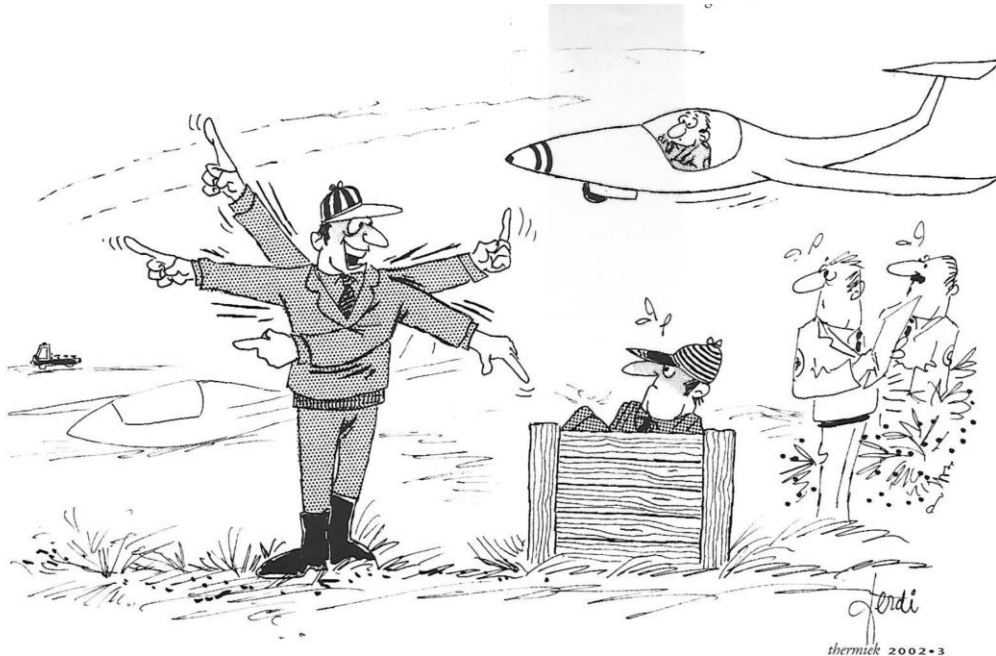


Learning about management: a seventeen year old kid on a glider airfield



Preface for the English translation

The title of the article is based on a play on words in the Dutch language. The meaning of the Dutch word-*start* is "launch", the meaning of *lijder* is "(s)he who suffers" and the meaning of *leider* is "(s)he who leads". So the meaning of the Dutch title can be translated as: From (s)he who suffers from the launches to (s)he who leads the launches.

Introduction

This article was written by me for the Dutch magazine *Thermiek* quite a few years ago. The underlying idea was not only to show that it is actually a fairly complex task, but that you can, especially as a (young) glider pilot, learn a lot from it. Things that can also benefit you in your further professional life.

Van startlijder tot startleider

Being a Duty Pilot means running an organization. According to Martin Smit, you learn more on a glider airfield than in an official management course. And with a lot more fun and for less money.

I have been walking around the various gliding airfields for about twenty-five years. Sometimes a little more frequently, sometimes a little less. I was able to experience several clubs up close. A lot has changed. The equipment is better. The rear seat of the Rhönlerche glider, surrounded by flapping and drafty windows, has been replaced by a very comfortable seat under a beautiful hood.

Getting lost on your cross-country flight has its charm. However, flying with a GPS and knowing exactly where you are is more pleasant. One thing has remained the same: just before nine o'clock, the roads to the gliding airfields are full of people moving in haste, most by car, some by bicycle.

The eyes are sometimes focused on the road in front, but usually on the sky above. With the emergence of the first cumulus clouds, this only gets worse ...

Upon arrival at the airport, the various tasks are divided. Everyone does what he can or is allowed to do. Some are on a schedule and therefore have to be there. Instructors are generally on a schedule. Duty pilots usually are, too. The instructors always show up, but for start leaders this is much less obvious. When a duty pilot is then sought among those present, it remains remarkably quiet. A winch operator is usually found quickly, finding a cable driver is almost never a problem and you can usually choose from several candidates to drive the control cabin to launch point. The duty pilot is apparently a very unpopular job.

Right person, right job

As a seventeen-year-old kid I was also allowed to be the duty pilot. Very exhausting. You had to keep an eye on everything. It started in the morning with setting up the glider operation. Everyone comes to ask you about everything. What is the position for the winch for today, how do we line up the gliders at the launch point?

People have to leave at the strangest times. Do we still think, or do we ask everything? Moving the gliders out of the hangar: I can do it better myself. Then everyone gets involved. After all, I am only seventeen and so I cannot know too much about it. It will be a total mess. I already understood that I had better appoint another member for that.

And it paid off to make it clear who had the responsibility. Otherwise, everyone got involved again. Responsibilities must be clear.

Fortunately, I could not drive the winch myself. Therefore, I had to appoint someone for that. Someone who is also willing to check the winch and refill the fuel himself, someone who does not start driving the winch to the field before knowing what the winch position is.

After appointing an unsuitable person a few times, it became clear to me that you had to get the right person for the right task. Again I had learned something.

Organizing is thinking ahead

The next problem was when to go to the launch point. Two events take place simultaneously: the hangar operation and the launch site operation. Shouldn't I have appointed somebody to be responsible for the launch site operation for the time being? Organizing is thinking ahead...

When you finally arrived on the launch site, you had to plan countless things again. If the landing area is marked, the lamp for the winch is aligned and so on. Once you had the business running, you were confronted with gliders that had just landed but were not retrieved from the landing strip. Why was nobody moving? And of course everyone thinks he has already retrieved too many gliders from the landing area.

Motivating people to make them do something they do not like. Not that easy. However, you have to; after all: you cannot remove all the gliders from the landing strip on your own.

Get as much out of it as possible

At three o'clock some people started to worry. They thought they had not flown enough. If you had finally planned all that, an instructor came up to you. So and so will probably go solo, do you have some extra starts for that? You have to choose who of the other members will fly less. The worst part is that you cannot afford to advertise that so and so might go solo. Defending a policy against a non-benevolent audience, where you are not allowed to go into the exact background of this policy. Do I not regularly deal with this as an instructor and in my work?

What is the Duty Pilot anyway?

Ultimately, it is nothing more than managing an organization. An organization in which everything must not only be done in a pleasant way, but also in a safe way. Of course, the latter in particular is a matter for everyone, especially the instructors. However, the duty pilot has a guiding role in this. If I look at what I myself have done in my professional life and still do, it is often organizing something. Getting the most out of a team. For each individual, but also for the group as a whole. In gliding, we have the cycles of a day. There is

a changing shift every day. However, the goals always remain the same. You will soon have the opportunity to do it again. Then you can immediately try again, and improve what you did not do right the last time.

If you look at what you learn at the various management courses, you sometimes wonder whether they should spend a day on a glider site. You learn a lot more on a glider site than on any MBA course. Moreover, it all costs a lot less and you have fun with it too. And for the future Duty Pilots: just go and be the Duty Pilot. You will learn how to run a fairly complex organization. Maybe all those *startlijders* will become *startleiders* again?

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