

PROBLEM SOLVING
THE 5 WHYS

Toyota's simple habit for finding root causes, not symptoms



THE SYMPTOM: A ROBOT STOPPED MID-WELD

- 1 **Why did the robot stop mid-weld?**
A fuse blew from an overloaded circuit.
- 2 **Why was the circuit overloaded?**
The bearings weren't getting enough lubrication.
- 3 **Why weren't the bearings lubricated?**
The oil pump wasn't circulating enough oil.
- 4 **Why wasn't the pump circulating enough oil?**
Its intake was clogged with metal shavings.
- 5 **Why was the intake clogged?**
There was no filter on the pump.

ROOT CAUSE: Install a filter — the fix is a five-cent part, not a new robot.

Most teams stop at the first plausible answer. Toyota's discipline was refusing to stop there — treating every symptom as a clue, not a conclusion, until the real cause runs out of places to hide.

"By repeating 'why' five times, the nature of the problem becomes clear." — Taiichi Ohno
Boaz Strategic helps leaders build the discipline to solve root causes, not symptoms.

Solving the problem, or just *the symptom*?

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In the 1930s, Sakichi Toyoda began pushing his engineers past their first explanation for a defect. Taiichi Ohno built it into the Toyota Production System.

The first answer is rarely the real one.

Ohno's classic example: a robot stops mid-weld. A fuse blew. Why? An overloaded circuit. Why? Dry bearings. Why? A weak oil pump. Why? A clogged intake — because there was no filter.

Five questions turned a robot repair into a five-cent part. Stop at question one, and you're replacing robots for the rest of your career.

The tool works the same way off the factory floor. A salesperson misses quota — why? Bad leads. Why? Marketing changed targeting. Why? No one told sales. Why? There's no process connecting the two teams.

Notice what's missing from that chain: nobody's name. The method stays productive only when it hunts for a broken system, not a person to blame.

Most teams stop at the first plausible answer. Toyota's edge was refusing to.

At Boaz Strategic, we coach leaders to keep asking until the real cause runs out of places to hide.