



Keyword: Five Whys

The Five Why Technique

by Kevin Eikenberry

Our kids instinctively know how to quench their curiosity by asking “Why?” We can learn from our kids here.

By repeatedly asking “Why?” you can dive into the symptoms which can lead to the root cause of a problem.

Although this technique is called The 5 Why Technique, you may find that five isn't the magic number. You may need to ask why fewer than or more than five times before you find the issue related to a problem.

In addition to helping identify the root cause of a problem, the 5 Why Technique can also invigorate our personal or group curiosity.

How to Complete the 5 Whys

- Write down the specific problem. Writing the issue helps you formalize the problem and describe it completely. It also helps a team focus on the same problem.
- Ask “Why?” the problem happens and write the answer down below the problem. If the answer you just provided doesn't identify the root cause of the problem that you wrote down in step 1,
- Ask “Why?” again and write that answer down.
- Loop back to step 3 until the team is in agreement that the problem's root cause is identified. Remember that it may not take five whys to get to a root cause.

An Example

Here's an example of the Five Why Technique at work.

Problem Statement: My lawn is brown.

Why is my lawn brown?
Because the soil is dry.



The Five Why Technique (continued)

Why is the soil dry?

Because it hasn't rained.

Why hasn't it rained?

Because it often doesn't rain much in August.

Why doesn't it rain much in August?

Notice at the fourth why there isn't really another answer – that is an indication that you have reached a root cause – and learned much more about the situation.

Even though I have explained this with a simple example, the technique works the same on any problem statement – simple or highly complex.



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