

Introduction

Well-intentioned, knowledgeable people often leap to conclusions about a problem and end up solving the wrong issue. While their knowledge and speed may look efficient and productive at the time, they often end up wasting time and other resources, having to solve the same problem over and over again.

Steps to Success

The Five Whys is a tool that helps you “peel the onion,” get closer to the root cause, and improve your chances of solving the real problem.

1. Start with the presenting problem, which is often a *symptom* of the real problem. Ask “why” this is happening, and put all your answers on the wall or a flip chart.
2. Repeat this process for every resulting statement, asking “why” for at least four more repetitions. You may need to repeat the process for various branches that are uncovered.
3. You will probably find your answers converging back to two or three systemic sources.

