

Ep. 46: CPI with Bud Boehnke

Welcome to Sword and Shield, the official podcast of the 960th Cyberspace Wing. Join us for insight, knowledge, mentorship and some fun, as we discuss relevant topics in and around our wing. Please understand that the views expressed in this podcast are not necessarily the views of the U. S. Air Force, nor the Air Force Reserve, and no endorsement of any particular person or business is ever intended. (Light music)

Welcome to another episode of the Sword and Shield. I'm Chief Master Sergeant Christopher Howard, Superintendent of the 960th COG and today with me, I have - Howdy y'all, it's Bud Boehnke. I'm the CCO for the 960th Cyberspace Wing. - Welcome back, Bud. I mean, I know that it's been a while since you've had a conversation here on the Sword and Shield. And I just wanted to kind of talk a little bit about your position and how that works within the Wing, and some of the changes that we're looking at. - You bet. So, love being on the podcast, and you're doing a great job. Everybody seems to be enjoying the podcast. Good feedback. So happy to be back. On our first podcast, Colonel Erredge and I talked about a CCOs role in strategic planning. - Okay - How frequently we strategic plan, why we strategic plan, who's involved, who are the customers. - Right - So, yeah, so we did not get to talk a little bit about more CPI-specific duties that a CCO or a Wing Process Manager does. So, I'm happy to talk about it, Chief, thank you for the opportunity. I come from a maintenance background and there's a lot of data to be recorded through maintenance - Right - Scheduled, unscheduled and there's millions of data points out there - Right, fail rates and man hours, are, you know, critical parts all that right? - Very actionable data. - Yeah - It can be discreet, it can be not discreet, it can be, you know qualitative and quantitative, equally are important. You have tons of quantitative data in maintenance. No kidding, no fluff data. Okay. So CPI is extremely important coming from a maintenance field. And so, that's where I got my start in continuous process improvement. And, I realized that the personnel management issues are just as backward as maintenance processes and procedures. - (Inaudible) - (laughing) - Right? Particularly, it was a shocker coming over to the Reserves, from an active duty - Ok - component. Scheduling is very different. - Very, right? I mean, there's a lot of things that come into play with a reservist versus Reg F. I mean Reg F you have your normal day-to-day operations, other things that need to happen as well. Like when were talking about maintenance, right? When is this part coming in? When, if we're talking about aircraft, when is the aircraft available for some of those repairs? Is it a red ball, is it not a red ball, right? And then scheduling that with the right personnel and the right shift. With the reservist, kind of add that on top of when is a reservist gonna come in, does that align with annual tour, Does that align with RMPs Does that align with, you know the UTA, et cetera, cetera, right? - It's almost easier to run the CPI program or to participate and be a CPI practitioner in maintenance - Gotcha because numbers are almost laid out for you. - Right - And you gotta to put pieces of the puzzle together. I think maybe in the reserves. And I think maybe when you're not dealing in such a collected data

perspective. We have to use some qualitative data. - (Inaudible) - in management and personnel and culture. And that's fine too. As long as we can show a current state, show the future state where we want to be. - Right - highlight those gaps and just start chipping away, you know piece by piece at those gaps. Then you can find any ways of process, personnel and for whatever improvement that you can find within an organization, you can find it. - Right - But it is a little difficult working with the conflicting schedules within the Reserves is something I learned within the first six months of coming on board. And so, it was a shocker to me. But, one thing I will say on the back end of that is that the folks in the Reserves are probably more resilient because of it, because of so many struggles. - Gotcha - That's where I'm willing to put my money on and that's what I'm choosing to believe, because the improvement efforts that we've seen around the wing, our groups and our squadrons, - Mhm - Have been, have been really large and the small ones have been really effective. - Yeah - And so there's a lot of folks out there who want to take that next step and who want to make a difference. I think CPI continuous process improvement is not as robust, maybe not even as mature in the Reserves as it is in an active duty. - Right. I agree. Right. So you have on the Reg F side, it's really been incorporated quite well in that process, right? You continuously, come back and forth with here's where we want to make the change, making the change, hot washing and then adjusting for the next stage. With the Reservist, you know, our timelines do get expanded. As you've talked about that, scheduling, you know we're looking at the traditional Reservists being one week weekend a month, two weeks a year. Those timelines really expand. You know, even look at EPRs. We do that every two years versus Reg F does it every year. We have to look at it at a much more finite focus especially for those UTAs and then adjust ATs. So, I can see where as a Reservist it does take us a little bit longer to get to some of those monumental changes, those large organization changes. But the good piece that you did point out was the fact that we are always in a constant stage of change as a reservist, right? Because of the way we do business, it's one weekend, a month, two weeks a year, you have to adjust every month. So that resiliency is definitely there. And the ability to flex and bounce back is far greater in a Reservist, I think. And that's not to take away anything from our Reg F brothers and sisters, right? It's just some of the ways we do business. I would say that mission sets on the Reg F are fairly similar, for the ebb and flow. It just Reservist it's across the whole gambit. - Sure. - Standardization, right. - Right - Is key. And the more experience and the more practicality that we gain we're going to get better at it. And so that's one of my jobs, not only on paper every year during my appraisal it's a job for me, but personally, it's, I want to teach people how to fish for themselves. - Right - And we can't expect Master Sergeant Vielman to run every process improvement activity for vouchers, - Right - She's going to be gone one day, she's going to be a chief one day. - Right - And so we have to make sure that we can standardize her efforts, everybody else's efforts that we're currently doing when we're not in this seat one day for the, for the next person. - No, it actually spurs a thought to me right now, a good point. Right? So as we go through these processes, a lot of things, a lot of success early on is based on the personalities of the leadership in that place, right. Or the individual taking on that particular project with the goal that we're going to take that personality-based success, change

it into a process and execute, be able to sustain it, and in successfully we repeat that, right? From that perspective, how would you challenge someone out there, that's looking for that opportunity, that has that passion, that has that personality to take something like that? Let's say vouchers like Vielman maybe some other project and run forward with it. - If they're already exhibiting those, that display of passion - Right - That's the first step - Okay - With any job, not process improvement, any job in leadership that we have, whether you wear the uniform or not. It is, it's got to come from within. You've got to be able to answer the first question. Why? - Right - Why is it important? And it's gotta be important to you to put forth such a incredible effort because continuous process improvement can be hard - Yes and lengthy, right? In some cases. - Hopefully not. - Right. - Hopefully, you know, it's like an OODA loop you perform one loop. And then the next year, loop two the next year, loop three. - Right - And you're constantly evolving through this, through this flight in the sky. So, hopefully a process improvement event is not going on for longer than 12 months. - Right - Now, there's always gaps to close, right? - Yes - There's never a such thing as a perfect process, a perfect storm. So, it's our job to identify, close the gaps and then ultimately, like I said, sustain it. So that the incredible work that's done during a 90 day or a 12 month process improvement event is continued for the next generation. My kids might want to serve. - Right - And we cannot let that effort, from that individual and that team go to waste. - No, I agree, right. And that's, that's some of the beauty of the process improvement is that the goals and the intent are there. And as you brought up the OODA loop, right, as we go through that first cycle in some projects that it may be only a month or so in that, in that first loop before we move on to the next, is we can always adjust. Right? So I know personally from being one of the wing priority owners for a period of time is we came in there with a set of assumptions and we came in there with a set of goals. And then as we started flipping through that problem set we realized we needed to adjust fire here. What we thought was the problem set or what we thought might be the end goal. Isn't really the true statement there. So we had to adjust and move forward. And I think that, that kind of leads us to the next piece of kind of pulling resiliency, and some of these opportunities, is how do we take that and make this into a leadership moment and help develop our airmen? - Yeah. So passion again, number one, you have to be passionate about people, helping and be an advocate for change. Number two, teamwork and communication is extremely crucial. No matter what we do, whether I'm a janitor or whether I'm a wing commander. - Right. - We've got to work within a team and we've got to share our history, share our guidance and our direction, where we want to go. And again, close that gap. - Right - You know, spheres of influence can be easily changed throughout our time. You know, I'm going to learn something from this podcast today that I'm going to be able to tell somebody about tomorrow. - Right - And so, if you have the ability to share experiences with your team, constantly communicate, constantly provide vector checks and be a wingman, then I think that's probably the second most important thing to understand when jumping into a continuous process improvement event or chasing a career, like I have in CPI. And so Chief, I think the third, most important thing for a CPI practitioner to have is vision. - Right - And so the, the first two kind of mesh into the third right? - Mhm - You have to be able to, to be resilient, right? We talked about the

resiliency and Reserves citizen airman. We talked about the ability to effectively communicate, - Right - up and down your chain with your team, with yourself, be honest with yourself even. And so, the third thing, Chief, is a clear vision. - Right - And so the first trait, communication, the second trait, teamwork, will help increase that vision. - Okay - And I don't mean increase your aperture because we don't want to scope creep. - All right. - But I do mean thinking strategically. - Right, well what's that end goal we're heading for, right? That, that type of vision. How are we going to, you know, kind of that line that's going to take us to that direction. Not necessarily, you know, finite, but we know that we're going to go that horizon. We're going to head towards that direction. And we don't know what we're necessarily going to find but we're going to try to keep ourselves tight as a group and get somewhere on that horizon. - We don't know yet. - Yeah And that's one of the most exciting things about CPI is that you're able to pivot very frequently - Right And I think that enables the team to be very decisive and enables a team to increase their ability to communicate. It increases the team's ability to be a wingman. - Right - Because you want to show good work but you also want to be, you also need to listen. (Laughing) - Yes. Yeah. No matter what role you have, right. That's a key piece that you learn through these processes as either a goal owner, project owner, a manager or a team member of any one of those levels. Is how do I communicate and how do I adjust and learning what it takes to be a good leader and a good follower, right. - The, amount of growth that I've seen through CPI events, virtual or not, preferably not, - Right - has been monumental on our wing. We had a visitor from the 860th come down a couple of weeks ago and they made a remark, that I'm going to paraphrase as best as I can. They hadn't seen that kind of energy around the wing staff in three years. - Right. - And that's a tremendous vote of confidence for the culture that's being spread around here. - Good for you. - And so, it seems like the first aspect of being a really good CPI practitioner, teamwork, - Right - the ability to communicate, and then the ability to have a vision on where you want to go. I think it's been, it's been proven, right? And so it shows with our programs, it shows with evaluations, it shows with the culture. Number one, most important thing in what we do is spreading that kind of culture, catching fire, and continuing to let that fire just rage across the Reserves. - No, I agree. And you know what I did not hear from you though, Bud? Was that there was a rank requirement, right? There was a positional requirement, that there was some kind of education requirement prior to being part of any of this. - Yeah - It goes to that attributes you talked about, that passion. The why, right? If you, as an individual inside this wing, have a passion for whatever process, whatever problems that we have in front of us, then you are the candidate. It doesn't matter if you're an A1C, doesn't matter if you're Lieutenant Colonel, right? It comes down to having a passion, a desire to make that change, and being able to at least bring it to the table. And then we can build a team around that and move forward. Right? - Yeah, Chief, if you took an oath to protect and defend the constitution, the United States, you're - Qualified - you're in. (laughing) - Right? - No, so, you know being a wingman is something that's not talked about. Maybe it is talked about, but I think maybe it should be talked about more. And we all have tremendous abilities to decompose problems and solve them. And so if you, if you're passionate, if you're a problem solver, if you enjoy learning and you enjoy teaching

others to fish for themselves instead of you doing all the work - Right - you're absolutely qualified to become a CPI practitioner. So, there's multiple levels of, of CPI influence you can have, you know you start off joining a team - Right - And whether you're working under a priority champion working group, whether you're involved in a travel voucher event, whatever the event is, a leadership planning event, any kind of event that you - Right - can plan, a burger burn. - There you go. Yeah. - Right? Anything, you know, you're going to get your chops. You're going to learn how to communicate effectively. You're going to learn how to how to be trusted with tasks. You're going to learn how to carry out those tasks, proficiently, how to communicate those tasks. - Comes down to the execution too, right? So it gives everybody an opportunity to show some success and learn some attributes and traits, no matter where they're at inside that team. And I think that's one of the great things that we have in this wing going on right now, is that culture of collaboration. With the idea that yes there is rank and structure when it comes to the military, good order and discipline, there is definitely lanes for leadership to make the decisions, And there's also lanes for directing. But when it comes to problem-solving and executing against that whole accelerate, change or lose and being innovative and being inclusive and trying to get after the problem set that we have in front of us, we are very collaborative in this wing. And that's a point I really, I love about your position is you help wrangle that collaboration quite often. You help focus some of those ideas. Because I'll be honest with you, I've got a number of bouts of good idea fairy, you know popping in, right. Actually, as a younger senior NCO, I even talked about, I was the good-idea-fairy killer and I'd have little stickers to stick on the desk - (laughing) - of all the fairies that were crushed. Not because it was a bad thing, but you know, cause I was the wrangler. All right, we have good ideas. Okay, we're going to focus on this one and we're going to move forward. But the point is that your position there helps take all those good ideas, bring them together align them, help the teams form, and then you are able to stoke the fire and foster that the team building. And you said something a minute ago that really stuck with me, was you see the growth and the change in culture. What other thoughts do you have on that change of culture and that growth that you're seeing in our airman here at the 960th Cyber wing? - The first thought that comes to my mind is it's a reward to see culture change because it's extremely hard to change a culture within an organization. - Yes. - You know, so Harvard business review has put out probably the most famous study about changing a culture within an organization. It was back in 2008, 2009. And you know, the cycle time in order to change an organization is put at like five years - Right. - And it's probably the most documented study on how to change a culture, how long it takes. So the reward for the last three years that we've been a wing has been the number one effect that's come into my mind. Number two is our ability to problem solve. Now with that said the problem that we currently have right now is that we have a lot of problems to solve - Right - and we don't know exactly, with data, we don't know exactly which problems take priority. We have a bunch of non-standardized tools that we use. - Okay - We have rating systems, we have risk-based analysis that we use, but it's not standard across the wing. And so, one squadron might use it, one squadron may not. And so in order for us to strategically get on the same page, - Right - we need to standardize that part.

We need to utilize our collaboration and the problem solving abilities that we have and mesh it with prioritization. - Right. - And of course, resources. We can have another podcast on resources, Sam? - Lack of? - Yeah. That's an hour conversation alone, right? We always need more money. We always need more people, but yes. How do we get after that? - Yeah. So the first thing we can do as practitioners is removing waste, right? We work within the confines of what we have right now, and we make it work to the best of our abilities through collaboration, through problem solving through communication, through leadership, right? - Right - And so the CPI methodology and tools that we use are simple. That's my job is to teach them. And so I liked that part, but again, the most the greatest thing that I see is the growth and maturity of not just the organization, but the people, myself everybody that I work with, you know it's great to see smiling faces around the wing. I don't know if they were here three years ago. - You know, I'm sure there were right? I won't look back in a kind of a dark spot but I'd definitely say that we've seen a lot of growth, right? You know, when you look at the maturity of the organization as a whole, we are still fairly new as an organization. And during those first days of an organization there tends to be a lot of scrap and things together. So, there was a lot of pressure putting on a lot of people. There was a lot of problem sets, as you've already identified, that were set at people's feet. And maybe in that moment there was a suffocation of that culture and suffocation of being able to get after it because it was just so overwhelming. And over time and with some changes and some adjustments I think that we're starting to be able to breathe, look at the problem set, be a little bit more objective and get after it in a totally different way. And then we also as we've grown and matured as an organization, we've found some hidden talents out there. We've gotten lucky with some of those choices with individuals to help us get after those problem sets. And we've stoked that passion to get to the point where we have individuals taking on those problem sets wholeheartedly and we've fostered the ability and the bandwidth for those priority owners. And for those team members out there to make the decisions, right. We didn't choke that decision out. So we're giving oxygen to that and we're building that fire. And like you said, we'll run rampant with this thing, I think as long as we keep that culture moving and that as leadership that we keep on giving the decision space to those individuals, to make that change, as long as it doesn't break away from the priorities or it is into any kind of illegal statements, right? - It can very easily, right? We can, we can lose focus and we can scope creep and get away from the problem statement or the mission. But the ability to empower folks at the very lowest level of the air force has been incredible. That's another positive influence that I've noticed from leadership is that the 960th as a whole, our airplane has climbed extremely rapid, right? - Yes. - So our ability to accelerate change has been extremely steep and it was great. It's a hell of a ride, it's been bumpy at times, but we're leveling off a little bit. We found a really nice altitude where we're cruising right now and there's going to be a time, you know when we maybe do our next strategic planning event where we're gonna to have to increase our altitude again. - Yes. - And it's going to be another steep climb. So yes, we need, we need practitioners at every level to feel empowered, to act empowered - Right - and then to empower others, for sure. - Right. And definitely from, you know being the devil's advocate and the crusty chief, right. It was like,

how do we know we're not perfect yet? And it really comes down to are all these problems linked and do we have room for improvement? And I think that definitely, we have some room for improvement and that empowerment will definitely aid getting us across that line. And on top of that, right, the outside world changes quickly, right. So even though we might be comfortable with plateauing today as our adversaries adjust the way they do business, as the environment outside of the gates of the base change, we're gonna have to make adjustments as well to get after that problem set a little bit differently. And that's where as a leader, I would challenge all of our leaders out there. Where are you getting to your airman? Where are you pulling that innovation from? Where you tapping those ideas? Are you talking to your A1Cs? Are you talking to your senior, talking to the young staff? You know, those changes in our thought processes as military members, at least on the enlisted side, you'll see the biggest adjustment is when we go from airman to NCO. They start thinking about all the problems that they dealt with as an airman. And that's where we start to lose them. If we're empowering them in that senior airman A1C through Staff Tech Sergeant, I think then we captured two problems there. A we get closest to the problem that's affecting our airmen. As well as we get after the empowering them to be part of the solution versus just pulling chalks and rolling. - Right. - I don't know if you had any additional thoughts on that. - Yeah. You gotta watch out for the solar winds, right? - Yeah. - So yeah, our adversaries are constantly working to disrupt our flow and infiltrate and sometimes we're susceptible, but you know here's a plug for CPI that I just thought of, speaking about the Harvard business review. They did another study that military, and we're talking all branches, military CPI practitioners are the most influential CPI practitioners out there because of organizations having a set budget. - Right - Right. If you're working with Tesla, budget's a little different than what we have the 960th Cyber Wing. - And so - Extremely - we have to be extremely mindful of that and work within our confines of operations. - Right - And so the ability to think outside the box is even greater in the military. And so those are, those are two reviews that I thought were extremely beneficial to me - Okay - going through my CPI career, understanding, wow this is a hell of an opportunity for an organization but for me individually on where I want to be where I want to retire, the influence that I can learn from folks and the influence - Right - that I can share with others. So - Appreciate it Bud. You know, I think that just that, that's a key off to another whole conversation that I'd love to have and dig through that personally. But I was wondering if you want to close out this particular podcast with any last parting words. - I'm ready to go eat some barbecue. - Gotcha. I'm definitely, I'm smelling it myself. Bud, thank you for your time. Thank you for your insight. Thank you for your leadership and your passion for CPI. I honestly do believe that it's this position and you specifically helping us stoke some of that fire that we have in our airmen and helping us focus on our goals and priorities and, and making that change that we need to have as an organization. Now, we identified that over the last three years we've seen a lot of improvements and I expect over the next five or 10 that this organization is going to probably be one of the top ones in the reserves. At least that's what I'm hopeful for. Maybe I'm a little biased and I'm okay with that. But thank you so much for all that you do for our airmen in the in the cyber wing. - My pleasure Chief, this job is extremely rewarding for me. I'm

empowered every day to work with teams to communicate and share experiences. So I feel extremely blessed to be here and not only to work in the realm that I work in but to work with people that I work with. So thank you. The pleasure's all mine. Let's go eat. - Awesome. Thank you. All right, gladiators. This concludes another episode of the Sword and Shield. As I like to tell you, keep on stabbing our enemies in the face, through cyberspace and get after it. And thank you for all you do. Right. Upbeat music