5 Steps to Simplify Any Process

THE BIG IDEA

Most owners try to speed up a process before asking if it should exist. Work these five steps in order. Doing them out of order locks in the waste.

Part 1: Clean it up first

Steps 1 to 3: cut before you polish.

01 **Question the requirement.**
Ask why this step exists and who asked for it. Challenge every assumption, even from experts. Smart people waste time improving things that should not exist.

02 **Delete the step or process.**
Try hard to remove it. More harm comes from over-complication than from deleting too much. A step that truly matters will come back.

03 **Simplify and optimize what is left.**
Only now do you improve it. Do not polish a step you should have deleted.

Part 2: Then speed it up

Steps 4 and 5: faster, then automated.

01 **Speed up how fast you learn.**
Shorten the time between trying something and seeing the result. Do this after cleanup, or speed just multiplies the mistakes.

02 **Automate last.**
Automating too early makes a bad process permanent. Automate only what is already proven, simple and tuned.

03 **Check the order.**
Taking steps out of order locks in inefficiency. If something feels stuck, find which step you skipped.

> “The most common error of a smart engineer is to optimize a thing that should not exist.”
>
> Elon Musk

DO THIS WEEK

- ☐ Pick one process that annoys your team, such as quoting, scheduling or invoicing.
- ☐ Write down every step, then cross out each one you could delete.
- ☐ Simplify what remains. Hold off on software or automation until it runs clean.

Ask weekly: What step are we doing only because we always have?

Source: Elon Musk, *Everyday Astronaut*, Starbase tour interview (2021), his 5-step process