

Boost Your Staff's Productivity - Eliminate Traffic Jams and Process Bottlenecks

Categories : [EMPLOYER HOT TOPICS](#)

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Wouldn't it be great if you could eliminate a bottleneck by simply eating a few chocolate candies?

If this seems like a strange concept to you, consider the famous [1952 "Job Switching" episode](#) from the iconic television series, I Love Lucy. Here, characters Lucy and Ethel went to work wrapping chocolates in a candy factory. When the conveyor belt, laden with candies, sped up too much for them to keep pace, Lucy and Ethel dealt with their bottleneck by eating the merchandise; when that did not eliminate the bottleneck, they stuffed them in their shirts and hats.

This is a famous scene that has been parodied and repeated in many subsequent TV shows. It is funny and classic TV comedy, but it is no laughing matter in the "real world". Off the TV show, Lucy and Ethel would have caused shipping delays, inaccurate order fulfillment and even missing product. In reality, identifying and fixing bottlenecks is critical to a company's continued success. Left unresolved, holdups can lead to lost revenue, dissatisfied customers, wasted time, diminished quality and higher employee stress levels. If you don't believe me, look at the stress level on Lucy and Ethel's face in the video.

Therefore, in order to improve stress levels, increase revenue, productively manage time, and improve quality, use the following tips to identify and eliminate bottlenecks:

Identifying Bottlenecks

The simplest and most logical way to identify process bottlenecks is to look for the biggest causes of stress. Consider these questions:

- Is there a routine or system that has a high level of employee stress involved in it? If there is, then it is not a well-laid out system.
- Is work continually delayed because employees are waiting for reports, products, more information or other resources?
- Is there too much work piled up at one end of the production (or service) cycle and not enough at the other end?
- Are certain departments always late in delivering needed items to both internal and external customers?

If the cause of the bottleneck is still unclear, try creating a flowchart for the system in question.

Flow charts break down a system by detailing every step in the process in an easy-to-follow diagrammatic flow. Once you map out a process, it will be much easier to see where the bottleneck lies. So detail every important step to help in understanding how work is accomplished and to identify potential areas for improvement.

Eliminating Bottlenecks

Once you identify the root cause of your bottleneck, try one or more of these ideas to improve workflow:

1. **Increase quality of input.** Ensure that whatever is fed into the bottlenecked system (materials, unfinished products, information, etc.) is free from defects. Doing so will help eliminate the wasting of time and other valuable resources on fixing or repeating work. Additionally, see if you can more fully prepare the materials/products fed through the limited resource. Any steps that can be taken to increase the quality of input will help speed the flow of work through the bottleneck.
2. **Reorganize workflow.** Sometimes, a simple change in the flow of work can dramatically boost productivity. Look for ways to offload non-essential tasks from the bottlenecked process. Your Snelling staffing representative can help you critically examine your workflow, and then [provide additional resources to handle these non-essential activities](#), so you can stay focused on your most important priorities.
3. **Assign your “A” team.** Put your most productive team members and best technology to work on critical bottlenecked processes.
4. **Add capacity.** This is probably the most logical option. If possible, purchase more equipment, run multiple shifts or hire additional staff to increase throughput. If your bottleneck is seasonal or reflects fluctuating demand, [Snelling's](#) staffing services can provide the supplementary personnel needed to increase capacity without increasing permanent headcount.
5. **Accept partial delivery.** Get creative with ways to keep work moving. If your bottleneck occurs with vendors, encourage them to provide their output in smaller (if incomplete) pieces. It may not be necessary to wait for them to complete their processes in order to take partial delivery. Determine the minimum amount needed to initiate the next step in the workflow process. Create a plan for accepting partial delivery, and then allow bottlenecked vendors to provide things in a final form at a later date.

When it comes to boosting productivity and fixing bottlenecks, your [local Snelling office](#) can be a great ally. Our staffing experts and People+ will increase efficiency, eliminate traffic jams and keep your business humming.