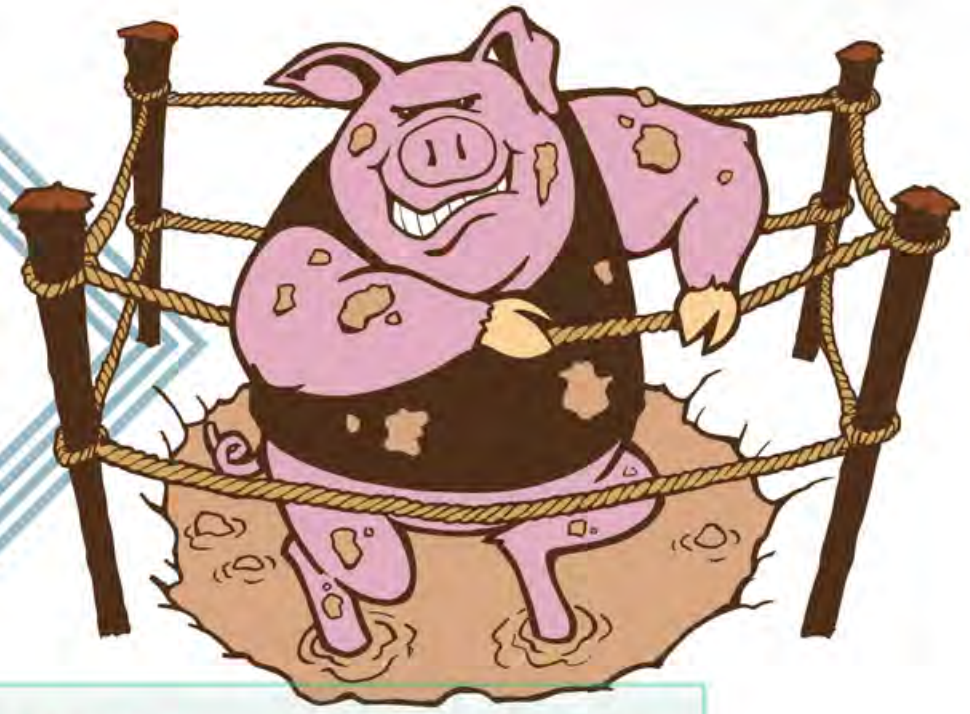


## THE GENIUS SECTION

*Sharpen Your  
Mind*



# Pig Wrestling

*This oddly named technique could be  
the problem-solver you've been looking for*

BY Helen Foster

**A**s I sat in my lounge listening to my neighbours shriek on the balcony, again, I was at my wit's end. But two weeks later, as they partied, everything had changed... and the reason was a little technique called 'pig wrestling'. So, could it change your life, too?

Pig wrestling is a problem-solving technique created by British performance psychologists Pete Lindsay and Mark Bawden, and introduced in their book, *Pig Wrestling: The Brilliantly Simple Way to Solve Any Problem... and Create the Change You Need*. The

name comes from a famous saying by George Bernard Shaw, "I learned long ago, never to wrestle a pig. You get dirty and besides, the pig likes it." The authors say that 'unsolvable' problems are like pigs, the more you wrestle with them the harder things get, so, instead of continuing to wrestle, you need to take a different approach.

How you do this is presented as a fable of an office manager complaining about a problem to his local barista - and in the 130-odd pages of the book that tell his story, the authors present a framework they say can help you come up with a solu-

tion to any problem. As I discovered, it works. And I'm not alone.

"I started using pig wrestling as a practical method to help clients become unstuck," says online business coach Markus Neukom. "It allows them to create distance between themselves and the problem and come up with alternative views on the issue that they might not have been able to work out alone. If you've ever got to a point with a problem where you think, *Oh, I give up, I've done everything I can think of*, it's a good sign that pig wrestling might help."

One issue with problem solving is we often try to do it in a very linear way. We might think we're trying different approaches, but usually they all have something in common, like trying to fix the same part of the problem.

"One reason for this is that we tend to learn our problem solving skills in childhood and, if we find something that works for us we keep using it," says Professor John Malouff, who studies behaviour change at the University of New England in Armidale, Australia. "It simplifies our life to create habitual behaviours like this, it's also why we often eat the same food or do the same things, but if a habitual approach suddenly doesn't work, you then don't know what else to do [to solve the problem]."

This is what I did with my neighbours – my approach was to ask them to quieten down in lots of different ways. But none of it produced the desired effect.

I was also stressing about it, running it over and over in my head. This, apparently is normal. University of Tokyo researchers found that people who are prone to worry think that they need to spend lots of time trying to come up with a solution to an issue. A second study by two US researchers, Sandra Llera and Michelle Newman, found we don't necessarily come up with good solutions when we're worry-

ing. "There's a lot of evidence to suggest that when you're in a negative mood, and it's very clear that worrying puts you in a negative mood, it's harder to think in a creative or goal-orientated way, which can

keep you stuck," says Llera. "You also focus more on the threat of a problem, rather than how to fix it."

While the people in their study generated solutions to a problem they worried about, an independent evaluator found the solutions of the people who worried were likely to be less effective than those created by the group who didn't worry so much.

If you find yourself stuck with a problem therefore, it seems it's time to stop banging your head against the same bit of wall and start coming up

### INSTEAD OF CONTINUING TO WRESTLE, TAKE A DIFFERENT APPROACH

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with alternative solutions. "There are at least 50 different ways you can solve any problem," says Professor Malouff. "You just need to become more aware and open to them."

He says that considering what would happen if you do the exact opposite of what you're doing right now is one good way to start this process. He also suggests you look at *all* the causes of a problem, not just the one you assume to be the main issue.

"Let's take your noisy neighbours as an example," he tells me. "You might assume that the person making the noise is the sole cause of the problem, but actually it's also caused by that noise entering your home, the noise entering your ears and your response to it. Now, you have three extra points where you might intervene," he says.

Dropping assumptions is a key lesson of the pig-wrestling approach. As is asking yourself to stop trying to solve the problem and instead, focus on how will you know if it has been solved - which might throw up new ideas of how to tackle it. As they say in the book, "people who think they've tried everything to solve a problem have done nothing of the sort. They may have exhausted their own imagination but they have not yet tried the right thing. Or, there would not still be a problem."

The suggestion that changed everything for me was questioning how my problem would be solved. I realised that it didn't matter if my

### 6 QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU SOLVE A PROBLEM

"What the pig wrestling process teaches you is to take a step back, reframe your thinking and think cleanly," says Markus Neukom. Considering the following questions can help get you started on finding a different solution.

- What solutions have I already tried?
- How would I know that 'the problem' is no longer a problem?
- When is 'the problem' not a problem?
- What is always present when the problem occurs?
- What's the difference between when the problem exists, and it doesn't?
- How can I define the problem in a more solvable way?

neighbours were making noise, if I couldn't hear it. It was like a light-bulb going on. I had already done everything I could to try and stop the noise at the source, but I hadn't done anything to try and change how much of it I could hear.

So, I double-glazed my skylight.

Looking back now, the answer seems embarrassingly obvious, but I was so fixed on one path that I hadn't even considered it. And if it wasn't for a little book about pig wrestling, I'd still be fighting a war I couldn't win. Instead, my pig of a problem is now snoozing (quietly) in the mud. Isn't it time yours joined it? **R**