Find the REAL Cause of Your Problem

TAL .004

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This letter is about finding the real cause of whatever problem you're experiencing – the hire who didn't work out or the campaign that flopped or the budget increase that didn't get approved.

1. The Problem

When you run into a marketing problem, you probably focus on solving it as soon as possible.

Then you move on – because regret is a waste of time and energy, right?

But here's the issue: focusing solely on solving an existing problem means you fail to prevent future ones.

After all, something caused your current problem, and, unless you identify and remedy the root cause, it will probably happen again.

2. The Solution

Preventing future problems is straightforward (but not easy).

Here's how:

1. Find the root cause of your current problem.
2. Implement a system to solve or prevent it.

To identify the root cause, use the Five Whys.

1. Start with a specific, one-sentence explanation of what went wrong.
2. Why did that thing happen? > One-sentence answer
3. Why did that thing happen? > One-sentence answer
4. Why did that thing happen? > One-sentence answer
5. Why did that thing happen? > One-sentence answer
6. Why did that thing happen? > One-sentence answer
7. Get your root cause(s). You can validate root causes by removing them from

the sequence of events. If they hadn't happened, would the problem still have happened?

For example:

1. Our new social campaign didn't generate the pipeline we wanted.
2. Why? Because not enough people clicked through to book a meeting.
3. Why? Because we didn't get enough impressions.
4. Why? Because we kept maxxing out our daily budget.
5. Why? Because our targeting was suboptimal.
6. Why? Because we didn't invest enough time in high-quality customer research.
7. Root Cause: Failure to conduct thorough customer research.

Not every root cause is identified so easily, though.

Sometimes, you'll be missing key data – why that freelancer failed to meet the brief, for example, or why your CMO declined approval for your new initiative.

When the data is human-sourced, just ask the person (this is why exit interviews are so important).

If you can't get data – for example, you're not sure why your Instagram posts keep underperforming – pursue multiple lines of enquiry.

This means following different 'lines' using the Five Whys.

1. Our Instagram posts keep consistently underperforming.
2. Why? Because our impressions are so low.
3. Why?
   A. Because we're posting when our audience isn't online.
   B. Because we're doing something 'algorithmically' wrong.
   C. Because only our employees like the posts – they're actually not getting any engagement from our ICP.

D. Our ICP isn't on Instagram.

None of those four answers is a root cause, but you could conduct tests and research to see which ones are probable (e.g. you could eliminate A by using Instagram's built-in analytics data to see when your audience is most active, or C by manually checking to see who's liking the posts).

If you have a couple of lines that you aren't able to eliminate, follow them all to their root causes, and then run tests to validate/eliminate each root cause.

3. Implementation

Tech Needed: None

Ease of Uptake: Hard

1. Create a problem-reporting system within your task management software.
2. Get every team member to create a new item when they encounter a problem (even a minor one).
3. Pick a time period (every fortnight or every month).
4. Manually classify all items as minor, moderate, or major.
5. Run Five Whys analyses on all major problems.
6. Check for recurrences among the minor and moderate problems.
7. Run Five Whys analyses on moderate problems that occur three times or more and minor problems that occur five times or more.
8. Implement solutions to the various root causes.
9. Measure efficacy by checking:

   A. the percentage of problems that recur after they've been solved; and

   B. the average number of problems per team member reported over each period.

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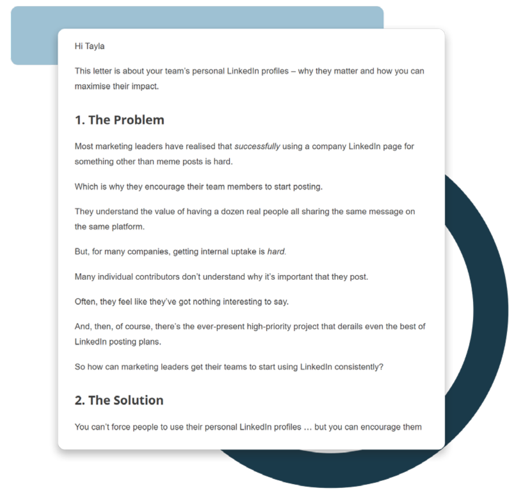

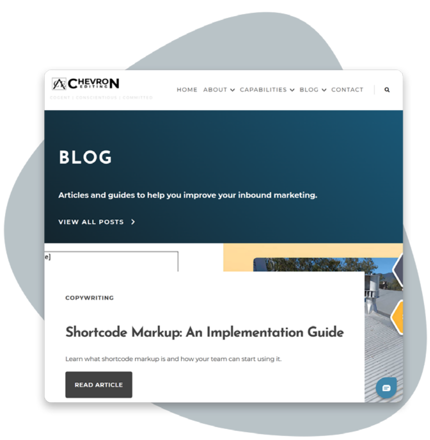

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