5-Whys Guide & Template[i]

The 5-Whys is a simple brainstorming tool that can help teams identify the root cause(s) of a problem. Once a general problem has been recognized (either using the Fishbone Diagram or Process Mapping), ask "why" questions to drill down to the root causes. Asking the 5-Whys allows teams to move beyond obvious answers and reflect on less obvious explanations or causes.

Step-by-Step Instructions

1. State the problem you have identified as a strategic problem to work on.
2. Start asking "why" related to the problem. Like an inquisitive toddler, keep asking why in response to each suggested cause.
3. Ask as many whys as you need in order to get insight at a level that can be addressed (asking five times is typical). You will know you have reached your final „why" because it does not make logical sense to ask why again.

It is said that only by asking "Why?" five times successively, can you delve into a problem deeply enough to understand the ultimate root cause. By the time you get to the 4th or 5th why, you will likely be looking squarely at management practices (more than five whys may be required for complex problems).

This methodology is closely related to the Cause & Effect (Fishbone) diagram, and can be used to complement the analysis necessary to complete a Cause & Effect diagram.

Example:

Problem: Parents don't feel that they receive timely and relevant communication from school.

1) Why? Parents don't regularly check our school website.

2) Why? They might not know that the information is there?

3) Why? We haven't told parents that the information is there.

4) Why? We haven't had time to meet with parents or prepare any materials to share with parents about the website.

5) Why? It's not something we normally plan for.

Possible solution: We need better tools and strategies for communicating with parents.
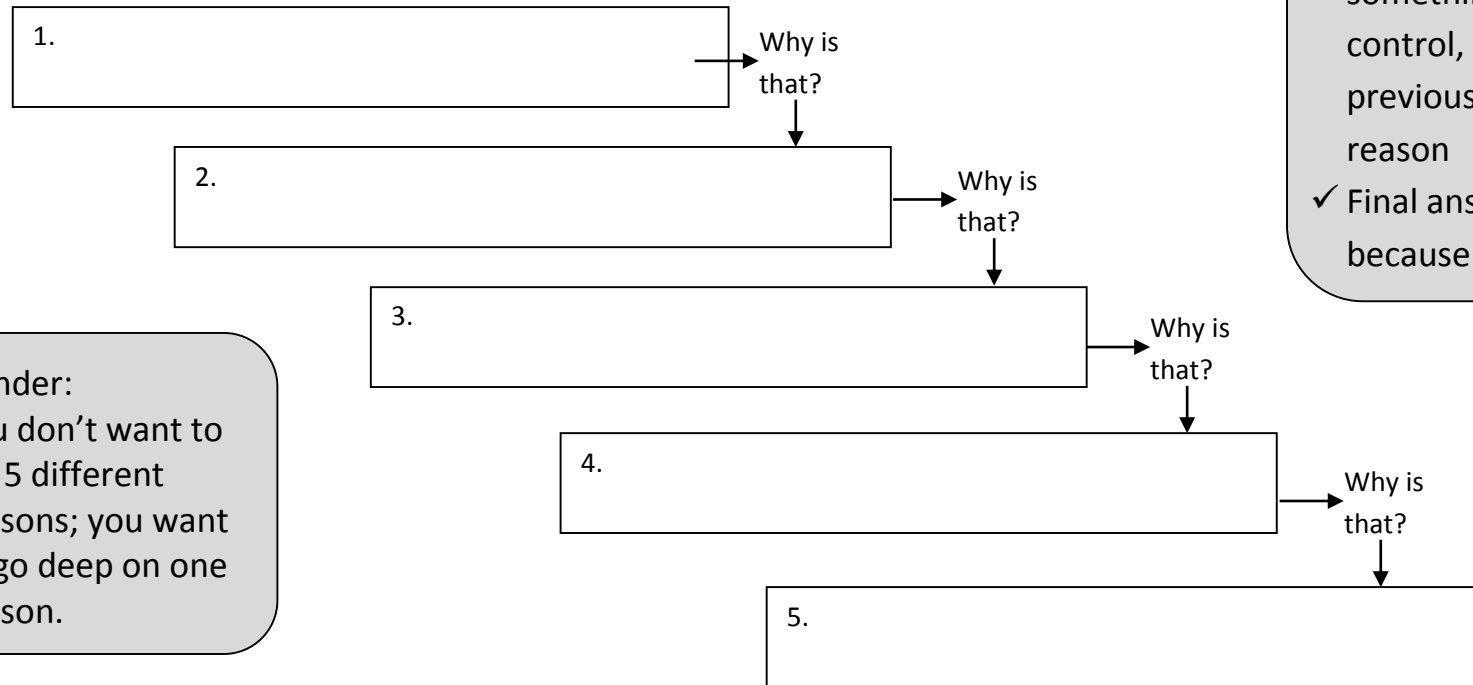
5-Why Analysis Template
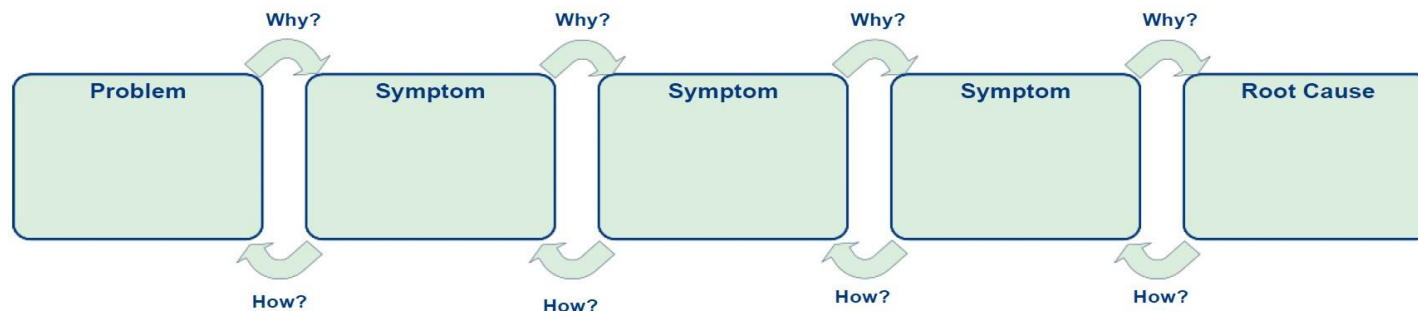
Asking Powerful Questions

5 Whys Worksheet

Define the Problem:

Why is it happening?

1.

Why is that?

2.

Why is that?

3.

Why is that?

4.

Why is that?

5.

Caution:
- ✓ If your last answer is something you can't control, go back up to the previous answer on one reason
- ✓ Final answer cannot be because of a person

Reminder:
- ✓ You don't want to list 5 different reasons; you want to go deep on one reason.

Identified Root Cause:

Action/ Plan to Address the Problem:

Action Plan Double Check:
1. Does your action plan indicate who is responsible for each action element?
2. Does your action plan involve a plan for communicating to relevant stakeholders?
3. Are the various elements of your action plan connected to a time frame? When will each piece be accomplished? Are deadlines set?
4. How will you assess whether the changes brought about within your plan have made a difference? How will you know if you solved the problem?