**Week 2: Lecture 1 - Critical Inquiry: The Bridge from Problems to Solutions**

It might sound strange – maybe even pessimistic – to suggest that our entire lives are nothing more than a bunch of problems. But if you stop and think about it, it seems true. Every day, at any given moment, we face multiple problems. Some of those problems create life-or-death situations requiring immediate solutions. Most of the problems we face, however, are not so critical, and often seemingly quite trivial.

Indeed, there are orders of problems. For example, some problems are created by basic survival needs (our bodies need food, water, shelter, clothing, heat, companionship, safety, and more). Other problems are related to survival but not immediately life-threatening (employment, transportation, resources, training, etc.). We often speak of issues like pollution, global warming, and economic crises as systemic problems. Those are big examples, and easy to identify as ‘problems’. But what about the little things?

Meal preparation seems, at its most basic level, to be problem-solving. Problems are not only big, negative issues; they are also the ordinary activities and situations we encounter every day. If we broaden our understanding of what the word ‘problem’ means, we can begin to see our everyday lives as a series of problems requiring solutions.

1. What we want to eat (meal)
2. What ingredients are required (recipe)
3. What ingredients we have and what we need to acquire (gap)
4. How the ingredients go together, and in what order (assembly)
5. How to cook the ingredients (process)

It depends on how you look at everyday life, but meal preparation seems to be, at its most basic level, problem-solving. And that’s because problems are not only negative. Once we broaden our understanding of what the word ‘problem’ means, we can easily begin to see our everyday lives as a series of problems.

The good news is, we are problem-solving creatures; our brains are hard-wired for it.

*Fortune cookie with the message, "you are a deep thinker with a knack for problem solving.”*

**Week 2: Lecture 2 - Another Take on Problems and Problem Solving**

In the article, Scrum Inc. (Sutherland, 2019), an approach to problems based upon our ability to manage them is presented. The article suggests we face four types of problems in our daily lives:

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That’s a helpful way to think about and categorize problems; after all, *how*we solve problems depends upon our ability to determine the types of problems we’re dealing with.

Take a moment to consider how we accomplish those two tasks:

* + 1. How do we define a problem?
		2. How do we solve it?

These tasks begin with and end with critical inquiry.

Consider the following basic problem-solving steps, with which you might already be familiar. Below are the Steps to solving the problems and the characteristics that define each step.

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This essentially follows basic case study analysis, which typically includes five general steps:

* + 1. Identify the most important facts surrounding the case.
		2. Identify the key issue or issues.
		3. Specify alternative courses of action.
		4. Evaluate each course of action.
		5. Recommend the best course of action.

At the very core of these processes is critical inquiry: the interrogative and investigative manifestation of critical thinking; or put another way, it’s all about asking questions and digging deeper!.

As mentioned, we’re hard-wired to do this; the critical inquiry tools and resources we are exploring and applying in this course help to ensure that we identify and solve problems effectively, logically, and completely.

For further context, read the article: Sutherland, J.J. (2019). [There are 4 main types of life and work problems we face every day. Here’s how to solve each one.Links to an external site.](https://www.cnbc.com/2019/10/30/4-main-types-of-life-and-work-problems-we-face-everyday-how-to-solve-each-one.html) CNBC.