

BREAK RIGHT!!

How to Survive the Missiles of Life

by Waldo Waldman

Picture this: It's a crisp, clear spring day and you're participating on a combat mission in the "no-fly zone" in southern Iraq. You're flying 550 knots at 22,000 feet with your wingman, who is 2 miles away and exactly 90 degrees to your right. You are both scanning for enemy aircraft, surface to air missiles (SAMS), and radar activity. Over half of your time is spent "checking six"—looking behind you and your wingman to check for unseen threats or movement.

Suddenly, you hear your wingman scream over the radio. "Break right, Break right! Missile launch your 5 O'clock!!" Your heart jumps and adrenaline rushes through your veins as your fight or flight reflexes take over. It's time to act and act now! Instinctively, you crank the stick to the right, bank the aircraft 90 degrees, and pull back as hard as you can as the g forces compress you back into the seat.

You lower the nose, dispense chaff and flares to help break the radar lock, and strain your neck while looking behind you to get a "visual" of the missile. The smoke plume of the missile exhaust becomes easily visible as you continue the maneuver to avoid its flight path. Fortunately for you, it detonates 1,000 feet from your aircraft. It looks surreal.

Before you can relish the victory, you realize that you're now "low and slow"—a perfect target for additional SAMS. Panic ensues once again as you climb to gain altitude while continuing to scan for missiles... and your wingman! You need to regain mutual support. As if reading your mind, he calls out on the radio, "Two, your visual is left 10 O'clock, 3 miles, high!" You focus your eyes and take a deep breath of relief as you find your wingman on the horizon, rejoin, and continue the mission. You survived!!

Just another day in the life of a fighter pilot....

What made surviving that attack possible?

1. Without hesitation, you **took your wingman's advice** when he said "Break right!"

2. You successfully **applied the evasive maneuver** procedures.

3. Your wingman **never lost sight** of you.

Each day, you're flying missions at work and at home. They may not be as intense as combat, but the pressures and threats are real. The key to winning (and not just surviving) these missions lies with your wingmen—your trusted partners. And these wingmen can be your co-workers, your supervisors, your spouse, or your best friend.

Are you aware of the wingmen in your life? Are you backing each other up, "checking six" for missile launches, and calling out "Break right" when necessary? Most importantly, when your wingman says "Break right," will you:

1. Heed their call? or,
2. Question them, doubt their credibility, or resent them for judging you?

The choice you make in that moment is critical: Heed the call and avoid getting shot down. Or ignore the warning, and you or someone you know may get hurt.

As I mentioned in my last column, being a wingman is all about trust. Trust implies respect, confidence, and even compassion. Not everyone can be your wingman, and that's why you should choose them carefully. Being a wingman also implies shared responsibility. You not only need to listen carefully (and act) when someone says "Break right," you need to be willing to call it out, as well.

Every day in the world of health and safety, you're placed in situations where you may need wingmen to help you "fly" more effectively, gain perspective, and keep your work and home environments safe. Wingmen help us gain a unique perspective

because we often fly with blinders on. It's easy to become so focused on a project that we lose sight of the big picture.

A good wingman will recognize when you're not functioning at "maximum performance." **They don't hesitate to call out a "Break right" in order to help you refocus on the mission and perhaps avoid a potentially deadly threat or safety hazard.** As first responders, construction supervisors, occupational health nurses, or physicians, it's critical to communicate and back one another up. It takes a team to get the mission accomplished. You need to make fast, accurate decisions, and rely on your extensive training to do the right things instinctively. You can't succeed unless you trust those working beside you!

The key is self leadership and accountability. It means being open to feedback and heeding the warning calls that your wingmen may send you. Then, by taking action (refocusing your attention and adjusting your flight path), you'll avoid the missiles, get back on target, and continue the mission safely and effectively.

So I invite you—my fellow wingmen—to look around the skies and identify the wingmen in your personal and professional lives that may need to hear you say "Break right!" Just as important, keep an ear out for their calls, too. Your co-workers, customers, patients, and even your lives may depend on it.

Push it up!® ■

Waldo
Your Wingman

Waldo Waldman builds team unity within organizations as a high-energy inspirational keynote speaker and leadership consultant. A former combat-decorated fighter pilot with real world corporate experience, Waldo brings an exciting and valuable message to organizations by using fighter pilot strategies as building blocks for peak performance, teamwork, and leadership. He has worked with dozens of national associations and corporations, such as Philips Medical Systems, Baptist Health, and UPS, and is president-elect of the National Speakers Association, GA Chapter. To learn more about Waldo's seminars or to register for his newsletter, "The Wingman," visit www.yourwingman.com, e-mail Waldo@YourWingman.com, or call 1-866-WALDO-16 (925-3616).