

THE WRIGHT WAY

7 Problem-Solving Principles From The Wright Brothers That Can Make Your Business Soar

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MAIN IDEA

On December 17, 1903, two unassuming bicycle builders Wilbur and Orville Wright did something most people assumed was impossible – they successfully flew an airplane they had designed and built themselves. This was a highly impressive achievement if for no other reason than many larger and much better funded organizations (including Thomas Edison, the Smithsonian Institution and the U.S. military) had already tried and failed to do the same.

So how, exactly, did the Wrights succeed where so many others had failed? Their approach to solving the problem of flight can be distilled into seven principles which are directly relevant to the challenges of solving problems in the broader business community:

The Seven Key Principles For Solving Problems That Are The Wright Way	1	Forging – use constructive conflict to come up with strong ideas
	2	Tackle the tyrant – Always tackle the hardest part of a problem first
	3	Tinkering – look for conceptual or tactile connections and contrasts
	4	Rigid flexibility – consider possibilities outside the normal boundaries
	5	Ongoing learning – make learning new ideas a lifelong passion
	6	Measure twice – be methodical and meticulous in solving problems
	7	Multiplication – harness the power of a team to achieve much more

“The one aspect of the Wright brother’s story that has yet to be told is that a key component of their problem-solving process was the application of a set of identifiable principles. These comprise a problem-solving model that I call ‘The Wright Way’ These principles, if applied to your business or organization, will not just get it off the ground, they will make it soar.”

– Mark Eppler

Principle #1 – Forging – use constructive conflict to come up with strong ideas Page 2

Always use conflict constructively to uncover and then validate new ideas and strategies. When a new idea has been subjected to the heat of discussion and the mental blows of contention, a much more practical solution is likely to emerge. Let the evaluation of new ideas be robust and thorough.

Principle #2 – Tackle the tyrant – Always tackle the hardest part of a problem first Page 3

Within each problem, there is usually some “tyrant” – a subset of the problem that needs to be resolved before everything else will come together. It’s far better to tackle that tyrant part of the problem first rather than leaving it for last because this will be a good indicator as to whether or not a solution for the larger problem is feasible.

Principle #3 – Tinkering – look for conceptual or tactile connections and contrasts Page 4

Tinkering is the art of looking for connections and contrasts. When trying to solve a problem, new ideas and new approaches can come to the surface as you tinker with parts of the problem in an effort to understand it, repair it or make it better. Become skilled at mental and physical tinkering to enhance your ability to solve problems.

Principle #4 – Rigid flexibility – consider possibilities outside the normal boundaries Page 5

One of the best ways to solve problems is to develop the ability to think outside the box without abandoning the box altogether. This requires flexing the mind to come up with possibilities that fall outside those suggested by policy, tradition or even personal experience.

Principle #5 – Ongoing learning – make learning new ideas a lifelong passion Page 6

To solve problems, you need a reservoir of good ideas, and the only way to build just such a reservoir is to be continually learning new things. Therefore, one key to keep moving forward is to be forever learning.

Principle #6 – Measure twice – be methodical and meticulous in solving problems Page 7

The fastest and most efficient way to solve a problem is not to spring into a flurry of unplanned action. Instead, the best way to get to a solution is to be methodical and meticulous in your approach to developing a solution. Paradoxically, doing things methodically is not only the best way of getting something done it is also the fastest way.

Principle #7 – Multiplication – harness the power of a team to achieve much more Page 8

The output of a group of people in solving problems is multiplied exponentially when five factors are present:

1. Trust between the members of the group.
2. An equitable distribution of effort.
3. The opportunity for everyone to profit.
4. Everyone has equal access to all the available information.
5. The equitable distribution of glory.

To multiply the effectiveness of any team, make certain all of these factors are present.

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