

# Five Whys to the Heart of a Relationship Issue

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If you are familiar with the Six Sigma process improvement program, you may be familiar with one of their tools called Five Whys<sup>1</sup>. The tool utilizes asking “Why?” five times in order to get to the root of a problem. It’s a non-judgmental, thought provoking tool that can be used wonderfully when coaching relationships.

The purpose of the tool is to dig down to the unconscious Gremlins, Assumptions, Interpretations, or Limiting Beliefs (iPEC’s GAILs) that might be going on with one or both partners in the relationship. The benefit of using this tool in this niche is that it leads to deeper responses and it does so without judgment or without too much pressure on either partner in the relationship. The best way to use it is when you think you hear any GAIL coming up with one or both partners and you can ask them the why questions without calling out the GAIL right away and without any judgment.

## Here’s how it might look:

One person in the relationship says that they are very angry with their partner.

The coach asks, “Why?”

The person says, “Because he didn’t go to the grocery store when I asked him to.”

The coach asks, “Why did that bother you?”

The client says, “Because now I have to go, and I’m overwhelmed, exhausted, and he let me down.”

The coach asks, “Why does him letting you down mean so much to you?”

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<sup>1</sup> Six Sigma and the Five Whys, visit:

<https://www.isixsigma.com/tools-templates/cause-effect/determine-root-cause-5-whys/>

The client says, "Because if he loved me, he would do this for me."

The coach then asks, "Why does him going to the grocery store mean he loves you or not?"

The client says, "Hmmm, well maybe it doesn't but it feels like he doesn't realize how hard I work and how overwhelmed I am."

The coach then asks, "Why does having him realize this so important to you?"

The client then says, "I wouldn't feel so alone and so scared that I can't handle everything."

**Now you've got some great material to work with!** You've seen examples of interpretation in the client's responses, which you can then ask the partner about. "Sue says that when you don't get the groceries it must mean that you don't love her. How true is that?" This allows the partner the opportunity to suggest that not only does he love Sue but also that he wants to be part of the solution and he just forgot to get the groceries. The coach can address that outer block by asking, "What would be a good way to remind yourself to get the groceries on the day that you committed to doing so?"

Also, the five why questions led to an opportunity to acknowledge and validate the client's experience. The last line that the client says is the deeper issue of fear around not being able to handle things and feeling so alone. Either the coach can acknowledge and validate this, or they can guide the partner to do so. Once the client is heard, then the coach can guide the couple into solution mode.

Also, this gives the coach a great opportunity to bring the unconscious into consciousness for both parties. "Sue, it sounds to me that you feel very scared and alone when John doesn't do something that he had committed to doing. How true is it that John doesn't love you or isn't still your partner?" "John, it sounds to me that sometimes you get overwhelmed and forget to do the grocery shopping. How true is it that you do this because you don't care about Sue's feelings? What might be a way for you to help her feel loved and cared for even if you forget the groceries?"

When couples start interpreting each other's behaviors in negative ways they can fall into very negative and combative patterns. The Five Whys allow you as the coach to help them drop the interpretations (as well as other GAILs) and get very conscious about what they are feeling and how to move forward.

**Credit:** The concepts inherent in this article are the author's interpretation of materials issued by iPEC®.