

## HOW TO PERFORM A ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS – REGARDLESS OF SEVERITY: SIX STEPS

**A ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS (RCA)** is one of the best ways to determine how to prevent future incidents. An RCA does not need to be a complex process. It helps you to get to the bottom of what happened. An RCA should be performed whether or not the outcome of an incident is severe.

Performing an RCA regardless of the severity can produce two benefits. First, it can help you to determine the cause before another, potentially severe, incident happens. Second, it can help create a commitment to continuous improvement among your employees that can benefit all areas of your organization.

An RCA can help you learn and grow. Understanding the cause of a problem can help you fix an issue going forward. When you understand why a failure occurred, then you can begin to make the necessary corrections – both individual and systemic.

You can use these six steps as a framework to perform an RCA on an incident:

STEP  
1

**Describe the incident. What happened? How often has it happened?**

STEP  
2

**Investigate the incident.** Assign cross-functional teams to investigate. Ensure each team produces documentation to support its findings. This may require meetings with people inside and outside the company.

STEP  
3

**Investigate the process.** What process was supposed to be followed? Was it followed? If not, define where processes were not followed and why. Specifically, review individual versus organizational failures.

STEP  
4

**Define solutions based on the investigation.** Try to ensure the solutions are both practical and highly tailored to the incident.

STEP  
5

**Formulate a plan.** Once the solution is defined, what is the action plan for implementation and measurement of success? Who, what, where, when, and how? Communicate the final plan to your whole team; institutionalize the knowledge.

STEP  
6

**Document and test.** Document the resolution and test periodically to ensure that the resolution was correct and has taken hold.

**LOOK IN THE MIRROR.** A root cause analysis can reflect individual, systematic, and leadership failures. When completing an RCA, be prepared to take a close look in the mirror. Pointing fingers and casting blame can only buy time until the same program arises again. The RCA is your best means to help ensure lasting prevention.

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