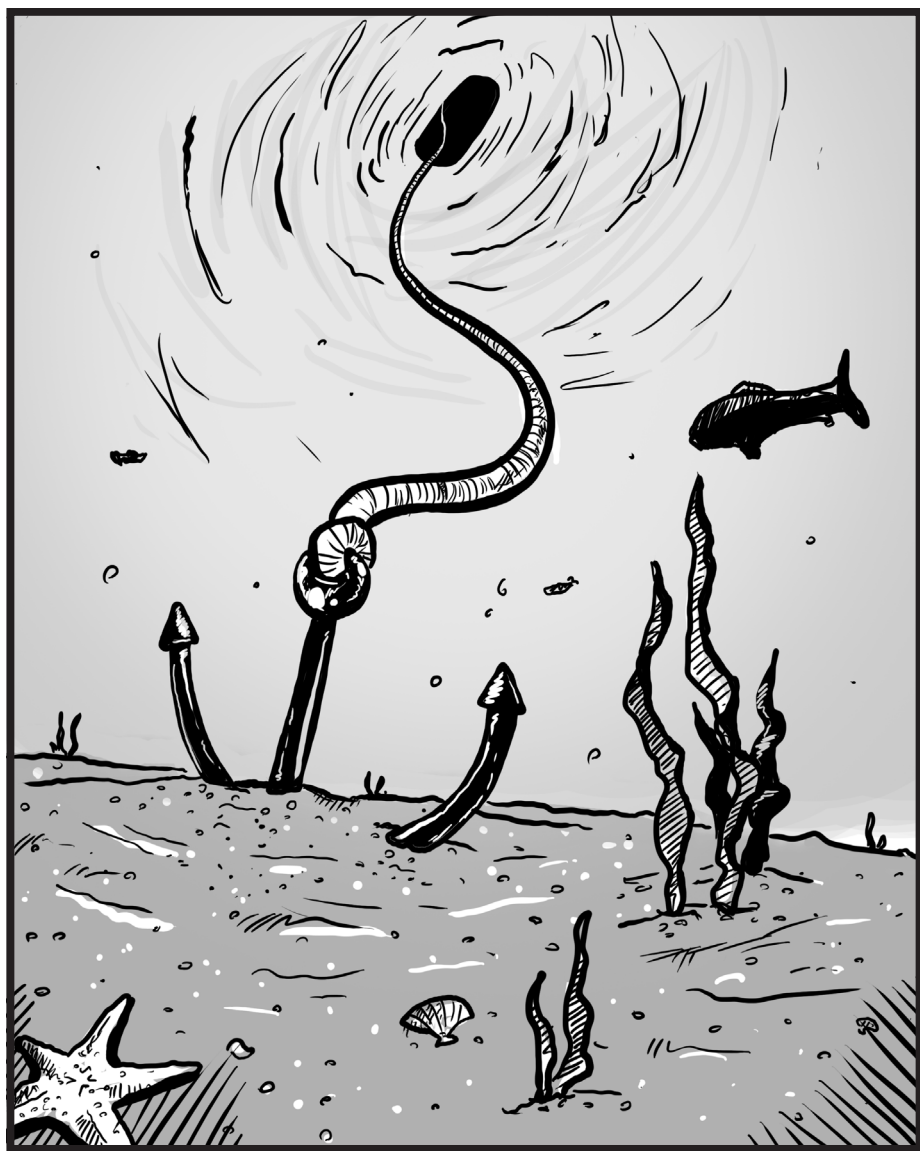
At this stage – DO NOT try to come up with answers or solutions to the challenges. Also do not pass judgment on your answers – there are no right or wrong answers at any point in the CPS process and if a detail seems relevant or significant to you – please include it. There will be a step in the process where all the information will be sifted. At this point; you should cast the net as wide as possible.

On a notepad write down responses to the following questions and prompts:

1. What are some things that you have done lately that you would like to do better?
2. What sort of challenges might be on your mind?
3. What do you wish worked better?
4. Who has been on your mind lately?
5. Why have these individuals been on your mind?
6. What are some of the goals that you would like to meet?
7. Now scan your life. What sort of opportunities might be in your world that you might like to take advantage of?
8. Imagine yourself ahead in time one year from today. What are some goals, some dreams, some visions you would like to accomplish or begin working on in the next year?



9. You have just been given a magic wand, and any wishes in relation to any aspects of your life can come true. What might those ideal goals or wishes for your life be?



## **Dropping Anchor**

*Testing for ownership, motivation and need for creative thinking*

## **Dropping Anchor**

### **Step 2:**

Testing for Ownership, Motivation and Need for Creative Thinking

### **Convergent thinking**

Now that you have generated many different challenges, goals and wishes, the next step is to sort through the list and identify one challenge that you would like to proceed with. In order to select the goal, wish or challenge that is most appropriate for CPS, apply the criteria listed below.

### **Directions:**

Review the list you have made in step one and highlight those challenges that you have the authority or ability to act upon. Eliminate the challenges that affect you but you have no ability to influence. You will highlight those challenges that you OWN.

From the list of challenges that you OWN now select those which you are highly motivated to find solutions for. Consider the potential gains and benefits of each and select those that will yield the maximum benefit to you. Now your short list will have challenges that you OWN and are MOTIVATED to address.

The final criterion is the need for creative thinking. Not all challenges that you own and are motivated to resolve are suitable for CPS because they may not require imagination or creative thinking to generate a solution. For example, if your list includes a wish to get the tires

on your car aligned – you would not need to go through the CPS process to know that the solution is to just get it done! From the short list of the challenges that you OWN and are MOTIVATED to address now select those which you would like to tackle using some CREATIVITY. These would be challenges that may have defied traditional solutions in the past.

The challenges that meet all of these criteria are suitable for CPS. These challenges may range from the mundane to critical. Select one that is in the middle of this range to use for your first run through the CPS process. You can return to the other challenges on your list later and apply the CPS process as you become more familiar and comfortable with using it.





## **Plumbing the Depth**

*Gathering data and generating a Challenge Statement*

## **Plumbing the Depth**

### **Step 3:**

#### **Gathering Data and Generating a Challenge Statement**

##### **Divergent then Convergent thinking**

Having identified a challenge that you own and are motivated to generate some creative solutions for, the next phase is to gather data about the challenge. In order to do so write your challenge as a statement beginning with either: “I wish.....” or “It would be great if....”

**Diverge:** Now that you have identified your goal, consider and note the answers to the following questions surrounding this wish:

##### **WHO...**

Who can help?

Who will gain/benefit?

Who will be affected?

Who has to have “buy in” or needs to be involved?

Who may resist?

##### **WHAT...**

What time frame does the project need to follow?

What resources are needed or are available?

What obstacles can be anticipated?

What assistance is available or needed?

What has been tried already?

##### **WHERE...**

Where will this take you?



Where have you come from?  
Where do you stand in the process?

### **WHY...**

Why is this important?  
Why have you not been successful in the past?

### **HOW...**

How does this affect you?  
How can you break it down?  
How will you measure success?  
How will you find help?

**Converge:** Now that all the data surrounding the challenge has been listed – identify the details that you need to keep in mind while addressing the challenge. Summarize the relevant data into the following categories:

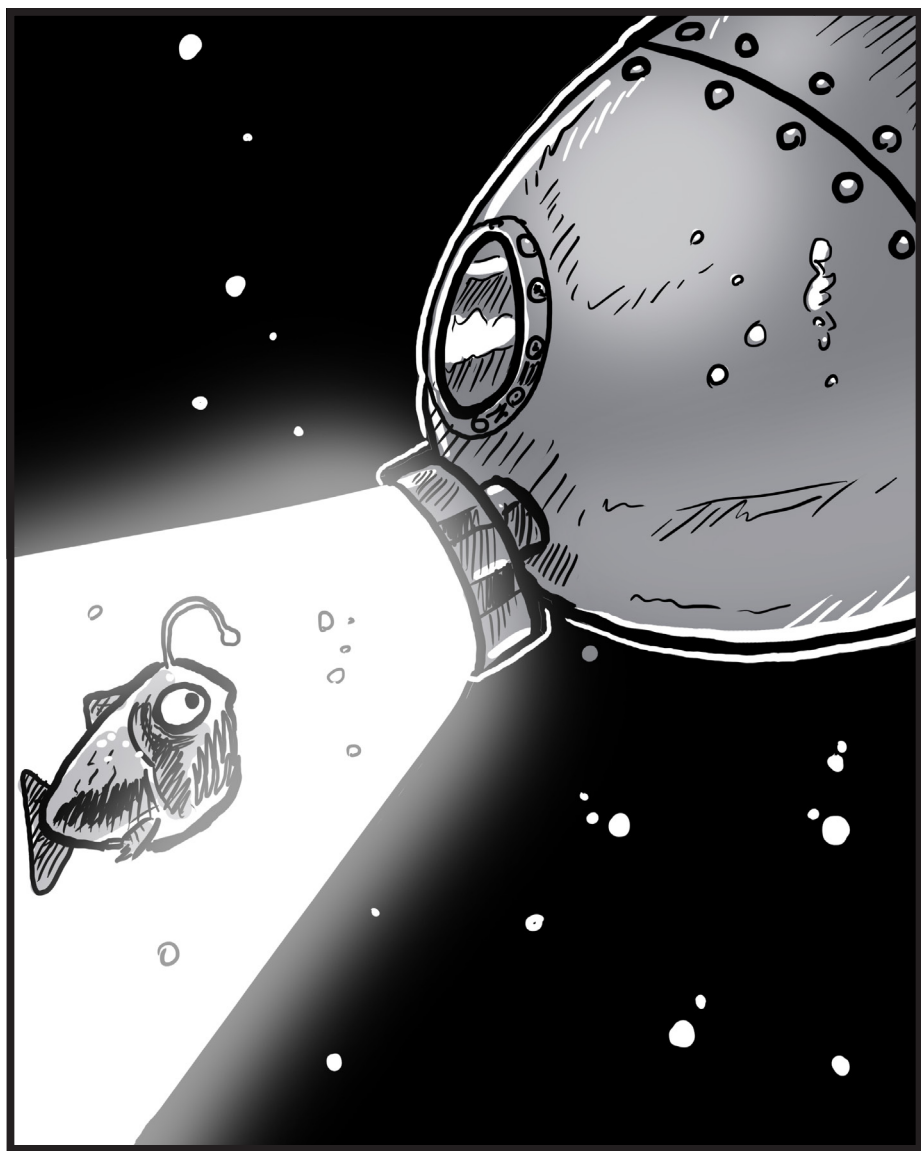
Brief History  
Tried to-date  
Impact – current and potential

Now revisit your goal statement. With the relevant data in mind, rephrase your goal statement as a challenge statement. In order to phrase a challenge statement use one of the following statement starters:

“How to...?”  
“How might...?”  
“In what ways might...?”  
“What may be all the...?”

It is important to phrase a problem or goal as a challenge because by using the open ended question format – you will invite ideas and open up your mind to possibility of solutions.

(See appendix for challenge statement starters and their abbreviations)



## **Looking Below the Surface**

*Examining the Challenge Statement*

## Looking Below the Surface

### Step 4:

#### Examining the Challenge Statement

##### **Divergent then Convergent thinking**

What you have now is a challenge statement. While it would seem that the next step should be to generate solutions – the CPS process takes a different approach. Experience and research have shown that often too little time is spent on examining the problem. As a result, often the wrong problem is solved or the right question hasn't been asked. The CPS approach requires that the challenge statement be examined and tested to make sure the right question is being asked.

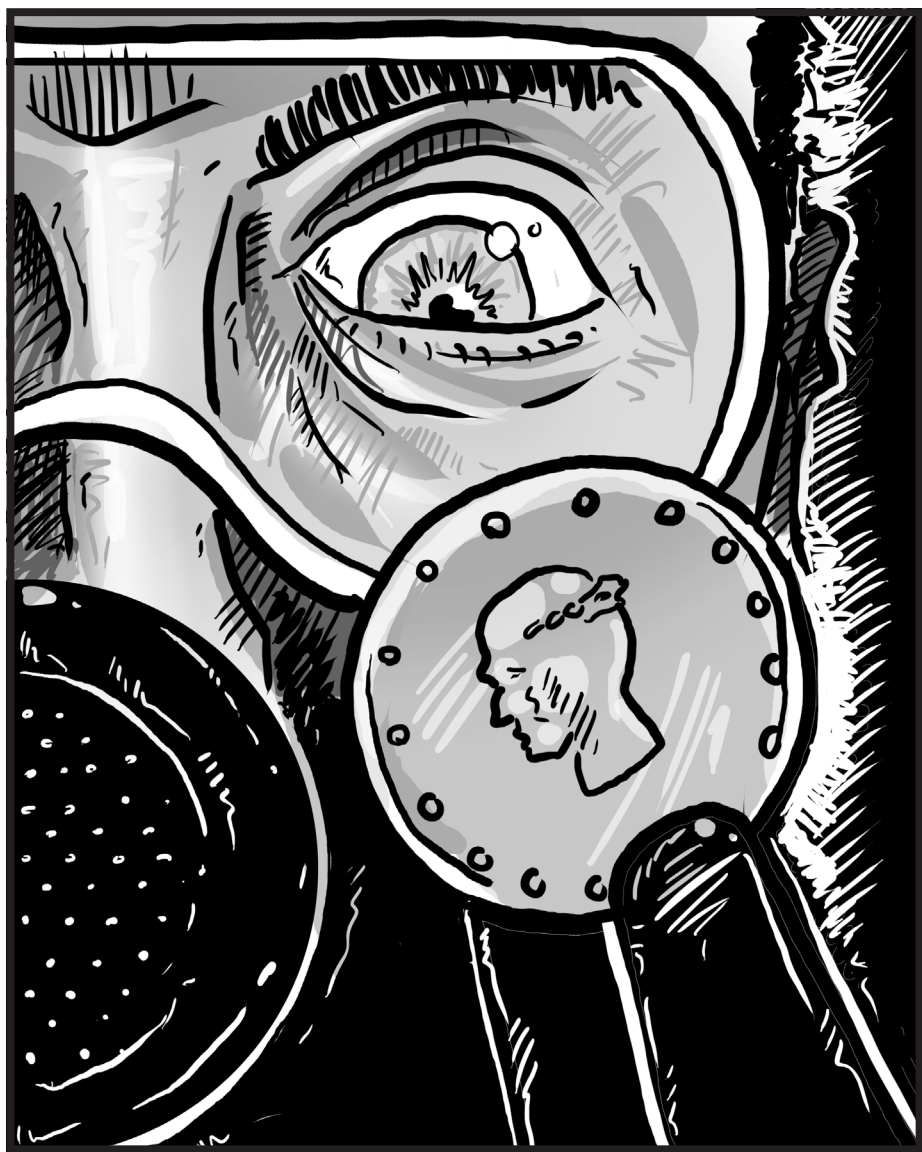
**Diverge:** Restate your challenge statement from as many different perspectives as possible. Use the challenge statement starters – “How to...?”, “How might...?”, “In what ways might...?”, or “What might be all the ...?” List each possible restatement on a separate post-it note or index card. If you get stuck, try turning the data you identified in Step 3 into challenge statements.

**Converge:** Look through the index cards or post-it notes and separate the most promising and intriguing challenge statements to consider. Sort the statements that seem to relate to each other into separate clusters. Now look at each cluster and consider what it represents. Phrase a challenge statement (using the challenge statement starters) that captures the essence of each cluster. Select the cluster that stands “head and shoulders”

above the others, or combine the essence of two or more clusters to create a challenge statement that best identifies the problem you want to work on. This is the clearly defined challenge statement that you will generate solutions for.

**Note:** You may find that your revised challenge statement is the same as the one you started with. In this case you can proceed to generating ideas for a solution with confidence that you have selected the correct problem to work on. However, in many instances you may find that the problem parameter has changed. The shift may be slight or significant – in either case the problem has been examined and the generating ideas can begin.





## Diving for Hidden Treasure

*Generating Ideas*



## **Diving for Hidden Treasure**

### **Step 5:** Generating Ideas

#### **Divergent then Convergent thinking**

Remember that there is no mystery to coming up with great ideas. Your brain has already gone through the process of Diverging and Converging several times. This cycle is the secret to successful problem solving. Before starting to generate ideas for solving your problem revisit the guidelines for Divergent thinking (Appendix). Also remember that at this stage you are generating ideas – these will be developed into solutions in a later step.

**Warm up:** Before you start generating ideas to solve your challenge you need to warm up. In order to warm up, practice diverging for ideas by working on a problem or challenge that is completely unrelated to your challenge. Some warm up challenges to consider are:

- What might be all the ways to improve a bath tub?
- What might be all the uses for a used q-tip?
- What might be all the uses for 10,000 golf balls?
- How to get a hippo out of a bathtub?

Spend 5 minutes generating as many ideas as you can for solving the warm up challenge. Remember the guidelines for divergent thinking and defer judgment, strive for quantity, seek lots of wild and unusual ideas and build on ideas. After the warm up exercise proceed to the next step.

**Diverge:** Place your new and improved challenge

statement in front of you and grab a stack of index cards or post-it notes. Set yourself a 10 minute timer and start to think of possible ideas for solving the problem. Phrase each idea as if it were a newspaper headline and write it on a separate index card or post-it note and put aside. After timer sounds – if you are on a roll – keep going. If you are slowing down – get up and walk around. Get a cup of coffee. Return to your challenge statement and try to generate more ideas.

Incubate – take a mental vacation. Go for a walk or take a bath, or light a candle and stretch out for a nap. Just let your brain go into simmer mode.

Return to your collection of ideas. Add more – push yourself to make connections to the thoughts that floated through your mind when you were in relaxation mode.

Stare out the window – do you see something that gives you an idea to solve your problem? Pick a magazine and look at the pictures – try to force a connection between your challenge and the picture. Consider this – What ideas do you get for solving the problem from looking the picture?

Defer judgment. Build off other ideas. It is easier to tame a wild idea than to energize a dull one. Go beyond the obvious. Strive for quantity. Consider novelty – get the obvious answers out of the way then make the stretch to creative ideas. Put yourself in someone else's shoes. Look at the challenge statement – consider changing the wording – does that spark new ideas? Restate your challenge as an analogy – does that give you a different perspective? How would you solve this problem if you were a child? What ideas would you consider if this were someone else's problem? Push, push, and push for more

ideas! Aim for at least 30 ideas.

**Converge:** Review your stack of ideas. Remember that these are just ideas at this stage and they may seem impossible or unrealistic – however you can mine these ideas for a possible solution. You will also refine these ideas into workable solutions in the next step. Sort your ideas into two piles – One pile that represents ideas that “sparkle,” seem intriguing or promising. The other pile is your ideas in reserve. Sort your pile of promising ideas into clusters of ideas that relate to each other.

Look at the clusters and consider what each cluster represents. Phrase a sentence to highlight the essence of each cluster. Use a verb and word it as an action statement. For example if a cluster represents ideas for ways to generate funds for a project – Instead of using a heading that says “Money ideas” – consider using – “Raise money” or “Collect donations” or “Find funding.”

Review your clusters and consider how they might fit together? Rewrite the idea clusters, combining them to form an idea phrase. The idea phrase should create a specific, measurable result. The result can be as stringent as using measures to quantify the result, that is, metrics or dollars saved, or simply as verifying that you have accomplished the solution or not. Write the Idea phrase using the statement starter:

**“What I see myself doing is...”**



## **The Prize Catch**

*Selecting and Strengthening the Solution*

## The Prize Catch

### Step 6:

#### Selecting and Strengthening the Solution

##### **Divergent then Convergent thinking**

You now have an idea phrase that needs to be tested and refined into a solution statement before it is developed into a Plan for Action.

**Diverge:** On a notepad write your idea phrase and below it list the following:

**1. Pluses:** What do you like about the idea? (Try to list at least 3 pluses)

**2. Potentials:** What opportunities does the idea suggest? Phrase your potentials starting with “It might...” (Try to list at least 3 potentials)

**3. Concerns:** What concerns do you have about the idea? Phrase the concerns using challenge statement starters (“How to...?”, “How might...?”, “In what ways might...?”, “What might be all the ...?”).

Now look at the concerns and for each one list at least ten ideas for overcoming it starting with the most important concern first.

**Converge:** Select the best ideas for overcoming your concerns. Create a new and improved **Solution Statement** by incorporating these ideas into your idea phrase at the start of this step. Phrase the solution statement starting with “**What I NOW see myself doing is... .**”



**Full Steam Ahead**  
*Plan for Action*

## Full Steam Ahead

### Step 7:

#### Plan for Action

#### **Divergent then Convergent thinking**

This is the final step in the CPS process. You start here with your new and improved Solution Statement: “What I NOW see myself doing is...”

**Diverge:** On your index cards or post-it notes write down every action step that you would need to take in order to make the solution happen. Go into detail. Consider the following questions:

What steps might you take to put your solution into action?

- What additional resources might help you to implement your idea – people, materials, money etc.?
- How might you gain acceptance for this solution?
- What might you do to gain enthusiasm for your solution?
- What are some things you might need to overcome?
- Where might you start?
- What special places or locations might you use?
- What are some places or locations to avoid?
- When might be a good time to begin?
- What special times might you use?
- How might you pretest the solution?
- Who might assist?
- What resources are available?



**Converge:** Once you have listed every possible action that you can – Review each action step – make sure it is specific. If not, then edit it to make it as specific as possible. On each card, note who would be responsible for taking the action step. Also, note who will check to make sure it is done, or to whom you would report completion. Consider appointing a “Loving Nag.” Next, organize the action steps by timeline – When will this action step be completed? Sort the action steps into:

- Short-term actions
- Intermediate actions
- Long-term actions

Assign specific dates to each term. Arrange the cards or post-its in the sequence that the action steps need to be taken – sorting them into the timeline. Be sure to make one of your first steps something you can accomplish within the next 24 hours. Momentum is essential in the creative process.

Transfer your completed plan of action onto a notepad, using the following format:

Action step	Who will do it?	By when?	Report completion to? Check/Support
Short-Term Actions: From: To:			
Action step a. Action step b.			
Intermediate Actions: From: To:			
Action step c. Action step d.			
Long-Term Actions: From: To:			
Action step e. Action step f.			

**Conclusion:**

Congratulations! You made it through and now you have a detailed plan of action to address your challenge. The journey may have seemed long and occasionally cumbersome . Consider this as you sit back and reflect on the fruits of your labor - By going through the process, you have:

- Ensured that you solved the right problem
- Examined many possible solutions and selected the best of the bunch instead of settling for the first “right” answer
- Challenged and examined the solution to ensure its success

Developed a detailed plan of attack that will no doubt yield results

## **Appendix:**

- I. Guidelines for Divergent thinking
- II. Guidelines for Convergent thinking
- III. Challenge Statement Starters

## **Appendix I.**

### **Guidelines for Divergent Thinking**

**1. Defer Judgment.** Criticism is ruled out; judgment of ideas must be withheld until later.

**2. Strive for quantity.** The greater the number of ideas, the greater the likelihood of developing useful ideas.

**3. Welcome “Freewheeling”.** The wilder the idea, the better. It is easier to tame a wild idea than it is to invigorate a tame one.

**4. Seek combinations and improvement.** Consider how two or more ideas can be fused into other ideas. How can ideas be turned into better ideas?

## **Appendix II.**

### **Guidelines for Convergent Thinking**

**1. Be Affirmative.** It is important to discipline yourself to think, “what’s good about it?” before succumbing to the “no way” reflex. Look for what you want, not just what you don’t want.

**2. Be Deliberate.** Avoid snap decisions. Give every option a fair chance and try to keep your prejudices in check.

**3. Check your objectives.** Remember your original goal. Watch out for “sparkling” ideas that don’t go in the right direction. Let your original objective be your guide.

**4. Improve ideas.** Not all ideas are workable solutions. Even promising ideas must be honed and strengthened. Take time to improve ideas.

**5. Consider Novelty.** Keep in mind that new results need new ideas.

### **Appendix III.**

#### **Challenge Statement Starters**

Use the following statement starters (abbreviations in parentheses) to restate a problem as a challenge in as many ways as possible:

- “How to...?” (H2)
- “How might...?” (HM)
- “In what ways might ...?” (IWWM)
- “What might be all the...?” (WMBAT)

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**Have you ever been stumped by a problem that seems to have no answer? For many individuals, teams and organizations the Creative Problem Solving process helps to craft a solution for such a problem. This guidebook is designed to help by facilitating you through the Creative Problem Solving process. All it requires is a willingness to engage...so let's get started!**

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