

## Solving Puzzles

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# From The Principal's Pen

Being a child of the '80s, I have some great memories. Many of these were made wearing parachute pants or a Members Only Jacket. I remember when Lady Diana became a princess. When Chernobyl reminded us how fragile the world really was. We tasted "New Coke" and didn't like it! We played with Cabbage Patch Kids and Glow Worms, GI Joes and Micromachines, roller skates and Big Wheels. We rode in the back of trucks, didn't wear seat belts, and somehow survived to adulthood. One toy created in the '70s didn't hit the western market until the early 80s and had sold over 100 million before 1982. We all had one, but most of us had no idea how it worked.

Erno Rubik was a Hungarian architecture teacher at a college in Budapest. The cube that bears his name was first made of wood and used as a classroom teaching aid. It took him a month to figure out how the thing worked after he created it. Six years after it was created, it broke through the control of the communist bloc when it was introduced to the west. The toy made Professor Rubik the first self-made millionaire behind the iron curtain. Today, more than 45 years later, it has an almost cult-like following.

I received my first cube when I was in elementary school. I spent about a month trying to figure the thing out before I gave up. I could solve one side, but I would only make the other sides more mixed up in doing so. Finally, I did what all my friends were doing, I broke it apart and put it back together to solve all the sides. Essentially, I cheated. I became proficient in my technique and could "solve" the puzzle in under two minutes.

I forgot about the cube for several years until I was given one as a gift in my first year as a school administrator. I was an assistant principal and figured out very quickly that being an administrator was a lot like solving the cube. Each day I would face problems with complex solutions. Trying to solve one side of the problem often only caused more significant issues with the other sides. Eventually, I figured the cube out and realized that you couldn't just see one side of the cube. You had to solve the cube as a whole. Life has a lot more in common with this six-sided cube than we might realize.

I have kept a Rubik's Cube on my desk or shelf for the last fifteen years. The cube has more than 43 quintillion possible moves. That is a forty-three with eighteen zeros behind it. However, the cube can be solved with as few as twenty-seven moves. The trick is to figure out the right twenty-seven moves. Today, with a youtube video and a few hours of work, you can teach yourself to solve the puzzle consistently. I usually pick it up at least once a day. Solving the cube reminds me that even

the most challenging problems have a solution. It reminds me that having the right strategy matters. It also reminds me that I usually have two choices in handling the most complicated problems. I can put in the work to figure out the problem, or I can do what I did with my rubik's cube when I was a kid. I can pop all of the blocks apart and put them back together. I can cheat. While we can always trade putting in the work to do things right for what's easy, it is usually a practice reserved for those not prepared to handle the bigger problems. While it might work for a time, it will never prepare us for the larger issues that we will face. It doesn't make us better.

**“Our whole life is solving puzzles.”**

**-- Erno Rubik**