



# Foundational Principles

for a Successful  
Life-Cycle Product  
Support Strategy

Bill Kobren

Whether the problem is challenges in maintaining the U.S. public transportation infrastructure, or service restoration issues encountered by regional utility companies in the wake of severe weather, we are regularly reminded of fundamental truths that are well worth considering about long-term infrastructure sustainment (or, in our case, weapon systems sustainment) planning and execution.

These principles have both personal, as well as professional applicability to those of us who serve as Department of Defense (DoD) life-cycle logisticians and product support managers. Forgive me in advance if I commingle time-tested perspectives with a generous helping of clichés, adages, colloquialisms and idioms—along with a bit of (hopefully) value-added pontification thrown in for good measure!

**Count the cost.** Unless there is an urgent and compelling requirement to do otherwise, be wary of building (or buying) something if you are unable, unwilling or unsure of your ability to sustain it throughout its projected life cycle. And as many of

*Kobren is the director of the Logistics and Sustainment Center at the Defense Acquisition University's Fort Belvoir, Virginia, campus.*

you know all too well, the operative word here is “projected”—as long as budgets are tight, service life extensions are very often a fact of life.

**Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today.** No time like the present. Let's get on with it. It's never too late to start planning for the future. This is particularly true of long-term product support and sustainment.

**Plan for the future.** Be disciplined. Defer gratification. To lose weight, exercise more, eat less. To retire comfortably, save more, spend less. There are many ways to sustain a system, some more costly than others. Invest in the future by designing for supportability. Design in reliability and maintainability. As the Director of the Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation so eloquently said a few years back, “The cost of operating and maintaining a system over its useful life is driven primarily

**Into each life some rain must fall.** Longfellow essentially was telling us that, sooner or later, it's going to rain. Instead of worrying about “if,” start planning for “when.” Oh, by the way, in case you haven't noticed, weapon systems age. Obsolescence is a fact of life, both inside and outside of your program. Rather than admiring the problem, focus instead on figuring out how you're going to proactively deal with the inevitable rather than denying reality or deferring critical decisions.

**Waste not, want not.** Enough said.

**Be careful what you ask for (because you just may get it).** Incentivize the right behaviors. Outcome-based, performance-based product support strategies and product support arrangements proactively leverage both incentives and remedies to positively motivate behavior and deliver long-term results that transactional-based sustainment strategies may not.

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by system design and reliability and maintainability decisions, which are typically made before production.”

**An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.** Invest early and often. Don't mortgage the future to subsidize today. Think long term. Although successful execution very often is a tactical activity, think strategically. Think life cycle. Think in terms of decades. What will the world be like? The threats we face? The technology advances? The operating environment? Priorities? Total life-cycle systems management is enshrined in DoD policy (DoD Directive 5000.01, Para E1.1.29) for a reason.

**Remember the Golden Rule.** Treat people the way you would want to be treated. This includes not only customers, but co-workers, employees, stakeholders, and many others. And don't forget your successors, some of whom you may never have a chance to meet but who will be living with results of decisions you make (or don't make).

**Communicate. Communicate. Communicate.** And don't forget that effective communication includes a healthy dose of listening.

**Make hay while the sun shines.** Work while you can. Before the next conflict. Before the budget gets tight. Before the unanticipated arises. By the way, for some reason these things generally seem to happen when it's most inconvenient or when you least expect them.

**A skilled craftsman doesn't blame the tool.** Tools, processes and guidance are powerful enablers. Continuous Process Improvement. Risk Management. Condition Based Maintenance Plus. Product Support Business Model. Earned Value Management. Open Systems Architecture. Technology Refreshment. Failure Modes Effects and Criticality Analysis. Proactive Diminishing Manufacturing Sources and Material Shortages. And Obsolescence Management. Reliability, Availability and Maintainability Analysis. Performance-Based Logistics (PBL). DoD Product Support Strategy Process Model. Reliability Centered Maintenance. Public-Private Partnering (PPP). Supply Chain Management. And the list goes on. Learn them. Understand them. Apply them.

**The grass is (not) always greener on the other side of the fence.** Poor performance by an organic product support integrator or product support provider is not necessarily grounds for dropping them or transitioning to another organization. Something so drastic, I would contend, should be an action of last resort—essentially after all other options to alleviate the issue(s) have been exhausted. Before making such a decision, it's very likely to be in everyone's best interest to first have a clear understanding of exactly what the issues are that are driving customer dissatisfaction through a thorough root cause analysis. Poorly defined requirements? Unrealistic expectations? Poor communication? Cost? Performance? Schedule? Product? Process? Responsiveness? Quality? Priorities? Metrics? Issues resulting from such a move could potentially

be worse than what you have now. Or you might experience a degradation in performance during the transition period. Before doing something possibly rash, make sure you have identified all potential issues, being sure to separate symptoms from causes. When conducting this evaluation, stick to the facts and base decisions on data—leave emotion, opinion and anecdotal evidence out of the equation. Conduct a rigorous root-cause analysis, bringing in subject-matter experts to assist as required. Evaluate the situation thoughtfully and clearly, considering both near- and long-term implications. Same goes for identifying and implementing potential solutions. Process improvements? Lean events? Benchmarking? Reviewing successful execution examples at same or other providers? PPP arrangements? PBL product support arrangements?

**The buck stops here.** Broadly speaking, our mission is to plan, develop, deliver and provide affordable readiness to our warfighter customers. We're each called upon to provide best-value product support to our soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines while simultaneously being good stewards of the taxpayer's dollars. We're each responsible. We're each accountable.

**Measure twice, cut once.** This old carpenter's adage is actually a vitally important principle that undergirds the product support business case analysis. It helps you to be sure you have identified, fully understand and carefully assessed available options. It helps ensure successful translation of product support requirements into cost-effective product support strategies and product support arrangements that meet and often exceed warfighters expectations.

**A penny saved is a penny earned.** Who could have imagined Ben Franklin would be one of the earliest proponents of Better Buying Power will-cost/should-cost management? A wise, visionary Founding Father indeed!

There's also a vitally important personal, professional and leadership aspect to be considered:

**Never stop learning.** Strive to be intellectually curious. Stretch yourself. Don't view training or education as a "square to be filled," a "box to be checked" or a task to be endured. Training and education make us better people, better employees, better logisticians, better acquisition workforce members. View Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA) certification training and 80-hour continuous learning requirements as just a starting point. Sign up for Defense Acquisition University (DAU) training courses and continuous learning modules in areas you may not be familiar with, or on subjects where a training course was deployed after you were certified. View DAWIA certification requirements as opportunities to grow—as thresholds, not objectives! In other words, do more than the required minimums.

**Be a reader.** As a corollary, read. You'll be the better for it; not only more well-rounded, but more insightful and knowledge-

able. If you're looking for professional reading materials, check out our recommended reading list on the home page of the DAU Logistics Community of Practice.

**Know Your Stuff.** Be the subject-matter expert. Be the "go-to" person. Educate your colleagues in other functional communities about the importance of life-cycle management, long-term product support planning, designing for supportability, developing, fielding, and sustaining supportable systems, investing in long-term reliability, maintainability, and operations and support cost-saving measures, and the value proposition of life-cycle logistics. Also be a good teammate. Support your systems engineering, cost estimating, contracting, test and evaluation, and, of course, your program manager in achieving program success.

**Mentor the next generation.** Be a mentor. Be a coach. Be a cheerleader. Be a motivator. Be a leader. Share your knowledge, insights, perspectives, and perhaps most importantly of all, the lessons you've learned from the "school of hard knocks." A significant percentage of our functional community already is retirement eligible, or within 10 years of being so. The need for successful mission accomplishment will still be there after each of us has moved on. Let's make sure we've done our part in preparing our successors for the handoff.

**Character counts.** Integrity matters. Do what's right. Don't cut corners (another carpenter's adage). Or to paraphrase the West Point Cadet Honor Code, do not lie, cheat, steal or tolerate those who do. This adage will serve you well, regardless of your experience level, DAWIA certification, duty title, level of responsibility, pay grade, rank or number of people you supervise.

**Treat government service as a sacred trust.** Give an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. If you wouldn't do it at home, don't do it at work.

**Deeds not words.** In a nutshell, "talk is cheap." Get on with it. Define the requirement, develop a plan, and execute. Exceed expectations. Under-promise and over-deliver. As Sophocles said, "It was my care to make my life illustrious not by words more than by deeds." Or as William Shakespeare wrote, "Talking isn't doing!"

**Contagious enthusiasm.** A corollary to "deeds, not words," contagious enthusiasm motivates teammates, inspires colleagues, takes organizations to new levels of productivity and facilitates success. Get fired up! Get on with it! Vince Lombardi once said, "Confidence is contagious. So is lack of confidence."

Take it for what it's worth. Remember that the advice is worth what you paid for it, you generally get what you pay for, and these observations are intended as food for thought! 

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The author can be contacted at [bill.kobren@dau.mil](mailto:bill.kobren@dau.mil).