Stage 3 – Prevention

Potential Problems
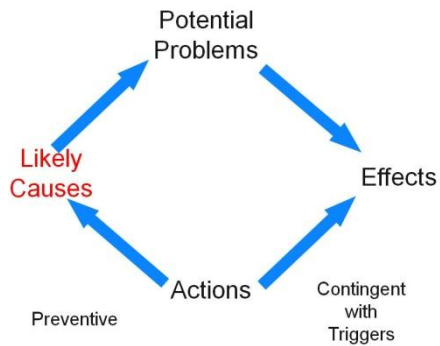
Likely Causes

Effects

Actions

Preventive

Contingent with Triggers

Here's where we break the Fire Fighting habit. Let's look first at reducing the probability we will have a problem. By looking at what could go wrong and the Likely Causes before having a problem, we take control of the situation. We will identify many Likely Causes and choose (there's that word again) which preventive actions to put into place.

Yes, this is a choice. We may not have time or money to do everything, few of us do. We want to take the most cost effective actions against the most likely to occur and most serious impact Potential Problems so we get the best return on our investment.

Stage 3 – continued

Potential Problems

Likely Causes

Effects

Actions

Preventive

Contingent with Triggers
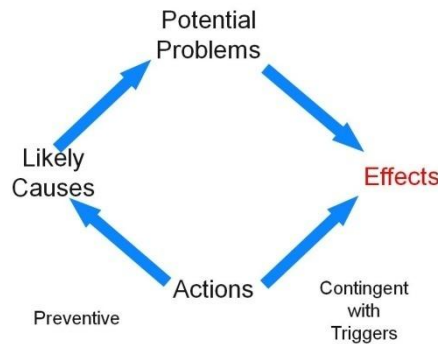
Now that we have taken preventive actions to reduce the probability of having a problem, we still need to consider what we will do should we have a problem anyway.

Contingent Actions (with Triggers) reduce the seriousness or impact of the problem when it occurs.

The triggers tell us it's time to kick in the contingent action. These are often automatic e.g. fire alarm and sprinklers go off when a fire is detected without requiring manual intervention.

The contingent actions and triggers need to be planned for in advance so they are ready to go when needed.

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FOCUSED PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

Cost Cutting using Systematic Problem Solving

or

How to Break the Fire Fighting Habit

CHOOSE

I love choices, don't you? I run into people all the time who say they have no choice; they have to behave as they do due to circumstances beyond their control. Their boss this, their spouse that, the job the next thing. This attitude also applies to the way they deal with problems. They hope they never have a problem and will wait until they do to figure out how to respond. Well, this is a choice. They choose to be victims rather than in control.

Do you want to put out fires or prevent them? Do you have time to work on growing your business or do you spend it handling customer complaints? How much more effective would you be if you were to reduce the number of problems in your organization?

If you're like many people, you respond to problems when they occur and you put out the fire and then move on to the next one. This is a pattern repeated daily by thousands of organizations and people around the world. Many of us fail to recognize that this is a choice. There are other ways to deal with this situation. Many who recognize the pattern don't know how to break it.
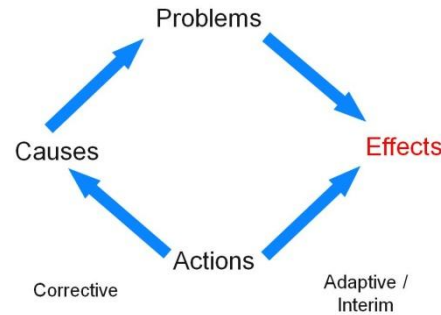
Benefits
A systematic approach to dealing with problems results in lower costs, increased productivity, and a common language within the organization. Focus is changed from "Who's to blame?" and put on correcting processes.

Utilizing This Concept

So, how do we do this?

Stage 1 - Firefighting

This is where most problem efforts start. We have had a problem and deal with the effects. Customers are upset, so are managers and workers. Often we are looking to place blame. We deal with the effects and then move on to the next problem. This is often the quick thing to do but does nothing to prevent a recurrence.

We adapt to the situation by changing processes to accept the problem. There is a danger of this becoming the new norm and causing a permanent increase in costs. This can become a spiral of death.

Stage 2 – Identify Root Cause
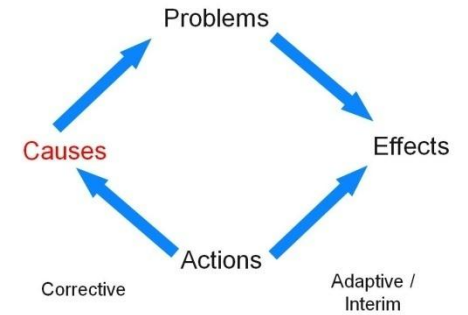
While we often need to deal with the effects of a problem first due to urgency (few people will sit in a burning building trying to figure out what caused it, they will get out and put the fire out first) it is important to go back and find out the cause of the problem. Only by identifying cause can we decide what to do about it. We may put in a corrective action. We may make a business decision to put up with the problem in the short term because corrective action will be expensive, complicated, or risky and the problem impact may be eliminated through a change in our business. The important thing is we decide based on solid information and choose our response.

Would you be happy moving from dealing with effects to finding and eliminating problem causes? Of course, it's a great improvement. So, why are your customers still unhappy? Why are your quality assurance and customer service managers upset? To find the cause of a problem, you have to have had the problem. That means someone has suffered and often times the result is lost business and profits.