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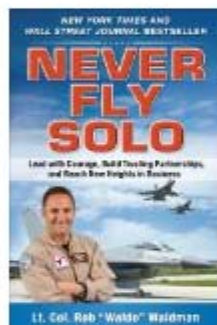
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## Book Review of "Never Fly Solo" Written by Lt. Col. Rob "Waldo" Waldman

January 24, 2010 by [Karen St. John](#) · [1 Comment](#)



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### [Never Fly Solo: Lead with Courage, Build Trusting Partnerships, and Reach New Heights in Business \(Hardcover\)](#)

By (author) Robert "Waldo" Waldman

Originally developed by General Dynamics, the F-16 fighter jet is a beautiful fighting machine. A single-engine super sonic "dogfighter," the F-16 can reach a maximum speed of over Mach 2 (Mach 1 breaks the sound barrier). No longer being purchased by the Air Force, the F-16 fighter jet is still being built by Lockheed Martin and exported to other countries.

Chuck Yeager was a fighter pilot who, in 1947, became the first pilot to break the sound barrier. And in October 2009 at precisely 10:00 A.M., Brigadier General Yeager and Major General Engle opened the Edwards Air Force Base Air Show with a pair of sonic booms from their F-16 aircraft flying high above the crowd at 30,000 feet. Once a pilot, always a pilot.

Yeager had to have it all – skill, discipline, intelligence, instinct, etc – to maneuver such a machine as an F-16. So did Lt. Col. Rob "Waldo" Waldman. Waldman flew F-16s, regularly breaking the sound barrier. His missions in the F-16 included Operation Desert Storm, Iraq and Serbia. But unlike Yeager, there is something very "different" about Waldman from any other pilot. In his book, *Never Fly Solo*, he makes a surprising confession: "You see, I was a claustrophobic fighter pilot with a fear of heights..."

In *Never Fly Solo*, Waldman talks about the challenges and opportunities that faced him in his chosen career. But

*Never Fly Solo* is not about being a pilot. Waldman wrote a book full of tips for being successful in business. He is upfront about his purpose in writing. The way he figures it, the lifesaving career-making tools he picked up as a claustrophobic fighter pilot could be applied to just about anything and to anyone.

The way I figure it is, if this Waldman could overcome his own personal phobia and pilot that serious a flying machine and live to tell about it, he probably had something worthwhile to say on just about anything. You do not live Waldman's life without possessing extra does of courage, integrity and fortitude, to say the least.

My logic was spot on. Waldman has a multitude of good things to say. He starts out by telling you a bit about himself. Like what happened to him was he was eight years old that started his love affair with planes. His writing flows easily, smoothly and logically. Filled with vivid descriptions and examples, he uses pilot fighter lingo but never strays from point, or leaves the reader wondering how his suggestions might actually play out in business or any other career path of a non-pilot's life. He is adamant about his first tip: be focused. He advises, "The journey can't begin until you find a mission in your work and life that is worth fighting for." He is realistic and upbeat about life: "... we're all going to get shot at, take some hits, and receive some battle damage. The key is let's not get shot down."

Why care about us non-pilot folks?

Waldman may have been a pilot, but he is a "wingman" by nature and proud of it. Wingman: someone who watches out for you; you have their back and they have yours. He lives by that code and is quick to advise everyone to always be and have a wingman in your life.

The need for a wingman environment in our lives, and any hesitation at the thought, is something Waldman understands. "Nobody likes to hear they have blind spots – areas of vulnerability – but our blind spots are there whether or not we're aware of them."

To understand Waldman's strong desire to help the rest of us seek out and establish this type of cooperative environment, one has only to look again at Brigadier General Yeager's attitude *after* he made history. In 1953, he climbed on board a plane and made new history breaking the sound barrier. Only this time, he was in a Canadair Sabre as a *wingman* for Jackie Cochran, the first woman pilot to break the barrier. If such a man as Brigadier General Yeager can serve as someone else's wingman, it is not surprising that another successful pilot is encouraging us to do the same. "Winners never fly solo," Waldman believes. There is only one team, one mission. "While self-leadership is critical to any business endeavor, the only way to maximize your potential, fulfill your mission – and the mission of your organization – and reach new heights is with the help of others, through authentic partnerships." With an environment of watching each other's back, Waldman makes a strong case that success is more likely, and easier.

Establishing a wingman environment, never flying solo, only works with effective communication, honest feedback and mutual support. Waldman makes no claim of being perfect and is quick to offer up his own mistakes as part of the human condition. When you make a mistake, he says, it is vitally important to gaining back trust. He suggests asking yourself, "What will the consequences be if I don't fess up' and I am found out?" If you can't abide by the rules, he adds, you have no business being in that position.

Waldman frequently sums up his tips for establishing a positive business environment, but it all begins with personal standards and being consistently the same person to everyone. He insists that you must embody the same qualities of the one you depend upon. And it all begins with integrity. "Your integrity affects everyone," Waldman states. "Integrity should not be a choice. Integrity should be instinctive." Even when nobody is looking.

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One of Waldman's comments eerily brought up a reminder of the recent, self-imposed chaos that a certain celebrity golfer has placed in his life. Waldman stated of people without high personal standards, "Their image is more important than their integrity, and in the end, they have neither."

There are multiple insights in *Never Fly Solo* that can be readily applied to any situation. One example is Waldman's helpful and astute distinction between inner and outer energies that drag you down. "Parasite" drag comes from negative relationships that sap your energy, pollutes your space and gives nothing in return. It stifles your creativity or neglects your best skills. "Induced" drag comes from within and is harder target to get rid of, like counter productive habits, self-limiting beliefs or fears. He suggests ways to minimize their effects and achieve "lift."

Waldman is not a Pollyanna, He knows "bad weather" is inevitable, and regards it as the time when character and skills get put to the test. In such conditions, he has hints for gaining back your equilibrium. He calls it his "Three Rs:" refocusing, refueling and retooling. He recommends remembering the three most important words in the English language: "I need help."

Even with all the tips for being successful, Waldman knows that "...not every mission is full of glory and winning. Sometimes it is just about coming back." The job of surviving is almost never fun, and sometimes, when you cannot find meaning in the mission, do not feel it is a higher calling or there is no one to save or to help, you may have to "abort" and go on to another mission. He has followed his own advice, only quitting after he felt he had earned the right to do so. He advises doing what he has done: dust yourself off, find another mission worth flying and get back to work planning a new mission buddy system.



There is still other good news. Waldman's *Never Fly Solo* tips are good enough to apply to more than just business. The tips would work beautifully for anyone in politics, government and yeah, even relationships. It is not hard to figure out why. When you pair integrity and trust and transfer it with healthy individualism into any environment, how could you not but jump out of bed each morning, eager to face your to-do list?

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Lastly, the tips Waldman gives are continuously popping back up in your mind. Why? Because they are not just about being successful in business...they are about being successful in living.