

Meeting Planners



Wingmen for Success!

By Rob "Waldo" Waldman, MBA



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, the key to my success was my wingmen—those men and women in the air and on the ground that supported me in accomplishing my missions. Fighter pilots never fly in combat alone. Like a flock of high-flying eagles, we always fly as a formation. True, my training and preparation were extremely important. However, 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 individual 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 (the force of gravity nine 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 among 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 six-o'clock and trust each other to do so. There is so much going on in combat, it is comforting to know that we are all checking each other's six-o'clock and providing mutual support to survive and win. It is a relationship that literally saves lives!

In business and life, your wingmen are your trusted and reliable teammates for success. How are you operating as a team in your organization? Are you fostering a *check-6* environment of teamwork and mutual support? Do you and your leadership embrace and promote a culture of trust? How does your team respond when under attack? More importantly, how do you respond?

In the meeting industry, there are countless opportunities to build trust and work as a team to win. As a professional speaker, I realize that the trusting relationships I have developed with my fellow speakers, planners, independent contractors, and vendors have been vital to my success. Graphic artists, Web designers, and audiovisual companies...they all have contributed to my victories on the speaking platform! Many try to do it all and often find it difficult to outsource our mind and ask for help. It is so essential to utilize those wingmen that are experts in areas where we are not.

Some of the greatest resources available to you in the government meeting industry are the various associations that provide amazing educational and networking opportunities.

Would you agree that the relationship you have with the Society of Government Meeting Professionals (national level and local chapters) is absolutely critical to your success? Monthly and annual meetings, guest speakers, workshops, seminars, newsletters, *Advantage* magazine, and a variety of other services provide a tremendous resource of information. By simply attending just one meeting or workshop, you can learn techniques from industry experts and literally shave months off your learning curve.

More importantly, the relationships you develop with the individual members of SGMP can truly make a difference in your professional lives. This brings meaning to SGMP, and makes it feel like family. In developing trusting relationships with your SGMP wingmen, here are a few techniques that can make a world of difference.

- When you meet a new (or old) member, do not just exchange business cards, follow-up and contact them! While e-mails are convenient, I highly recommend making a personal phone call (this is where the true foundation of a relationship is built). Before you do, study their company Web site and marketing materials. Learn about your new wingman, their backgrounds and needs, and see if there is a way that you can personally help them with your expertise.
- Get to know your wingmen planners up close and personal! Set up a lunch or coffee meeting and share your ideas, accomplishments, and lessons learned. Invite other meeting planners to your office and have a mini brainstorm session, exchange marketing materials, and share supplier information.
- After finding out their current challenges, ask yourself...whom do I know that can help this person? Perhaps you know a past client or supplier that could use their services, or a reliable printer, caterer, or production company. Connect this planner with these folks. By doing so, everyone wins.
- Regardless if your client is internal or external, remember to treat each of them with the same level of commitment and passion. Never sacrifice your integrity, as it is the quickest way to dissipate trust between two people. The meeting industry is a tightly knit community and you never know when you will be working with that same client or supplier. Your reputation and how others perceive you in the industry is your most important asset, and you should continually strive to maximize it!

All of us in the meeting industry are trying to effectively perform our missions in a highly competitive environment every single day. Just like fighter pilots, we need to check each other's six-o'clock in order to succeed. After all, we are in this business together. Winning 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.

Therefore, next time you meet with one of your meeting planner wingmen, look them in the eye, shake their hand, and say, "I'm proud to be your wingman!"

Remember, it is all about relationships!

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