

Engaged vs. Supporting

by *Waldo Waldman*

“Survival is when you’re focused on the competition. Winning is when you’re focused on the customer!”

—Waldo Waldman

No fighter pilot ever flies a combat mission solo. We always fly as a team—with our wingmen, who provide mutual support and maximize our ability to accomplish our objectives. It’s impossible to win solo because so much needs to get done in a rapidly changing environment, and the missions are extremely complex. In order to exploit the advantages of a unified team, we assign roles and responsibilities, train accordingly, and finally, hold each other accountable!

For example, during an air to ground “engagement” when seeking to eliminate a ground target (power station, bridge, etc.), there is *always an engaged fighter pilot and a supporting fighter pilot.*

The engaged fighter:

- acquires the target
- sets up the geometry for the “attack,” and
- dispenses ordnance.

The supporting fighter:

- monitors fuel state
- keeps track of emergency airfields
- listens on the radio for intelligence updates, and
- “clears” the area for enemy aircraft or ground threats.

Mutual support is the key here. The engaged fighter must be focused on one thing and one thing only: the Target! The supporting fighter allows him/her to stay focused on the target by preventing distractions (i.e., enemy fighters) and helps to maintain and build situational awareness (“SA”). For if the engaged fighter loses focus of the target, even for a split second, the mission could fail. That’s why we have a saying in the fighter pilot world: *Loe sight, lose fight!*

This whole process is choreographed and rehearsed during the most critical phase of the planning process—the mission briefing. It is during the briefing when objectives are established, roles are

assigned, and contingency plans (the what-ifs) are made. More often than not, a great briefing leads to a great mission.

Let’s expand on Situational Awareness. SA is fighter pilots’ ability to know where they and their wingmen are at any given time, and all the variables that affect the accomplishment of the mission (weather, location of threats, altitude/airspeed, fuel state, location of emergency airfields, etc.) The higher your SA, the better your ability to make mission-critical decisions when unforeseen emergencies or changes occur. In essence, SA allows for flexibility and gives you as a leader the big picture.



WALDO WINGMAN

SA can be built (or diminished) at any time during the flight, and you must constantly scan for more information to maintain your SA.

Look at your work environment and you’ll see the same dynamics at play as you seek to maintain health and safety. If you’re working in a hospital performing surgery, the engaged “fighter” is the surgeon and the supporting wingmen are the certified registered nurse anesthetist and surgical nurses. They help to maintain and build the surgeon’s SA. The crucial elements of surgery—surgical and operative procedures, pain control, patient safety—require individual expertise and high levels of concentration and coordination. If the surgeon can’t stay focused and adapt to the rapidly changing needs of the patient, then the patient (customer) suffers.

On the factory floor or construction site, the engaged fighters are the aerial lift operators, welding technicians, and machine operators. The supporting fighters are the safety directors, foremen, construction site managers, or general contractors. Note that, in this case, *the formal leaders are in a supportive role rather than an engaged role.* This is a crucial point. *More often than not, the role of the leader is to support rather than engage.* But a critical mistake is made when leaders think they should be engaged!



Wingman Wing Tip: Know your role and don’t reverse it unless there is a clear exchange of responsibilities.

Remember: Your role as a leader (both in a formal position and as a wingman to your fellow workers) is to support your wingmen and help build their SA. They, in turn, will help you build your SA and see the big picture.

SA is built by knowing OSHA standards and regulations, operational safety protocols, lockout/tagout procedures, and continuous (up to date) training and education. Combined, they reduce risks; prevent injuries to workers, patients, customers; and create a more productive work environment. The ultimate beneficiary is the customer because your focus is on service. *Whenever you become distracted from your primary target—your customer—you transition from winning to surviving.* Your job is to win. Besides, we all know that winning is a lot more fun than surviving!

You must stay focused and coordinated as a team to win in order to ultimately serve your customer. That’s why you get a paycheck. Understanding one another’s roles, being 100 percent accountable and prepared, building SA, and *knowing who to turn to for help* are critical to your ability to be flexible and defeat the health and safety missiles that are being launched on you every day.

Push it up! ■

**Waldo
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Waldo Waldman has worked with dozens of corporations and will be the closing keynote speaker at the Region IV VPPA Annual Conference on June 22 in Orlando. To learn more about his seminars or to register for his free newsletter, “The Wingman,” visit www.yourwingman.com or call 1-866-WALDO-16 (925-3616).