

# Study Guide: The 5 Whys



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## Introduction

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## 5 Whys Example

Your company website is down and you need to get it up and running as soon as possible. You make the correction to get it back up and running. You might conduct the 5 Whys to understand why it went down and what can be done to prevent it from happening again.



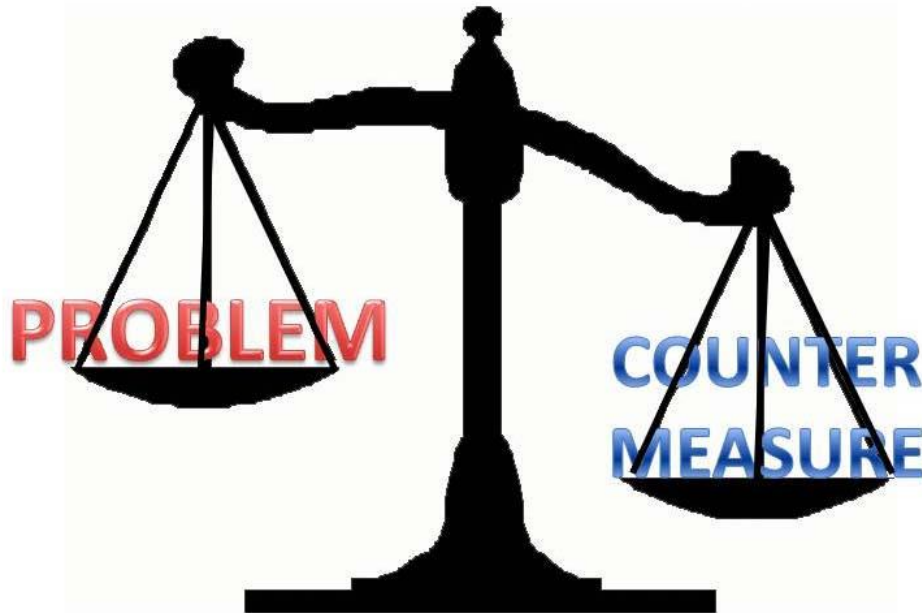
Here is what you learned during the process:

- Why did it happen?
  - It ran out of memory
- Why?
  - Because it was improperly configured
- Why?
  - Because the site administrator made a mistake
- Why?
  - Because the development team hadn't provided adequate instructions
- Why?
  - Because they assumed it was obvious

The next step is where the real power of the 5 Whys is revealed.

## 5 Whys Corrective Action

Corrective actions, also called countermeasures, are steps to ensure the issue does not reoccur.



In the example:

Cause 1: The website ran out of memory

- Countermeasure: Get the site up and running ASAP

Cause 2: Incorrect Configuration

- Countermeasure: Create an SOP to verify configuration before every update

Cause 3: Site admin made a mistake

- Countermeasure: Make sure site admin knows how to run the new verification

Cause 4: The development team hadn't provided adequate instructions

- Countermeasure: Train the dev team to provide sufficient instructions

Cause 5: Dev team assumed it was obvious

- Countermeasure: Have a word with the dev team manager

**The key point is that the causes are addressed at every level of the problem**

- Over time, as you fix problems this way, you develop the systems to prevent similar issues in the future
- What initially appeared to be a technical issue was discovered to be a human or process problem at its root
- Asking Why five times is simply a rule of thumb. You may need to ask three times or even ten times to get to the real root of the problem

## The 5 Whys Advantages and Disadvantages

Although the 5 Whys is a powerful tool for identifying and correcting root causes of issues, it is not suited for every possible scenario. Make sure you understand the advantages and disadvantages of the 5 Whys technique.



### Advantages

- Allows you to identify the cause of your problem, not just its symptoms
- Simple and easy to use
- Helps you avoid taking immediate action without considering the real root cause of the problem

### Disadvantages

- Different people may get different answers as to the cause of the same problem
  - Raises questions about the reliability of the technique
- It is only as good as the knowledge and experience of the people using it
- You may not dive deep enough to uncover the root cause of the problem entirely

## The 5 Whys Summary



- To prevent some problems from reoccurring, you need more than just a quick fix
- The 5 Whys can help you analyze and fix problems so they are eliminated for good
- It works by asking 'Why'
  - Continue asking 'Why' until you've uncovered the real root cause
  - Over time, you will find that less and less problems occur in general