TOOL

Solution Ownership

Curated by Simon De Los Rios

WHO IS THIS FOR

This tool is for leaders whose teams bring them problems instead of solutions, and who end up solving everything themselves.

PAIN

Being the default answer for every issue, which keeps the team dependent and keeps you operational when you want to be strategic.

SOLVES

Teaches your team to think through a problem before bringing it to you, shows them they are trusted to make decisions, and gives you time back for strategic work, without making them feel unsupported.

TOPIC

LEADING A TEAM

READ TIME	TIME REQUIRED	WHAT YOU NEED
2 minutes	15 min, then ongoing	notebook, pen

Step 1: Notice the pattern

Think of the last three times someone brought you a problem without a solution attached, and write them in the table.

THE PROBLEM	WHO BROUGHT IT	WHAT I DID WITH IT

– *Is this happening because they have not been asked to think this way, or because it has always been easier to just ask me?*
– *When did I last bring my own manager a problem without a solution, and what stopped me?*

Step 2: Set the new expectation

Asking for a possible solution with every problem builds your team's critical thinking. It is also a long-used way to stop upward delegation, which is when your team hands their problems up to you. Decide on the standard you want going forward, and hold yourself to it with your own manager too. A common one: come with the problem, at least one possible solution, and what you think should happen next.

– *What is this expectation in one sentence?*

Step 3: Introduce it directly

Tell your team the new standard and why it exists. Say it so they hear that they are trusted to make decisions, and that their questions are still welcome. Write the two sentences you will say on the card.

THE STANDARD *From now on, please bring me* _____

_____

WHY *I am asking because I trust you to* _____

_____

– *Does this land as "I trust you to think," or as "stop bringing me your problems"?*

Step 4: Hold the line the first few times

When someone brings you a problem without a solution, ask them to come back with one instead of solving it for them. If something is urgent or a safety issue, deal with it first and ask for their view afterward.

– *What do I feel right before I give the answer myself: needed, impatient, worried it will go wrong?*
– *What is the version of this that supports them without doing the thinking for them?*

BEFORE YOU CLOSE THIS

Name the first meeting this week where you will say it, and write the date. Then block one hour next week for the strategic work this frees up.

CONTINUE WITH

The Recognition Gap, once your team is stepping up and solving more on their own, naming that shift out loud is what makes it stick.

Curated by: Simon De Los Rios
Source: SDLR (original). Upward delegation: Oncken and Wass, Who's Got the Monkey? (Harvard Business Review, 1974)