

15% Solutions

Idea In Short

The 15% Solutions method is a practical approach designed to help individuals focus on actions they can take immediately, within their own sphere of influence. It empowers individuals to overcome feelings of powerlessness and initiate positive change by focusing on small, actionable steps. This method helps people take immediate action.

This method centers on the idea that even small, individual actions can contribute to significant overall change. This concept was popularized by professors Gareth Morgan and Asaf Zohar, who recognized that many companies were seeking ways to restructure and redesign their operations to facilitate major change. The core principle is simple yet powerful:

instead of aiming for a 100% perfect solution, individuals should identify and act on the 15% of the solution that lies within their immediate sphere of influence

The "15%" represents the portion of a solution that an individual can implement independently, without needing approval, resources, or support from others. This focus on individual agency helps to bridge the gap between knowing what needs to be done and actually taking action. It encourages individuals to take ownership of their contribution to a solution.

The core of the method involves asking the question:

What can I do right now, without additional resources or external influence?

This question prompts individuals to identify concrete actions they can take immediately. It shifts the focus from what is lacking or what is preventing progress to what is already within

their control. This shift in perspective can be incredibly empowering, especially in situations where individuals feel overwhelmed or stuck.

The Liberating Structures, developed by Henri Lipmanowicz and Keith McCandless, provide a structured way to implement 15% Solutions. This involves asking individuals to reflect on their personal challenges or the challenges of their group and identify what actions they can take without more resources or authority. This reflection is typically done individually before being shared and discussed in small groups, where members can provide consultations and support each other.

Building Momentum and Trust

One of the key benefits of 15% Solutions is that it moves individuals and teams away from feelings of blockage, negativism, and powerlessness. By focusing on what can be done immediately, people discover their individual and collective power to drive change. This approach also helps in revealing bottom-up solutions that might otherwise go unnoticed and in sharing actionable ideas among team members.

Moreover, 15% Solutions help in building trust within teams. When individuals see that their small actions can lead to significant outcomes, it fosters a sense of collaboration and mutual support. It also reduces waste by ensuring that resources are used efficiently and effectively, and it closes the knowing-doing gap by translating ideas into tangible actions.

The Process

The process typically involves several steps. First, the challenge or problem is clearly defined. Then, each participant spends a few minutes individually brainstorming their 15% solutions. They write down a list of actions they can take independently. This individual reflection is crucial for generating personal and actionable ideas.

Next, participants share their 15% solutions in small groups, usually of two to four people. Each person takes turns presenting their ideas, while the other group members listen and offer support through questions and suggestions. This sharing process helps refine the 15% solutions, making them even more concrete and actionable. The feedback from the group can also help individuals identify potential obstacles and develop strategies to overcome them.

A key aspect of this method is the emphasis on action. The goal is not just to generate ideas, but to identify actions that can be implemented immediately. This focus on immediate action helps to build momentum and create a sense of progress. It also helps to overcome feelings of powerlessness and frustration that can often accompany challenging situations.

Case Study - Improving Team Communication

Imagine a team experiencing communication issues. Team members often feel out of the loop and misunderstandings are common. They decide to use the 15% Solutions method to address this challenge. The question posed to the team is:

What can I do right now to improve team communication, without needing approval or resources from others?

One team member realizes they often send emails without clearly stating the purpose or desired action. Their 15% solution is: "I will start using clear subject lines and include a brief summary of the email's purpose in the first sentence." This is something they can implement immediately without needing anyone else's approval.

Another team member recognizes they rarely initiate informal communication with their colleagues. Their 15% solution is: "I will make an effort to have a brief, informal conversation with at least one team member each day." This simple action can help build stronger relationships and improve overall communication.

During the small group sharing, these 15% solutions are discussed. Other team members offer suggestions, such as using specific keywords in subject lines to make emails easier to search and scheduling short, regular check-ins to facilitate informal communication. The sharing and feedback process helps to refine and strengthen the individual 15% solutions.

As a result of this exercise, team members begin implementing their 15% solutions. Emails become clearer and more effective, informal communication increases, and the overall team communication begins to improve. This example demonstrates how small, individual actions can lead to significant positive change within a team.

Benefits and Important Considerations

The 15% Solutions method offers several key benefits. It empowers individuals to take ownership of their contributions to a solution. It fosters a sense of agency and helps to overcome feelings of powerlessness. This method is particularly useful in situations where individuals feel overwhelmed by the scale of a problem or where they feel they lack the authority or resources to make a difference.

This method also promotes immediate action. It encourages individuals to focus on what they can do right now, rather than waiting for external factors to change. This focus on immediate action helps to build momentum and create a sense of progress. It also helps to prevent procrastination and avoid getting bogged down in analysis paralysis.

Another advantage is its simplicity. The method is easy to understand and implement, requiring minimal preparation or resources. This makes it a highly accessible tool that can be used in a wide range of settings.

However, there are also some important considerations. It is crucial to ensure that the 15% solutions are truly within the individual's control. If the actions require approval or resources from others, they do not qualify as 15% solutions. It is also important to remember that this method focuses on individual actions. While these actions can contribute to larger changes, they may not be sufficient to address complex, systemic problems on their own.

Summary

The 15% Solutions method is a powerful tool for empowering individuals to take action and initiate positive change. It focuses on small, actionable steps that individuals can implement independently, fostering a sense of agency and overcoming feelings of powerlessness. This method promotes immediate action and can be used effectively in a wide range of settings.