

Leader Toolkit

5 Whys

We are **CUSTOMER-OBSESSED** leaders, **DEDICATED TO QUALITY**.

We care about, and act on, every detail. We focus on what matters and deliver results.

Why use this tool

The best way to handle a problem situation is by identifying and dealing with the primary [root] cause.

By repeatedly asking the question "Why" (five is a good rule of thumb), you can **peel away the layers of symptoms and find the root cause of a problem**.

Very often what seems to be the reason for a problem will lead you to another question.

When to use this tool

Whenever you are struggling to understand the underlying cause for problem behaviour or a problem situation.

How to use this tool

1. Write down the problem you are seeing.
2. Think about **why** this happened - what could the cause be? Write it down.
3. If that isn't the root cause – **repeat** step 2 as many times as needed.

Tips

- Although this tool is called '5 Whys', you might find that you will need to ask the question fewer or more times than five before you **find the real issue related to a problem**.
- The **5 Whys** approach is **not a 'Who is to blame'** approach. It is a way of finding a **sensible reason** for **WHY** people didn't do something or something didn't happen.
- Time and responsibility pressures often lead to decisions and actions that cause problems and the root cause of the problem may be **something "below the surface"** or **something people don't normally recognise as a cause**.
- The **5 Whys** tool needs practice. The more you use and practice it, the more you'll begin to find the real root causes of problems.
- Use **5 Whys** in a **workshop**, making everyone feel included and able to collaborate. By writing up the suggested answers, everyone has an open, structured way to analyse the problem because they can see the thinking proposed at each step.

5 Whys



List the situations, actions, behaviours or events that contribute to the problem
0. Write down the problem that you are seeing (the symptom).
1. <u>Why</u> did this happen, what could the cause be?
2. If this isn't the root cause ask, <u>why</u> did this happen, what could the cause be?
3. If this isn't the root cause ask, <u>why</u> did this happen, what could the cause be?
4. If this isn't the root cause ask, <u>why</u> did this happen, what could the cause be?
5. If this isn't the root cause ask, <u>why</u> did this happen, what could the cause be?

