

Qualicide

Wilbur Wright found himself pressing his pencil harder and harder against the paper while his brother Orville droned on about Process Improvement. Wilbur was doodling in the margin, and the circles were becoming increasingly darker. Finally, the point broke and the pencil tore into the paper. Disgusted, he threw the pencil across the room.

“Look!” he exclaimed. “I just want my notebook back so I can finish taking those wind tunnel readings!”

“Calm down, Will” his brother replied. “It’s just the daily back-up.”

“It’s a helluva time for a backup! It took me three hours to get the fan speed adjusted and the weights balanced so I could measure the lift and drag, and then that trollop grabbed the notebook out of my hands!”

“Mind your tongue, brother! She’s a Professional Data Transcriber. And we agreed during the last Stakeholder’s Meeting that our Business Continuity Plan required off-site storage of our daily backups.”

“We agreed?” Wilbur asked. “I was doping the left wing and nearly passed out from the fumes because you shut the door and turned off the fan. When I staggered into the office to catch my breath you asked if my vote on the disaster recovery plan was yea or nay. I just said ‘Whatever.’”

“You were pushing us way over our daily energy target.” Orville scolded. “A chilly October morning and you had the door wide open. We could have lost our Energy Star certification!”

“You nearly killed me for an Energy Star rating?” Wilbur asked incredulously.

“I was just following the plan” Orville replied. “If you can’t use that dope with the door closed you need to ask the Environmental Health and Safety Committee to research less toxic chemicals. That reminds me. We need to develop a written succession plan.”

“Why do we need a plan? There’s only the two of us and we formed a partnership. If I die, you get everything. If you die, I get everything. If we both die, it doesn’t matter anyway because we’ve sunk every penny we own into this flying machine. We were making good progress, too, until you went to that three-day seminar on quality manufacturing processes. I thought you were going to improve your welding skills so our engine mounts wouldn’t crack. Instead, you came back babbling about process improvement and sick sigma.”

“That’s *six* sigma, bro. And I learned a lot at that seminar. I learned we didn’t have a clue about how to run a bicycle business, let alone a research and development program. We hadn’t done our Market Research. We hadn’t developed a Business Opportunity

Proposal. We hadn't performed an Opportunity Cost Analysis to see how much we were sacrificing by not focusing our research on building better bicycles. We weren't implementing Relentless Reduction and Recycling. We hadn't even passed a Technical Review Board, let alone a Quality Review Board or a Program Review Board."

"What's with all these committees and boards?" Wilbur shouted in exasperation. "There's only the two of us. We are the committees. We are the review boards. Only since you went to that class you haven't done a lick of work around here. All you've done is harass me so I can't get any work done either. Any day now we're going to open the papers and read that Samuel Langley is flying circles above the Potomac while we're still interviewing focus groups to determine why man wants to fly!"

"That's hardly fair, Will." Orville's voice sounded hurt. "I've written dozens of Standard Operating Procedures and prepared 15 Process Improvement Plans. Besides, you'll have to admit. Our market research did reveal a high level of skepticism about our project among potential customers."

"Listen, Orv. I appreciate what you're trying to do." Wilbur's voice started out low and sympathetic, but he felt his anger and frustration rising as he continued. "But the truth is, we don't have a product. And we're never going to have a product unless we stop worrying so much about processes and start focusing on actually building something!" He stormed out of the workshop into the office and headed for the front door. Just then Margaret, their professional data transcriber, stepped in through the door and handed him his notebook.

"Here's your notebook, Mr. Wright." She said. "And you might want to try slipping out the back way instead of using this door. Ever since your brother filed that Environmental Impact Assessment the sidewalks are jammed with people protesting potential disruptions of the jet stream."

Author's Note: Special thanks to Chris McGowan, who suggested the idea for this story.