**5 Whys**

A tool to assist in ascertaining the underlying or root cause of a problem

**WHY**

Understanding and addressing the root instead of a superficial cause is preferable because:

* Addressing a superficial cause will likely result in the issue resurfacing repeatedly
* Eliminating the root cause will likely result in a lasting solution

**WHEN**

* In the analyze phase, before attempting to resolve the issue
* When there is a need to resolve simple to moderately difficult problems

**HOW TO**

1. Begin with the problem statement.
2. Ask Why is this problem occurring? Cause 1, the most proximate to the problem, may also be obtained by studying the Cause & Effect Diagram or one of the tall bars on the Pareto Chart.
3. Ask, Why does this outcome occur? The answer, Cause 2, forms the basis for the next question and the activity continues on in similar fashion.
4. Continue to ask Why iteratively (multiple times in succession) until you have arrived at a potential root cause

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| **TIPS*** Use this simple tool first whenever a process or system is not working properly, before moving to a more in-depth analysis such as root cause analysis (RCA) or Failure Modes Effects Analysis (FMEA)
* The root cause may be reached in 3 Whys or 7 Whys, there is nothing scientific or magic about the number 5
* Search deeper for system issues instead of blaming a person
* Stop when the team has reached a root cause that they will be able to act upon
* Do not fall into the trap of always identifying the last Why as “Lack of People/Staff” or “Lack of Resources”
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**Resources:**

* The 5 Whys Problem Solving MethodVideo - [www.mindtools.com](http://www.mindtools.com)

**Template:**

* 5 Whys

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