Managers solve problems. It is that simple. That is your job. Leaders continue to solve problems and they also strategize ahead of the problems to prevent them from occurring. Therefore, it is important to be skilled and knowledgeable about the entire problem-solving process. There are several steps between understanding the root cause and generating a solution. You may wish to take an online class or one offered at your local community college.

These two tools are classics. Both are used to identify the root cause of a problem. This is probably the most important step of any problem-solving process. If you do not identify and treat the root cause, you will probably treat a symptom and the problem will remain.

- **Five Whys:** You can do this activity alone, but it is more fun with a group. Select a symptom or what you think may be the cause of a problem. Ask, “Why is that happening?” List all responses on a flip-chart page. Repeat the question for every response you receive. List the responses close to the word/phrase you are asking about. Continue to repeat the question, “Why is this happening?” until the responses begin to converge to one root cause or until the responses no longer make sense. You will get to your root cause this way.

- **Cause and Effect:** The cause-and-effect diagram (also known as a fishbone diagram) represents the relationship between some effect and all the possible causes for it. The effect or problem is written on the right side of a blank page about half way down. A horizontal line is drawn and diagonal lines are added to look much like fishbones. Each of these is labeled with a key category. A standard set of labels includes processes, people, machines, methods, and material, though any major category that emerges may be used. (See example on next page.)

  Ask a group of coworkers to get together for about 45 minutes to create a cause-and-effect diagram to get to the root cause of a problem before solving it. Construct the diagram on a flip-chart page, placing the problem statement in a box on the right. Ask your coworkers to brainstorm ideas and write them in the appropriate major category. For each response, add smaller bones as necessary, branching off the major causes. Interpret the ideas by looking for the causes that appear repeatedly.
PROBLEM
Customer deliveries are at least 24 hours late 38 percent of the time.