Five Whys Worksheet

Purpose: Get to root causes.

1. State the problem.
2. Ask "Why?" five times.
3. Build on each answer.
4. Identify the root cause.

What is the problem/decision/action/obstacle?

Why?

Why?

Why?

Why?

Why?

What is the root cause?

How To Use (Pro Tips)

Systematic Inquiry:
- ➜ Create a worksheet with a vertical chain of questions. Write the problem at the top, then below it, sequentially ask "Why did this happen?" for at least five iterations.
- ➜ Ensure each answer is specific and based on factual observations, not opinions.

Avoid Superficial Answers:
- ➜ Dig deep: if the answer seems obvious, push further with additional "why" questions.
- ➜ Sometimes it may take more than five iterations—but aim to keep it concise.

Collaborative Exploration:
- ➜ In group settings, have multiple team members contribute different perspectives to the chain.
- ➜ Compare chains to see if they converge on a common root cause.

Validation:
- ➜ Once a root cause is identified, test it by hypothesizing solutions and verifying whether addressing that cause mitigates the problem.
- ➜ Document both the process and the findings for future reference.

Questions To Reflect On

Beyond Surface Causes:
- ➔ What initial "why" seems too obvious, and how might a deeper investigation reveal an underlying systemic issue?
- ➔ Consider a recurring problem in your work or life—how might different stakeholders offer alternative "why" answers, and what does that say about the problem's complexity?

Balancing Depth with Clarity:
- ➔ At what point might asking "why" too many times risk overcomplicating the issue, and how do you decide when you've reached the core cause?
- ➔ How can you validate that the ultimate "why" truly addresses the root issue, rather than just a symptom of a broader challenge?

Uncovering Hidden Patterns:
- ➔ In what ways might the root cause you identify be interconnected with other challenges or systemic issues in your environment (such as organizational culture or financial habits)?