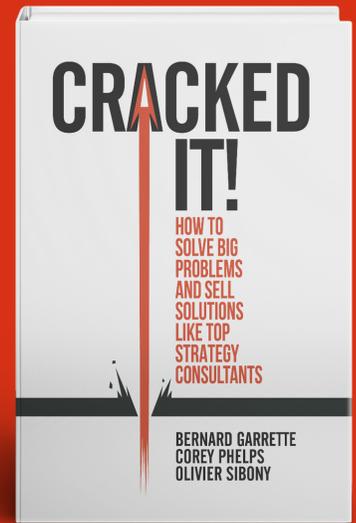# CRACKED IT!
THE 4S METHOD

Research shows numerous pitfalls trip us up when we try to solve challenging business problems and sell the solutions. A disciplined method can help us avoid these obstacles. The 4S method will help you develop better solutions and sell them more effectively.

CRACKED IT!

HOW TO SOLVE BIG PROBLEMS AND SELL SOLUTIONS LIKE TOP STRATEGY CONSULTANTS

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STATE the Problem

A narrow framing of a problem, which can happen when we label it a threat or have only a cursory understanding of it, can lead to a flawed problem definition and irrelevant solutions. We need to be disciplined in how we define the problem and in how we understand it. To state the problem, use the TOSCA (trouble, owner, success, constraints, actors) checklist to develop the core question. This will motivate your search for solutions. For understanding, invest in empathizing with those who experience the problem to reframe how you see it.

STRUCTURE the Problem

It's easy to fall prey to the confirmation trap where we quickly zero in on a solution without testing it and ignoring conflicting evidence. To avoid this, we need to structure the problem for analysis. Start with hypothesis pyramids: identify a candidate solution, break it down into mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive (MECE) sub-hypotheses and analyze each. If this doesn't yield a good solution, structure the problem using an issue tree: decompose the core question into fine-grained, MECE sub-questions and then conduct analysis to answer the questions to identify the best solution. An alternative approach is to use research into understanding the problem to synthesize a set of imperatives that an effective solution must address, which will guide the search for solutions.

SOLVE the Problem

The frameworks we use to structure and analyze problems can blind us to important aspects of their nature, leading us to develop ineffective and costly solutions. To avoid this pitfall, we must be aware of the assumptions our frameworks employ and use diverse frameworks to see the problem from different perspectives. An alternative approach is to use the solution development tools of design thinking: use the solution imperatives from the structuring phase to guide the generation of diverse solution concepts and then translate the best of these concepts into tangible prototypes and test them with the people who experience the problem and converge to the best solution.

SELL the Solution

Valuable solutions don't sell themselves. When we communicate our recommendations, we often tell the story of how we arrived at the solution instead of why the solution should be adopted, forgetting that our reasoning isn't obvious to our audience. Instead, we need to communicate a clear, coherent and compelling story that persuades the audience to adopt the solution. Use the pyramid principle to structure your pitch: begin with your answer to the core question from your problem statement and then develop the supporting key line of your story by addressing why the solution should be adopted and how, using the results of the relevant analyses along the way.