

CREDIT: DIGGING OUT SNOW HOLES CC-BY-SA/2.0 - © JAIN LEES - GEOGRAPH.ORG.UK/P/1690251



FINDING THE

ROOT CAUSE

IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF SOME PROBLEMS

Darrel Lim

Life Coach | C-three [Counselling & Life Coaching]

Many years ago, I learnt the “5 Whys” method which originated from the Toyota Production System, developed by Taiichi Ono in the 1950s.

The 5 Whys is about trying to analyse the underlying reason causing a problem by iteratively asking the question “why did this happen” five times, following which “the nature of the problem as well as its solution becomes clear.”

This method along with many other problem solving methods have become very popular today. They are based on the idea that if we uncover the root cause of a problem, we can make

improvements that prevent the problem from occurring again.

The root cause analysis concept has its roots (pardon the pun!) in industrial operations where people sought to improve the quality and consistency of factory line production. In a factory, a small problem can quickly snowball into a huge problem over time, as machines churn out thousands of products. Hence, that is useful to actively find ways to eliminate errors and fix problems early, and doing a root cause analysis helps to trace problems back to its source to be corrected.

What Went Wrong?

Unfortunately, this mindset and focus on digging to the root of a problem has since also widely been applied to how we address our own problems. There are always times in our life when things don't go well, or we have regrets over some outcome. When this happens, we tend to spend time and effort digging into the “Why” of it with the hope that we might learn how “not to make this mistake again and things will be ok the next time”. For example, If we didn't do well in the exams, we might have a strong desire to

C-THREE PROVIDES FREE WORKSHOPS, COUNSELLING & LIFE COACHING ONLINE & ON CAMPUS @ A3.05.B + C8.06.J

© Darrel Lim. You may download, view, print, or reproduce this document, without modifications, and for non-commercial use only. All other rights are reserved. The material herein is for general information purposes only. When in doubt, seek [professional support](#) immediately.

understand why. We might try to find reasons in circumstances or in ourselves (we blame our perceived inabilities or bad decisions made). Well this can be useful if the following conditions are met:

1) Everything is fully within your control. The next time the problem might occur, you can prevent it from happening as long as you know the best decision and action to take. You have absolute control over every single factor that might affect the outcome.

2) The situation, circumstance, process will repeat in exactly the same way again in the future. The next time you encounter the same situation which is an exact repeat of the past, you are far more knowledgeable now and will know what to do in order to ensure the problem doesn't re-occur.

If we apply this to exams, this means looking for the "why" behind our performance will make sense only if (1) every factor is within our control, including how much good quality sleep we will get the night before the exams, diet and nutrition, stress level, exam difficulty, no illness, etc and (2) the next exam we take will be exactly the same as the last exam, so what we learnt not to do or do from the last exam can be fully applied with expected better results.

If you feel that both (1) and (2) above, don't apply to you, then hey congrats! You are a normal human being - not a robot with omnipresent super powers over nature and fate!

The fact is, we are not robots or machines to be fixed. Unlike a factory line where diagnosing the root cause problems in a production line guarantees a better future outcome due to the controlled environment and repeated processes, we have lives filled with uncertainty and variety.



What caused a problem for us yesterday may no longer be relevant today. Sometimes the root cause is that there is no root cause, but just a confluence of various causes that randomly happened. Finding a root cause might not always be useful for us.

If so, what then can we do to improve our lives?

What Went Well?

Factors that lead to things going wrong might typically be very diverse, unpredictable and not within our control.

It would be better to instead focus on what we are able to do or have done, especially if it has led to things going well. If we did it before, we can certainly try doing it again! Our strengths and abilities are always present in us, ready to be called upon again in the future.

Factors that lead to things going wrong might typically be very diverse, unpredictable and not within our control. The next time a problem happens, rather than wallow in a spiral of negativity while

digging for a root cause and what went wrong or what is wrong with ourselves, **let's look at what did go well, no matter how small, and which of our strengths and abilities enabled this to happen.**

Rather than fixate on why an exam did not go as well as we hoped for, focus instead on what went well, such as how we managed to at least get some studying done despite our busy lives and constraints, and how we did manage to complete some parts of the exam. Then consider how to do more of these to prepare better and get better scores in the next exam!

Instead of finding the root cause, let's look for root strengths!

Dream . Believe . Do

1.

How would you hope things could go better the next time?

2.

What strengths have helped you so far and might help you make things better next time?

3.

What can you try next time in the hope that perhaps things might be better?

BOOK A CONSULTATION

If you would like support to think through your goals, resources and plans, [book](#) a free consultation with a Life Coach at [C-three](#) [Counselling and Life Coaching] in SUSS.

The Life Coach will collaborate with you to discover and understand your strengths and aspirations. You will identify practical goals and actionable steps to use immediately to achieve your goals.

