

Root cause in five honest questions.

D8A.ACADEMY/RESOURCES/FIVE-WHYS

01 A worked chain

The dashboard shows wrong revenue. Ask why until you hit process.

WHY 1	Numbers wrong? Duplicate rows in the sales table.
WHY 2	Duplicates? The import job ran twice.
WHY 3	Ran twice? A retry fired after a timeout.
WHY 4	No guard? The job is not idempotent.
WHY 5	Why not? There is no standard for pipeline jobs.

→ Five levels down, "the dashboard is wrong" became "we need a pipeline standard". That is the tool working.

02 The rules

Four rules keep the chain honest.

stop at process	never at a person. "Human error" is a dead end.
verify each hop	check the data before asking the next why
branch if needed	two plausible causes? Follow both chains.
5 is a guide	stop when the answer is something you can fix

04 5 Whys or fishbone?

Chain for depth, fishbone for breadth.

5 WHYS

- One symptom, one chain
- Minutes, in any meeting
- Linear cause suspected
- Depth over coverage

FISHBONE

- Messy multi-cause problems
- A workshop with the team
- Buckets: people, process, tools
- Coverage over depth

▲ COMMON TRAPS

03 Trap: stopping at a person

"Marc forgot to check" is where the analysis starts, not where it ends.

bad ending	"be more careful" has never fixed anything
keep asking	why COULD he forget? No checklist, no alert, no validation.
good ending	a system change that survives his vacation

→ Blameless is not about being nice. Blame just ends the analysis five whys too early.