

5 WHY'S

The **5 Why's** is a question-asking method used to explore the cause/effect relationships underlying a particular problem. Ultimately, the goal of applying the 5 Whys method is to determine the root cause of a problem.

The following example demonstrates the basic process:

- My car will not start. (the problem)
 1. *Why?* - The battery is dead. (1st why)
 2. *Why?* - The alternator is not functioning. (2nd why)
 3. *Why?* - The alternator belt has broken. (3rd why)
 4. *Why?* - The alternator belt was well beyond its useful service life and has never been replaced. (4th why)
 5. *Why?* - I have not been maintaining my car according to the recommended service schedule. (5th why, a root cause)

The questioning for this example could be taken further to a sixth, seventh, or even greater level. This would be legitimate, as the "five" in 5 Whys is not gospel; rather, it is generally true that asking why 5 times is generally sufficient to get to a root cause. The real key is to encourage the troubleshooter to avoid assumptions and instead to trace the chain of causality in direct steps from the effect to a root cause that still has some connection to the original problem. Note that in this example the fifth why suggests a broken process or a changeable behavior, which is typical of reaching the root-cause level.

Use this method the next time you do an accident investigation to get to the real cause. Instead of just settling for: "It was just a freak accident" or "He should have been more careful" ask yourself WHY at least 5 times and see if you don't get closer to the real reason the accident happened. Finding and fixing the root cause will help prevent the same thing from happening again. It can help you work . . .

SAFELY—OR NOT AT ALL.

This e-mail was produced by the Institute of Scrap Recycling Industries, Inc. For more information, visit us on the Web at www.ISRI.org
For comments or suggestions about *For Your Safety*, e-mail joebateman@isri.org

March 23, 2010

