Optimize

5 Simple Steps for Boosting Productivity in Your Machine Shops

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Improving productivity is a constant goal for any manufacturer. In today's increasingly competitive and uncertain market, machine shops are no different.

To boost efficiency, manufacturers have long implemented lean manufacturing practices as part of their overall operational strategy. As cited in this eBook, ***5 Performance-Boosting Best Practices for Your Industrial Metal-Cutting Organization***, there are a host of lean manufacturing tools to consider, including:

- *The 5 S's*
- *Root Cause Analysis*
- *Value Stream Mapping*
- *Gemba Walk*

While lean manufacturing practices are anything but new, machine shop managers can take a more simplified approach to improve efficiency at even the most customized shop set-up. According to *LeanProduction.com*, manufacturers can experience great improvements in productivity through small daily increments. The idea is to identify and fix one problem each day using three questions (one each for Information, Focus, and Action) to identify problems from plant floor information, decide which issue to fix, and then take action to correct it. (Click ***here*** for some examples of the three questions.)

A *Modern Machine Shop* blog, however, notes that while improving productivity is essential to maintaining competitiveness, productivity on the shop floor comprises much more. "Productivity on the manufacturing floor depends on a combination of efficient employees, equipment, and processes," the blog states. "Before you can adopt any method for productivity improvement, you'll need to measure your existing output levels, create a baseline, and implement solutions for measuring change."

The blog article goes on to list eight steps to help manufacturers design a more productive and successful manufacturing floor. Read on for a summary of five of the eight steps (Read all eight steps ***here***.):

1. **Examine the workflow**. Analyze the people, technology, and processes required for production, as well as the procedures, communication tools, and resources available. Identify the pain points and note how changes would impact the overall system.
2. **Update business processes**. Share workflow problems with project managers to make improvement plans. Evaluate performance and interpret any appropriate changes.
3. **Invest in continued employee education.** Be sure to keep your workforce up-to-date on the latest machining and manufacturing technologies. New advancements often require new skills for certain tasks and regular training will keep your machine shop running efficiently.
4. **Get smarter machining tools**. Even if your workforce is trained, they can only work as fast as their tools. While advanced machinery can be costly, the investment pays off in the long run by helping companies stay competitive.
5. **Invest in maintenance**. While new equipment can boost productivity, it also requires maintenance to ensure that it continues working efficiently. Employees should know how to troubleshoot in instances of system downtime, quickly find root causes of errors, and then correct them. Remember to consider the process, the blueprint, and the material when making

adjustments.

Whether you run a high-mix or a small-scale shop, increasing productivity is essential to remaining competitive in today's industrial metal-cutting industry. While there's no sure-fire formula when it comes to boosting productivity, taking the time to drive improvements across the shop and making small adjustments from a baseline assessment can make a big impact.

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What strategies has your machine shop used to increase productivity on the floor?

