



FIVE WHYS PRACTICAL PROBLEM SOLVING

Introduction

This common problem solving process is used to analyze and solve any problem where the root cause is unknown. This is a good method to use in conjunction with the fishbone diagram as it helps staff drill down to root causes rather than stopping at the initial surface reasons for problems.

There are four major stages of the process:

1. Grasp the Situation
2. Cause Investigation
3. Problem Correction
4. Prevention

1. Grasp the Situation

During the first stage of the process:

- Identify the Problem
- Clarify the Problem
- Location of the Problem

2. Cause Investigation

In the second stage of the process:

- Conduct a “5-Why” investigation to identify the root cause
 - for the specific problem
 - for why the problem was not detected
 - for why the “system” allowed the problem to occur

3. Problem Correction

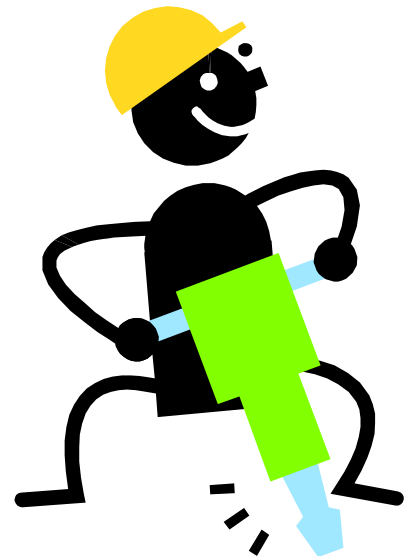
In the third stage of the process:

- Take specific action to correct the problem. At a minimum, short-term temporary measures are required to protect the customer.

4. Prevention

In the fourth stage of the process:

- Take specific action to make sure the problem cannot recur
- Capture Lessons Learned





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Stage I – Grasp the Situation

◆ **Step 1: Identify the Problem**

In the first step of the process, you become aware of a problem that may be large, vague, or complicated. You have some information, but do not have detailed facts.

Ask:

- What do I know?

◆ **Step 2: Clarify the Problem**

The next step in the process is to clarify the problem. To gain a more clear understanding, ask:

- What is actually happening?
- What should be happening?

◆ **Step 3: Break Down the Problem**

At this point, break the problem down into smaller, individual elements, if necessary.

- What else do I know about the problem?
- Are there other sub-problems?

◆ **Step 4: Location of the Problem**

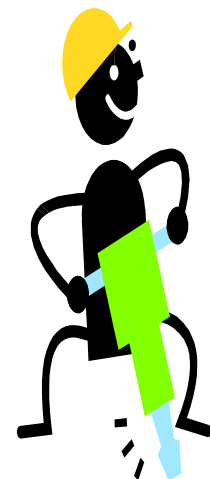
Now, the focus is on locating the actual point of cause of the problem. You need to track back to see the point of cause first-hand. Ask:

- Where do I need to go?
- What do I need to see?
- Who might have information about the problem?

◆ **Step 5: Grasp the Tendency of the Problem**

To grasp the tendency of the problem, ask:

- Who?
- Which?
- When?
- How often?
- How much?





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Stage II: Cause Investigation

- ◆ **Step 6: Identify and confirm the direct cause of the abnormal occurrence.**
If the cause is visible, verify it. If the cause is not visible, consider potential causes and check the most likely causes. Confirm the direct cause based on fact. Ask:
 - Why is the problem occurring?
 - Can I see the direct cause of the problem?
 - If not, what do I suspect as potential causes?
 - How can I check the most likely potential causes?
 - How can I confirm the direct cause?

- ◆ **Step 7: Use 5-Why investigation to build a chain of cause/effect relationships that lead to the root cause. Ask:**
 - Will addressing the direct cause prevent recurrence?
 - If not, can I see the next level of cause?
 - If not, what do I suspect as the next level of cause?
 - How can I check and confirm the next level of cause?
 - Will addressing this level of cause prevent recurrence?

If not, continue asking “Why?” until you find the root cause.

Stage III/IV – Prevention and Problem Correction

Stop at the cause that must be addressed to prevent recurrence. Ask:

- Have I found the root cause of the problem?
- Can I prevent recurrence by addressing this cause?
- Is this cause linked to the problem by a chain of cause/effect relationships that are based on fact?
- Does the chain pass the “therefore” test?
- If I ask “Why?” again, will I be into another problem?

Be sure you have used 5-Why Investigation to answer these questions:

- Why did we have the problem?
- Why did the problem get to the customer?
- Why did our “system” allow it to occur?

NOTE: it is possible to ask the WHYs more or less than 5 times. Do what is necessary to identify the root cause.



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Step 8: Take Specific Action to Address the Problem

Use temporary measures to eliminate the abnormal occurrence until the root cause can be addressed. Ask:

- Does it contain the problem until a permanent solution can be implemented?

Implement corrective actions to address the root cause to prevent recurrence. Ask:

- Does it prevent the problem?

Follow-up and check results. Ask:

- Is the solution working?
- How do I know?



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