

PRODUCTIVITY

Identifying the Bottlenecks in your Business

There comes a time in every small business that we get so busy that we are in over our heads; working 50+ hours a week and not even treading water.

Before you decide to hire more help – which besides being a big financial decision is also a time-consuming, emotional ordeal; perhaps it is time to take a step back and analyze what is happening in your grooming business model.

During my career in product development and engineering, I was able to wear multiple hats including overseeing two high-volume production lines for electro-mechanical equipment. There were assemblies of various parts and various wiring schematics. Once I had a contest to see if anyone could build a subassembly faster than I could. Needless to say, I lost to every person on that assembly line. However, during this game I was able to see some of the challenges that the workers had and vowed to make the necessary changes to make their tasks easier.

What this exercise showed me was the importance of identifying the bottlenecks in this manufacturing line. We changed the line to include overhead tools, anti-fatigue mats, 5S tool boards and gravity feed subassembly feeder lines. Productivity increased 15% within a week and hit 25% within a month.

(5S is a Toyota manufacturing term meaning everything has a place so you don't have to go searching for it when you need it. Likewise, you return it when you are done with it so you know exactly where it is the next time you need it. You may have seen these boards with the tools outlined on them signifying only a specific tool belong in that spot.)

Before we made these changes, I was given the green light to add 2-3 workers to the assembly line. After the investment in new tools, etc., the current number of workers remained the same. No interviewing, no hiring or firing, no additional fixed costs. Workers were happier now that they had the right tools and had been listened to regarding what they needed.

Productivity produces profit.

So here is your challenge:

Do a time study in each "station" in your business. This would include washing, drying, grooming, cutting, nails, etc.

Find out where your bottlenecks are. Where are you spending too much time? Perhaps it is in washing – have you looked at a wash system? (Amazingly, we just came out with one!).

Is it in drying? Do you need a stronger dryer or another one? Is it in styling and grooming? Are your shears and trimmers sharp? Do you need to upgrade these? Is there a better shampoo or conditioner you should be using to make the job easier?

There are always ways to improve productivity or throughput. Just because you are working on a dog or cat does not mean that it can't be done more efficiently.

While your bather is working, time their work *without them knowing*. To be fair, time 3-4 baths each day for a week. All of us have our good days and bad ones.

Do this with all your processes. Find the bottlenecks and where you can focus on improvements. Are the dogs washed and waiting to be dried? Are they dried and waiting to be groomed? Is your groomer waiting on washed dogs?

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One more time:

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Does that make sense?

The numbers:

If you can increase productivity by 15%, you could add over 300 grooms per year without increasing your overhead one red cent. (Assuming 40 grooms/week and 50 weeks/year).

The payback for a few hours of analysis could be \$15,000 of high profit revenue. Even if your analysis shows you need to spend \$1500 on new equipment and tools, you still net out \$13,500 of high-profit revenue.

If your research shows multiple areas that should be addressed, tackle one at a time. The easier one first – this is the low-hanging easy-to-pluck fruit.

Training

What about training? Perhaps the process is correct but the worker is inefficient. Training can be the easier task to complete and also the most difficult depending on the student and the teacher. In my experience, 95% of the time fault lies with the teacher.

Talk with your employees. Sometimes they have great ideas on how to make their jobs more productive and more efficient. If the goal is a clean, happy well-groomed dog at the end of the line, there may some advice that your employees can give to make it more efficient. Remember that they are performing these tasks many times per day.

Like the game I played on that assembly line years ago, you may find that your employees are much more efficient in their playground.

Get your phone out and open up that stopwatch function. This will be time well-spent reviewing your business efficiencies.

We are here to help.

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