

Is There an Editor in Your Shop?

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Precision machinists already know how to add value by subtraction. We take a 30-pound bar of material and remove stock. The result is 19 pounds of precision machined products and 11 pounds of chips to be recycled.

So why do some shops seem to just keep adding capability without ever removing machinery, tools or processes that are no longer needed? Does there come a time where those extra things get in the way of your people and company achieving your mission? Is there a time when abundance becomes a competitive disadvantage?

Perhaps you need an editor in your shop. Consider the following definitions of the word, “edit.”

Edit: To prepare (written material for publication) as by correcting, revising, or adapting. To modify.

This is the first of several definitions of “edit” I found online. I like this one because it assures continuous improvement with its “correcting, revising, adapting, modifying” terminology.

Edit: To supervise the publication (of a newspaper or magazine, for example).

I think we all know who supervises the production (publication) of the precision machined products we manufacture in our shops. This aspect of the definition of “edit” makes it clear that the person who is responsible for editing is also responsible for production.

The editor is not just a critic appointed to cut, but ultimately has the responsibility to produce with the means available. So the editor needs to temper his or her vision of “less is more” with the understanding that “I need to have what is needed to produce” in order to be successful.

The shared responsibility for both production and correcting the process is foundational to success.

Edit: To assemble the components of (a film or soundtrack, for example).

Again, putting the pieces together is an aspect of managing our shops and “professional editing” is worth our consideration.

Yes, we have this capability...and this...and this. But to assemble a first-class shop (or film, or magazine), someone has to ask what is missing or what else should be added. In this case, editing is a process that adds value by determining, and then adding, needed value capability.

Edit: To eliminate, delete.

This is what I think of first when I hear the word “edit.” Cut. Eliminate. Get rid of. Pitch. Purge. Lean.



Most of us recognize this phase when the orders are slow coming in and the receivables start to get stretched out. Suddenly, we start to focus on “editing” our staff or workforce.

While financial arguments are always compelling arguments, that does not mean they are the right course in the long run. Such arguments may be mandatory, dictated by circumstances, but that does not make them necessarily right.

What is your company’s vision of editing? Yes, we have the machines, processes, tools, equipment and employees that we have. When it is time to purchase new equipment, machinery and tools, or hire new employees, we go through a management exercise to “cost justify” the additions.

Will they pay off? Will they add value? It is good to ask these questions before making new investments.

But some even more important questions are, “Who asks this question about the equipment, tools and machinery we have already purchased?” “Who asks this question about the employees we already have?” “Do we continue to evaluate, edit and justify the status quo?” “Should we?”

Who is your company’s editor? The definitions above provide some important clues. An editor must be committed to continuous improvement: correcting, revising, adapting. Improving!

An editor must be responsible for production, or else he is merely a critic. The editor must be constantly adjusting and putting the right pieces together to make a coherent whole.

The editor is the one person who is trying to make sense of what we have, and what we can ship, using what we have.

Our business vocabulary seems to be too black and white. It’s limited to talk of either managers or leaders, as if those were the only relevant activities for management.

My experience with “editors” makes me think that I’d just as soon work for a shop that had a great editor as for one with a great manager. What do you think? Who is your company’s editor?