



## Throughput Consulting, Inc. Article – for Publication

### Is Idle Time Really Bad?

Productive people - entrepreneurs, for instance - generally are folks who work hard, play hard and have interesting, creative hobbies. It often follows that these folks are impatient with employees who do not use idle time well, who are not curious, or who do not show an interest in the business. This sort of situation, if not handled well, can and does lead to contests that are not productive for the company in the long run. Much has been written about motivating employees and we would suggest that there are many fruitful ways to approach the problem. Let's then, return to the question.

Is idle time really all that bad? Conventional wisdom says that it is. The cost accountant would certainly agree. A more thoughtful answer would say that it depends on how you use the idle time. Sure, good employees will take initiative. They will clean up; build loads ahead; help another employee; and take an interest in new or unfamiliar things in your shop. Certainly, if the employee routinely has spare time, you should broaden his duties. And while all this is good ... very good, it still misses the most important point.

If no one in your shop has idle time, then it is certain that you are not meeting delivery promises and that you have a growing backlog; growing, that is, until your customers start taking their work elsewhere.

You might say, "Wow that is jumping to conclusions." And I would suggest that your shop probably deals with this daily as the mix of work changes. Here is a common example.

Let's say that you have a multi-load order for carbonitriding. Further, let's say that each load takes just under an hour to build but two hours to run. If that were the only order, there would be idle time for the employee. Now, let's turn it around. You have another multi-load order for carbonitriding that takes one hour to run but two hours to build which could result in idle furnace time if you ran the loads end to end. Instinctively, you alternate loads handling both orders easily, and both flow smoothly and quickly through your shop.

A bit idealized? Yes. In practice, it usually isn't quite this obvious or easy; it is why we build loads ahead. Yet we know that mix is very important and always changing; and we know that conscientious, versatile employees are invaluable in that they will use mix to keep the floor running productively.



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Idle time is capacity in reserve with your employees just as it is with your furnaces. With it, you are able to respond effectively to spikes in the work load. So relax about the idle time and go gather Market Share! Turn those spikes into trends. Remember, there is no Finish Line.

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