

5 Whys Worksheet

A 20-minute structured conversation for linear, single-event failures. Fill out in order. Stop when the last "why" points to something you can actually change.

Companion to: *Fix the System*, Chapter 13. **Who uses it:** the technician who did the repair + the planner + the supervisor. Three people. **When:** within 48 hours of the failure, while the repair is fresh. **Time to complete:** 20 to 30 minutes. **Filed where:** attached to the asset's CMMS record alongside the work-order close-out. Referenced in the work order's Notes field.

Header

Date: _____ Facilitator: _____

Asset tag: _____ Asset description: _____

Work order #: _____ Failure code: _____

Participants (name + role):

- _____
 - _____
 - _____
-

The failure event

One sentence. Specific equipment. Specific date. Specific symptom.

When was the last prior failure on this asset (same or similar failure code)? Date: _____

Is this the third or greater occurrence of this failure code in the last 12 months?

- ☐ Yes — this is a repeat failure and RCA is required.
- ☐ No — RCA is discretionary. Continue if the failure was costly, unexpected, or safety-adjacent.
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Before you start: tool check

5 Whys is the right tool only when the cause chain is linear and recent. Check:

- ☐ A single, identifiable failure event (not a slow drift, not multiple events combined).
- ☐ The sequence of causes can be imagined as a straight line with no branches.

☐ A 20-minute conversation will likely identify the root.

If any of these is not true, stop and switch to a Fishbone session. This worksheet will not give you a useful answer on a multi-cause problem.

The chain

Fill each row in order. For each "Why," the next row's "Because" is the cause of the prior row's effect.

You do not have to fill all five rows. Stop as soon as the last "Because" points to something you can actually change (a missing PM, a training gap, a procedure not followed, a part number substitution). The number five is a rule of thumb, not a law.

Why 1

Why did the failure event happen?

Because _____

Why 2

Why did that happen?

Because _____

Why 3

Why did that happen?

Because _____

Why 4

Why did that happen?

Because _____

Why 5

Why did that happen?

Because _____

Root cause

The last "Because" above is the candidate root cause. Write it below in one sentence, using plain language.

Candidate root cause: _____

The confirmation test

A candidate root cause is only a root cause if addressing it would prevent the chain from starting again. Answer:

If we fix the candidate root cause above, does that prevent this failure from recurring on this asset, and on similar assets with similar conditions?

- ☐ **Yes.** Continue to Actions section.
- ☐ **No, or uncertain.** The chain is not complete. One of three things is true:
- You have not walked back far enough -> add more "Why" rows on a continuation sheet and keep going.
 - The chain has branches and 5 Whys cannot capture them -> stop and switch to Fishbone.
 - The answer is a category of cause, not a cause -> rewrite it specifically.

Sanity-check phrases that usually mean you have not found the root:

- "Operator error" (why did the operator take that action?)
 - "Part failure" (why did the part fail?)
 - "Wear and tear" (wear and tear is a description, not a cause)
 - "We don't know" (then the investigation is not done)
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Actions

Every root cause produces at least one work order and at least one standard / procedure / training review. If none, the RCA is incomplete.

Mitigation work orders (immediate fix)

What	WO # opened	Owner	Due date

Standard / procedure / training changes (systemic fix)

What changes, specifically? (An SOP revision, a PM interval change, a failure-code update, a training module, a spare-parts stocking decision.)

Change	Where it lives (SOP #, PM #, training #, failure code, parts)	Owner	Due

Similar assets affected

Does the same root cause likely exist on any other asset with similar conditions? Name them. Open a tracking work order for each.

- _____
- _____
- _____

Review and sign-off

Participant sign-off

By signing, each participant agrees that the candidate root cause and the confirmation test above reflect the team's assessment.

Technician signature: _____ Date: _____

Planner signature: _____ Date: _____

Supervisor signature: _____ Date: _____

Follow-up check (at 90 days from completion)

Has the failure recurred on the same asset? No Yes

If yes, one of three things is true:

- The root cause was correct but the action was not closed. (Audit the work orders.)
- The root cause was correct but the change did not hold. (Re-assess the action design.)
- The root cause was wrong. (Re-open as a Fishbone session.)

Follow-up check completed by: _____ Date: _____

File location

- ☐ Worksheet attached to CMMS record for asset tag _____.
- ☐ Work orders from the Mitigation section opened in CMMS and referenced on this sheet.
- ☐ Procedure / standard / training changes submitted to the owning function within 30 days.
- ☐ Similar-asset tracking work orders opened (if any identified).

Free toolkit downloads and updates: getov.xyz/toolkit/fix-the-system/ch13