



Real-Life Stories

The Metal Head Corner: Finding New Efficiencies in the Shop

David Levine | Mar 01, 2017

What You Need To Know

Organize workflow like a production line.

Invest in training and educating your workers.

Consider investing in more-expensive metalworking machines upfront to save more long term.

MSC Senior Metalworking Specialist Wayne Davidson began his career as a CNC machinist building fixtures and components for the automotive industry. He moved into sales and applications before landing his current job at MSC Industrial Supply in Appleton, Wisconsin. Here, Davidson explains what it's like to work with manufacturing companies throughout the country, training their staffs to become more efficient within their metalworking processes and the simple changes you can make that will result in long-lasting and lucrative improvements.

Shop efficiency has never been more important in our industry. In fact, I believe it is part of our duty to our country. Yet shops big and small continue to juggle their time as unexpected problems arise every day that throw us off the path. This is why staying on task is essential for success. The best way to do that is to uncover ways to be more productive. When so much work can be done overseas with cheaper labor, it's important that we combat those lower wages by keeping our costs down. Time is money, and shops need to focus on overall value to keep work here in America.

How? Technology and automation are a big part of it, especially in higher-production jobs. With smaller-batch jobs, the focus should be on **setup reduction**, where the largest timesavers can be had. To do that, I suggest that shop owners invest in quick-change tooling wherever it makes sense.

Walking from one area to another in the shop can also waste time, so **organizing workflow** is key. Some shops are so packed with equipment it can be hard to maneuver through them. You need to set up your space so there is room to move around, allowing your work to flow naturally. The raw material comes in, and then it goes right to the saw, then to the machines, and finally out to shipping. Organize your shop like a production line to achieve maximum efficiency.

Next, think about **how you train your workers**, especially younger ones. There is a major talent gap in

our industry, so I believe everybody needs to invest in training. Shop owners should take advantage of distributors like MSC that provide **necessary instruction**. One important lesson is to teach your workers how they can save money. We put it in black-and-white cost-savings documentation—the dollars you can save by reducing X amount of time. When your employees see that in true dollars, it can be very impactful. They will think harder about how they go about their day and become more efficient as they begin to understand how a minute here and there can actually save money.

Another investment is in choosing the **most efficient machines, cutting tools and tool holders** available. People often try to save money by buying cheaper equipment, but they lose value in the long run. A more efficient machine will likely be more expensive, but in the long run it is going to be much more cost-effective.

Can all of this really help? You bet. I had a customer who was machining some simple stainless-steel flat-stock parts that needed to be milled to length with four tapped holes in each part. The customer had two vises in the machine, so he loaded just two parts at a time. I suggested making aluminum fixture plates utilizing Mitee-Bite clamps. Locating pins were used to quickly locate the fixtures on the machine table, which allowed changing from one loaded fixture to the next in just over a minute. This also allowed him to load parts on the second fixture while the machine was running. We lowered the cutting-tool cycle time and saved the customer approximately 100 hours of machine time annually. At a shop rate of \$100 per hour, that's an annual savings of \$10,000.

Key Takeaways

- Learn the best ways to tackle smaller-batch and larger-parcel jobs.
- Teach your associates how to routinely save money.
- Use MSC's metalworking field specialists to find solutions to your technical, application and product challenges.

Do you know of other tips to make your shop more efficient?

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