



youth service bureau

The Five Whys

How 5 questions can help your family be more productive and happy

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Do you wish you could get out the door faster every morning? Do you wonder why it takes so long to get chores done around the house? Do you long for more time together as a family?

For Charles Duhigg, author of *“Smarter Faster Better: The Secrets of Being Productive in Life and Business,”* he wanted to figure out how to have dinner with his kids. His busy work schedule seemed to be preventing him from making it home in time. So, he started researching companies and businesses that are extremely productive in hopes of figuring out what made them so successful. He found that “even the most complex problems have simple causes – if you know how to look for them.”

The process of identifying these simple causes is called “the Five Whys.” It involves asking a series of questions until you get to the root cause of a problem.

Let’s look at an example of how this process could work:

PROBLEM:

I’m spending too much money eating out at restaurants and on fast food.

- 1) **FIRST WHY:** Why am I eating out so much? Most of the money spent is on lunch food, and I need to eat lunch every day.
- 2) **SECOND WHY:** Why am I eating out so often during lunchtime? Because I didn’t pack a lunch.
- 3) **THIRD WHY:** Why didn’t I pack a lunch? Because I didn’t have time in the morning to pack a lunch.
- 4) **FOURTH WHY:** Why didn’t I have enough time in the morning to pack a lunch? Because I got up too late.
- 5) **FIFTH WHY:** Why did I get up too late? Because I stayed up too late the night before.

After examining these “five whys,” a few simple solutions have appeared. I could either go to bed earlier, which would help me get up earlier, which would give me enough time to pack a lunch... Or, I could find another time to pack lunch, like sometime the afternoon or evening before work. Either way, I am packing more lunches and saving more money. Problem solved!

Using “the Five Whys” can help us identify real, practical solutions to everyday problems, which helps us feel more productive, successful, and happy. As Duhigg said, “‘Productivity’ means different things to different people, but at its core, it’s about thinking a little more deeply about the choices we make

every day... Productivity isn't about running faster or pushing yourself harder, but rather, about working smarter and paying a bit more attention to what is really going on.” We encourage you to use “the Five Whys” next time you are facing a problem at home or at work. You may be surprised at how simple the solution can really be!

Read more about “the Five Whys” at The New York Times here:

http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/03/10/how-asking-5-questions-allowed-me-to-eat-dinner-with-my-kids/?mwrsm=Email&_r=0

You can also learn more about Charles Duhigg’s book here: <http://www.amazon.com/Smarter-Faster-Better-Productive-Business-ebook/dp/B00Z3FRYB0>

Resources

“How Asking 5 Questions Allowed Me to Eat Dinner With My Kids,” by Charles Duhigg. March 10, 2016. The New York Times (online). http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/03/10/how-asking-5-questions-allowed-me-to-eat-dinner-with-my-kids/?mwrsm=Email&_r=0