

Reverse Problem Solving

The reverse problem-solving method is a creative thinking technique where instead of directly trying to solve a problem, you flip the problem around (or even think of ways to make it worse) in order to reveal hidden insights, obstacles, or new solutions. It's often used in brainstorming, innovation, and strategic planning.

How it works

1. State the problem normally

Example: *“How can we increase membership in our nonprofit organization?”*

2. Reverse the problem

Flip the question around to its opposite.

Example: *“How could we decrease membership in our nonprofit organization?”*

3. Brainstorm “negative” ideas

Think of as many ways as possible that would create the opposite of what you want.

Example: *“Ignore new members, make events boring, hide our mission, overcharge fees.”*

4. Flip the ideas back to positive solutions

Once you see how you could *make things worse*, invert those ideas into strategies that actually solve the original problem.

Example:

- “Ignore new members” → *Develop a strong welcome program.*
- “Make events boring” → *Create engaging, interactive events.*
- “Hide our mission” → *Communicate our mission clearly and often.*

5. Evaluate and act

Choose the best flipped ideas and put them into action.

This style of problem solving is extremely helpful by breaking people out of the traditional style thinking patterns providing different perspectives. It allows people to identify hidden barriers and blind spots you don't normally see when viewing the issue directly. Lastly, this simple tactic turns “what not to do” into clear and direct paths for “what to do.” Utilize this method of problem solving when you experience a block in brainstorming ideas!