



# 3 Tips for

# INCREASING THROUGHPUT:

## Output, Downtime, and Improvements

By Zack Estes



Many businesses struggle to find work.

If that's you, this content probably isn't for you.

But far more businesses struggle with *throughput*. They have the jobs lined up; they just don't have the capacity to get them done. The problem isn't demand. The problem is supply—your ability to consistently fulfill promises, deliver on time, and meet expectations.

It's a productivity problem.

Many businesses end up in this unfortunate cycle. They keep saying "yes" to every customer, thinking the workload will sort itself out. But soon, they find themselves stretched thin, missing deadlines, or even worse—delivering subpar work.

And oftentimes, they're promising lead times they simply can't fulfill.

Eventually, they become known for this issue. They're not just a business anymore—they're *that* business.

The business that overpromises and underdelivers.

"The brand of broken promises."

And, as every business owner knows, once you lose trust, it's nearly impossible to regain. A broken promise leads to less trust. Less trust leads to fewer customers. Fewer customers lead to fewer opportunities. And, eventually, you might just be back to square one—struggling to find work.

"The business that  
overpromises and  
underdelivers."

So if you're struggling to find work, this *might* still be for you after all. It just depends on the root cause.

And if your backlog is filled, but your productivity can't keep up, read on.

Poor productivity is a critical variable most businesses aren't effectively solving for. It's the silent killer of growth.

Let's get into how to fix it.

## Tip 1: Understand Your Output

What you do matters. But do you want to know what matters even more?

What you produce. The outputs.

Inputs are important, sure. But your inputs—your tools, your secret sauce, the proprietary way you do things—matter far less than the outputs you produce for your customers. Too many businesses are caught up idolizing their inputs, focusing on what makes them unique, but forgetting that what truly matters to the customer is the result.

You can have the most intricate, carefully planned processes in the world, but if you're not producing the results customers are paying for, those processes are irrelevant.

So, the first step for businesses struggling with throughput and productivity is understanding the current state of output production.

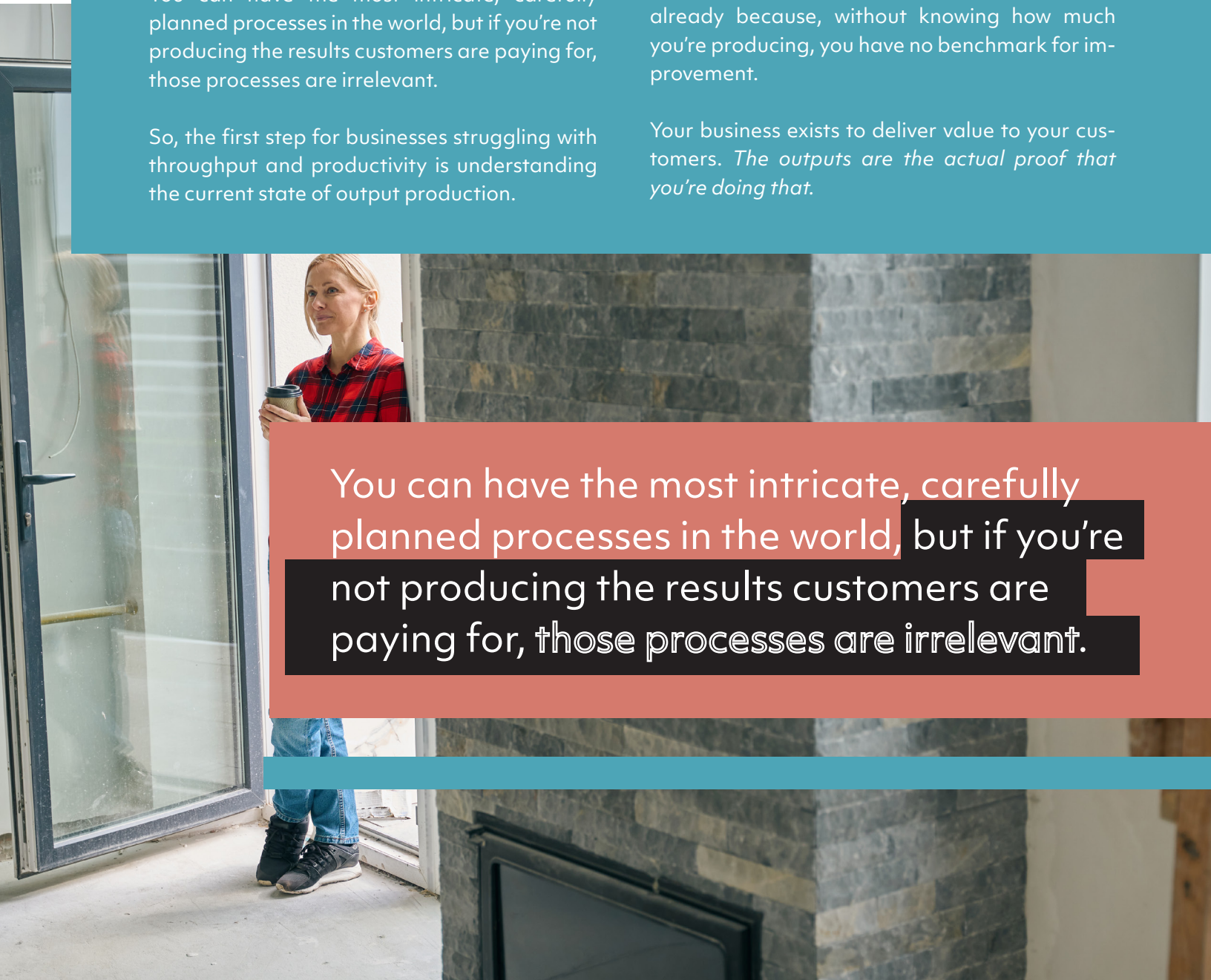
This means you need to be crystal clear on your deliverables.

Here are a few examples of outputs for different types of businesses.

- **Marketing Agency:** Number of campaigns launched (or improved) per day
- **Dirt Contractor:** Cubic yards of dirt moved per day
- **Coffee Roaster:** Pounds of coffee roasted per shift

These are measurable, tangible results. You need to start tracking these metrics if you aren't already because, without knowing how much you're producing, you have no benchmark for improvement.

Your business exists to deliver value to your customers. *The outputs are the actual proof that you're doing that.*

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a red and black plaid shirt and blue jeans, stands in a doorway or near a large window. She is holding a white coffee cup with a black lid. The background shows a stone fireplace mantel and a window with a view of the outdoors. The scene is lit with natural light, suggesting an indoor setting like a cafe or office.

You can have the most intricate, carefully planned processes in the world, but if you're not producing the results customers are paying for, those processes are irrelevant.



## Tip 2: Understand Your Downtime

Let's talk about downtime. Most businesses have far more downtime than they realize.

Downtime is the enemy of productivity. It's any period during which work isn't actively contributing to output—the deliverables your customer pays for. We'll call the time spent actively producing outputs "uptime."

Everything else? That's downtime.

Here's how you can visualize any process:  
Resources → Process → Result.

You start with resources: information, tools, and materials.

You then use those resources to process them—turning them into a finished result. This is where the magic happens. This is where value is created. But here's the problem: In too many small businesses, employees are spending way too much time gathering resources, waiting for approvals, or troubleshooting issues instead of producing.

In other words, they're stuck in downtime.

Meanwhile, your customers don't care how difficult it is for you to get ready to actually produce value. All they care about is the result: the solution to their problem, delivered on time, at the price you promised.

When you're caught up in downtime, your profitability erodes.

You start losing money, your stress levels spike, and (worst of all) you risk breaking your promises to customers. If your productivity issues lead to delays or cost overruns, that broken promise will haunt your business.

Downtime is the  
enemy of  
productivity.

So now that you're measuring your outputs (Tip 1), the next step is to measure your downtime. What's eating away at your employees' valuable time that could otherwise be spent creating value?

Here are some typical examples of downtime activities.

- Searching for resources (e.g., tools, materials, or information)
- Waiting for approvals from management
- Attending meetings that don't drive output
- Setting up and maintaining equipment
- Reworking defects
- Dealing with complicated team communication

I'm not saying you should suddenly implement an extensive time-tracking system that monitors every minute of downtime (although, when you're ready for it, tracking that will be invaluable). But I am suggesting you start paying attention to the patterns.

Where are you losing time? Where are your employees getting stuck?

Create a list of the top reasons your team isn't producing value—anything that frustrates or delays them from focusing on the core task at hand.

### Tip 3: Understand Your Improvements

Now that you know how much output you're producing (Tip 1) and where your downtime is coming from (Tip 2), you can intelligently start making improvements.

Improvement is the name of the game. But here's the thing—not all changes are improvements.

Improvement requires a baseline standard. If you don't have a standard for comparison, any change you make is just that—a change. It's simply doing things differently without knowing if it's actually better. And without a standard, it's impossible to know if your tweaks are actually reducing downtime and increasing throughput.

Change is reactive—it's what you do when you're frustrated and desperate for different results. Improvement, however, is intentional—it's what you do when you understand the baseline, identify a bottleneck, and strategically address it.

So, let's put this into context. If you're trying to increase throughput, the goal is to produce more outputs in the same amount of time.

Here's how it all connects:

1. By measuring your outputs, you establish your initial standard.
2. By measuring your downtime, you uncover the reasons why that's your current standard.
3. And now, by understanding improvements, you can target downtime and make intentional adjustments to improve output.

But don't stop there. Making improvements is a continuous process. As you reduce downtime and increase throughput, you'll uncover new inefficiencies. This is where Lean principles come into play—the idea that improvement should be an ongoing, daily habit, not just a one-off project.

“Improvement, however, is intentional—it's what you do when you understand the baseline, identify a bottleneck, and strategically address it.”

### Bonus Tip: Build a Culture of Continuous Improvement

If you want to solve your productivity problem once and for all, it's not enough to make a few quick fixes. You need to create a culture where improvement is part of your everyday workflow. This can be as simple as setting aside time each day to focus on process improvement.

If you spend just 30 minutes each day working on these tips, you'll be amazed at how quickly your productivity will improve.

But to build a culture of continuous improvement, it has to come from the top.

Leadership needs to buy into the idea that everyone can contribute to the process—every employee, at every level, should have a role in identifying inefficiencies and suggesting improvements.

When your team is empowered to make improvements, they feel more invested in the success of the business. And when improvement becomes second nature, you'll start to see compounding gains in productivity, profitability, and customer satisfaction.



## Fixing the Root Cause of Poor Productivity

If you're dealing with a productivity problem, don't wait until it snowballs into broken promises and lost customers.


Start by understanding your output, measuring your downtime, and making intentional improvements.

And most importantly, focus on building a culture of continuous improvement.


When you do this, you'll not only increase your throughput—you'll build a reputation for reliability, trust, and value creation.

Customers will notice. Employees will notice. And your business will operate more efficiently, with fewer headaches and more opportunities for growth.

After all, a business that keeps its promises is a business that thrives.



"A business that keeps its promises is a business that thrives."



### EFFORTLESS WARMTH

The Valor Madrona freestanding gas stove combines stunning cast-iron craftsmanship with energy-efficient radiant heat to provide superior home comfort. Available in arched, square, and modern styles, the Madrona provides the perfect balance of style and warmth.



**valor**