



# Getting it Wright

**Words:** Richard Lightbody, Communication, Maersk Training

Training for any industry is of paramount importance in the drive towards creating an accident free culture and maximum efficiency. It is no less the case with a relatively new industry like wind turbines. Maersk Training is currently bringing techniques and lessons learnt in the oil and gas and maritime sectors to help increase understanding at every level in the wind turbine industry. Training programmes have been developed to involve all staff with a focus on interweaving people skills with technical standards.

The same day Orville Wright died of a heart attack, a plane with 31 passengers onboard disappeared without trace in the yet to be labelled 'Bermuda Triangle.' They were amongst no fewer than 140 people killed in air crashes worldwide that January in 1948.

Forty-five years had passed since Orville and his brother Wilbur had broken free of the earth for the first time and in that period the airplane had grown from curiosity to an essential form of transport. What the new industry had yet to learn was how to minimise the risk factor.

It is generally held today that the aviation industry has been the front-runner in the pursuit of an all-embracing safety culture. Core to the final goal of zero incidents is training and a common set of guidelines and regulations.

Traditional industries like mining and maritime, despite having longer to sort out their safety aspect short-comings, lag behind aviation despite the fact that you are more likely to get injured working under the earth and on the high seas than in the air. Like oil and gas exploration, there has been

a tendency for advancements in safety to be triggered by tragedy rather than planned desire.

'We have with the wind turbine industry the chance to grasp the challenge at a particularly opportune time,' says Frank Christoffersen, Managing Director of Maersk Training in Esbjerg. 'The good thing is that those at the helm of this relatively new industry are keen to bring all the players into the same part of the park.'

By players Christoffersen means the big OEM hardware providers, the operators and training establishments. He has seen at first-hand how the industry is eager to respond to initiatives and change. It was at Maersk Training in Esbjerg and its sister operation across the North Sea in Newcastle that the Global Wind Organisation (GWO) gave first approval to five new wind-related safety courses.

That first training package introduced certification and immediately set a base level for the industry. Since then the same course has been conducted across the world meaning that technicians have a common understanding of such vital aspects as working at heights, manual handling, fire awareness, sea survival and first aid.

'We were delighted to be the first,' says Christoffersen, 'but that wasn't the important milestone, it was when it went global that it really became a game changer. The higher we all can lift safety standards the better it is for all.'

Safety is one issue, the issue that most make number one, but Christoffersen and his team are responding to the latest development from GWO, Basic Maintenance Training (BMT).

'I believe they have been working on this for some time and that it will have a practical run out in the summer as a trial version and depending on that a more concrete formula will follow. We at Maersk Training have split the development of the four modules between Newcastle and Esbjerg, in order to create the best of a 'better learning experience' says Christoffersen.

'We'd like to be first in the field again, but that is not the important target. Getting it right is number one. We are hopeful because we have been working closely with Siemens on a similar training programme.'

The technical training is very much hands on and at the expanding Esbjerg centre they already have the facilities up and running. Beyond safety and the technical aspects Christoffersen is looking towards the next development.

'Our goal will be to create teams who support each other to such an extent that they improve performance and safety hand in hand without any lethargy ever creeping in they know that they will return home safe, good job done,' says Christoffersen who pointed out the benefits they had developed with the Danish power giant Dong Wind Energy.

For the first time they focused a training programme around leadership which went from the shop floor up to the control room. In three sessions, with a gap in between to allow for reflection and development, the guys from the storeroom, the office and the offshore technicians met and were

encouraged to share experiences by a team of instructors experienced in people skills.

By exchanging job practices they opened up the often confusing secrets of their individual workplaces. As one storeman put it 'now when they (the technicians) ask for something I immediately see why they are asking. With the open knowledge of their work needs I also respond by asking questions in a different way.'

Maersk Training has been combining technical and people skills for some time now. Using highly advanced simulators they have developed performance enhancement courses that bring as many as 60 people together. For this they create life-like scenarios that push crews to new levels of performance through greater understanding of what the other person does. 'It removes the "them and us" stigma which is a blight on any attempt to build a properly functioning team,' says people skills head, Morten Kaiser.



Frank Holst Christoffersen, Managing Director at Maersk Training in Esbjerg showing the technical training facility



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This has proved particularly useful with drilling crews and following the Dong experience at Horn Reef 2 off the Danish coast, they believe the opportunities in the turbine industry are as great. The workplaces may be very distinctive, the challenges different, the dangers unequal, but the result the same – a rounded workforce where everyone understands and appreciates the needs and contribution of others.

The buzzword in much of today’s work environment is communication. The days are long gone of the factory boss who saw workers as numbers and the Situational Leadership course gives them all a voice. ‘It removes the stigma of silence,’ says Kaiser, ‘it opens ears . . .and eyes.’

Frank Christoffersen doesn’t see simulation as being today’s answer to turbine training, maybe tomorrow, but not today. ‘The industry is still coming together and what GWO is doing is creating a leading edge

that the big companies seem to respond to. I expect they will buy into programmes like BMT and support them for the good of the whole industry. They will of course have their own priorities and local preferences, but I will suspect they will want to build on GWO’s proposals rather than dismantle them.’

Midway between Christoffersen’s office in Esbjerg and his home in the middle of the Jutland peninsula is the monument to the man who was the Orville and Wilbur Wright of wind sourced power, Poul la Cour. The inventive Dane came up with many of the technical solutions to generating power from a supply source that was omnidirectional, uncertain and uneven.

In 1908 la Cour died knowing for five years that man could fly and perhaps suspecting that someday his use of a propeller would offer the world a viable option in terms of clean energy. The propeller was a common tool to both la Cour and the Wright brothers

and they shared a common disregard of commercial potential in favour of technical development.

The blades turned for the first time at Askov in 1891 so perhaps turbine power isn’t such a new industry; just an industry with renewed potential. Today the tower for his first wind turbine houses a small museum, frequently used by schools. In his heyday the tower also acted as a place of education and development – he’d be exhilarated by the size and generating capacity of today’s turbines and by the commitment to training.

We’ve come a long way since the 5.33 meter wing spanned Kitty Hawk and the 20KW turbine. ‘There have been dips in interest and demand since la Cour, but we are currently a focus industry,’ says Christoffersen, ‘the opportunities are there. We owe it to the pioneers and our children to get it right.’ ■

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