"The 5 Whys"
Root Cause Analysis

"If you don't ask the right questions, you don't get the right answers. A question asked in the right way often points to its own answer. Asking questions is the ABC of diagnosis. Only the inquiring mind solves problems."
– Edward Hodnett (1871-1962 British Poet)

Determine the Root Cause: 5 Whys
 (Adapted from www.mindtools.com)

Asking "Why?" may be a favorite technique of your three year old child in driving you crazy, but it could teach you a valuable problem solving technique.

The "5 Whys" is a simple problem-solving technique that helps you to get to the root of a problem quickly. Made popular in the 1970s by the Toyota Production System, the 5 Whys strategy involves looking at any problem and asking: "Why?" and "What caused this problem?" Very often, the answer to the first "why" will prompt another "why" and the answer to the second "why" will prompt another and so on; hence the name the 5 Whys strategy. Benefits of the 5 Whys include:

- It helps you to quickly determine the root cause of a problem.
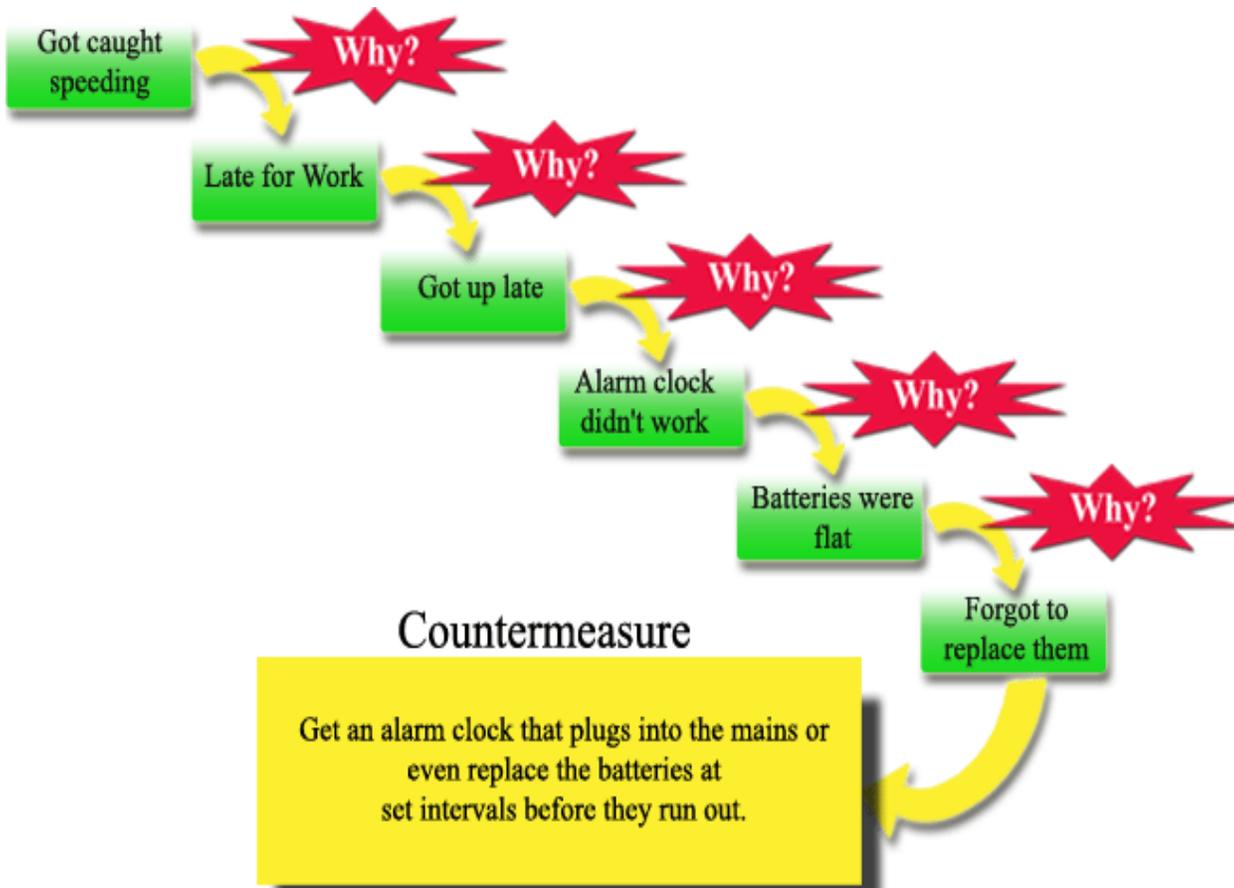- It's simple, and easy to learn and apply.

How to Complete the 5 Whys

When you're looking to solve a problem, start at the end result and work backward (toward the root cause), continually asking: "Why?" You'll need to repeat this over and over until the root cause of the problem becomes apparent.

1. Write down the specific problem. Writing the issue helps you formalize the problem and describe it completely. It also helps a team focus on the same problem.

2. Ask Why the problem happens and write the answer down below the problem.

3. If the answer you just provided doesn't identify the root cause of the problem that you wrote down in Step 1, ask Why again and write that answer down.

4. Loop back to step 3 until the team is in agreement that the problem's root cause is identified. Again, this may take fewer or more times than five Whys.

5 Whys Example

Problem Statement: Got caught speeding.[i]

i http://www.educational-business-articles.com/5-whys.html