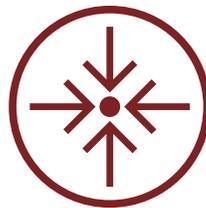
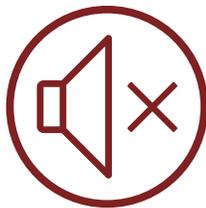


FOUR SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS

with Root Cause Analysis and

ONE LIFE-CHANGING ALTERNATIVE



ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS AN ENDEAVOR FOR CHAMPIONS

Quite succinctly, this endeavor draws and creates champions. If you are new to this field of investigations and have not yet been “hooked” by RCA, be prepared: you are likely to become a passionate advocate. It feels good to know that you are involved in a quest to make all our lives better.

No matter how or where you start in the field of root cause analysis, you will shortly see that RCA seems to work. Whether you choose a specific RCA method, or simply “do it yourself,” you will discover fascinating, near breathtaking reasons why things go wrong if you take time to probe deeply.

It is like digging up the soil near your home because you suspect something interesting is down there, and discovering a cave of jewels.

ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS AN ENDEAVOR FOR CHAMPIONS

As in all realms of life, when you discover something for yourself, you will want to share your discovery with others. You will even wish that all people would desire to unravel these mysteries just as you have. It is as intoxicating as it is inviting, and most often creates lifelong learners and devout practitioners in the time that other concepts are still introducing themselves to their acolytes.

Having been involved in this field since 1974, I have come to realize that the creation of RCA champions is a double-edged sword. On one hand, much of the world is now involved in RCA of one sort or another, with sincere and dedicated champions everywhere. On the other hand, almost all these true champions are doing something different – at least on the surface.

Most RCA champions seem to have latched onto the notion that we have more-or-less already figured it out. They look into the causes of the problems around them and compare them to previously developed “checklists of possible causes.” They may possibly trace the causes of their problems back to people who have not followed procedures, either through blazing new trails or even just skipping a few steps. Maybe they actually find problems with certain checklists that have been developed, or with our present building codes. Perhaps they’ve developed software products that help people map causal factors, or they actually supply logic diagrams to lead people to the “truth” – all in support of the endeavor we call “Root Cause Analysis.” My-oh-my do people seem to like these approaches.

On the surface, all these champions are doing something apparently different but at their “root” they’re not different at all. They all seem to avoid the truth about why things go wrong in our lives:

It’s me, it’s you, it’s US -- ALL of us!

I have come to the very disturbing conclusion that RCA, as currently practiced, has arguably become the major impediment to discovering the true root causes of our problems.

I will elaborate on four problems with RCA, and then suggest one life-changing alternative.

SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM #1

WE'VE RIGGED THE SYSTEM TO AVOID TELLING US THE TRUTH.

If you think about it for a while, you might see that the "type" of RCA process an organization chooses is a litmus test for who they are, and even for who they want to be.

Are you the person who will be choosing an "RCA" process? If so, your choice is a litmus test for who YOU are, or even for who you want to be, so please be careful about your choice!

Do you or your organization seem to prefer to end their inquiries with mechanical, equipment, or surface-type "causes?" If so, consider yourselves amongst the most shallow in your approach to understanding why things to wrong. This may sound gruff, but ending our inquiries with surface issues is something that was done in the 1970's – and we have certainly learned much more about why things go wrong since then.

Does your organization prefer to end its inquiries with system-type "causes?" If so, you will end-up wrapping yourselves into a tighter and tighter ball of checklists, procedures, and other rigid controls that are impossible for people to dwell in. Please do not go down this path. Learn from those who have. It is a dead-end, and often a fatal one.

Whereas you will certainly find mechanical and system-type issues when you delve into the causes of your problems, and whereas you will certainly want to correct those deficiencies as they are found, you will be missing the profoundness of what is at the true root levels of things that go wrong if you merely stop there. It's not our equipment, nor our systems that cause our problems. It's you, it's me. It's ALL of us!

RCA, as currently practiced, seems to divert us around this important truth.



SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM #2

WE LIKE TO THINK WE ARE ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES, EVEN THOUGH WE ARE NOT.

The cause of the cause of the cause of the cause...

In a true Root Cause Analysis, the investigator would have to start tracing the “cause of cause of the cause” of the issue. As they went back through the history of the problem, they would rapidly see that “today’s” problems were actually caused by:

- ✖ The people that worked here before us, and
- ✖ The people that worked here before them, and
- ✖ The people that worked here before them, or

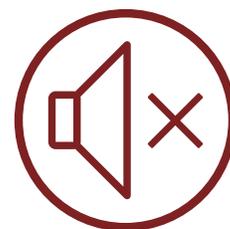
- ✖ The way I was raised, and
- ✖ The way my parents were raised, and
- ✖ The way my grandparents were raised,
- ✖ And on, and on, and on....

Do you see the point? Where would a person have to stop in order to know they were addressing “root cause?”

Although this might sound silly:

If people were able to trace the causes of a problem deep enough, they would eventually get to “Adam and Eve,” “the Big Bang,” or the Beginning of Time.

Since no one is able to chase the causes of a problem all the way back to the Big Bang, everyone stops short, while still calling their efforts a Root Cause Analysis. This incorrectly causes people to think they have identified the root causes of their problems when they have not, and is quite dangerous.



A simple example might help explain the problem.

Let's suppose you have a slow running drain, and find the drain is clogged. If you clear the clogged pipe, have you "solved" the problem? You'd probably say "No, I'd need to know why my pipe clogged in the first place!" I would agree. So let's say you find that the wrong diameter pipe was used for that particular drain! Let's also suppose that the pipe was located in a crawl space so that you could have it replaced.

Have you "solved" the problem yet? You would probably say "yes," but have you?

Clearing the clog may relieve the immediate issue, and increasing the pipe size would be a longer-term fix, but both those activities address "root causes" that beg other questions: "Why did the installer use an incorrect pipe size," or "Why didn't the home inspector see the problem and require a replacement?" Note that each additional question is another step back in time.

I'll never forget one of my first Root Cause Analysis speeches. It was in the late 1970's. I was considered the Root Cause Analysis expert in the Chemical Company where I worked. A person in the audience raised his hand and asked:

How do you know you've found "the root cause?"

I thought to myself, "what a stupid question," and I ignorantly answered:

When you address the problem and it does not reoccur!

He was about 55 years old, and I was about 30. He raised his eyebrows in disapproval and said:

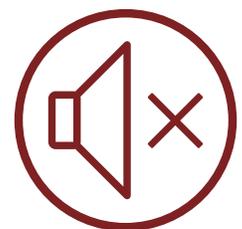
So if you remove one dandelion from your lawn and that one dandelion never appears again, are you telling me you've addressed the root causes of that dandelion?

The 55 year-old man in the above story understood the problem. In the 1970's, I did not.

Do you understand the problem?

The unintended consequences of continuing to use the phrase "root cause" are dire.

We lock ourselves in a box of arrogance.



SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM #3

WE ARE NOT ASKING PEOPLE TO LOOK AT THEMSELVES

By now, you probably know the point I am trying to make: When something goes wrong, we are not asking people to look at themselves. Even worse, we're almost requiring them to blame other people and things!

Saying that "we" are the problem offends some people. Does it offend you? If so, why?

Can you think of one incident that has occurred within a system that people have created whose causes cannot be traced back to people? If you can, I guarantee my ability to rebut it. I have learned that everything that goes wrong in a system created and maintained by people is caused by people. Everything.

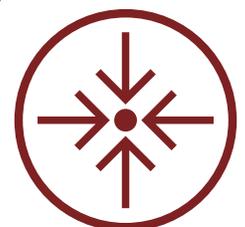
This does not imply, however, that people are not influenced; myself included.

It is true that I have been strongly influenced by my parents, and that they have been strongly influenced by theirs, and so on, and so on. But think about that for a minute. A past-tense occurrence is also a continual presence in everyone's lives – from the beginning of time until today – from the past and into the future – a truly ROOT CAUSE that is both past and present tense: The Way We ARE.

The way we are (present-tense) has always been responsible for all human success and all human failure. This was just as true 1,000 years ago, or 100 years ago as it is today. A recent article about G. K. Chesterton, an English writer who lived in the early 1900's, makes the point:

In the early 1900's, in the midst of WW1, the London Times issued a request from several notable authors to put their best thoughts in writing for an "essay contest." The question that was posed to these authors, in the midst of "the war to end all wars," was:

"What is the problem in the world today?"



All the notable authors presented lengthy essays in response to this question, except for one author – Chesterton. Chesterton’s response was a 2-word sentence. His answer was:

“I am.”

Chesterton flabbergasted the London Times, and won the contest. His answer was perhaps the most profound answer any human being gave to such a question.

“I am” existed ever since humanity existed, and will exist until it ends. It’s the truth that links the past with the present, and most importantly, with the future! In fact:

The only truly proactive question any of us can answer is “what is it about the way I am that contributes to the problems around me, and what am I going to do about it?”

RCA does not ask people to look at themselves. It’s much worse! Most, if not all RCA methods intentionally avoid addressing this issue. It gets even worse than this.

RCA methods, the way they are being used today, instead try to convince us that it is NOT the way we are.

It’s our equipment.

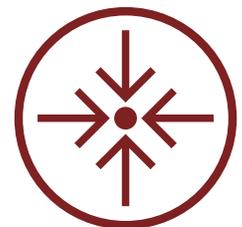
It’s our procedures.

It’s our systems.

It’s things that have already happened in the past.

It’s anything except ourselves, present-tense and today, that’s the causes of our problems!

Trying to understand why things go wrong ought to cause individual human beings, living today, to struggle with the most basic truths about themselves. Current RCA efforts do not do this. Even worse, current RCA efforts seem to be intentionally avoiding this. RCA has become dangerous nonsense.



SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM #4

RCA, AS CURRENTLY PRACTICED, PERPETUATES THE BLAME VIRUS!

A person that is blaming other people and things cannot see themselves as part of the problem. Blame is the enemy of introspection. If the goal of learning from things that go wrong is to help people see themselves as part of their problems, then our organizations should do whatever they can do combat the Blame Virus.

A biological virus that invades a human body is one of the most “evil” entities imaginable; the only known function of a virus is to propagate itself. It seems to care about nothing except reproduction. Unfortunately for the body that is infiltrated by the virus, the only way it can reproduce itself is to take over the resources of a healthy cell so that it can use its reproductive machinery. It has no such machinery of its own.

The virus invades a healthy human body, penetrates healthy cells, takes over the reproductive resources of a cell and propagates and,

In the process, it kills the healthy cells. If enough cells die, the human dies.

The human notion of “blame” is almost exactly the same. Psychology, philosophy, and most world religions all agree that there is no known function of blame other than to take over the resources of a healthy psyche so that it can reproduce itself – and in the process of taking over the psyche, it kills it.

Individuals who cannot see themselves as part of their problems ARE the problem!



Listen for the presence of the Blame Virus, and you will hear it everywhere. We have been invaded, and it is “killing” many of us. It even has even influenced the way we investigate things that go wrong.

In most organizations, when a problem occurs, the “RCA experts” are called. These highly trained, very intelligent, expert professionals come on-site as fast as possible and start gathering evidence (as they should). When they are finished with their evidence gathering, they get together and draw their conclusions.

We have found that this was lacking, and that was lacking, and that if you had done these things differently, then this incident could have

been avoided. We recommend that you change the following facets of your business and consider disciplining the following people. All our conclusions are outlined in our final report!

More often than not, the people involved in the incident are not allowed to participate in developing the final conclusions, making things even worse. Many, many times the people that “did it” are not even interviewed. The “culprits” are usually brought in at the end of the investigation and told what they did, what they should have done, and what their punishment will be. What a travesty.



RCA, in most companies, has become a formalized Blame Virus!

I hate to say this, because I know how it will sound, but almost everything about the current ways of practicing RCA have become flawed – fatally flawed. RCA has become near meaningless nonsense!

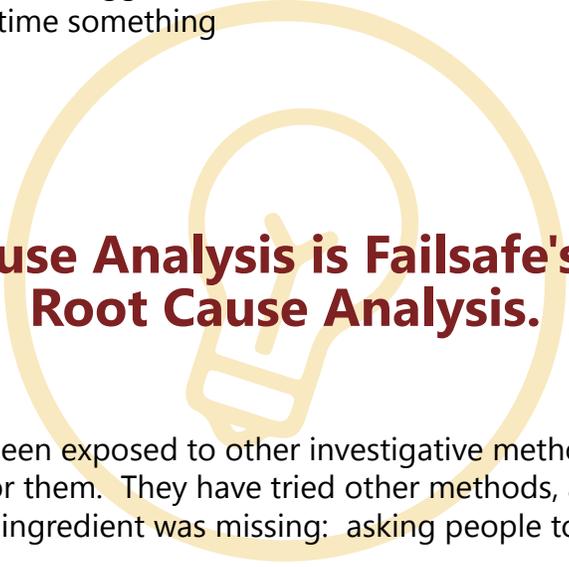


CONCLUSION WHAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE?

I am an extremely fortunate person. I have stumbled across an alternative to the above. I do not want to imply that I have all the answers to life's problems. Such an inference would be even worse than the danger that we I trying to point out in the present usage of RCA. Instead,

I have learned that the answers to life's problems emerge from the internal struggle that is supposed to occur every time something goes wrong in each of our lives.

As I became more and more aware of what I was seeing, I changed the name of my approach from Root Cause to "Latent Cause Analysis" in 2006, because I wanted to distance myself and my company from the present usage of RCA. The Four Significant Problems outlined above are directly confronted with Latent Cause Analysis.



Latent Cause Analysis is Failsafe's brand of Root Cause Analysis.

According to people that have been exposed to other investigative methods, Latent Cause Analysis has been the "game-changer" for them. They have tried other methods, and gone down those paths only to realize that the essential ingredient was missing: asking people to look at themselves as part of their problems.



In 2014, as the popularity of LCA has increased, I decided to expand the influence of LCA beyond that of what only I could provide. Failsafe Network, Inc. is now poised to provide LCA training and services on an increasingly aggressive scale. Our business plan includes affiliating ourselves with committed trainers around the world, as well as client-advocates within sites already committed to LCA.



In closing, please consider one of Failsafe's key mottos:

The Ultimate Goal of LCA is to CHANGE PEOPLE, because when people change, everything else changes.

And then please also consider the best way to change people. It's by asking them to answer:

What is it about the way I am that contributes to the problems around me, and what am I going to do about it?

Learn more about the life-changing and game-changing Latent Cause Analysis by visiting my company's website at Failsafe-Network.com.

Latent Cause Analysis classes are now available. Visit our website to see available dates and to request more details for your organization. Space and dates are extremely limited!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

C. Robert (Bob) Nelms

Bob is the founder and owner of Failsafe Network, Inc. since 1985. He has helped thousands of individual people at all levels of their organizations to “see their roles differently” by helping to understand that they are part of the problem.

Bob is available for Keynote, After Dinner, Society Meeting, Company Meeting and almost any other forum where people are interested in learning from things that go wrong. Most people appreciate Bob’s passion for this subject, the humor that he brings to the subject, and his candid, blunt style. You will leave the room thinking about what he said, whether you agree or not. Some of his career highlights include:

- Meeting and working with people around the world, learning that we all encounter the same issues in life, no matter what country we live in, or what our economic circumstances, what industry or company we find ourselves.
- Being able to hear people say, “I wish I would have thought about these things a long, long time ago -- it would have made a big difference in my life.”
- Understanding that I am part of my own problems, as well as part of everyone else’s problems. It’s not you, it’s me.
- Being able to work with a handful of “affiliates,” together trying our best to take “learning from things that go wrong” to another plateau. It is not easy!



Bob graduated from Texas A&M University in 1970 with a B.S. Aerospace Engineering.

Career Milestones

- ✦ Renowned speaker and trainer on Root Cause Analysis since 1985
- ✦ Author of two books titled What You Can Learn from Things that Go Wrong – A Guidebook to the Root Causes of Failure and The Dynamics of Inculcating the Root Cause Mentality
- ✦ Moderator of The Root Cause Conference, a 2000-member, international web-based conference on Root Cause Analysis since 2000.

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