

## Is Root Cause Analysis a Tool in Your Toolbox?

The definition of Root Cause Analysis is the rapid and persistent pursuit of the fundamental breakdown or failure of the process that, when resolved, prevents a recurrence of the problem.

Common root cause analysis tools are the “5 Whys” and the Ishikawa or Fishbone diagram. The “5 Whys” tool is used when an issue does not seem overly complicated, when there is one single root cause. It can be branched out to follow multiple causes if necessary. The Fishbone diagram is used when an issue seems more complicated and there are clearly multiple causes. These two tools can be used in combination.

The Fishbone diagram can help to identify and prioritize multiple causes to identify one to focus on. The “5 Whys” can be used to follow a focus cause to its real root cause. How do you know if you have identified the real root cause?

### The Root Cause Litmus Test

- Does the root cause statement identify an element of a process?
- Is the root cause controllable?
- Can we ask “why?” one more time and get another controllable root cause?
- If we correct/improve the root cause we have identified, will that ensure that the identified problem will not recur?
- Can we turn the problem on and off when we turn the cause on and off?

Don't forget that people can never be the real root cause!

Complicated issues require determination and commitment to remove each cause with the implementation of true error proof solutions. We must be relentless! Band aiding the problem will not prevent wasted time dealing with it in the future.

Remember that the “mindset of the past” focuses on the worker. We must be process thinkers who focus on improving the processes that make up our every day activity. When we fail to use a root cause analysis tool, we have tendencies to make assumptions and address the wrong issue. Root Cause Analysis tools can bring simplicity to complexity.

For root cause analysis to be most useful, it cannot be a tool we use when we have time to look for something to fix. We must design our processes, organization and culture around finding and solving problems where they occur. For this to be the case, the work itself must tell us a problem is occurring before the impacts are felt; the problem must be engaged, not dismissed as insignificant or typical; and the problem must be fixed by making the right way the easy way or making the wrong way impossible. Everyone in the organization has to be engaged.

I want to end the article with some meaningful quotes.

*"We can't fix Problems with the same kind of thinking we used when we created them"*

**Albert Einstein**

*"All things are difficult before they are easy."*

**Dr. Thomas Fuller**

*"I wouldn't give a nickel for the simplicity on this side of complexity, but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity."*

**Albert Einstein**

*"To solve a problem or to reach a goal, you don't need to know all the answers in advance. But you must have a clear idea of the problem or the goal you want to reach."*

**W. Clement Stone**

**David Bonnette**  
**CI Engineer, Wylie Plant**

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