

The One Process Rule

Write down one process this week. Why that single step changes more than any software, and exactly how to do it.

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The tool is not the problem.

Most companies do not have a software problem. They have a process that nobody has ever written down, and a piece of software bought on the assumption that it would supply the process. It does not. Software supplies speed. If the process underneath is broken, speed is the last thing you want.

We see it every week. A quoting tool that made a quoting process nobody trusted go faster. A scheduling app laid over a schedule that still lived in one person's head. An inbox tool that answered email faster with the same wrong answers. Each one cost money, and each one was bought before anyone looked at how the work actually moved.

Automating a broken process just gets you broken faster.

So the rule is simple, and it is the same rule we follow before we build anything for anyone:

Write down one process this week. Not five. One.

One process, followed from start to finish and written down plainly, will tell you more about where your operation is losing time and money than any demo, any audit, and any tool. It takes about an hour. It costs nothing. And it is the one step almost nobody takes before they spend.

What "a process" means here

A unit of work that starts with something arriving and ends with something done. A quote request that becomes a sent quote. A job that becomes a paid invoice. A new hire's first day that becomes their first week. If you can name the thing that starts it and the thing that ends it, it is a process.

What this guide is not

It is not a system for documenting your whole company. That is a project, and most of them stall. This is one process, one hour, one page. Do it once and you will know whether to do it again.



Step one

Pick the right process.

Not the biggest one. Not the most interesting one. The one that costs the most, which is usually the one that feels the most ordinary.

Listen for the complaint

Every company has a process that people grumble about. "I have to enter this twice." "Nobody knows where that stands." "I stayed late again to get the invoices out." The complaint is the map. Whatever people complain about most is where the time is going.

Look for Saturday

Ask what work gets done outside of working hours. Estimates finished at night. Reports built on the weekend. Records requests answered after the office closes. Work that spills past the day is work the day cannot hold.

Ask what would stop if one person were out

If the answer is "the schedule" or "the billing" or "everything," that is your process. The point is not to replace that person. It is to make sure the company can breathe when they take a week off.

The five that cost the most, in our experience

Process	What it usually costs
Answering new inquiries	The job goes to whoever answered first. Often not you.
Getting a quote out	Days of delay per quote, and bids turned down because nobody could get to them.
Sending the invoice	Weeks between finishing the work and getting paid.
Chasing documents	Hours a week spent asking for things that should have arrived on their own.
Finding out where things stand	One manager as the only person who knows, and a day spent answering "where are we on this."

Pick one. If two are tied, pick the one that touches money sooner. Write its name at the top of the worksheet on the next pages and stop deciding.



Step two

Follow it, start to finish.

Take one real unit of work, not a made-up example. Yesterday's quote request. This morning's service call. Last week's invoice. Follow it the way it actually happened, not the way it is supposed to happen. Those are different, and the difference is where the money is.

For each step, note seven things. They are the seven columns on the worksheet.

1. **What happened.** One plain sentence. "Sarah typed the order into QuickBooks."
2. **Who did it.** A name, not a role. Roles hide the fact that it is always the same person.
3. **Which tool.** Email, a spreadsheet, a whiteboard, a notebook, memory. Memory counts as a tool. It is the least reliable one you have.
4. **How long it took.** Your best guess in minutes. Do not agonize. Close is fine.
5. **How long it waited first.** The time between the previous step finishing and this one starting. This number is usually bigger than the step itself, and nobody tracks it.
6. **Was anything retyped?** Information moved by hand from one place to another. Circle it. This is the most automatable work in any company.
7. **Was a question asked?** Anyone stopping to ask someone else something. Circle these too. Every one is information that lives in only one head.

Follow what happened, not what should have happened.

Two rules while you do it

Do not fix anything yet. You will see problems immediately and want to solve them. Write them in the margin and keep going. Fixing one step before you have seen the whole thing is how companies end up automating the wrong part.

Ask the person who does it, not the person who manages it. The manager will describe the process as designed. The person doing it will describe the process as lived. You want the second one.



The worksheet

One process, one page.

Print this page. Fill it in with a pen while you follow the work. It does not need to be neat.

The process

It starts when

It ends when

#	What happened	Who	Tool	Took	Waited	Retyped?	Asked?
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							

Total minutes working

Total minutes waiting

What went wrong the last time this process failed, and what it cost



Step three

Read what you wrote.

Look at the worksheet and count four things. Each one points at a different kind of fix, and only one of them is the kind people usually buy.

Count	What it means	What usually fixes it
Steps marked Retyped	The same information is being moved by hand between places.	Connecting the two places. The most common and cheapest fix.
Total Waited minutes	The work is fine. The hand-offs are slow.	The next step starting on its own when the previous one finishes.
Steps marked Asked	Information lives in one person's head.	Capturing what they know so the system can answer instead.
The same Who on most rows	One person is the process.	Taking the repetitive half off their desk.

Most companies find that waiting time is three to five times the working time. The work was never the problem.

Now, and only now, decide what to build

You have one page that shows where an hour turns into a week. Sometimes the answer is a tool you already pay for that nobody turned on. Sometimes it is connecting two systems. Sometimes it is one small piece of software built for this exact process. And sometimes the process is fine and the problem is somewhere else. All four are cheaper than buying first.

What to do Monday

- ☐ Show the worksheet to the person who does the work. Ask what you missed.
- ☐ Pick the single step with the biggest number next to it.
- ☐ Decide whether that step needs a person. Most do not.
- ☐ If it does not, that is the first thing worth building. If you want a second opinion, we will give you one for free.



Bring the worksheet. We will tell you what it is worth building.

Thirty minutes. You walk us through the one process you wrote down, and we tell you what is worth building, what is not, and what we would do first. If the answer is that you do not need us, we will say that too. Nothing is billed for the conversation.

**Schedule a meeting at rhodeislandintelligence.com/schedule
Or call or text 401-541-2747. You will get a person.**

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Building for what's next.