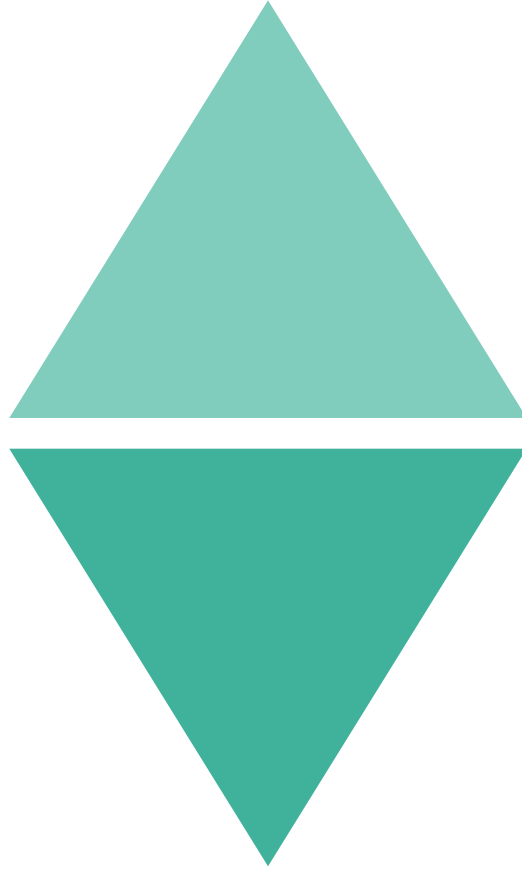




# Problem Reversal





*We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.*

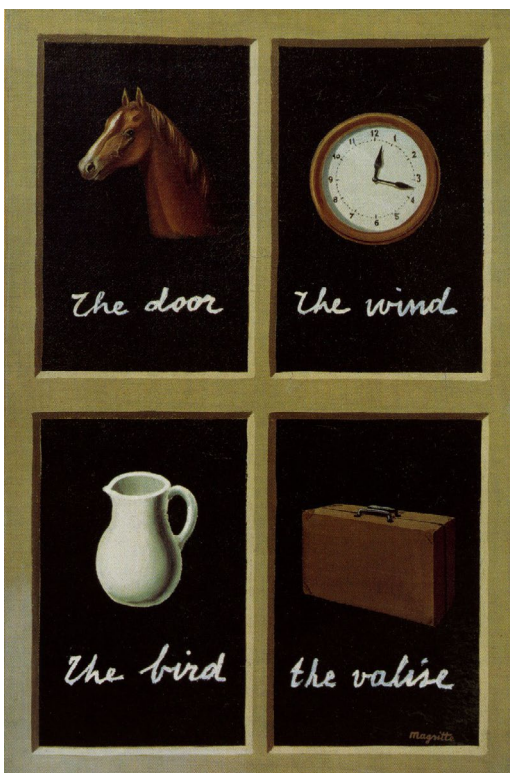
ALBERT EINSTEIN

## What's it all about?

Problem reversal focuses on solving an identified problem by turning it on its head and encouraging you to think about it differently. One well-known example of a practical problem reversal is the police 'sting' operation. In a 'sting,' known criminals are selected and told they have won a prize and are then personally invited to an event to collect their 'prize.' Once the unsuspecting guests arrive, they are duly arrested. Instead of defining the problem in terms of how to go and catch offenders, the police asked how they might get the offenders to come to them.

## What's it for?

In many cases, the problem definition is what limits our ability to generate new ideas. The meaning of the words or their order can put blocks on our thinking. Taking a problem and reframing it in terms of its opposite can change the direction of your thought and generate new solutions. It can throw people slightly off balance and into the unexpected, getting the creative juices flowing.



### Key to Dreams, Rene Magritte (1935)

In his Key to Dreams, Magritte causes us to ask new questions: some of the labels and their associations we recognise but others are disconcerting. He has caused us to consider again what we are looking at and what it means.

# Using the tool

The following are the basic steps for using the reversal technique:

1. State the problem as originally defined
2. Reverse the direction of the problem in any way possible. The nature of the reversal is not as important as rearranging the information about the problem
3. State the new problem and explore its implications
4. Continue reversing the problem until an agreed solution is found

To give an example, your problem might be how to improve customer satisfaction. The reversed problem would be how to really put customers off.

Ideas on how to upset customers could be:

- Open at inconvenient times
- Don't provide any information on your products or services
- Don't answer the telephones
- Employ rude and disinterested staff

Now you can reverse some of the answers and see what they offer you in terms of possible solutions. You might decide to introduce new working times to make yourself more convenient than your competitors.

## What next?

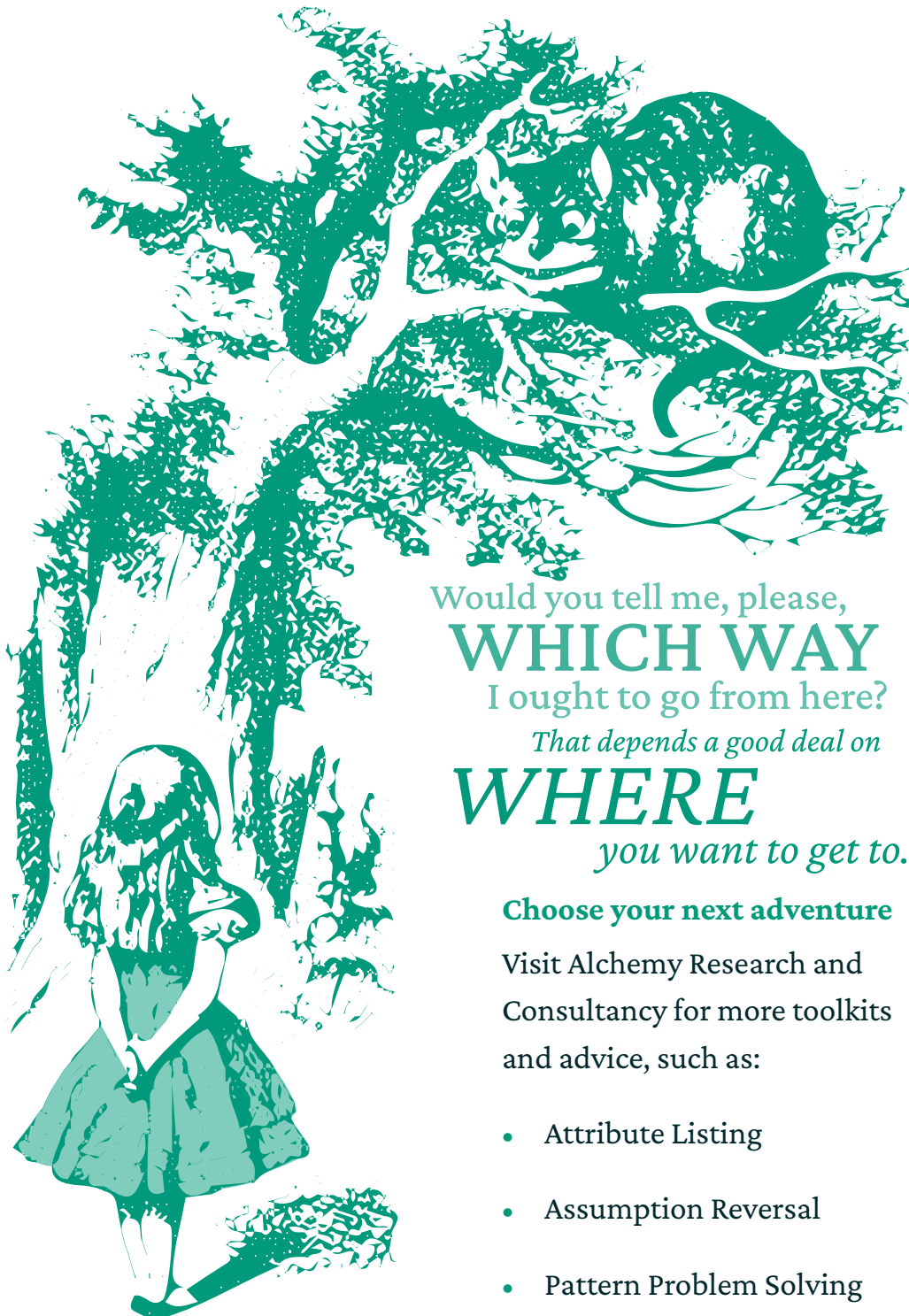
Think of a recent problem you have solved. Try the reversal technique on it now. Does it support your solution or does it suggest some new ideas?

# Quick tips

- Try the most outrageous reversal you can think of
- Open up your thinking as much as you can and try not to censor yourself or others
- If the first reversal does not produce a practical solution, try a different slant



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I ought to go from here?  
*That depends a good deal on*  
**WHERE**  
*you want to get to.*

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