

5-Whys Guide & Template

The 5-Whys is a simple brainstorming tool that can help any team identify the root cause(s) of a problem. Once a general problem has been recognized 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.

Example:

Problem: We need more staff to distribute meals at lunch

1) Why? Because there are 79 residents and we can't do it all in 20 minutes

2) Why? because we have to wait for the meals to be dished up before we can distribute them

3) Why? because there is only one person behind the steam table and three distributing meals

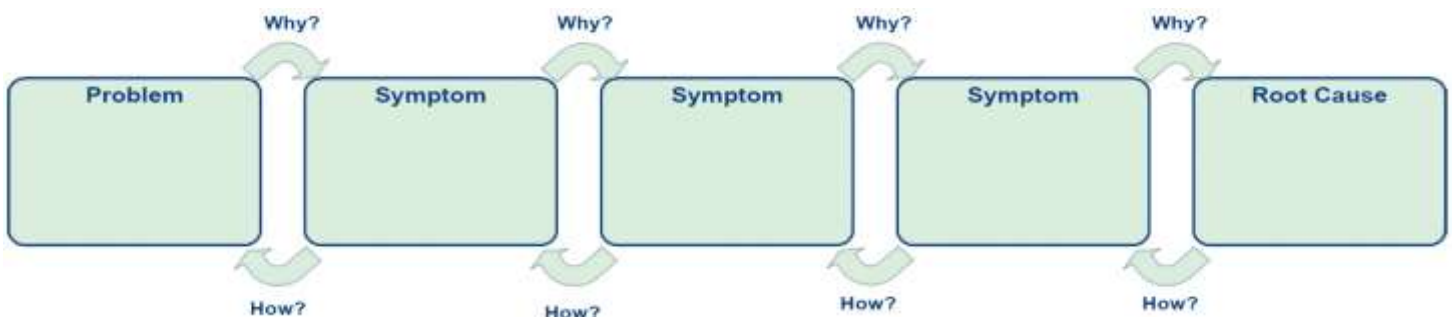
4) Why? because Dietary always dishes up the meals

5) Why? that's our standard policy

At this point you understand the root cause, and can see where a change is needed.

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).

5-Why Analysis Template

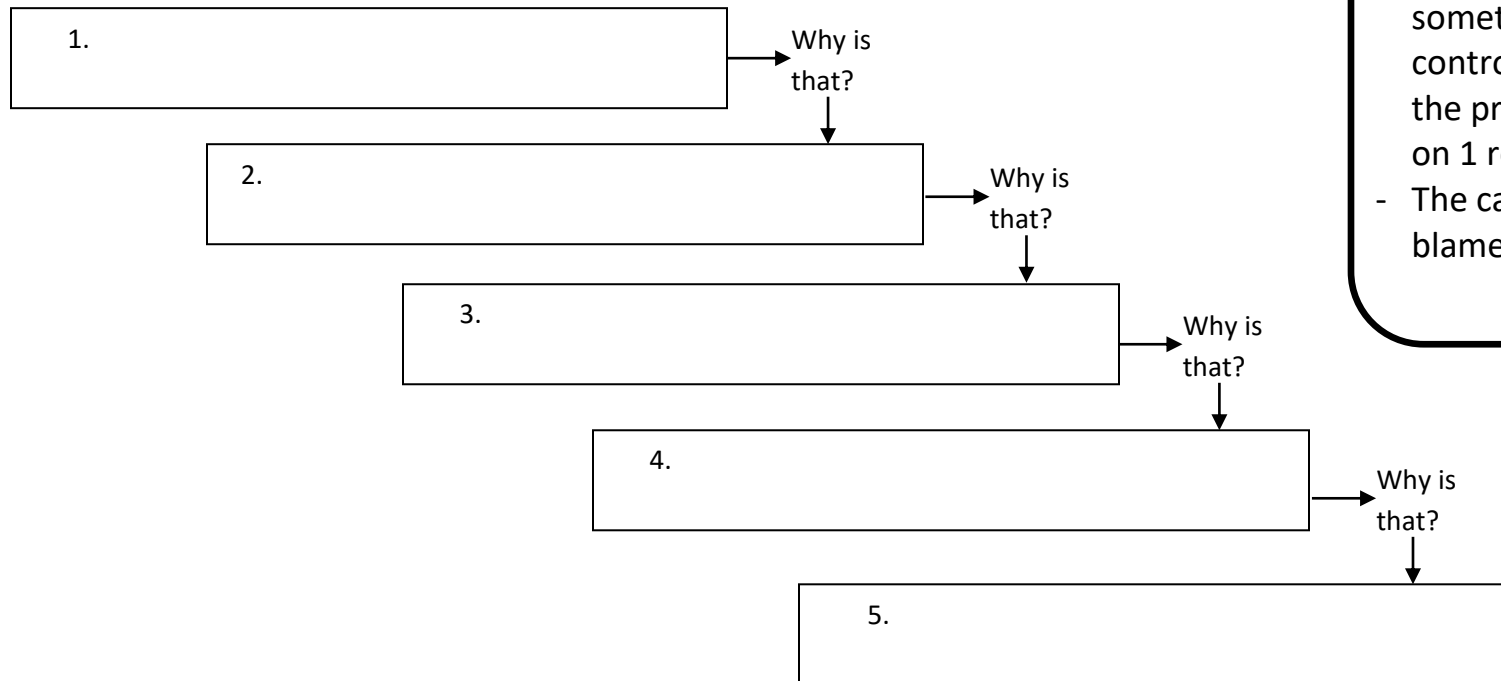


Asking Powerful Questions

5 Whys Worksheet

Define the Problem:

Why is it happening?



- You don't want to list 5 different reasons; you want to go deep on 1 reason each time.

- If your last answer is something you can't control, go back up to the previous answer on 1 reason
- The cause can't be blamed on a person

Action: