



PROBLEM SOLVING IN THE WORKPLACE

Proficiency Level: Intermediate

Lesson Length: 90 minutes

Vocabulary and Expressions: “May I make a suggestion?,” “short staffed,” “run out of,” “offer”

Language/Culture Point: May vs. can

Objective: Students will be able to solve common problems in their workplace.

Materials: 1) index cards (workplace problem cards), 2) student pages, 3) ball

Supplemental Materials to be Created: Lesson 12 requires the instructor to add any problem that is common for their business. These can be introduced in step one to be used throughout the lesson. If adding additional problems, the instructor can also add to the story in step two, as well as short dialogues for sentence strips to be used in steps four through six.



STEP 1: ACTIVATE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
10 minutes	- Index cards	- Brainstorming

TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Write “short staffed” on the board and ask if the students know what it means. Draw a representation on the board to help lower-level students.
2. Do the same for “broken equipment” and “out of supplies.”
3. After each one, ask the students if they ever have this problem at work. What happens? What does your boss do? Your coworkers? You?



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4. Brainstorm with the students what happens when we have these problems and how they are solved at work. For example:

When we are short staffed, our boss is anxious and assigns everyone more tasks. When equipment is broken, I am frustrated and my task takes longer to complete. When we are out of supplies, my coworker has to order more and I get behind on my tasks.

5. If there are other common problems at your business, you may introduce them in this step.
6. Allow students time to take notes on vocabulary in the space provided in their books.
7. Pass out index cards to the students and have each student write one problem on each card until each problem is written down. Collect these workplace problem cards; they will be used later in the lesson.

STEP 2: MINI-PRESENTATION WITH PROMPT

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
10 minutes	- Student pages	- Chalk talk

TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Using the ideas and cards from step one, create a Chalk Talk that tells a story about the problems that happened at work that day. Include in your story how you offered to help by saying, "May I make a suggestion?" and were able to solve the problems. For example, broken equipment (ex: "May I make a suggestion? I can call the repair service.") or being short staffed (ex: "May I make a suggestion? I can add a few tasks to my duties today."). For example:

When I arrived at work this morning, my boss told me that we were short staffed. He was very anxious about all the tasks for the day. I wanted to help, so I made a suggestion. I offered to do more tasks. Later that morning, we had some broken equipment. It takes a lot longer to complete our tasks when we can't use the equipment. I wanted to help, so I made a suggestion. I offered to call the repair service. We had one more problem in the afternoon. We ran out of supplies! We get behind on our tasks when we run out of supplies. I wanted to help, so I made a suggestion. I offered to call to order more supplies.

2. Repeat as necessary.



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STEP 3: COMPREHENSION CHECK

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
10 minutes	- Student pages	- Retelling

TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Put students in pairs and have them retell the story to their partner. If one partner cannot remember every part of the story, the other partner can help.
2. When each pair has finished, ask a few volunteers to retell different parts of the story until it is complete.

STEP 4: HIGHLIGHT LESSON FOCUS AND MODEL TASK

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
10 minutes	- Workplace problem cards	- Graphic organizers, cards, think aloud

TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Tell the students, "Today we will practice solving some common problems at work."
2. Draw a graphic organizer on the board with two columns. Label one column "Problem" and the other "Solution."
3. Draw a workplace problem card and read it to the class. Write the problem in the "Problem" column.
4. Think aloud about how you might solve the problem. Introduce the phrase, "May I make a suggestion?" when thinking about your solution.
5. When you come up with a good solution to the problem, write it in the "Solution" column. More than one good solution is possible.
6. Have the students write the problem and the answer in the Problem/Solution Chart in the student pages.

**PROBLEM SOLVING IN THE WORKPLACE****STEP 5: GUIDED PRACTICE**

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
10 minutes	- Work problem cards	- Question asking and answering, cards, graphic organizers

TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Have a student draw a workplace problem card and read it to the class.
2. Ask the student for a solution to the problem. Have the student introduce his or her solution by saying, "May I make a suggestion?" The student may ask classmates for suggestions if he or she has trouble coming up with a solution.
3. Once the student has found at least one good solution, have him or her write it on the board.
4. Repeat the process, although this time the student should ask you what your solution to the new problem should be.
5. Have the class write the problems and solutions in the Problem/Solution Chart in the student pages.

STEP 6: SMALL GROUP WORK

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
20 minutes	- Workplace problem cards	- Cards, question asking and answering, surveys and interviews

TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Tape each workplace problem card somewhere around the classroom.
2. Put students into pairs and have them circulate through the classroom to each of the workplace problem cards (or as many as time permits).



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3. At each card, the students should work together to identify the problem and come up with a good solution. When offering solutions to each other, they should use the phrase, “May I make a suggestion?”
4. Students should record both the problem and the solution in the Problem/Solution Chart in the student pages.
5. Once students have visited many (or all) of the workplace problem cards, have the class come together and share their solutions for each of the problems presented.

STEP 7: HIGHLIGHT HOW ENGLISH WORKS

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
10 minutes	-	-

TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Write one of the responses on the board so that students can see the different uses of “may” and “can.” “May I make a suggestion? I can stay late tonight.”
2. Ask the students if they know what “may” means. Why do we not say, “Can I make a suggestion?”
3. Explain that it is often okay to say “can.” The difference is that “may” is used for permission, and “can” is used for ability. However, we now often use “can” in place of “may.”
4. If you want to be formal or polite, as you do with your boss or supervisor, it is appropriate to use “may.” Especially in tense or stressful situations at work, we want to be polite when offering help.
5. Brainstorm with the students other times they should use “may” instead of “can.” There may be many times they can use this with their supervisor or customers. For example:
 - “May I help you?”
 - “May I come in?”
 - “May I take PTO?”



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STEP 8: QUICK CHECK AND REVIEW

Time Frame	Materials	Teaching Strategies
10 minutes	- Ball	- Ball toss

TEACHING ACTIVITY

1. Have the students stand in a circle. Toss the ball to one student and report a problem. For example, "We are short staffed today!"
2. The student will respond with language they have been practicing during class. For example, "May I make a suggestion? I can do extra tasks today."
3. When the student has responded appropriately, they will toss the ball to another student and report another problem. That student will respond appropriately before tossing the ball again.
4. Continue as time allows.