

The Five Why Process as taken from the Fifth Discipline Fieldbook.....

Asking "Why" five times, in a team setting, with discussion.

Best done with an intact team, working on a real problem. Can also be done in pairs.

Takes one hour or more.

Have plenty of flip chart paper, markers and self-sticking notes handy and assign someone to write everything down.

Step 1: - The First Why

Pick the symptom where you want to start - the thread which you hope to pull on to unravel the knot.

You may come up with three, four or more answers to the why.....

Step 2: - The Second Why

Repeat the process for every one of the answers above..... Post the answer near its parent.

Steps 3-4-5 Continue to repeat the process through the fifth cycle.

As you trace the Whys back to their root causes, you will find yourself tangling with issues that not only affect the initial problem, but the entire organization. The policy to get the lowest price on supplies might have been caused by a battle in the finance office. It might result from a purchasing strategy, or from underinvestment in maintenance. The problem is not that the original policy was "wrong-headed," but that its long-term and far-flung effects remained unseen.

To be effective, your answers to the five whys should steer away from blaming individuals. Blaming individuals leaves you with no option except to punish them; there's no chance for substantive change. One of the benefits of the five whys exercise is that it trains people to recognize the difference between an event-oriented explanation, and a systemic explanation. The systemic explanations are the ones which, as you trace them back, lead to the reasons why the problem wasn't resolved at its initial point of visibility (the puddle of oil on the floor).

Page 92: "Don't look for leverage near the symptoms of your problem. Go upstream and back in time to ferret out the root cause. Often, the most effective action is the subtlest. Sometimes it is best to do nothing, letting the system make its own correction or guide the action. Other times, the highest leverage is found in a completely unexpected source."

An Issue of Root Cause

Abstracted from:
"Putting Qualified Teachers In Every Classroom"
Richard M. Ingersoll
Education Week, June 11, 1997

Symptom: The lack of qualified classroom teachers:

41% of 12th grade students enrolled in physical sciences
54% of all history students
4 million secondary English students

"Causes": Poorly trained teachers --> More rigorous training
Teachers Unions / Seniority --> Change seniority rules
Teacher Shortages --> (partially true)

High turnover of new teachers
Dissatisfaction with job
low salaries
little input into decisions
rampant discipline problems

Root Cause: Teaching is Considered "low-staus" work
Teachers are considered semi-skilled
Lack of respect for complexity of good teaching
American culture is basically anti-intellectual (PGP)

"The way to make sure there are qualified teachers in every classroom is clear. If teaching were treated as a highly valued profession, one requiring a great deal of knowledge and skill to do well, there would be no problem in attracting and retaining more than enough excellent teachers, and out-of-field teaching would neither be needed nor permitted."

Root Cause: Definitions and Understandings:

Root Cause	=	“Original reason for nonconformance within a process. When the root cause is removed or corrected, the nonconformance will be eliminated.” (AT&T)
Cause	=	An established reason for the existence of a defect or problem.
Common Cause	=	A source of process variation that is inherent to the process and is common to all the data.
Random Cause	=	A cause of variation due to chance and not assignable to any factor.
Special Cause	=	Causes of variation, in a process, that arise because of special circumstances. They are not inherent parts of the process.
Symptom	=	“An observable phenomena arising from and accompanying a defect. Sometimes, but not always, the same word is used both as a defect description and as a symptom description but most often a defect will have multiple symptoms.” (Juran)
Cause-and-Effect Diagram	=	A diagram graphically illustrating the relationship between a given outcome and all the factors that influence this outcome. (Also called a “fishbone diagram” or an “Ishikawa diagram”) Used as a tool in the exposure of root cause.
The Five “Whys”	=	A technique for discovering the root cause(s) of a problem and showing the relationship of causes by repeatedly asking the question “Why?”.
Paretoing	=	A process for weighting or prioritizing the many underlying causes of a problem. Based on the concept that by resolving the important few - one can gain the largest improvement.