

# Chase the problem down to its root.

## Background

*Sakichi Toyoda · Toyota Production System · 1930s*

The Five Whys is the simplest tool in the kit and the most often skipped. Ask why five times and you stop treating symptoms. Most teams never get past Why 2. The root cause is usually a system, incentive, or assumption — not the event that triggered the conversation.

## How to Run This

- 1 State the problem as a specific observable event — something you can point to.
- 2 Ask "why did this happen?" and write the first answer. Resist the urge to jump to solutions.
- 3 Ask "why?" to that answer. Repeat until you reach Why 5.
- 4 Circle the answer that could be changed to prevent recurrence.
- 5 Check: if you fix the root cause, does the chain above it go away?

## Facilitator Tips

### Common mistake

Stopping at Why 2 — the first answer is usually a symptom, not a cause. Push deeper until you hit a system, a decision, or an assumption.

### What good looks like

Root cause identifies something fixable: a process, a policy, a missing check. Not a person. "John didn't review it" is not a root cause.

### When to move on

When fixing the root cause would prevent the original problem from ever happening again — not just this time.

## About Wade Institute

Wade Institute of Entrepreneurship is Australia's leading centre for entrepreneurial education, based at the University of Melbourne. The Studio is Wade's free, AI-powered innovation workshop platform — making 24 structured frameworks available to anyone, each one facilitated by Pete, an AI coach trained in Wade's methodology.

## Try this interactively in The Studio

Pete will guide you through the Five Whys — asking the right follow-up questions at each level, and helping you distinguish symptoms from root causes. You'll leave with a completed analysis and a session report.

[studio.wadeinstitute.org.au](https://studio.wadeinstitute.org.au) →

**THE EVENT**

*What happened? Describe the observable problem.*



**WHY 1**

*Why did this happen?*



**WHY 2**

*Why did that happen?*



**WHY 3**

*And why did that happen?*



**WHY 4**

*Keep going – what caused that?*

**ROOT CAUSE**

*The deepest driver. This is what you fix.*