

# Release the Brakes and Fly Without Fear

You can break the safety fear barrier at work.

**A**s I write this article at my favorite Starbucks, I can't help but hear the conversation next to me. A middle-aged woman is having a coffee meeting with a peer; they discuss job opportunities, the market, and their personal networks. It's obvious that she's lost her job due to cutbacks and is networking like mad, reaching out to her wingmen and exploring job opportunities. Sound familiar?

We all know someone who recently lost a job or who is struggling with their business. The economy is tough today. Sales are down, credit is tight, budgets are being slashed, and jobs are being cut. And when you consider the folks who are working in your factories, hospitals, and construction sites, they come in to work every day with this burden on their shoulders. Their 401(k)s are down, and many are at risk of losing their jobs, too. Stressed out and anxious, we've all been affected. It's just reality.

We can't control Wall Street, but what we can control is *how we react* to what's going on. When adversity strikes, we have two choices: We either fear or we lead.

If we fear, we *crawl* out of bed—*anxious, worrisome—and focus on what we don't have. We become strangled with doubt and strap into our jet, ready to take off, but push up the throttle with the brakes on. Doubt is what prevents us from releasing our brakes and ultimately destroys the warrior spirit. It kills discipline, focus, and attention to detail—the core components of a safe work environment. When corners get cut and procedures aren't followed, accidents happen.*

If we lead, we *jump* out of bed, acknowledge our fear (hey, it's normal to be afraid when adversity strikes!), and then give *thanks* for what we have. We gather our resources, plan the day's mission, and then take action. We focus on doing, not doubting . . . on performance, not philosophy. We understand that we're in control of our jet and are ultimately responsible for creating a safe, productive work environment.

Here's the question you have to ask yourself during adverse conditions on the job: Will you fear or lead?

In turbulent times like today with the missiles being launched, we have to be warriors, not worriers. Warriors confront the reality of their fears and then lead by taking action. When I flew in combat with my wingmen, sure, we were scared. Sure, we had doubt. But when it came time to execute, we prepared relentlessly and then took action as a team. We felt confident because we weren't flying solo and knew we could count on each other for mutual support. Most importantly, we focused on our actions, not on our attitude.

At work, attitude alone won't get you to takeoff and keep you safe. Yes it's important, but, ultimately, you have to take action for

positive change to occur. Attitude gives the thrust, but action provides the vector. You have to release the brakes on your jet and roll down the runway with *knowledge of procedures, a safety target, and a flight plan*, knowing full well what the stakes are if you fail. I know it can be overwhelming, and it isn't easy staying focused and prepared at work. But, let's face it, the greatest safety results often require the greatest effort and risk.

I want to emphasize that being a modern-day safety warrior at work isn't about combat. It's about commitment, courage, and accountability. It's about fighting for a cause that means something.

Warriors fight to keep those they serve safe, but they also fight for freedom, peace, family, and love. Warriors work. Warriors live by the credo, "*The more you sweat in peace, the less you bleed in battle.*" They plan and train with discipline and intensity and put forth the effort so they never have to go to battle and deal with a safety violation. As the great Chinese general and military strategist Sun Tzu wrote in "The Art of War," the greatest victories in war are the ones that are never fought.

Most importantly, *warriors are a beacon of hope for those in need.* In essence, warriors are wingmen. Warriors are your co-workers who set the safety example by complying with OSHA rules and regulations, who have your back at work and make sure you're not doing anything stupid, or who take your keys when you've been drinking. They give their love and advice freely but also help you be accountable to the most important wingman in your life: yourself!

Warriors are wingmen who will do what it takes to help you turn your anxiety and fear into courage, push up your throttle, release your brakes, and take off. Warriors want you to win . . . safely.

As we deal with these uncertain economic times, I would challenge you to lead instead of fear. Rather than take the easy way out and give in to your fear, make the tough call and have the courage to take the right action to maintain safety and performance standards at work. When the missiles of adversity are fired, pray for the discipline and strength to be a safety warrior for your customer, your co-workers, and for those who lack the courage to release the brakes on their own. They need you to be their wingman—a warrior with a heart. Never Fly Solo! **OHS**



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