Increase Productivity: Replace Fiddling Around with Craft Time



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I'm not sure when the term "fiddlin' around" began to be used to describe misdirected and wasted time and effort. That's not important. Attempting to track down its origin on Wikipedia or elsewhere would be … you guessed it, fiddlin' around.

Do you, as an owner or manager, find yourself bogged down (or allow yourself to be bogged down) in useless activity, wasting five minutes here and another five minutes there and there and there?

Equally troubling, do you sense your employees are spending too much time and effort doing things that provide no measurable value either for your company, your clients or (unknowingly to them, perhaps) themselves?

I'll bet you do. Almost certainly we all do once we summon the courage (yes, courage) to stop and consider just how much wasted time fills most of our and our employees' workdays.

The good news is that we can minimize these lost minutes and hours if we make the effort to recognize them. Then, of course, we have to take steps to deal with them.

Monroe Porter, president of **PROOF Management Consultants**, puts it simply: All of us only create value when we're actually in craft time.

I love the word "craft." It suggests performance beyond mere effort. It suggests employing our unique skills to produce certain actions that produce positive outcomes—be they products or services.

If you are reading this, you are, in a very real sense, a craftsman seeking to gain some insight into being an even better craftsman.

Here’s what I mean. If you’re the company leader, you produce the most positive results for your company when you are leading. Similarly, if you’re a salesman, your craft is selling, and your goal should be to maximize the amount of your time each day to selling. A lawn tech only generates revenue by making applications, and field crews only generate revenue when they’re actually operating mowers, laying pavers or providing other tangible services on clients’ properties.

Porter says successful companies are successful primarily because they implement practices and procedures to maximize each team member’s craft time. It starts with planning. Porter referenced a study claiming that every dollar spent on planning returns $4 to $5 to a company in increased efficiency and productivity.

Productivity has very little to do with hard work, he continues. Productivity is about things like taking steps to reduce drive time, equipment downtime and other non-craft time killers.

Measuring and benchmarking performance also figures largely in improving productivity. “Anything we measure we get better at,” says Porter. In other words: If you can’t measure it, you can’t improve it.

Monroe’s **comments, which he made at the recent CENTS Show** in Columbus, Ohio, reminded me of a short video I saw in Brillion, Wisconsin, about 10 years ago. The event, hosted by the **Ariens Co.** and directed by industry consultant Jim Palauch, introduced the concept of lean management to a group of about 20 or 25 landscape company owners and managers. Lean, of course, is all about implementing systems and processes to recognize and eliminate wasted time, effort and materials.

Jim McCutcheon, CEO of **HighGrove Partners LLC**, shared a video of one of his employees, obviously anxious to do a good job, taking two or perhaps three minutes to trim around a single small tree. Spending that much time and effort on every small tree on every property is a significant time waster and productivity killer, most of us might agree.

The young man was definitely not “fiddlin’ around” and was clearly engaged in his work. However, this example clearly demonstrates the incredible importance of training and oversight to minimize non-productive, time-wasting effort and replace it with craft time.

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