

Successfully Using 5 Whys

*“A problem well stated is half solved.”
- Charles Kettering*

Hints for successfully using the 5 Why method for root cause analysis

1. Using the 5 Why method to determine the root cause of a problem can only be successful if the problem/symptom is clearly stated at the beginning.
2. Ask yourself, “What problem do we need to solve in the near future?” Do not ask, “What is the problem and why?” Asking “why?” is the next step, after developing a clear statement of the problem.
3. Visualize peeling away the layers of symptoms which can lead to the root cause of a problem.
4. When looking to solve a problem, start at the end result and work backward (toward the root cause), continually asking, “Why?”

Correct and incorrect usage of the 5 Why Method

Incorrect

Problem: There are too many dumpsters in the weld shop

Why? Because there are too many

Why? There isn't enough room

Why? Because the shop is too small

Why? Because of the location

Why? That's the way it is

Solution: Move the dumpsters across the road.

This solution will not solve the problem because the dumpsters still need to be moved across the road.

Correct

Problem: There is a traffic jam in front of the weld shop

Why? Because there are dumpsters in the doorway and in the road

Why? Because they aren't being repaired in a timely fashion

Why? Because there are not enough welders available

Why? Because two are out with injuries

Why? Because they don't have the correct support equipment

Problem restated: The shop does not have the correct support equipment.

Solution: Get the correct support equipment.

This corrects the root cause.