

How to use the 5 Whys

What it is

Ask 'why did that happen' five times in a row, each answer becoming the next question, until you hit the real root cause.

When to use it

When the same problem keeps happening and the obvious fix never actually sticks.

Steps

1. **Name the problem.** What keeps going wrong?
2. **Ask why, five times.** Each answer becomes the next why. Keep going until you hit something you can actually fix.

Common mistake

Stopping at the first answer, which is usually just a symptom, not the real cause.

Pairs with

Occam's Razor and First Principles Thinking.

Example: always running late to work

Date: Mon, Jan 22

The problem

I'm late to work almost every day

Ask why, five times

Each answer feeds the next why.

1 I leave the house later than planned

2 I hit snooze multiple times

3 I go to bed too late

4 I'm scrolling my phone instead of winding down

5 I don't have an evening wind-down routine

6

7

8

9

Root cause: Set a phone cutoff time an hour before bed

5 Whys Root Cause Chain

Date: _____

The problem

Ask why, five times Each answer feeds the next why.

1

2

3

4

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Root cause: _____