



New Day, New Jet

How to Face Each Day With Courage and Fly to Your Potential

By Lt. Col. Rob "Waldo" Waldman

The air-conditioned briefing room felt as cold as ice as I waited for the arrival of my instructor. I was a bundle of nerves. One more "busted" check ride would put me one flight away from washing out of undergraduate pilot training. My dream of becoming a fighter pilot hung by a thread. I began to doubt myself.

What if I mess up again? What if I forget to call "gear down" on final approach or fail to apply the proper spin recovery procedures? I repeatedly chair flew the maneuvers over and over and knew what needed to be done, but kept replaying the previous flights I failed in my head. I second-guessed myself and my confidence dwindled. The sweat poured down my back.

In walked the instructor who would decide my fate: Major Jerry Free. A former F-4 fighter pilot who had little tolerance for mediocrity and laziness, he stood 6' 3" with buzz-cut hair and shiny boots. I was intimidated, to say the least.

Not knowing what to expect, I stood at attention, braced myself and saluted smartly.

He saluted back, looked me in the eyes and reached over to shake my hand. "OK, Waldo, it's a new day, new jet! Are you ready to pass this flight, or what?"

He smiled.

Suddenly, the energy of the room shifted and I instantly felt more confident. All the stress and anxiety I had bottled up exploded out of me like a bullet. My mind became clearer as I thought to myself, "I can do this. Today, I'm going to fly like an eagle." Major Free believed in me.

New day, new jet. Wow! I never heard that expression before. But somehow, those four words and the man who spoke them instantly changed my attitude from FEAR to FOCUS — from anxiety to action. I was ready to fly.

Some of you may be facing similar predicaments in your life that are testing your resolve, skill and focus. Perhaps you are experiencing financial challenges or are having concerns at

work as your company and clients adapt to our volatile economy. Missed sales quotas, budget cuts and lost customers plague us. No mission is ever perfect, and neither are we.

We're all human and have our limits. But sometimes, when we're stuck and full of doubt, we underestimate our power to overcome adversity and perform at our best. We focus on our past failures and can't see the light at the end of the tunnel of success because our vision is darkened by our fear of future failure. We pull back the throttle of performance instead of pushing it up. In essence, we let our past define our future. This is the greatest challenge we face when dealing with adversity.

But I believe there is no reason for us not to live up to our potential each day and perform at our best. Fear and doubt are distractions that can demotivate us and pull us off course. Don't let yesterday's failure define you. It's how you respond that counts.

And while I do believe it's critical for us to remain positive in tough times, no amount of motivation is going to replace the fundamentals of hard work and preparation. You have a job to do. You have the aircraft and are ultimately in control of your own jet. The question is: Are you better prepared to fly today than you were yesterday?

Success begins with self-trust.

As you strap into your jet each day and conduct a preflight "attitude check," ask yourself:

- Am I focused on my past failures or my past successes?
- How have I improved from yesterday to today?
- What actions will I take today to plant the performance seeds for tomorrow?

You can't philosophize your way to success. The world (and your customers) is growing tired of rhetoric and philosophy. Today, we need performers who can get the job done.

But sometimes, no matter how much you prepare, it's impossible to break the performance barrier on your own. So, here's the next and most important question you should ask

when fear and doubt hold you back from flying your jet: Who are the wingmen in my life I can call on to help me fly?

Winners never fly solo.

Wingmen inspire us. Wingmen give us hope and lend a "helping wing." Wingmen reflect our greatness back at us and help us release the brakes holding us back from success as we face each new day with courage. They don't fly our jet for us, but rather give us confidence in our own abilities. They alter our mindset from "I can't" or "I won't" to "I can" and "I will."

My challenge to you is not to be inhibited from calling out to your wingmen for some encouragement when you're not quite up to that tough mission. Ask for help. Be vulnerable. We're all taking hits. Today it might be you. Tomorrow it might be them.

But don't forget to be a wingman to others as well. Keep an eye out for your colleagues who are struggling and who might benefit from a little lift as they prepare for that job interview or big sales presentation. Like Major Free, be a shining light and inspire them to realize their fullest potential.

In business and life, yesterday's clouds can block us from seeing today's blue skies. Let us not forget that each day is a new day and we're blessed to have a jet to fly.

In the end, I passed my flight with Major Free because he made me realize that I was good enough to fly.

You are good enough. You've got wings. And you've got wingmen.

It's a new day, new jet. Now go and fly!

Push it up!

Lt. Col. Rob "Waldo" Waldman is a former combat-decorated fighter pilot with corporate sales experience. Known as "The Wingman," he is an inspirational peak performance speaker and uses fighter pilot strategies to build teamwork, leadership and trust in highly competitive environments. Waldo's clients include Aflac, Hewlett-Packard, Nokia, Bank of America, John Hancock and The Home Depot. To download his Top Gun Motivation mission briefing, visit www.YourWingman.com, e-mail info@yourwingman.com or call 1-866-925-3616. ■