Sounding the Alarm: Six Simple Firefighting Tips to Improve Workflow in Healthcare

Instructional Series Workbook

For the frustrated firefighters in the workplace.

D'Angelo **ADVANTAGE** LLC

Laboratory Learning Solutions

Expert Training for the Diagnostic Laboratory

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Introduction

In this series, we offer six firefighter tips to improve your workflow. Our simple tips will guide you to remove bottlenecks and gain operational efficiency in your workplace. This proven series teaches you how to effectively identify sources that fuel the chaos and present solutions to promote workflow improvements. With these simple steps, you and your team can extinguish the avoidable firewalls and focus on the tasks at hand.

This workbook includes the instruction and the tool for each tip. The files for each tip can be found at https://www.dangeloadvantage.com/instructional-series/

Tip # 1-What is Going On Here?

We begin our firefighting series with Tip # 1. What's going on here? We gather the team and pose the question: What issue during your workday requires you to stop your work and fix some thing before you can continue?

Give the team a few minutes to reflect on their workday and capture the team response. Gather one frustrating issue per team member. Once the list is complete review the issues with the team and ask: how often do these issues happen in any given day? Record responses and add a number next to each issue on the list.

The perspective from each effected employees is critical considering they perform the rework. Next, take a vote from the team. Review the entries on the list and based the frequency, ask the team which issue should we work on first? Which one has the highest number of occurrences? Which issue affects workflow? Which issues may affect the integrity of the work.

Lastly, decide as a team: What will we work on? Choose one. This concludes Tip # 1.

List the issues and the number of occurrences for each

Tip # 2. Understanding the Real Issues

In Tip # 2. we will work to understand the real issue. In our first session within the series, What is going on here? we reviewed the list of team member frustrations and chose one. We will now brainstorm that issue with our team to determine the causes. The tool we will use is cause a Fishbone or Ishakawa.

The goal of the fishbone is to understand every contributing factor to our issue and reasons for occurrence by using the 5 why's to drill down to the root cause. There may be 3 or 4 whys to get to the root cause. In this fishbone we listed the typical categories such as management, man, method, environment, machine and material. However, you can list any category that fits your purpose.

Begin with a category. Are there any contributing factors that may be problematic in your process? Learn more about why these issues happen by going through each category and ask the 5 why's until the fishbone is complete. You'll now have a good understanding why these issue(s) occur.

Put a red box around the critical root causes. We will go to work to eliminate these causes from reoccurring.

Fishbone Diagram

Management | Man | Method

Root Cause

Issue

Root Cause

Root Cause

Environment | Machine | Material

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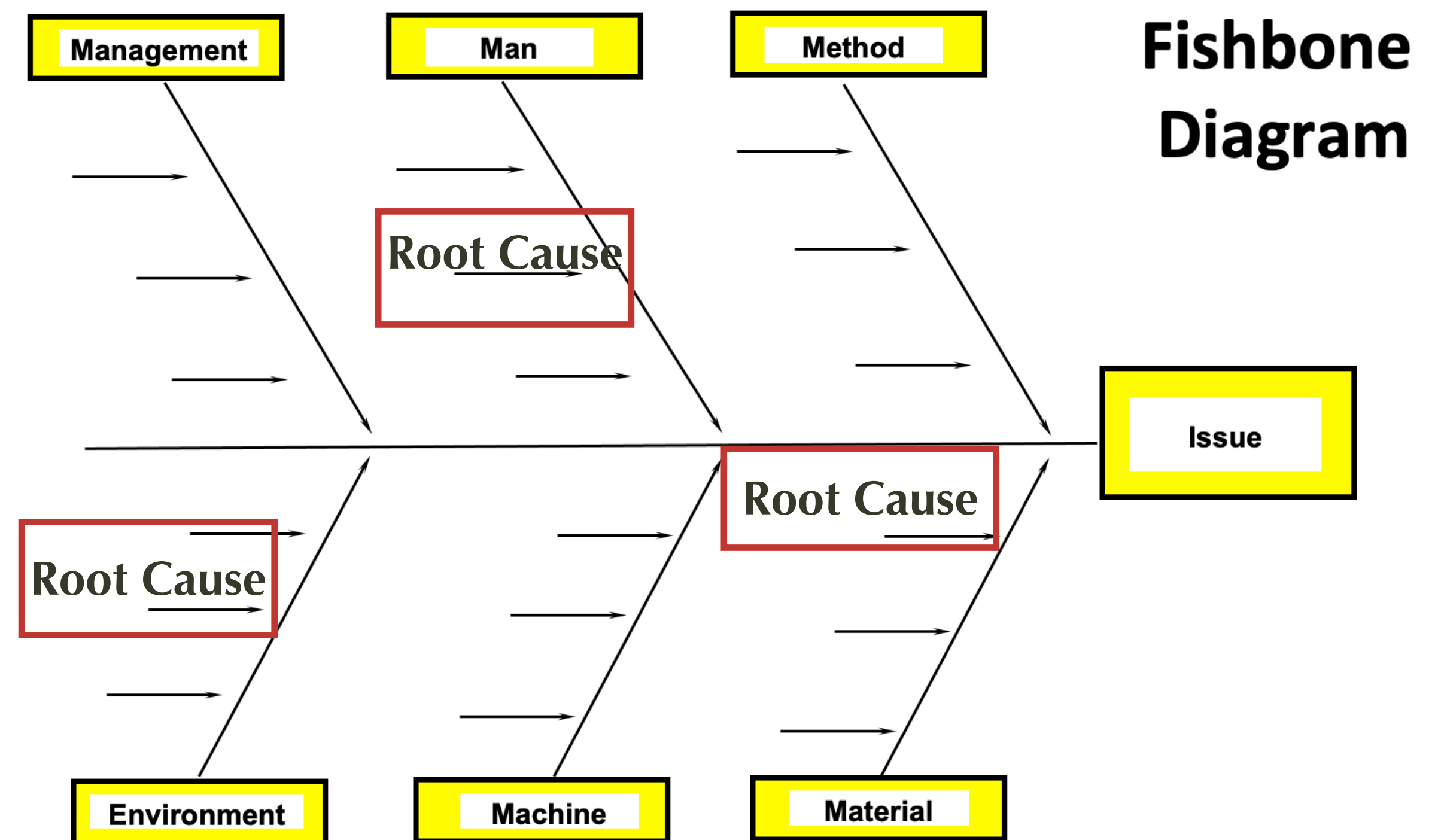
Tip #3 Observing the Process

In Tip # 3 of the Firefighting Series, we go to the place where the work is occurring to see for ourselves what is actually happening. We follow the process from start to finish and document any activities that may have contributed to our original problem. Don't forget to gain the workers perspective.

Waste, inefficiency, defects and opportunities for improvement are documented on the observation form.

The observations noted are complied and shared within the team. The focus is to identify the most common or critical problems. We will use these frequent occurring issues in the next tip of the series.

Observation Organizer

Observer
Team:
Date:
_____
_____
_____

The goal of process observation is to understand the entire process: We will work to accomplish the following:

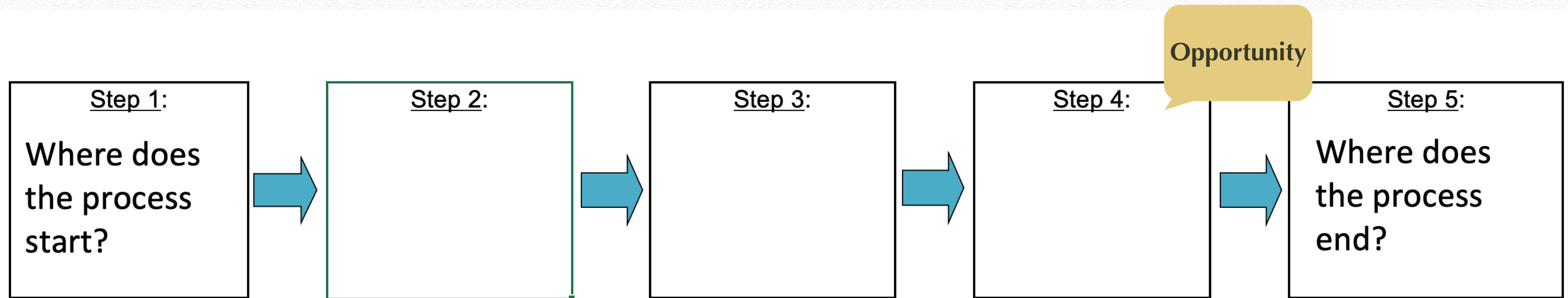| Observe 1 | Follow the work- from start to finish |
Observe 2	Identify waste encountered at each handoff
Observe 3	Note workers performing their task & activities
Observe 4	Go and See and ask the workers why?

Rules

Watch & communicate

No blame

Positive reinforcement

Ask for clarity

Clear ambiguity

Ask the expert for details -why does this happen?

Document all Details from the Observation Session Below

Observation (What process did you see?)	Waste Observed?	Document defective handoffs/ Inefficiencies	Notes/ How many times did it occur?

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Tip # 4 Documenting a Few Steps of the Process

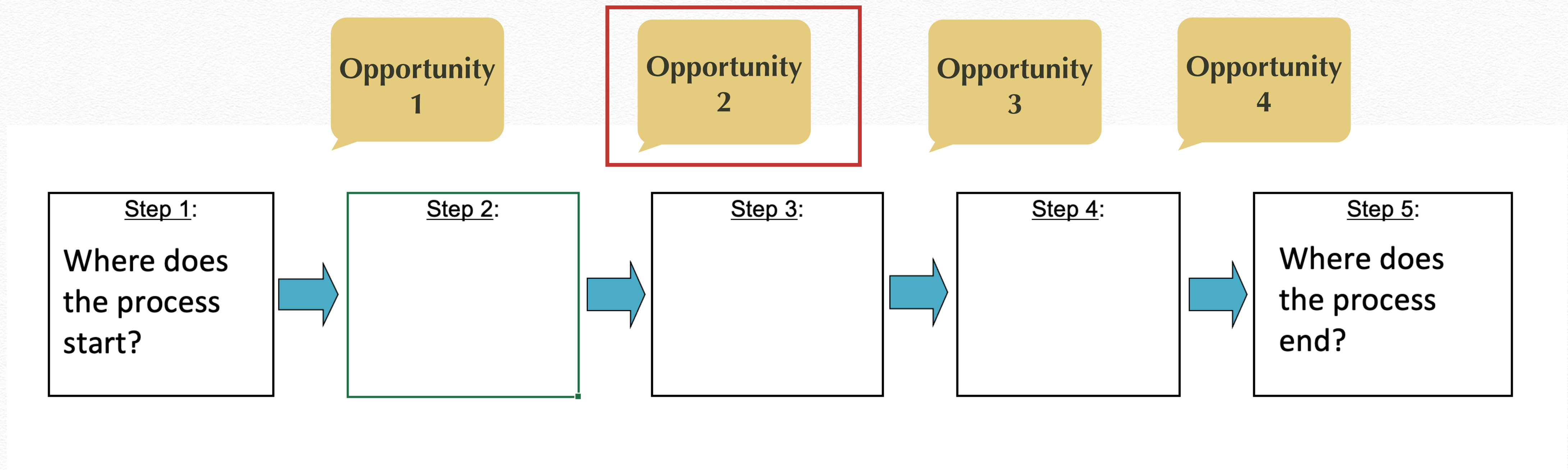| Step 1:		Step 2:		Step 3:		Step 4:		Step 5:
Where does the process start?	→		→		→		→	Where does the process end?

Opportunity

In this Tip # 4 we develop a high-level process flow map consisting of 5-7 steps. We capture the process noted through observation or by our working knowledge. We note how our original issue could have occurred and add important team notes from the observation session. As we study this process flow, we better understand the handoffs, bottlenecks, defects and the start to finish details.

The high-level map will allow us to identify a few process steps and brainstorm corresponding issues that happened between those steps. We note defects as kaizen bursts or opportunities for improvement. If these defects may have contributed to our original issue we will add them to the bursts above. Add as many bursts as necessary to illustrate the overall picture.
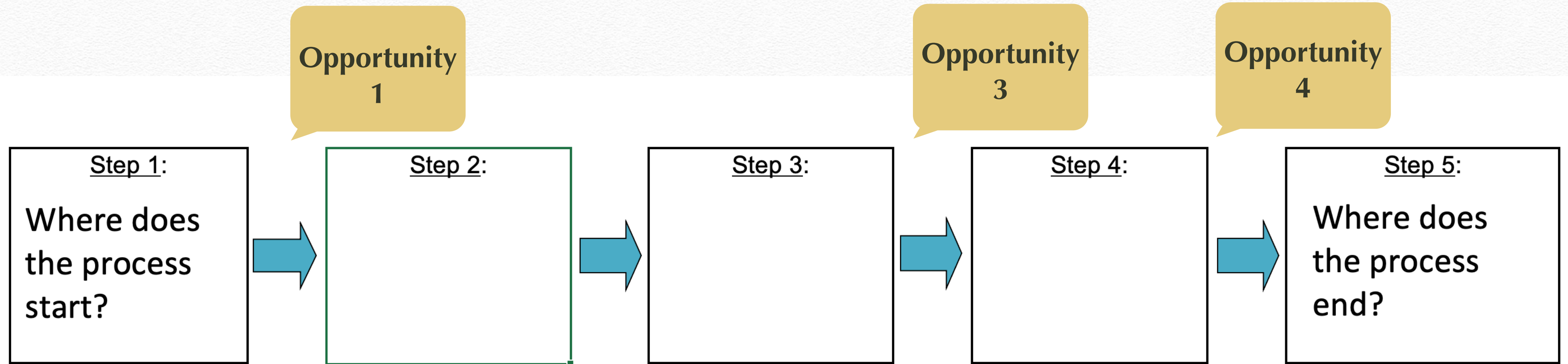
Note: Capture an overall total processing time of the current state to gain an understanding of how long this process currently takes. Example: Start: Tuesday 9:00 AM. Finish: Friday 6:30 PM.

Tip # 5 We can Design a More Efficient Process

| Opportunity 1 | Opportunity 2 | Opportunity 3 | Opportunity 4 |

| Step 1: Where does the process start? | → | Step 2: | → | Step 3: | → | Step 4: | → | Step 5: Where does the process end? |

In Tip # 5 we discuss designing a more efficient process. We noted opportunities or defects that occur within our 5-step flow and will choose one to start the improvement process. The opportunity here is to redesign the current process to reduce the overall processing time and eliminate defective occurrences. A significant improvement should result once this process complete.

Tip # 6. That Worked so What's Next?

Opportunity 1

Opportunity 3

Opportunity 4

Step 1:	Step 2:	Step 3:	Step 4:	Step 5:
Where does the process start?				Where does the process end?

In this final firefighting tip # 6, we discuss continuing the improvement process. We revisit the original process map, choose another kaizen burst, brainstorm with our team and work to eliminate this issue from reoccurring. Once again, we will follow the identical method and work to eliminate the remaining issues noted during observation.

Conclusion

We've learned a simple method to improve healthcare processes and reduce the frustration and firefighting within our daily work.

Going to the place where the work takes place is instrumental to understand how and why the issues begin the first place.

Identifying the root cause is critical for the success of any process flow.

Lastly, we learn to celebrate our hard work and success!

To review the instructional series and download the files go to https://www.dangeloadvantage.com/instructional-series/