



Dai Trying, Santa's Chief Elf, cast his eye round the table and mentally girded his loins. This was going to be a tricky meeting, so it was, and no mistake. He banged his gavel on the desk and cleared his throat.

"Right then, boyos, I call this meeting to order. We've got a fair bit to get through, look you, so let's get to it. First up, a reading of the minutes from the last meeting...." He looked over his glasses at Jones the Calligraphy who was taking notes in intricate and painstaking detail.

"... *to order*..." Jones the Calligraphy added some embellishment to the 'r' before becoming aware that everyone was looking at him. "What?"

Dai sighed. "You write a bee-yootiful hand, so you do bach, but I'm curious why you applied for the job."

Jones the Calligraphy scratched his beard. "I heard you were short-handed."

"No-ooo, I'm pretty sure we wanted someone who could *take* shorthand. But I have to say, your minutes are a thing of wonder, so they are." *Pity they turn out to be weeks rather than minutes*, he thought. "Never mind, let's skip reading the minutes. There's important business to attend to by here, see? It's been pointed out by concerned parties", he inclined his head towards Frosty the Snowman, who was looking decidedly melty round the edges, "that we need to reduce our carbon footprint." He paused, awaiting the inevitable. *And three .. two ..*

"Oh, now I say," interjected Santa. "I defy anyone to get down some of those sooty chimneys without picking up a bit of dust ..."

... *there we go*.
"... and I admit my boots are a little on the large side, but I don't exactly trample it into the carpet...."

"Yes, not *quite* what I was meaning, your Jollyness," Dai interrupted. "No, what I'm after saying is that we need to try to be more *green*, but. More environmentally friendly, isn't it? Now we've had a bunch of these scientist boyos looking into ways we can improve, and they've come up with this here list."

He took a deep breath.



"Right then, if we can look at making the reindeer more green first ..."

"Not ... not the *nose!*" gasped Santa. "No, no. Rudolph's fine. It's actually the ... er... *other* end that's the problem, as it were." Dai tugged at his collar and wished it wasn't his turn to be chair. Jones the Calligraphy, meanwhile, dipped his pen in the inkpot again and began tracing a delicate *footprint*.

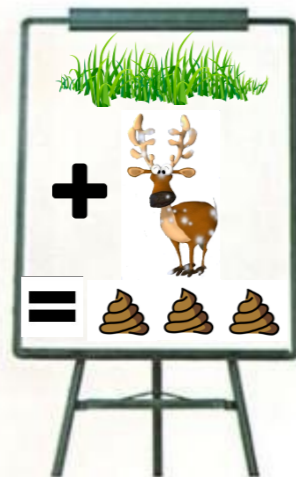
"Look you, what I'm trying to say is that we need to think about our output!" declared Dai.

Jones the Sack raised a hand. "I thought productivity was up?"
"Oh, it is, lad, it is. And I'm not talking about off the production line either, that's the very problem," said Dai flatly. "See now, let me hand over to Jones the Pooper Scooper to brief you."

As Dai's meaning dawned, everyone round the table recoiled a little bit, except Jones the Pooper Scooper who was now in his element. *(A visual, we'd suggest, it's best not to linger over)*.

Jones the Pooper Scooper walked around to a chart on an easel in the corner and flipped the front sheet back.

Some of the younger elves snorted, but most of the audience were speechless.



"Grass," Jones the Pooper Scooper began, thumping the top of the chart with a wooden pointer, "goes in. Poop," he smacked the bottom of the chart, "comes out. I thank you."

He walked back to his seat and sat down, leaving most everyone still staring open-mouthed at the graphic tableau on the chart.

"Well," said Dai eventually. "Duw. That was a very ... brief ... briefing, wasn't it, but? Mind, they do say a picture paints a thousand words." He looked at the chart again. Mostly it painted one. Write large. "Okaaaay, so what the lad may have skated over ..." he winced at the turn of phrase " .. er.. skimmed over .. No!" He took a deep breath. "Look you, in point of fact, the motion in front of us ..." several elves sniggered and Dai banged his head off the table a couple of times. "Duw, duw, duw. Let's all just settle down, right? What I mean to say is that we have ourselves a bit of a problem with emissions, see? Methane emissions, if I have to be particular, and let me tell you, lads, I'd considerably rather not. But those clever scientist boyos have worked out what's caused the hole in the ozone layer at the North Pole, and it's a tragedy so it is, because it turns out it's Dancer, Prancer, Donner, Blitzen, Comet, Vixen, Cupid, Dasher and Rudolph!" *Especially Comet*, thought Dai. *If you'd seen him that first week he arrived, soaring through the sky with that blazing trail behind him. Full of beans, he was ... Course, we took them off the menu after that, and you have to say that Frosty's been a sight more careful with his matches since too.*

"So the thing is, see, we need to look at a change of diet for them."

"What, like they have to go vegetarian?" asked Jones the Ribbon (who may have had a room temperature IQ, but he did tie a beautiful bow).

"They're already vegetarian, bach. No, apparently we need to get them eating ..." he looked at his notes and his eyebrows rose ... "*seaweed?*" He scratched his head and stared out the window, where a brisk north wind tossed a few extra inches of snow onto the bank against the stable wall.

"Any ideas lads?"

Jones the Sack raised a hand. "I propose we think about it now in a minute."

"Capital. We'll do that. Write that down."

Jones the Calligraphy, however, was still working hard on his *productivity*.



"Right, next on the agenda. Single use plastics. We've got to cut them right out, see?"

"Ah," nodded Santa, "now there I have to agree. When I ventured to change children's habits some years back ... you remember Dai?" *(See Santa Claus and the Copper Crisis - 2013)*.

"I do. I really do." *I still come out in a cold sweat sometimes in the dead of night.*

"Yes, so I was all for getting back to proper toys that last a lifetime," Santa smiled in reminiscence. "None of these plasticky things that you open up and then throw away by Christmas night, or that break in five minutes. No! Things you can hand down to your children. Your *grand ..*"

"Yes, yes. Durable, got it. But in point of fact, while that's an admirable aim, and it is, for sure, it's not actually what single use plastic means."

"No?"
"No, your Jollyness. It's about things you can't refill. Plastic cups, bags, bottles, that manner of thing."

"So my toy sack is good? I refill it every year you know."

"I do know. And your toy sack is the very epitome of sustainability, so it is."

"Good, good Oh, but what about that Tupperware box I keep mince pies in?" he asked worriedly. "It's plastic."

"But *reusable*. You don't throw it out when you've eaten the pies, do you? It's things you throw away when you've finished with them that we're talking about, see?"

"Ah. Right, I see."
"So what we need to ..."

"Oh! Oh! What about plastic drinking straws?! They'd be bad, wouldn't they?"

Dai could see the rest of the day disappearing into an endless round of *Name The Plastic*. He'd have to bring out the big guns. This was a job for ... Management Speak!

"*SO I PROPOSE*," he said loudly, to quell any other interruptions, "we assemble a steering committee ... (no that is *not* Jones the Sleigh," he said in a sharp aside to Santa, who could be guaranteed to seize the wrong end of any given stick with both hands), "... to gather reports on domestic practices *vis-à-vis* plastics usage, and, *ipso facto*, present us with a policy on sustainability. Yes," he said, holding up a hand, "I know it means thinking outside the box, so I'll touch base with a few of you later and we'll aim for some blue sky thinking, OK? Now, are we all singing from the same hymn sheet, hmmm?"

There was utter, bamboozled, silence.

And into it, while Jones the Calligraphy laboriously created *Methane*, he dropped the bombshell.



"So. Moving on. It's been suggested that .. uh... where possible, we ... er... try to fly .." he braced himself "... less."

Uproar.
"Less?!!!"
"*We only fly once a year!!*"
"*What's less than one? It's nothing! It's no-fly!!!*"

"*The children!! Oh Gawd, will nobody think of the children?!!!!*"

Dai pounded the desk with his gavel. "Order! Order!!! For the love of Croft Original, *SHUT UP!!!!*"

The furore subsided into anxious mutterings. Dai smacked his gavel a few more times till there was silence.

"Thank you. Now there's no point saying this isn't a right old conundrum, because it is, and there's the fact of it." A hand rose at the end of the table. "Yes ... ummm...?"

"*Who's that?*" he hissed in an aside to Jones the Sack.

"*Griffiths the IT Support,*" he whispered back.

"*We have IT Support?*" Dai shook his head. Who knew?)

"Yes lad? What have you got to say?" Griffiths the IT Support took his glasses off and rubbed the indentations on the bridge of his nose.

"Well, looking at this logically, from a scientific standpoint, see"

"Ah, if I could maybe interrupt you now for a minute?" said Dai. "If you're going to be after using long words and talking scientific stuff, then out of consideration for Jones the Calligraphy here, I think you might need to condense this a bit, bach. Otherwise the poor lad'll be scribing away till a week Tuesday. So let's keep it simple, but. You're saying we need to do what, exactly?"

"Nothing."
"Nothing?"

"Nothing. We've already done it."
"We've ... what?"

"Already done it," nodded Griffiths the IT Support. "Nothing more to do."

Dai looked at him, nonplussed. "If it helps," offered Jones the Calligraphy, raising a timid hand, "I've no plans till Sunday?"

"Well said, lad, that's uncommonly decent of you. There you go, then," said Dai, turning back to Griffiths the IT Support, "I think we can manage the slightly longer version."

Griffiths the IT Support leaned back in his chair. "*Welllllll*, as I see it", he said, "we visit every house in the whole world in one night, right?"

"Except for the ones with no kiddies," pointed out Jones the Ribbon.

"Or with different beliefs," added Jones the Sack.

"Yeah, like getting your presents on *New Year's Day*," said Jones the Sleigh, twirling his index finger by his temple. "Weeeee-ird."

"Or getting *coal*," said Jones the Pooper Scooper in disbelief. "Who gives coal as a present?"

"Oh no, I don't think that's a Christmas present, I think that's more of a Hogmanay thing," pointed out Santa. "You see it goes back to ..."

"*A-n-y-w-a-y*," Griffiths the IT Support raised his voice over the babble, "the point is, see, that it's impossible. Whole world in one night? Not possible." Dai scratched his head.

"But ... we do it. Every year."

"*Ex-actly!*" Griffiths the IT Support pointed a finger at him.

"What do you mean, 'exactly'?" asked Dai, crossly. *And that's IT Support all over*, he thought. *You feel stupider coming out of the conversation than you were going in.*

"No, no, no, but listen," said Griffiths the IT Support urgently. "You said we should try to fly less '*where possible*'. *Where. Possible.* Well we're not flying at all where it's possible, right? Only where it's *im*-possible. So that's it, isn't it, see? We should just carry on as we are." He nodded in satisfaction.

Dai blinked. "Well now. Well." He looked at the other elves who were in various stages of befuddlement as they tried to wrap their heads around this. Except for Jones the Calligraphy, who was busy assembling the *steering committee*.



"I think," said Dai, ticking items off his agenda, "we've cracked it, lads." *Talked about everything, achieved almost nothing. Pretty much a classic meeting.* "All that's left, look you, is to have a name for all these new directives, but. Something we can get behind. Let's throw out some watchwords, boyos!"

"Green!" shouted Jones the Sack.

"Recycling!" proposed Frosty.

"Enviren ... envinum ... green!!!" beamed Jones the Ribbon.

He tries, so he does, sighed Dai, as he translated into *environmentally-friendly*.

"Tupperware!!" offered Santa, evidently still playing *Name the Plastic*.

"Air travel!!!" from Jones the Sleigh.

Dai looked down at his scribbles. He rolled his eyes, crumpled the sheet and tossed it in the bin. *Well there's daft I am*, he thought. *As if they'd just fall into some kind of snappy acronym we could get behind*

G ... R ... E ... T ... A ...