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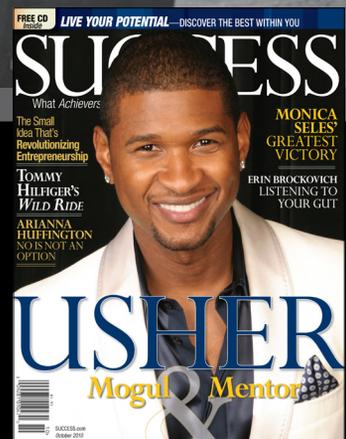
MISSION: EXCELLENCE

How you respond to challenges determines the altitude you'll reach in life.

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Courtesy of Waldo Waldman

MISSION:

How you respond to challenges determines the altitude you'll reach in life.

I imagine being strapped into a single-seat fighter jet at 25,000 feet above enemy territory. You tear through the pitch-black sky at the speed of sound in a cockpit so small there's barely enough room to shrug your shoulders. You must maintain laser-like focus as you operate dozens of weapons and sensors and fend off surface-to-air missiles.

This was a typical day in my life as an F-16 fighter pilot. But despite the challenges of combat, I loved every minute of my U.S. Air Force career. I was constantly pushed to my limits and challenged to break my performance barriers. Because in addition to the missiles I faced in combat, I also faced the missiles of adversity and fear. My battles didn't just occur over the skies of Iraq; they happened each day as I struggled to overcome my fear of failure, self-doubt and a lifelong battle with claustrophobia.

You and I have more in common than you may think. Sure, I've flown fighter jets, but we both have to dodge the missiles of change, fear and adversity as we seek to fulfill our mission objective. The flight path to success is never easy, and to stay on target we have to earn our wings every day.

Regardless of profession, missiles will threaten to keep us from reaching our potential. How we respond to those challenges will ultimately determine the altitude we reach in life. I learned many powerful lessons in combat that helped me break my performance barriers, and I would like to share four of them with you. They have worked for me as a pilot, entrepreneur and professional speaker, and I am confident they will work for you.

PUSH IT UP: Commitment is attitude in action.

Before flying a mission in the 35th Fighter Squadron in Korea, my wingmen and I called out three words while simulating pushing the throttle to full power. Those words were "Push it up!" It meant we were 100 percent committed to the mission and had each other's backs.

In today's constantly changing and stressful world filled with budget cuts, layoffs and limited resources, it's not a matter of *if* the missiles of adversity will come your way, it's *when*. The key is not to get shot down. The question you must ask yourself is, are you willing to face the missiles or will you abort the mission because of your fear?

Courtesy of U.S. Air Force



EXCELLENCE

by Waldo Waldman



Winners work. They sweat, sacrifice and take action.

You have a choice each day: You can either push it up and stay committed to your mission, or you can pull it back and allow yourself to be discouraged by adversity. The key is to take action. Living up to your potential means resisting the temptation to ease up and pull back on the throttle of commitment when the missiles start flying. This is where your character and courage are tested. Growth comes when you face the missiles and stay the course to reach your goals.

This type of commitment takes effort and discipline. One of my favorite sayings is, “The more you sweat in peace, the less you bleed in battle.” Winners work. They sweat, sacrifice and take action. They avoid becoming complacent when things are going well. Remember, complacency kills.

MISSION-READY: Preparation leads to confidence and success.

One thing was certain when my wingmen and I strapped into our F-16s: We never flew by the seat of our pants. We prepared relentlessly, studied the threat, and knew our tactics inside and out. By the time we took off, we were mission-ready. One of the keys to our planning success was our focus on “chair flying” every possible contingency. We *mentally rehearsed* every missile launch, engine failure and aircraft malfunction. We did this on the ground, so that in the heat of battle, we would be able to confidently execute the plan.

How do you prepare for your missions? Are you mission-ready? Do you execute a well-prepared plan, or do you fly by the seat of your pants and simply react when adversity strikes? Preparation is a critical factor to reaching your potential. Study your competition, stay current on new technologies, attend seminars on personal development, leverage social media to build your brand and practice responses to business objections *before* heading into battle. When you rehearse for success, you’re much more likely to achieve it. Preparation leads to confidence and confidence builds trust. Trust sells. Remember, wingmen never “wing it!”

CHECK SIX: Mutual support inspires trust and leads to success.

When I was a young instructor pilot, I committed a major faux pas by missing a critical flight briefing. I accidentally slept through my alarm, and my negligence cost the squadron valuable training



Courtesy of U.S. Air Force



Courtesy of Waldo Waldman

Hear about
Waldo Waldman's
journey from
Air Force pilot to
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Love Lifts. Fear Drags.

by Waldo Waldman

What gives meaning to your mission? What is it you love? Is it your children, church or vacation home? Only you know what it is that lifts you. Whatever it is, don't lose sight of it or you'll lose the fight. When you focus on what you love rather than your fear, you can break past the barrier limiting your potential to reach new heights.

The Seven Rules of WINGMANSHIP

W—WIN. Win stands for "work it now." Plan on hitting the target or don't fly at all. Be willing to sacrifice and do the hard work necessary to win. Effort is the impetus to action.

I—INTEGRITY. Integrity is the foundation for trust and the most important core value in building a long-term, successful business. Integrity means you are a person of your word. You do what you say you will do and you honor your commitments.

N—NOW. Wingmen operate on a "now timeline." Do what's necessary to take action now and resist the temptation to procrastinate and become complacent.

G—GENEROUS. Wingmen give unconditionally. Give your time, advice and feedback to others. Most importantly, give your focus. Be the type of person others can come to for help, and you'll always have others there for you when you call out "Mayday."

M—MISSION-READY. Preparation is critical for success. Discipline yourself to study the competition and your customer, hone your skills and "chair-fly" your missions. Finally, build cohesive relationships before the missiles of adversity and change are launched.

A—ACCOUNTABLE. You, and no-one else, must be fully accountable for results. Own them. Never outsource responsibility. Ultimately, you're the mission commander of your aircraft.

N—NEVER FLY SOLO. Always lend your wings to others in need and be willing to ask for help. "Walk the flight line," and connect with your co-workers, vendors and customers by learning their business and challenges. Finally, treat others as people first. When you do, your wingmen will become more loyal and stay committed to the mission.

time. I was subsequently grounded from flying that day, and I expected to be reprimanded by my commander (a rather intimidating officer whose call sign was "Psycho.") But instead of the reprimand I expected, he asked a few questions that changed my opinion of him as a leader. "This isn't like you Waldo. You're never late. Are you feeling all right? Is everything OK at home?" His questions surprised me, but they also made me feel appreciated.

Psycho showed me he cared by the questions he asked. He connected with me as a person, not just a fighter pilot. In fighter-pilot lingo, Psycho was checking my six.

Fighter pilots provide mutual support by checking six, or watching for threats in their wingman's most vulnerable blind spot—directly behind them (i.e., their six o'clock). Checking six is about keeping an eye out for the missiles being fired at your teammate, co-worker or friend. It means helping them see what they cannot. It also means respecting your wingmen, being receptive to critical feedback and having the courage to give honest feedback.

We all have blind spots, negative habits and personal emergencies that may limit our potential. But when we have a wingman in our formation who has our best interest in mind and who can see what we can't, we're less likely to get shot down.

How are you acknowledging, appreciating and connecting with your wingmen? Do you have the courage to tell them what they need to hear and not just what they want to hear? Are you checking their six or are you checking out?

When you build a *check-six culture* of mutual support at work and at home, you help create an environment of trust where people aren't afraid to make mistakes or take risks. Most important, it helps people to push it up and take action when the missiles start flying.

RELEASE YOUR BRAKES: Find the courage to face your fears and take off.

The greatest factor in limiting our potential is fear. I remember

being overwhelmed by fear on many combat missions. Rather than trying to eliminate it, I learned to shift my focus by "thinking outside my cockpit." I looked outside to my wingmen and realized that even though I was flying alone, I wasn't flying solo. Their support gave me confidence and helped dissipate my fear. I also looked down at a picture of my niece and nephew. They reminded me of what was important in my life, and how I needed to get back home for *them*. They gave meaning to my mission and helped me build the courage to push up my throttle, release the brakes and take off. **S**

