

The Repetitive Why Technique

The question 'Why?' can be a powerful 'problem finding' technique especially if asked at least five to six times repetitively (Table 1). Using only the 'Why?' question can enable people to get closer to the cause of symptoms, or the 'problem-behind-the-problem'. Using the 'Why?' question followed each time by a 'What possibilities does the answer elicit?' question can lead to the generation of a richer perspective of possibilities, solutions and ideas from each 'Why?' question.

Table 1 An example of asking the question 'Why?' being asked five times (Imai 1986).

Question	Answer
1. Why did the machine stop?	Because the fuse blew due to an overload
2. Why was there an overload?	Because the bearing lubrication was inadequate.
3. Why was the lubrication inadequate?	Because the lubrication pump was not functioning
4. Why wasn't the pump working?	Because the pump axle was worn out
5. Why was the axle worn out?	Because sludge got in.

Imai, M 1986, *Kaizen: the key to Japan's competitive success*, McGraw-Hill Publishing, New York, NY.