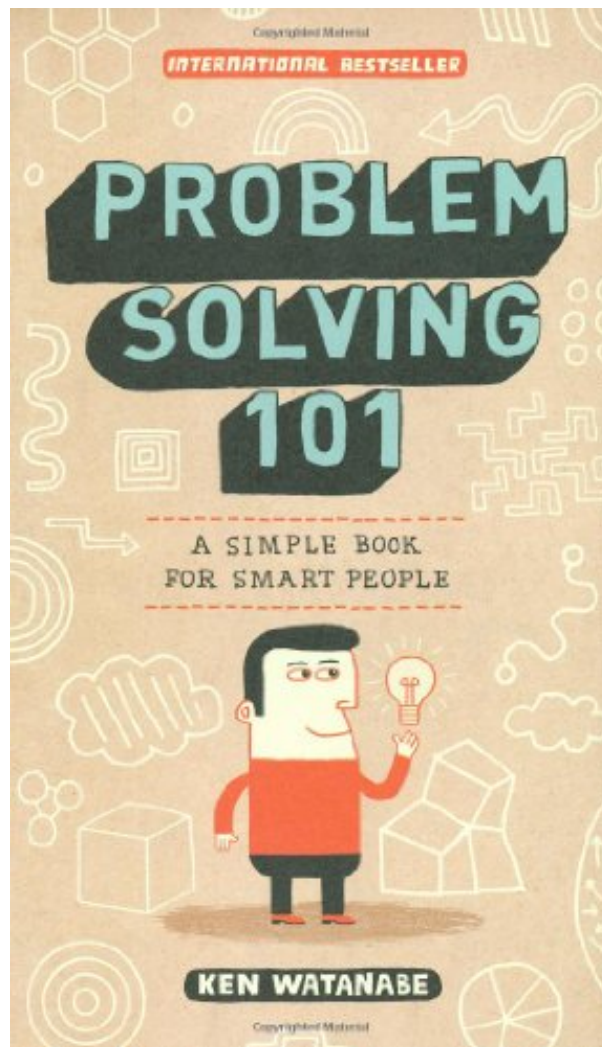
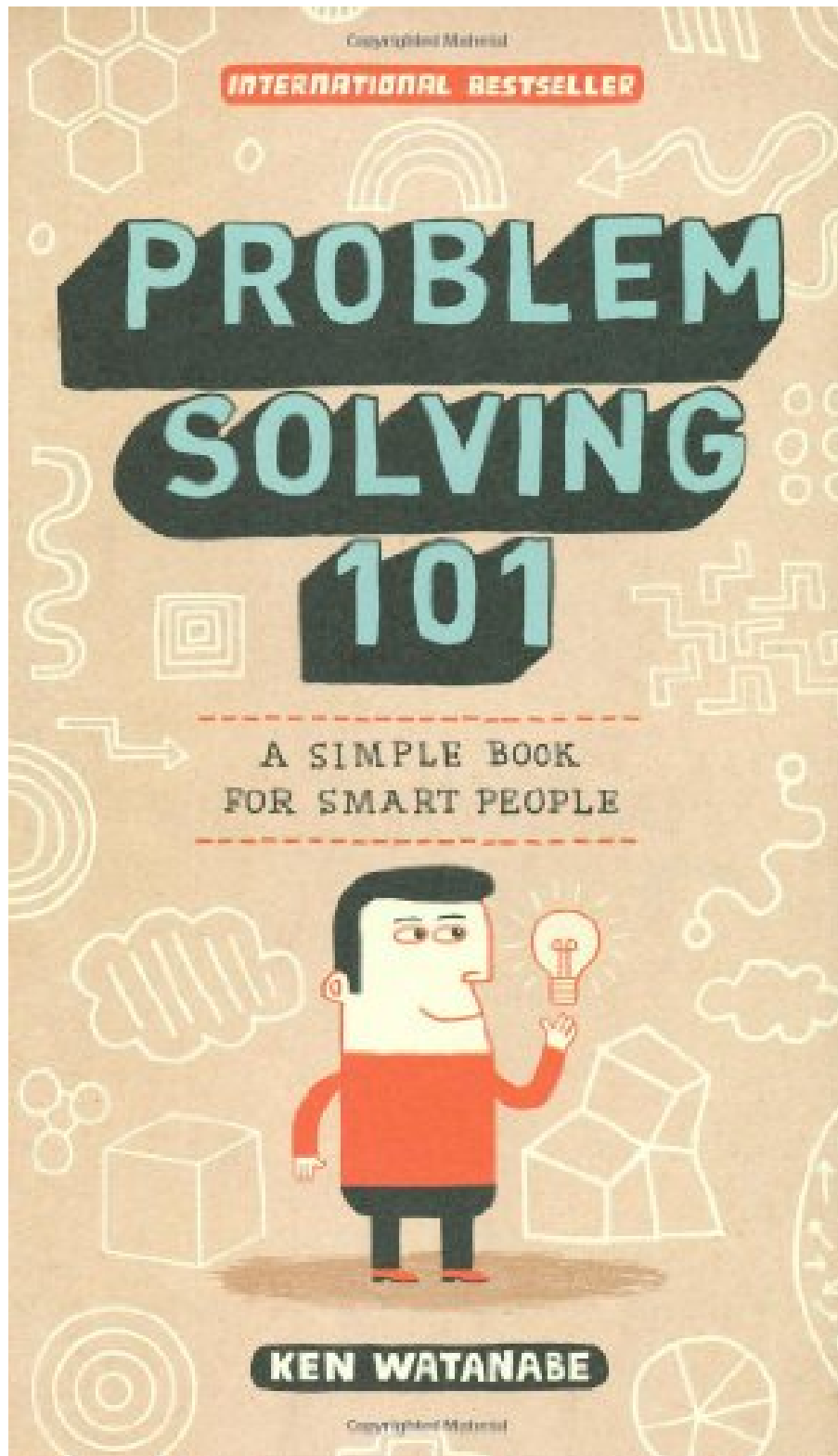


# PROBLEM SOLVING 101: A SIMPLE BOOK FOR SMART PEOPLE BY KEN WATANABE



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## Review

"Problem Solving 101 teaches us to recognize the common elements in the decisions we face every day and how to think carefully about them. It offers tricks and tips for every age. If I may offer one more suggestion: when you don't know which of two options to choose, toss a coin, and when it is up there in the air think about how you want it to fall, and you have your answer."

--DAN ARIELY, author of the New York Times bestseller Predictably Irrational

"This book made me angry. It made me angry because there are so many people in this country who need to read it, who should read it, who will benefit enormously from reading it . . . and won't. They'll watch a reality show on TV instead. If everyone made decisions like Ken Watanabe, the world would be a better place."

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"This is an excellent primer on problem solving."

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## About the Author

Ken Watanabe grew up bilingual in Japan and studied in the United States at Yale and Harvard Business School. He was a management consultant at McKinsey & Company for six years. He is now the founder and CEO of his own education, entertainment, and media company, Delta Studio.

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# **PROBLEM SOLVING 101: A SIMPLE BOOK FOR SMART PEOPLE BY KEN WATANABE PDF**

The fun and simple problem-solving guide that took Japan by storm

Ken Watanabe originally wrote Problem Solving 101 for Japanese schoolchildren. His goal was to help shift the focus in Japanese education from memorization to critical thinking, by adapting some of the techniques he had learned as an elite McKinsey consultant.

He was amazed to discover that adults were hungry for his fun and easy guide to problem solving and decision making. The book became a surprise Japanese bestseller, with more than 370,000 in print after six months. Now American businesspeople can also use it to master some powerful skills.

Watanabe uses sample scenarios to illustrate his techniques, which include logic trees and matrixes. A rock band figures out how to drive up concert attendance. An aspiring animator budgets for a new computer purchase. Students decide which high school they will attend.

Illustrated with diagrams and quirky drawings, the book is simple enough for a middle-schooler to understand but sophisticated enough for business leaders to apply to their most challenging problems.

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

A simple and useful book

By Hector Cham

A surprising simple and useful reference book for decision making.

Although Ken Watanabe was a consultant dealing with business decision makers, he showed his incisive self by illustrating decision tools using 3 intriguing stories.

5 decision making tools were introduced: logic tree, Yes/No tree, problem solving design plan, hypothesis pyramid, and pros and cons evaluation table.

Some salient points:

1. Problem solving isn't a talent. It's a habit. By developing the right skills and adopting the right attitude, anyone can become a problems solving kid.
2. Problem solving is a process that can be broken down into four steps: (a) understand the current situation; (b) identify the root cause of the problem; (c) develop an effective action plan; and (d) execute until the problem is solved. making modifications as necessary.
3. You have to keep asking the "why" and "how" to develop a custom made action plane.
4. On problem solving design plan, if you start collecting and analysing data without first clarifying the question you are trying to answer, you're probably doing yourself more harm than good, and realise later that most of the research was a waste of time. To avoid this problem, you should develop a problem-solving design plan before you start chasing after information. In the design plan, you clarify the issues you are trying to solve, state your current hypotheses and rationale, and list the analyses, actions, and information required to prove or disprove those hypotheses, drastically increase your problem-solving productivity. Additionally, putting your plan down on paper will not only clarify your thoughts. If you are working in a group, this plan will also help your team to focus on what needs to be done and provide the jumping-off point for your group brainstorming. You will be able to focus on only what you really need to know to make a decision.
5. The 5 columns for a problem-solving design plan are issue, hypothesis, rationale, analysis/activities and information source.
6. When you set a goal get into the habit of asking yourself, "What specifically do I want to achieve? When do I want to achieve it? What specific conditions do I have?"
7. There are 2 forms of hypothesis, an argument structure and grouping structure. Unlike the grouping structure, with an argument structure, if one of the statements is untrue, the main conclusion is automatically

false.

8. Impact = plan effectiveness x quality of execution

9. Once you have a concrete plan of action to achieve your goal, don't forget to create a concrete schedule. Write down everything you are going to do, and when you plan to do it.

10. We tend to be swayed by our first impressions. If we first think something is attractive, we tend to try to collect evidence that supports that idea. On the other hand, if we think something is unattractive, we tend to highlight only its negative points. It is critical to avoid this tendency in order to make a sound decision.

11. These are more than just tools for organising your thoughts. They help point out information you might be missing and bring up questions you may need to ask yourself along the way about what you really think is important.

12. We often make important decisions without taking enough time to think through the options and to track down accurate information.

13. The most important thing for you is to be surrounded by great players that you get to both play with and compete against on a daily basis. Also get as much playing time as possible by playing real games under pressure.

14. Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.

15. Spend less time worrying about things and more time thinking about actions you can take to get closer to your goals, then actually take action.

16. Problem solving is easy when you know how to set a clear goal, figure out how to reach it, and follow through while reviewing your progress and making changes to your plan as necessary.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

An easy read about thinking, decision making, and problem solving tools.

By Shuan Lo

A nice, short read. Describes the use of a few thinking tools that can be helpful in our daily lives and at work, packaged in a form of cute children stories. I particularly enjoyed the illustrations.

The tools described includes:

1. Logic tree and yes/no tree: a visual tool for identifying all potential causes of a problem
2. Problem-solving design plan: a method that includes clarifying the issues you are trying to solve, stating your hypotheses, and listing the actions required to prove or disprove those hypothesis
3. Prioritization matrix: plotting your solutions in terms of impact vs. ease of implementation
4. Hypothesis pyramid: clarifying our argument before diving into data collection
5. Pros and cons and Criteria and Evaluation: for evaluating multiple options

Some of these tools I had learn in school or am using at work. Reading about them is a refreshing exercise.

If I have one complaint about the book, it is its price. The Kindle version sold on U.S. Amazon is pretty expensive considering the length of the book. I finished it in about an hour.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.



An excellent critical thinking textbook with an emphasis on the practical

By David

Watanabe wrote this book as an introduction to practical critical thinking designed especially for the Japanese educational system, which faces some of the same challenges that the Chinese system faces when it comes to critical thought processes. The book is targeted at middle school students, but can be profitably read by anyone. The primary value of the book is that it deals with practical critical thinking (that is, problem solving) as opposed to information-analysis critical thinking, which is used primarily to decide whether or not we ought to agree with propositions or actions that are being urged on us and is taken up with logical structures and standards of evidence. The latter type of critical thinking is, of course, quite necessary, but it is almost the only thing that one generally sees in critical thinking textbooks.

The book has four sections: a description of the dispositions of effective problem solvers (invaluable and a nice addition to my current dispositions lecture), finding root causes, setting and pursuing goals, and making decisions. Each of them explains how things are done using an extended illustration of a particular school kid drawn as a cute little cartoon animal. It would be a phenomenal basis for an upper elementary or middle school CT class, along with a similar volume on info-analysis critical thinking.

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