



August 2007

[Home](#)
[Mission](#)
[Services](#)
[Testimonials](#)
[Clients](#)
[About](#)

# Focus

*A Newsletter published for clients and friends of Wagner Consulting Group*



## Page Links

[Case Studies](#)  
[Signup for FREE Newsletter](#)  
[Newsletter Archives](#)  
[Downloads](#)

## Team-Based Problem Solving

Savvy leaders know how to use teams to identify the root causes of problems and then devise effective solutions, and are careful to select the right team members and appropriately frame the issues. Using teams in brainstorming sessions to solve problems offers two important advantages.

- First, involving people with diverse experience and skills expands the range of potential solutions.
- Second, the participants in the process are more likely to buy in to the solution and become effective proponents of the change required.

Selecting the right members for a problem solving team is the most important step. Look for people with a predisposition to collaboration, and think carefully about who might contribute unconventional ideas that could lead to a breakthrough solution. After all, you would not be carrying out the process if solving the problem was straightforward. It's especially important to involve employees from different work groups if the problem touches multiple departments or disciplines. Problem solving teams may also include people from different companies.

Also, be alert to the all-important human factor when searching for solutions. We often define problems and solutions strictly within the context of processes, and use classical management techniques to define measure, analyze, and establish control mechanism to devise solutions. However, many problems are caused as much by *perceptions* as by processes, and you may fail to find the solution until you consider how people view their jobs and responsibilities to others. In this regard, using a technique called the "Five Whys" is particularly effective.

The Five Whys is a question asking method used to explore the cause/effect relationships underlying a particular problem. This technique was originally developed by Sakichi Toyoda and was used within Toyota Motor Corporation during the evolution of their manufacturing methodologies. The goal of applying the Five Whys method is to determine the root cause of a problem, as the following example from *Wikipedia* illustrates.

My car will not start. (The problem)

1. *Why?* The battery is dead. (The first why)
2. *Why?* The alternator is not functioning.
3. *Why?* The alternator has broken beyond repair.
4. *Why?* The alternator is well beyond its useful service life and has never been replaced.
5. *Why?* I have not been maintaining my car according to the recommended service schedule. (The fifth why and root cause)

Notice in this example that the root cause begs a *sixth* question, “Why haven’t you been maintaining your car?” The answer to that question will be revealing. For example, it may be ignorance (this implies a training/education solution), lack of money (better financial management), or indifference. The key is to encourage the troubleshooters to trace the chain of causality in direct increments from the effect to the root cause.

The concept of “Two heads are better than one” is fundamental to team-based problem solving. So are the leadership strategies of team building and creating buy-in through communication and inclusion. Team-based problem solving produces better and more enduring solutions. Moreover, this approach decreases the headaches a manager must deal with on a daily basis. Warm and fuzzy feelings are available at no additional cost.

*Tom Wagner*

We help our clients accelerate profitable growth

Call us at 800 422-1374 to learn more

If you do not want to receive this newsletter, reply to this e-mail with REMOVE in the Subject field.

Copyright 2007 Wagner Consulting Group, Inc. - (800) 422-1374