Sounding the Alarm:

# Six Simple Firefighting Tips to Improve Workflow in Healthcare

## Instructional Series Workbook

To aid those who are frustrated by fighting all the little "fires" that impede workflow.

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 removing bottlenecks and gaining operational efficiency in your workplace. This proven series teaches you how to effectively identify the sources of error and inefficiency that fuel chaos.  Additionally, it helps front line staff to identify solutions that will promote workflow improvements. Using these simple steps and tools, you and your team can extinguish the avoidable fires and develop firewalls so you can focus on the task at hand.

This workbook includes the instruction and the tool for each tip. The supporting materials for each tip can be found using the following link:
https://www.dangeloadvantage.com/instructional-series/

# Tip #1-Asking "What is Going On Here?"

We begin our firefighting series by asking the question, "What's going on here?" To answer this essential first question we gather a team of people who actually do the work and ask: 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. Gather one frustrating issue per team member. Group all similar responses into a single issue. Once the list is complete review the issues with the team and ask: How often do these issues happen in any given day? Rank the responses according to the frequency indicted by the team.

Then, ask the team members who are responsible for error correction and rework: How much time each day do you spend dealing with this issue? Record the time spent after each issue.

Finally ask: Which issues have the potential to cause harm? Place a star in front of those identified.

Now, take a vote from the team. Discuss the entries on the list based on the severity, frequency and interruption time: Which one has the highest number of occurrences? Which issue affects workflow? Which issues could affect patient care?

Lastly, decide as a team: What will we work on first? Agree (as a team) on one.

# Tip #2-Understanding the Real Issues

In Tip #2 we will work to understand the true cause(s) of the selected 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 all possible causes of that issue. The tool we will use is called a Fishbone or Ishakawa diagram.

The goal of the Fishbone is to understand most if not all of the contributing factors for the selected issue and to understand the reasons for occurrence.  Start with the issue the team agreed to investigate.  Identify the contributing factor categories you will use--in this fishbone we used the typical categories: management, man, method, environment, machine and material.

Under each category, brainstorm with the team all the possible causes for the selected issue that fall under each category.  Then use "The 5 Whys" to drill down and find the "causes of the causes."

Look for root causes that appear in more than one category.  Look for root causes that are related to causes in another category.

You'll now have a good understanding of why these issue(s) occur.

Put a red box around the critical root causes.  These are the causes the team will work on first.

**Fishbone Diagram**

Management | Man | Method

Root Cause

Root Cause

Root Cause

Issue

Environment | Machine | Material
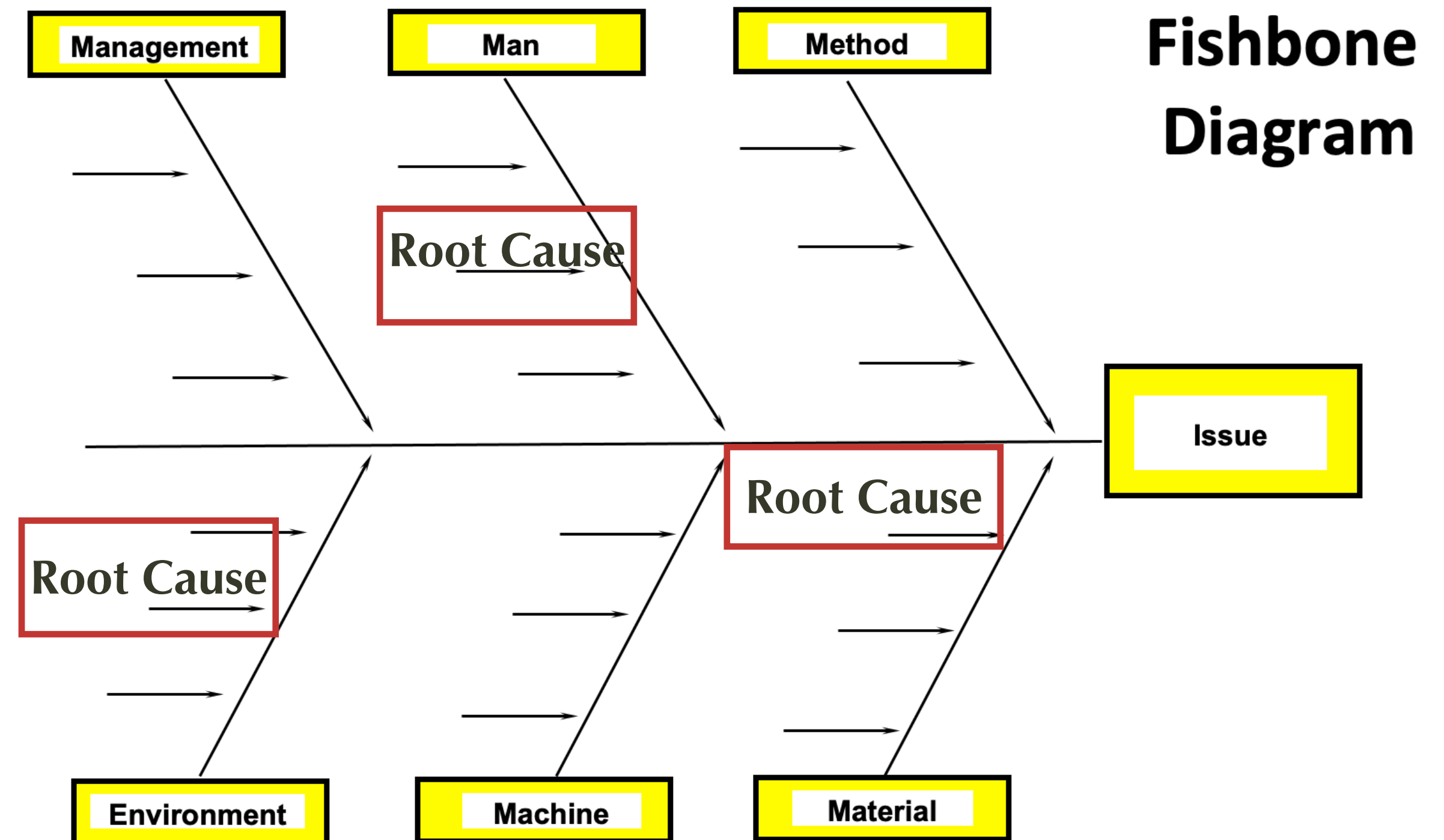
# Tip #3-Observing the Process

In Tip # 3 of the Firefighting Series, we go to the place where the work is performed to see for ourselves what is actually happening. We follow the process from start to finish and document each step in the process. We look for any impediments to the flow of work or any activities that may contribute to the selected issue. Talk to the people doing the work to gain a front row perspective.

Waste--in the form of inefficiency and defects--is documented on the observation form. Any ideas for improving the process are also documented, especially those provided by the front-line worker.

The observations noted are complied and shared within the team. The focus for this step is to confirm that the issues and causes identified in the first two steps are supported by observations. If not, go back with what you have found and repeat the first two steps.

The information gathered in these observations sessions will be the basis for the next step.

## 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

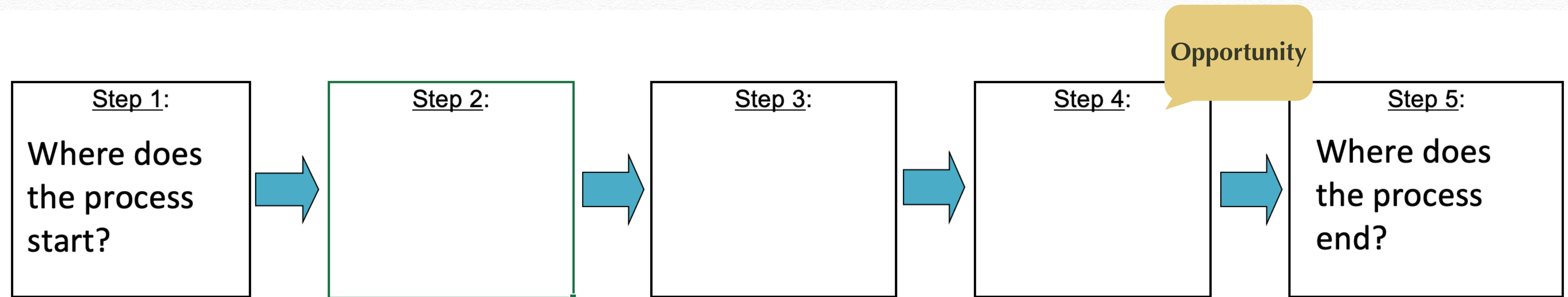**Observe 4**  Go and See and ask the workers why?

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? |
|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

# Tip #4-Documenting the Process Steps

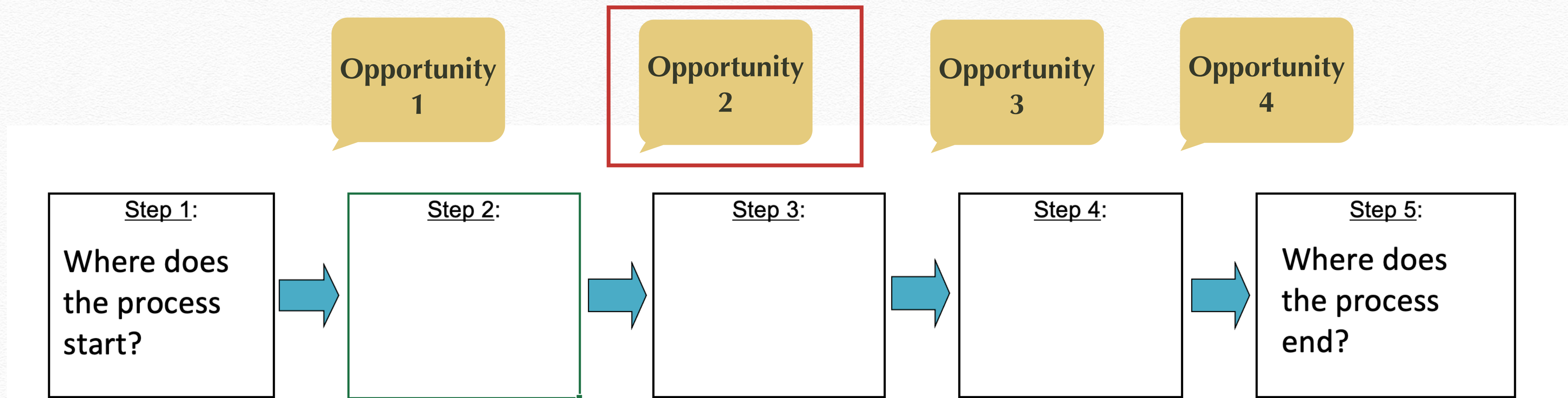| Step 1: | | Step 2: | | Step 3: | | Step 4: | | Step 5: |
|---------|---|---------|---|---------|---|---------|---|---------|
| Where does the process start? | → | | → | | → | | → | Where does the process end? |

**Opportunity**

Tip #4 involves developing a high-level process flow map consisting of 5-7 steps. Using what we observed, we add bubbles or balloons to the diagram noting where the original issue is most likely to occur and where the root causes we identified arise. If any of the steps are unclear, go back to the work area and observe until they become clear.  As we study this process flow and the details between the process start and the process finish, we better understand how handoffs, bottlenecks, and defects affect the flow of the process.

The high-level map, with the issues and causes annotated, will allow us to identify opportunities for improvement.

Note: In order to see more clearly any potential time-dependent issues, document the total elapsed time for the process.
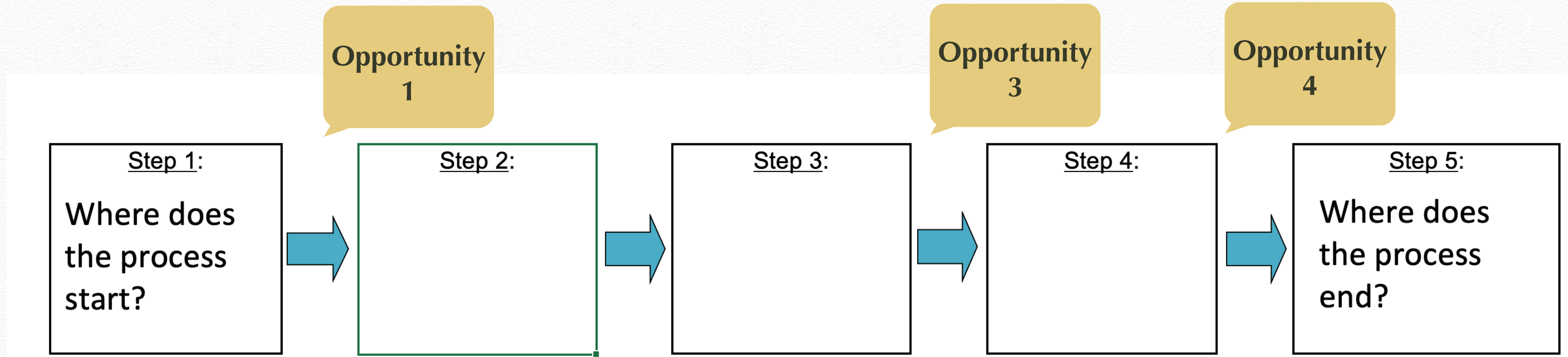Example: "Start: Tuesday 9:00 AM. Finish: Friday 6:30 PM."

# Tip #5-Designing 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? |

Tip #5 is the one teams find is the most fun.  After the team has identified the most significant issue and its causes, after they have found where in the process this issue is most likely to occur, it is time to discuss designing a more efficient process. Ideas for removing barriers to accurate work are documented on the process map.  For each opportunity or t the team found within the high-level flow chart, document a way to either eliminate the issue, find it early or correct it before the end of the process.  Look at your list of potential improvements and choose one to start the improvement process.  After each change to the process, wait for a week or two for any additional issues to shake out, then implement another improvement.  The goal here is to redesign the current process to improve flow and efficiency and to eliminate defects. A significant improvement should result once this process complete.

# Tip #6-OK!  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? |

Tip #6 may be the final tip in this series, but it is actually the starting point for an ongoing improvement process. The skills that you learned in this short lesson are ones you will use over and over.  Again and again you will revisit the original process map, choose another improvement opportunity, brainstorm causes with your team, observe what is actually happening, rework the high-level map and find the best ways to eliminate or control this issue.

This is an easy and effective way to consciously and continuously put out little fires long before they become conflagrations!

# Conclusion

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

Agreeing on what to fix and identifying the root causes is critical to improving process accuracy.

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

Making work visual and documenting how it can be made easier is the best way to make it better, faster and cheaper.

Finally, don't forget to celebrate your hard work and success!

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