



With Great Apologies to Clement Clarke Moore ...

Twas the night before FY closeout at USAF,
 and the PMs were nestled all snug at their desks.
 Budgets were adjusted and figured with care
 In hopes that funding would soon show up there.
 Amounts were looked at, figured with precision.
 "Just inflate it 150%" was shouted with derision.
 Contractors scurried to minimize their risks
 Organic staff tried to amend deliverables lists.
 When out on the street there arose such a roar –
 I closed down Solitare and ambled over to the door.
 I slipped outside, hoping no one would see
 (that door was off limits during THREATCON D).
 Bright sunshine left me shaking with fear
 (with mandatory OT – hadn't seen the sun all year).
 Looking down the street, on glistening black tar,
 I spied a chubby man climb out of a beat-up old car.
 His brow was all furrowed, his face held no cheer.
 I knew in a moment – he was a Software Engineer!
 His hair was rumpled, his clothes didn't match
 his pants drooped, and he showed *just a crack*.
 His shirt was un-ironed, and his belly hung low.
 His orange tie, blue socks and brown shoes *didn't go*.
 Muttering "Sorry I'm late – last meeting over-ran,"
 he went inside, and beckoned me to stand.
 "I'm from the Pentagon – they sent me here straight.
 They're trembling in fear as your schedule is late."
 "I'm here to make changes, keep you on your toes.
 I'm here to *help* you (you know how it goes ...).
 "Get moving, and get your budget in the black.
 I have some ways to get you back on track.
 His lack of knowledge made me hang my head in shame.
 He wasn't technical; he just knew technical names.
 "Lose Jovial – C++, Ada, or Java is best.
 Language is important – does yours pass the test?"
 I tried to argue, to explain our current state.
 "Coding isn't our problem – requirements are late."
 "We can write software, but our progress is fruitless.
 Users won't say what they want – they're all clueless."
 He sighed deeply, then shook his head side to side—
 "That's been your excuse for years – no more free ride."
 "What about our process?" I tried to plea.
 But each point I had, he countered with glee.
 "We don't mind a process; we like Level 3.
 But what we want is for the process to be free.

Who cares about planning, or CMM levels,
 as long as developers are coding like devils?"
 I couldn't take his attempts to code far too quick.
 I explained our process, which made him quite sick.
 "We develop it correctly, and have a process to follow.
 Requirements with no validation are hollow.
 Once we coded blindly, now we see the light –
 We follow a process to develop software right!
 Design is important (OO does the trick)
 because undesigned code cannot be fixed!
 Now off you go – back to your boss.
 Experience shows – without a process we're lost!"
 He muttered curses, but I stuck to my guns,
 sending him back to his car on the run.
 "You don't understand" he said, driving out of sight.
 "You have time to do it over, but not to do it right!"
 "I understand well," I said, "I understand fine.
 If you want quality software, it just takes time!"
 I don't want to seem obstinate, rude, nor surly.
 But if you want quality, plan for it early."

—Dave Cook, Draper Labs, and Les Dupaix, STSC

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