

“Why? times 5” Technique

The “Why? times 5” or the “5 Why’s” tool can help a team move a problem from something that is unclear to something that is more concrete. The technique simply involves asking “Why?” five times, after which the team should be better able to identify a more specific starting point. Here is an example:

At a team meeting, a teacher on the team presents a problem: Susan, a student, is distracting other students in class. Five questions, and answers, should be addressed:

- “Why is Susan distracting other students in class?”
 - Susan is unprepared for class and bothers other students to borrow supplies.
- Why is Susan bothering other students for supplies?
 - Susan does not have her supplies with her in school.
- Why doesn’t Susan have her supplies with her in school?
 - Susan does not have her supplies because she leaves them at home.
- Why does Susan leave them at home?
 - Susan leaves them at home because she does not have an organized way of preparing for school.
- Why doesn’t Susan have an organized way of preparing for school?
 - Susan lacks basic organizational skills.”

Adapted from: Wheeler, Jim. The Power of Innovative Thinking. U.S.A.: National Press Publication. 1988.