

4 lean principles you should implement this year to maximize output and minimize cost

1 Understand your metrics

If you have too many people on the clock at once, you'll find that you're not only needlessly spending extra on payroll, but you could also lose money due to a decrease in the quality of your output. Efficiencies will be reduced when a smaller amount of work is divided among a larger number of people, altering the workflow and creating bottlenecks.

OUR TIP:



Know your units per hour (UPH), and use this metric to help establish your workflow so you can staff properly during volume fluctuations.

2 Reduce non-productive time

When your workers start or finish their shifts, and when they head to and from lunch and breaks, they can lose minutes of productive time with each transition. When you multiply these nonproductive minutes by the number of workers on the shift, that can really add up to fewer outgoing units.

OUR TIP:



Set and manage clear expectations for productive activity while workers are on the clock. For instance, sounding a bell can help workers understand precisely when breaks start and end, as well as when they have five minutes to return to their posts.

3 Reduce travel time during production

Workers can lose a lot of time walking between picks, to staging areas and between docking and stocking locations. Instead of traveling throughout the working area, that time can be used on more productive tasks.

OUR TIP:



Make sure that supplies and essentials, like areas for staging pallets and changing batteries, are close to work stations. That way, workers can remain in one area to complete all of their tasks.

4 Reduce touches and double handling

This is especially important in unloading trailers and packing stations. Workers might naturally prefer to build work in process (WIP). For example, if workers have to pack a certain volume of items, they might prefer to take all of the items out of totes at once, then place them all on the work station, then reorganize the entire group of items before packing them. This leads to multiple touches, which makes the process longer and less efficient.

OUR TIP:



Prioritize one-piece flow processes in the work cell. When you take one unit through the entire work process at a time, you reduce the number of touches and you create a more efficient workflow.

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