

Getting to the Root Cause of Success

by John Petrie, Director, Conway Management Canada

Most of us have used fishbone charts and the “5 Whys” to help figure out the root cause for a particular problem, such as shorted orders, too much inventory or equipment downtime.

Have you thought of using the same tools to understand what causes a good thing to happen, so that you can identify the root cause and take action to get more of what you want? Here are two examples:

What causes sales?

- In the consumer products sector, one of the possible causes is good retail distribution.
- *Why...what causes that?* Products that are profitable for the retailer to sell.
- *Why...what causes that?* Innovative products.
- *Why...what causes that?* A new product development process with fast cycle time.
- *Why...what causes that?* A respected process owner and the right people involved.
- *Why...what causes that?* The right structure and resources provided by senior management.

What causes employee satisfaction?

- Apart from compensation, involvement in things that affect them is among the most important causes.
- *Why...what causes that?* Clear and frequent communications.
- *Why...what causes that?* Managers who believe that this is a good thing.
- *Why...what causes that?* Expectations created and rewards and recognition provided by top leaders.

At your next leadership team meeting, think about trying out this concept. Here are possible steps:

- Pick something that benefits the business and that you would like more of.
- Draw a fishbone chart to develop possible causes of the good outcome.
- For the causes that you consider to be the most important, ask “Why” 5 times — drill down to get the root cause.
- When you have the root cause, consider whether or not you are doing enough to get the results you want. If not, decide what else needs to be done, by whom, by when and for what result. ■

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- **They use variation and innovation** to outwit their opponents. Mike Vrabel, the offensive tackle, caught a winning pass in the end zone. Adam Vinateri, the place kicker, threw a game winning pass to the end zone.

Who knows what will happen in the next few seasons? The offensive and defensive coaches have been hired away to other coaching jobs. That will make things more difficult, but with the way the Patriots **study, change and improve work**, and the winning and innovative culture of the organization, I'm sure that they will find ways to succeed. ■