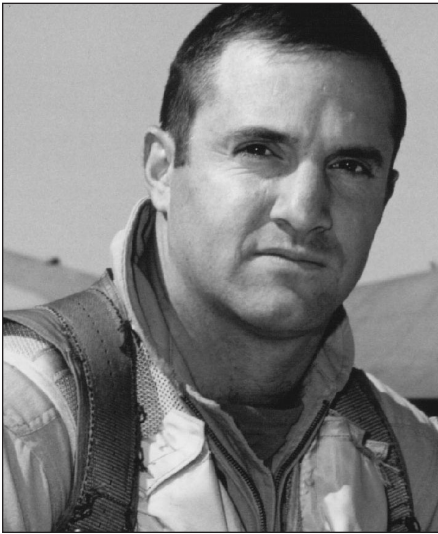


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## Speakers Bureaus: Wingmen for Success!

By Rob Waldo Waldman



In today's furiously competitive business environment, the organization that promotes and embraces a culture of teamwork and trust wins...and wins big. Winning, and not just surviving, requires companies to be **proactive**, anticipating strategic and operational changes *before* they occur. Moreover, gaining market superiority requires more than superior products, exemplary service, or leading edge technology. It requires motivated, skilled, talented and **trusted people!**

**Enter the wingman!** As a former Air Force fighter pilot with over 65 real-world combat missions, I depended upon my wingmen—those men and women in the air *and* on the ground that aided me in accomplishing my missions. Fighter pilots never fly in combat alone. Like a flock of high-flying eagles, we always fly in formation. True, my training and preparation were extremely important. But the ultimate reason for my success on those stressful and hostile missions—and quite frankly the reason I am alive to write about it—was my team.

In combat, I trusted my wingmen to provide support when I needed them the most. From the pilots of my formation, to the weather forecaster, to the maintenance crew, each was a critical link in the chain of success. If one link was weak, then the success of our mission and our lives were at risk! When operating a \$30 million jet at twice the speed of sound over hostile terrain, dodging surface-to-air missiles, and pulling up to

9G's (that's 9 times your bodyweight!), there is little to no margin for error!

Each member of my team had a specific responsibility in combat. We **briefed our plan** before every mission so that everyone involved knew exactly what was expected. This briefing **promoted trust amongst all wingmen**, and subsequently reduced the anxiety and stress of going into combat. Finally, we fostered a 'check-6' attitude in everything we did. 'Check-6' technically means looking behind you (at your six-o'clock position) for the threat. In combat, a fighter pilot's most vulnerable position is at his or her six-o'clock, because that is the most difficult area to cross check. Fighter pilots constantly check each other's '6' and trust each other to do so. There is so much going on in combat, it's comforting to know that we are all checking each other's 6 and providing mutual support to survive and win. It's a **relationship** that literally saves lives!

For all of us in the speaking industry, there are countless opportunities to work as a team and win. As a professional speaker, I realize that the trusting relationships I have developed with my fellow speakers, independent contractors, and vendors have been vital to my success. Graphics artists, web designers, printing companies, speaker coaches...they all have contributed to my speaking victories. So many of us try to do it all and often find it difficult to 'outsource our mind' and ask for help. It is so important to utilize those 'wingmen' in our lives that are experts in areas where we are not.

One of the greatest resources we have as speakers is that of a speakers' bureau, yet so many of us take this relationship for granted and forget to do the 'little things' that build trust with our bureau partners. Sometimes we forget that we cannot do our jobs as professional speakers alone, as single-ship fighter pilots. It takes assistance from our bureau wingmen to bring us the business we need to truly excel and stay profitable in the speaker industry. Bureaus should be part of your overall marketing and sales strategy and supplement your direct sales and marketing efforts. It simply makes good business sense to leverage this valuable resource.

In developing trusting relationships with bureaus, we may want to ask these questions:

Do we take the time to study the web site and business model of a bureau we are trying to establish a relationship with *before* we contact them?

Are we passing on leads we obtain at events to the bureau that booked us?

When we receive an inbound call from a prospective client, do we ask how they heard about us and, if appropriate, pass this lead to the specific bureau?

When possible, are we distributing 'bureau friendly' presentation folders, fee menus, and videos to the bureau?

Are we keeping detailed records of our bureau's business practices and logging which of our engagements are actually booked by bureaus?

Bureaus may want to ask these questions when working with speakers:

Are you 'checking 6' for your speaker partners and keeping us informed?

Are you doing your part in promoting our expertise to your clients?

Do you seek to understand our talents, uniqueness, and what our business objectives are?

Do you provide feedback on our materials and help us to adapt to our changing environment when appropriate?

I think it is critical that we remember to thank each other on occasion, and not to take our relationships for granted. We should treat each other as partners in success and as extensions of our offices. Just like fighter pilots, we're all trying to effectively perform our missions, differentiate ourselves in a highly competitive environment, and win!

Having a 'check 6' relationship with your bureau partners will reap many rewards. The speaking industry requires a teamwork approach, and we should trust each other to do not only what is right from a business perspective, but from a people perspective as well.

So, next time you meet with your speakers bureau wingmen, shake their hand, and say, **"I'm Proud to be your Wingman!"**

Remember, it's all about relationships!

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