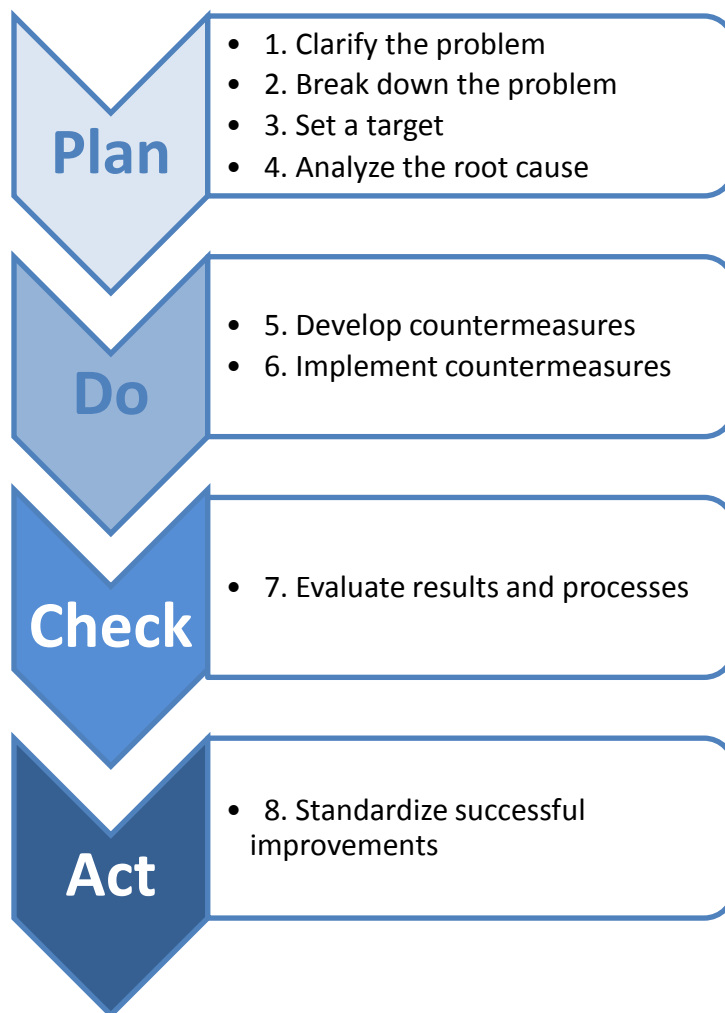**The Eight Steps for Successful
Problem Solving**
Based on the Toyota Business Process
October 2010

8-Step Problem Solving Model

Plan
- 1. Clarify the problem
- 2. Break down the problem
- 3. Set a target
- 4. Analyze the root cause

Do
- 5. Develop countermeasures
- 6. Implement countermeasures

Check
- 7. Evaluate results and processes

Act
- 8. Standardize successful improvements

Step	What?	How?
1	**Clarify the problem**	Observe the situation. Go and see. Talk with people. Gather information. Visualize the problem. Understand current results and the ideal results. Who is the customer? What results matter? What is the performance gap?
2	**Break it down**	Based on facts, break down the problem and clarify your objectives. What is abnormal? Where is it abnormal? When is it abnormal? Who? Take your larger vague issues and divide them into smaller grouping or chunks. Decide which problems to tackle first. Base selection on level of importance, level of urgency, and potential to get worse.
3	**Set a target**	Establish a SMART goal -- specific, measureable, achievable, realistic, and time bound. *Action Verb:* Increase, decrease *Object:* What you wish to improve and for whom? *How Much:* A target goal and metric for success. *By When:* The time frame for completion of your goal.
4	**Root Cause Analysis**	Thoroughly investigate the root cause. Use a fishbone diagram or a problem tree. Ask a successive series of "Why's?" to move beyond superficial, lower order thinking. Base you analysis on facts, not hunches. Manager your impatience to dig and reflect at a deeper level. Reach higher order thinking. You should begin to experience a synthesis of the complex data you have been taking in. Isolate the root cause.

Step	What?	How?
5	**Develop Countermeasures**	Develop as many countermeasures as possible. Then, narrow them down to the most practical and effective ones. Build consensus with others. Select the ones to test. Create an action plan for implementing them. Lay out a time line with the action steps, roles, responsibilities, and deadlines. Determine the measures you will track to evaluate progress toward improvement.
6	**Implement countermeasures**	Get management support for the changes. Implement quickly as a team. Develop a clear process for reporting progress. Check progress at regular intervals. Create a cadence to checking. Post visual controls with the performance measures relative to the target and the benchmarks.
7	**Check Results and Process**	Evaluate the overall results and the processes used. Think in terms of the customer's view, the agency's view, and your own view. Understand the factors behind your success or failure. Did the changes meet your target? Did you contribute to the agency's strategic priorities? Did you improve customer satisfaction? Speed up response times? Improve quality by reducing errors? Reduce costs? Share your results with others.
8	**Standardize**	When you are successful solving a problem, make it a standard process. Share it with others. Repeat the 8 step problem solving process to continue raising the standard.