PROBLEM SOLVING · DEFINE THE PROBLEM

Root Cause Drill

Trace a recurring problem, one proven link at a time, down to the cause that's really driving it.

The recurring problem _____

Date _____ Run by _____

One rule above all: no cause earns the next one beneath it until it has evidence. An unfinished chain is meant to look unfinished.

SYMPTOM — WHAT KEEPS HAPPENING

observable terms: what you see, how often, since when — not the cause yet

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CAUSE 1 — THE FIRST CAUSE YOU'D NORMALLY FIX

the comfortable one — the one you'd usually stop at

EVIDENCE ☐ PROVEN

log / number / timeline / screenshot / example

↓

CAUSE 2 — WHAT CAUSES CAUSE 1?

drill down, not sideways — one chain only

EVIDENCE ☐ PROVEN

prove it before the next link

↓

CAUSE 3 — WHAT CAUSES CAUSE 2?

keep going while removing it would still only patch the problem

EVIDENCE ☐ PROVEN

no evidence, no next link — stop, or go and get it

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ROOT CAUSE — THE ONE WORTH REMOVING

stop here only when removing this would end the recurrence, not just reduce it

The one change we'll make

what we do differently, starting now

How we'll check it worked

the signal that tells us the recurrence stopped

Read the chain back, root → symptom: does every link still make sense? ☐ **Yes, root confirmed** ☐ **No — drill one link deeper**

The first cause is often where curiosity stops — not where the problem starts.

Prove every link · drill down, not sideways · a cause you can only patch isn't the root · unlike Five Whys, every answer is proven before you move on.

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