TOOL 11

Root Cause Analysis for Performance Issues

> **PURPOSE:** *Before assuming a performance issue is about effort or ability, use the 5 Whys to find the root cause and design an intervention that addresses it.*

Employee: *Enter name*	**Manager:** *Enter name*	**Date:** *MM/DD/YYYY*

THE 5 WHYS TECHNIQUE

Start with the problem and ask “why” five times to get to the root cause. Describe the performance gap objectively, then dig: each answer becomes the next question.

Stop when the answer is something you can change. That is the root cause, and it is more often a system than a person.

5 WHYS ANALYSIS

Problem	*Objective description of the performance gap*
Why? (1)	
Why? (2)	
Why? (3)	
Why? (4)	
Why? (5)	
Root cause	

CATEGORIES OF ROOT CAUSES

Category	What it looks like	Solution
Skill	Lacks necessary technical skills; needs training or development; wrong role for their abilities	Training, mentoring, role adjustment
Will	Lack of motivation or engagement; personal issues affecting work; disagreement with direction	Motivation conversation, support, alignment
Process	Unclear expectations or priorities; broken processes or tools; insufficient resources	Fix the system along with the person
Contextual	Team dynamics problems; organizational changes creating stress; workload	Address environmental factors

Category	What it looks like	Solution
	imbalance	

INTERVENTION

Root cause category	*Skill, Will, Process, or Contextual*
Intervention designed to address the root cause	
How we'll track whether it works	*Measure, owner, and date to check*

EXAMPLE

Problem: Employee is consistently missing deadlines. Why? They're not finishing work on time. Why? They're spending too much time redoing work. Why? Requirements keep changing mid-project. Why? Stakeholders aren't aligned on requirements upfront. Why? We don't have a clear requirements-gathering process.

Root cause: a process issue, not an individual performance issue.

> **Pro Tip:** Most performance issues have systemic roots. Fix the system, and performance often improves. This is the teachable moment approach: learn what's broken, not who to blame.