



## The Joy of Flying to Heights and Distances Previously Unimaginable

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Previously published in [Leader to Leader's January 2019 issue](#)

Shortly after the first powered flight at Kitty Hawk by the Wright Brothers, Orville Wright told the curious public that man would *never* be able to build an airplane that would be capable of carrying more than two people.

I read Orville's prediction in the early 90's onboard a 747-300 from Detroit to London, flying at 35,000 feet, cruising at 500MPH with 400 passengers on board with all of our luggage stored below deck, over 50,000 gallons of fuel at takeoff, and flight attendants keeping us well fed and in perfect creature comfort.

The first 747 flew in February of 1969, just 21 years after Orville's passing in 1948.

Achieving sustainable and controllable flight has been a pursuit of man since the first time we looked up in the air and witnessed birds flying so effortlessly. In ancient days, man attempted flight by strapping feathered wings to their arms and flapping with all their might and many of these failed flights ended in disaster for the aspiring pilot.

After centuries of trying and failing, we then discovered the relevant principles of powered flight and, in just a few short years, we were able to fly to heights and distances that were previously unimaginable, even for those who invented the airplane.

### Companies and teams want to fly

My managerial and leadership career that began in my 20's and 30's felt like the equivalent of strapping feathered wings to my arms every day while trying to get the teams I was leading off the ground. I would come home tired from the effort and mentally exhausted from the lack of results. By my mid-30's I was burning out. I was convinced there had to be a better way. Some amazing authors like Tom Peters and Peter Drucker described some relevant principles that led me to believe that getting my teams off the ground and flying was actually possible. My optimism was fueled by these authors. Their books convinced me that the pursuit of joy in business was worthy and practical pursuit.

Joy is a powerful word in life and, as it turns out, in business too. A company that discovers the relevant principles of organizational flight can also fly to heights and distances that were

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previously unimaginable. And, in doing so, can experience the business value of joy. By simple analogy, an airplane whose weight exceeds its lift capacity will never get off the ground. The weight of a human organization can be measured in disengagement statistics. If 80% of a company's workforce is disengaged, the remaining 20% cannot lift the organizational aircraft off the ground.

If we could swap those numbers ... imagine the possibilities. The same people, the same expense load, the same buildings and parking lots, the same paychecks. Yet, results that achieve those similar to the aforementioned 747.

### **Your *Why* is essential, but the *How* is a close second**

Simon Sinek famously exhorted *Start with Why*, but after you understand your *Why*, you must consider your *How*. And this is where organizational design is so important.

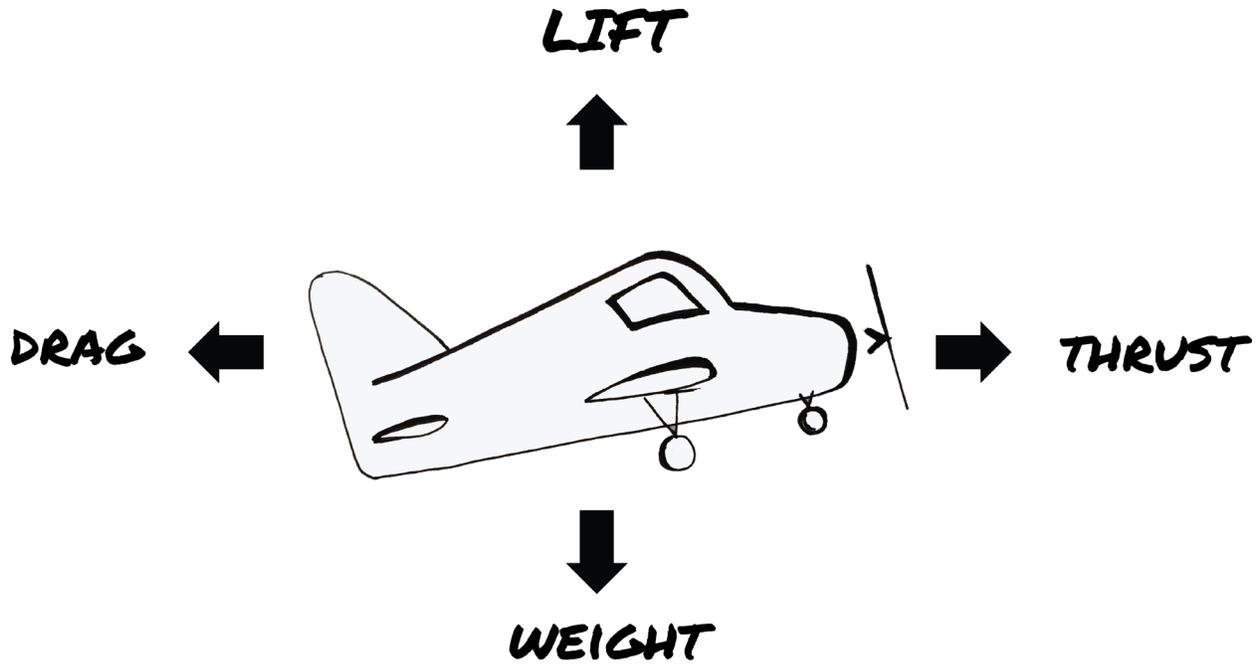
I believe the Wright Brothers had a more powerful *Why* than their rivals, especially the well-funded team of Samuel Pierpont Langley. Langley wanted to build an airplane. The Wright Brothers wanted to fly.

Yet, even the most powerful *Why* cannot get your organizational plane off the ground and safely and sustainably kept in the air if the plane itself is not designed properly, and the pilot is not properly skilled. The Wright Brothers experimented their way to sustainable flight.

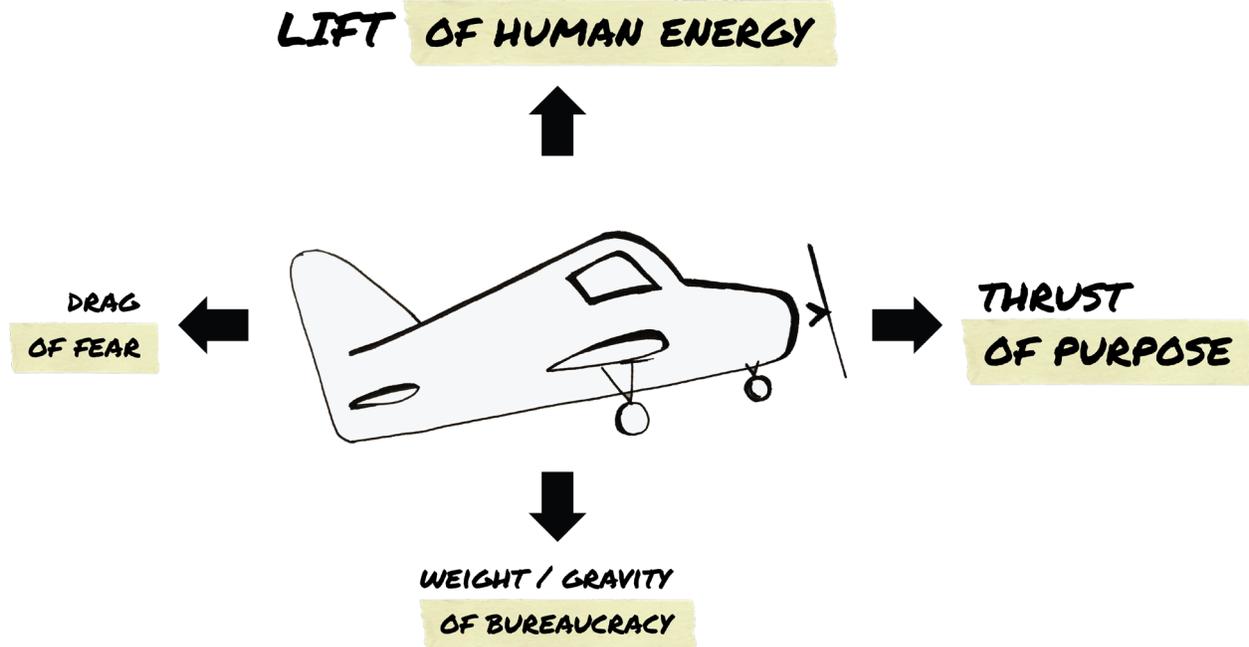
### **The Principles**

Let's take a look at a plane and compare the forces and principles of flight to those of a human organization.

A plane has four basic forces at work: Lift, Weight, Thrust and Drag.



The positive forces of Lift and Thrust are what get the airplane off the ground and flying towards the destination. The counter forces of weight and drag are unavoidable as they have everything to do with the utility of the aircraft itself. In other words, we cannot eliminate them. We can, through proper design, minimize them. If we think of our human organizations in this same way, we can understand what lifts our team, what weighs them down, what propels us to a worthy destination and what produces drag.



Let's look at each of these individually.

### The Thrust of Purpose

People are naturally inclined to work together in teams, particularly when that work is focused on a worthy external goal. When we speak of joy at my company, we believe that joy comes to teams by having great and authentic answers to these questions:

- Who do we serve?
- What would delight look like for them?

By focusing on the delight of others, we derive a deep sense of satisfaction and thus feel a meaningful sense of worth about our hard work. It's amazing how much we will put up with if the goal is worthy enough. We won't worry as much about creature comforts, the quality of snacks in the lunchroom, and whether the company-supplied coffee is the best they ever had.

Our job as leaders is to fully communicate the shared sense of worthy purpose of our organization. Everyone in the company should be able to clearly answer the two questions above. Intriguingly, the answer for us is not our customers, our employees nor our investors. Yes, of course, we want to serve them too. But as a custom software design and development firm, our answer is to delight the people who will one day use the software our team is designing and building. We may never meet them; they certainly won't pay us for what we do;



yet our attention is focused on delighting the people who will use the work of our hearts, our hands and our minds every single day.

Our Thrust of Purpose is defined by our **Why**.

### **Lift of Human Energy**

In our earliest days, we were invited in to visit with a technical team at a local governmental agency. As we described our company, our approach, our purpose and our methods, we could tell we just weren't connecting with this group. They were lifeless and listless and had almost no questions at all afterward.

Their boss, who had invited us in, connected with us after the presentation and thanked us enthusiastically telling us he had never seen them so excited!

Whoa.

We must consider as leaders that the human energy of our teams is something that should be guarded, protected and nurtured. At our company, we do many things to lift the energy of our team. Our open space, the laughter and the fact that we avoid overtime as much as humanly possible are all a good start. We cut our team off from electronic communications when they vacation so they can actually enjoy the time away. There is no expectation of work from home. We expect people to have another life outside of work. One team member started a Tuesday lunch jam session and anyone who plays an instrument or sings is invited to join some very talented musicians.

Our work processes do not expect multi-tasking and program it out of the equation. You and a pair partner (yes we work in pairs) are allowed to focus on a single task until you get it to done. If you get stuck, you can suspend that work and move on to another task already outlined. In this way, two elements of our culture feed the energy of our team:

- Sufficient time is provided to get meaningful things DONE
- An elimination of the waste of waiting.

One of the most unusual benefits of working for our company is that we allow newborns to come to work with their parents. This isn't daycare; the child is with the parent. They come in all day, every day from about three months old to six months old. We recognize this is unusual and not practical for most companies and teams, but the energy and delight that a baby brings in beyond anything we ever expected. Even our customers behave better when we bring the



babies to meetings. And the kids love the buzz of verbal communication and laughter (and attention!).

All teams can get work done, whether energized or not. Most would agree that high-energy teams get more and better work done and feel more pride in both their work and their company and that is a powerful force of positive leadership.

### **The Weight of Bureaucracy**

If every decision requires a meeting, a committee, an approval or a policy check, your organizational plane will never get off the ground. Each day people will be waiting for a decision to be made, or an approval to be granted. Whoever the granting authority is, the team will not move faster than them. The weight of this approach will counter any other human energy you have mustered.

Eventually this weight will destroy any motivation to fly because it will be clear to everyone that flight isn't possible because no one has ever seen it occur.

Meeting loads (calendars filled with back-to-back-to-back meetings), email boxes impossibly filled with URGENT messages, multi-step approval systems for even trivial purchases will add a weight to a team that cannot be overcome. This weight will be felt on the shoulders of your teams and they will weary of the unnecessary burden. The lack of trust these systems portray is evident to everyone.

Bob Chapman, CEO of Barry-Wehmiller, was confronted on just such a topic when one of his high-performing workers questioned the company's policy of having to go through a security checkpoint to use tools that helped him do his job. Effectively this worker was asking Bob why he was trusted to do so many things for the company, but when he needed a tool to increase his effectiveness he was treated as if his main aim was to steal from the company. To Bob's credit, he had that system dismantled immediately. Bob's company is a shining example of a company that feeds human energy.

How many companies have purchased books to inspire their teams and then locked them in a file cabinet with a gatekeeper and careful tracking system? How many of those books are ever read?

As leaders we must consider the standard processes and procedures we use to "manage" our teams and ask the questions:

- Is it necessary, really necessary?

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- Does it slow things down?
- Does it communicate that we don't trust our people.

While recording the audio version of my latest book, the audio engineer who was listening to me over two days got caught up in the message of my writing. At a break, he related a story to me about a time he worked in the mechanical end of a bowling alley where the automatic pinsetters needed regular intervention to keep the bowlers happy. He noticed one day that the owner had padlocked the exit doors at that end of the bowling alley, fire escapes that would only be needed by the workers themselves. When he challenged this policy, the owner told him he was worried the workers would steal valuable equipment. The young man protested to no avail. He quit as he didn't want to work for someone who was going to employ such a lack of trust as to endanger his workers.

### **The Drag of Fear**

I was taught to lead in my earliest days by trying to motivate others with fear. It didn't work for me when I was being led in this way, and it never worked when I was elevated into leadership. It was, however, the only example I knew, so I mimicked it in my early leadership days. I had one boss who taught me that if I ever saw two people chatting in the hallway that I should walk up to the pair and just stand there.

"They'll get back to work," he taught me.

This is hilarious to me now, because we pair our workers, so I have now institutionalized two people talking to one another ALL DAY LONG. 😊

Fear is present in so many management systems it is likely hard to imagine its absence:

- The dreaded annual performance review
- Cutting the lowest 10% of the forced ranked workforce
- Most in the company only "Meeting Expectations" when given a review
- A zero-sum game economic reward system where the more I give to one person, the less I give to another.
- The public elevation of individual heroes over team achievement
- Courtyards, palaces and high-floors in office towers for top leaders
- Gatekeepers for bosses who have declared they have an open-door policy

As leaders, avoiding invoking the FEAR card when leading our teams may be the hardest single change any of us can make. Yet, it is the most important. Fear steals away the most human part of us because when we are afraid we scale back our humanity to our primitive reptile brain and

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then we lose the most important element of our teams, the part where we can express the most human qualities: Creativity, Innovation, Invention and Imagination.

### **The Payoff**

If our organizational aircraft is properly balanced and designed, we can fly to heights and distances that were previously unimaginable. In doing so, the amazing benefit is that the work of leadership is lessened dramatically. A properly balanced aircraft, (heaviest at takeoff due to full fuel) is easily lifted off the ground by the pilot with the slightest tug on the yoke. When the pilot pulls back on the yoke just a little bit, the nose of the aircraft tilts up in what is called a *Positive Attitude* and at the right speed the aircraft itself simply lifts off the ground and flies.

The research is now clear and readily available. We have discovered the relevant principles that cause human teams to fly. We can begin designing organizations that can fly and fly fast and far to amazing destinations.

With joy as your fuel, I wish you a safe and happy flight to wherever you are going.

### **Take the next step – bring joy to YOUR organization!**

Read the books – filled with colorful anecdotes from Richard Sheridan’s personal journey and wisdom from many leadership mentors, [Chief Joy Officer](#) provides an approachable, down-to-earth philosophy and practice that will bring a renewed sense of purpose to the work of building others. [Get Chief Joy Officer here.](#)

[Joy, Inc.](#) offers an inside look at a shared belief system that influences physical space, embraces making mistakes, and eliminates meetings—all while fostering dignity and respect for the team. Good for readers in any field who want tangible examples of a healthier, happier atmosphere at work—leading to the sustainable business results required for growth. [Get Joy, Inc. here.](#)

Spend some time with us! Learn practical ways to change the course of leadership to one that focuses on increasing human energy, engagement and results in Menlo Innovation’s [Lead with Joy workshop](#). In this two-day event at our inspirational offices, CEO Richard Sheridan leads the group through compelling, immersive activities to share the practices required to build a culture of joyful leadership. Information and registration [here.](#)