Written by Bob Williamson, Contributing Editor
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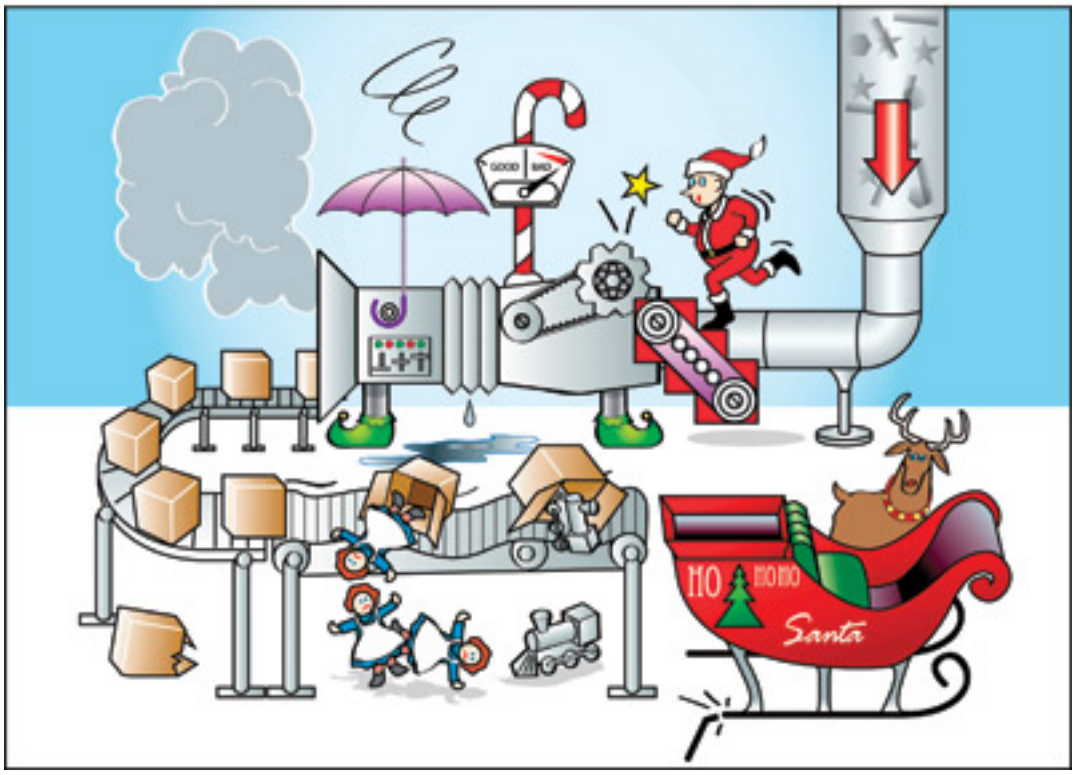
Most readers will be familiar with the poem that begins "'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse." Regardless of who actually wrote the original version, either Clement Clarke Moore or Henry Livingston, Jr., this poem has been part of a holiday tradition for many of us over the years.

Imagine, though, what might have been happening around the time this classic was penned—*during, let's say, the week before the big day, in that most famous workshop of all*. Things would have been coming together. The season's production of gifts would have been nearing fulfillment. And then (we've all been there), the unexpected…



'Twas the week before Christmas and all through the place,
Not a person was loafing, with one week to the race.
The packages were moving down the conveyors to load,
While the elves all had visions of hitting the road.

The machines were all humming, to the max they could go,
With all parts and all motors producing the flow
Of goodies and toys and clothing and games,
All running and churning the presents with names.

When all of a sudden, there came a huge clatter
Announcing that the schedule was ready to shatter.
First the labelers, then robots, then presses and all,
They clattered and sputtered and went into a stall.

The bearings and seals all suffered from heat
And the worst folks imagined was 'bout to be seen.

All loading was stopped, but the sleigh was not full.
All leaders and workers gave maintenance a call!

"Give maintenance a call!" was the cry from the shop.
"Give maintenance a call!" was spread from the top.
"Give maintenance a call!" was heard all around.
"Give maintenance a call!" Their feet hit the ground.
From their perches above, on roofs and on cranes
From their shops and their projects and underground trains,
Came mechanics and technicians with bright shiny tools
And electricians and fitters from all the best schools.

They pounced on the wrappers, the valves and the seals
And with their tools and meters, they were startled to see
The machines were all shot. They were down for the count!
"Give maintenance a call!" was the solution to mount.

"Give maintenance a call!" was the fix all had seen.
But maintenance alone could not fix a machine.

The budget was planned for maintenance last year
With much less for bearings, for seals and for gears.

The labelers and loaders and conveyors all ran
With little to none of a maintenance plan.
There was tightening and scrimping on every new part,
And cutbacks on time to check, lube and chart.

The numbers looked good. All the schedules were met.
And all big warehouse shelves were filled with no debt.
But all is not lost 'cause the sleigh has a load,
Albeit lots less than was planned for the road.

Some presents with names would surely be missed,
But bad news like this clearly wouldn't persist.
Then back in the shop, the sleigh gave a groan.
Its load and its driver could now not be flown.

"Give maintenance a call! The sleigh fell apart.
The runners are rusted and loose from the cart!"

"Give maintenance a call!" was all that was heard.
"Give maintenance a call!" for what was deferred.
Soon after last year's long late night sortie,
The maintenance was cut to ten dollars forty.
So it sat there all year, while nothing was done,
Just rusting and failing. PM? There was none.

Now Dasher and Dancer and Prancer and Vixen,
And Comet and Cupid and Donner and Blitzen
All heard the bad news from the shops over there.
Should jolly old St. Nick be told of the scare:

That the presents with names were about to be stopped?
And the children whose wishes were about to be chopped?
Oh, what would we do if our mission should fail
Or to deliver the gifts with the speed of a snail?

Then all of a sudden, St. Nicholas appears,
Aroused from his sleep by the shouts and the tears.

He looked at the labelers, the presses and all.
He looked at bearings and things that had stalled.
"Give maintenance a call!" was all that he heard.
"Give maintenance a call!" for what was deferred.

He pondered the destruction, the sorry state that he saw.
He wandered the mess: "This is the last straw!"

His fears had come true. It had come down to the worst.
All the presents with names could not be disbursed.
The merry old soul grew sad and then cried,
"'Tis the season to be jolly," he sneered at his ride.

The sleigh, it just sat there, rusted, tilted and broke
Then suddenly St. Nicholas really awoke!
The cobwebs of sleep and nightmares he knew
Were all a bad dream, one not to come true.

He got up and he dressed in his brightest new clothes,

Then he wandered the shops and the plant to disclose:

His bad dreams were a warning that all had to hear.
"Give maintenance a call. We'll tell them right here."

We'll give up our machines each month for a check
To be sure that our plans don't turn into a wreck.
He told workers and leaders, "We're all in this stream!"
We win it or lose it as one great big team.

So, look at your habits, your charting, your plans.
Find ways to prevent all failures and scams.
'Twas the week before Christmas and all through the shops
All lines should be humming. There should be no flops.

A lesson was learned, even though in a dream
That maintenance is shared, and that's a new scheme.
You plan all the work and work all you plan,
For reliability's our goal, and we know you all can.

Deploy all new tasks, new lists and techniques.
Give your attention to noises, to rattles and leaks.

Assuring capacity is the name of our game,
For assets, our people, our customers, our name.

May your holidays be blessed with good tidings and cheer…
The next time you'll see us, it will be a whole brand new year! **MT**

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