

Practical Tips to Improve Your Operational Efficiency



Everyone is looking for tips on how to improve their business. United Performance Metals has observed first-hand what leading manufacturers are employing as best practices. As a company with over 35 years of experience serving the needs of metal fabricators, we're sharing the most effective tactics observed in the field. Though they may not seem revolutionary, their impact on efficiency is definitely worth sharing.

- 1. Measure Performance.** *There's an old adage that says, "You can't manage what you don't measure."* One consistent process among top fabricators was the integration of a system for measuring performance. Measurement requires continuous feedback to guide a company's planning efforts, and it provides a basis for selecting what improvements to make first. The gamut of measurement tactics can range widely. A sheet of paper used to tally the number of jobs run is a simple example, while electronic counters and computer software can automate the process and capture real time data. SWOT analysis, action plans, and balanced scorecards are other tools used to not only to measure but also to improve performance of the most successful fabrication companies.
- 2. Make it Visible.** *If we don't know something is wrong, how will we know it needs fixing?* All too often we hide the pile of statistics and data away from our agents of change – our operators and sales persons; those who are in the best position to influence change. The second practical observation of top fabricators is their consistent and prominent display of performance measures. Opportunities to display pertinent data for your workers abound whether it is shown on their desktop, viewed on a mobile device, or featured across a big screen monitor. Visual dashboards place data in front of people with their feet on the floor and their eye on the prize; these kinds of visible metrics keep employees accountable by displaying progress toward individual, team, or company goals. It's highly effective for everyone to see *all the data all the time*.
- 3. Build & Document Processes.** *If it's not documented, it doesn't exist.* There's nothing worse than realizing too late that integral steps in your procedures were skipped or simply forgotten. Documentation is another performance task that may take some time, but pays significant dividends in the end. Leading fabricators have become proficient at documenting processes and procedures not only to provide consistent performance, but also to meet the demands of a changing workforce. The pool of skilled operators in our industry is aging. Long term employees

are leaving organizations, taking with them invaluable years of experience. Younger professionals are changing positions more rapidly and bringing with them more technical expertise. As the next generation of skilled employees takes the floor, documentation will provide a road map for creating long-term process improvements.

4. **Continually Improve.** *The saying, “If you’re not moving forward-you’re moving backward” is more relevant than ever before.* Those companies that have instilled a culture of continuous improvement tend to outperform the competition. The rapid broadcast of quality management ideologies has created positive change throughout the industry – those who are unable to implement them are often left behind. At risk are yields in improved quality, increased utilization, shorter production times and decreased costs. Today there are numerous resources to help your company on its continuous improvement journey. Still, be mindful of the fact that one size does not fit all. While philosophies like Lean Manufacturing and Six Sigma are both popular and proven, they can also be costly to implement. Don’t be afraid to seek out additional opportunities that might be a more realistic fit for your organization.
5. **Make it Everybody’s Business.** *Opportunity is around every corner.* Improving efficiency must be the job of everyone in your company to be effective. If you leave efficiency up to a single department, you might miss out on valuable insight. Breakthrough innovation comes from a culture that encourages employees to make a personal commitment toward the successful future of your business. The most efficient manufacturing companies keep everyone abreast of both immediate and long-term goals, encourage input from every level, and often build reward systems that inspire breakthrough thinking.

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