

# train your sales team

A Hands-on Guide for Sales Managers



Based on  
an interview  
with  
Waldo Waldman

This article is based on a conversation with Rob “Waldo” Waldman, founder and president of The Patriot Group, a sales and leadership consulting firm. As a professional speaker and consultant, Waldo uses his experience both in high-level sales and as a combat-decorated fighter pilot (with over 2,650 flight hours and 65 real-world combat missions in Iraq and Yugoslavia) to provide insights into the nature of leadership in the corporate setting. He can be reached at 2906 Woodruff Drive, Atlanta, GA 30080. Tel: 866/925-3616. Email: [Waldo@Yourwingman.com](mailto:Waldo@Yourwingman.com) Web: [www.YourWingman.com](http://www.YourWingman.com).

## How to Motivate Your Team

You may think that your sales job is worlds apart from the job of a fighter pilot. However, there are many similarities:

- You are both committed to short-term mission success and long-term corporate victory.
- In order to guarantee success, you both train to execute as perfectly as possible.
- You both operate amid intense conditions and under extreme pressure.
- The smallest mistake can be fatal.
- The consequences of failure, if not the loss of your life, can be at least the loss of your lifestyle.
- Each and every day, you are both fighting for your survival...and fighting to win!

Over the century that humans have taken to powered flights, military strategists have devised a highly effective method to ensure the success of flight missions. The principles behind that method are applicable, step by step, to a successful sales mission. Here are ten steps to flying your next sales mission like a jet fighter pilot.

### Phase One: Preparation

**Step 1: Achieve the right attitude (attitude determines altitude).** You may have heard the term “the right stuff.”

That refers to the attitude of confidence that a jet pilot needs to strap himself or herself into a vehicle that moves faster than the speed of sound and then start dodging airborne missiles. In sales, “the right stuff” comes from knowing your objective for the call, relentlessly preparing for the call, and getting focused on the primary mission objective, which is helping the customer. Get enthusiastic about this opportunity to be of service. Enthusiasm breeds confidence and confidence absorbs fear, which is the greatest deterrent to sales success. Remember: Fear prevents you from taking risks, and prospects never buy from fearful salespersons. Rather than worry about your commission or quota, turn the focus away from yourself and focus instead on your customer and what you need to do to help them solve their problems. In essence, when you help your customer to win, you’ve achieved victory in your mission.

**Step 2: Gather intelligence.** Before any flight mission, pilots gather every bit of information they can about the environment into which their jets will be flying – not just

Watch Rob Waldman online.





## Reps' Frequently Asked Questions

**Q:** How do I handle a question or objection for which I haven't prepared?

**A:** Use the three most powerful words that a sales rep knows: "I don't know." Admitting that you don't know the answer to something actually increases your credibility – as long as you add that you'll find out the answer and get back to them. And then do that, as quickly as you possibly can.

**Q:** When I make a sales call I'm alone, so why do I need to think about wingmen?

**A:** While it's possible to think of a single sales call as a mission, the overall sales process is the actual campaign. Your wingmen – the rest of your organization – will determine whether or not you can really deliver on your promises to the customer. They are your trusted and reliable partners (tech support, customer service, IT, administration, etc.) It is best if you know what they're capable of achieving – before you go on a sales call.

**Q:** When is it appropriate to ask my "wingmen" for help?

**A:** The first time that you encounter a problem that you can't solve, you should consult your corporate wingmen – such as your sales manager and others – to get the help you need. Your organization should embrace an environment where it's ok to ask for help. However, part of your mission debriefing is to learn from the experience...which means that you shouldn't need to call for help on the same subject more than once.

enemy positions, but every aspect of the situation that might have an effect on the mission. Intelligence ultimately determines tactics and it has to be on time, from various sources, and as accurate as possible. In sales, you gather intelligence by studying the customer's Website, press releases, current vendors, and your competition. Find out what clients you currently have who are in that customer's industry or located in that customer's region. Decide what questions you will need to ask that will help qualify or disqualify this lead. Decide how you are going to differentiate yourself from the competition.

## Step 3: Devise contingency plans.

Successful flight missions require pilots to expect the unexpected. Even reams of competitive intelligence can't totally dispel the "fog of war," the fact that the real world and combat conditions are likely to change, sometimes radically, from moment to moment. In sales, you build a contingency plan by asking yourself "what-if" questions: What if they challenge me with price? What if they are currently engaged with another vendor? What if they ask for a referral? Have answers to these objections ready and waiting, BEFORE picking up the phone or walking in to see the client!

## Step 4: Mentally rehearse the call.

Jet pilots always "chair fly" a mission, multiple times, before they ever come near their aircraft. They rehearse everything because it is the secret to being a Top Gun. The reason is simple: The mind doesn't know the difference between a real event and an imagined event. Therefore, envisioning the entire mission, including the effective handling of unexpected events and the final outcome, acclimatizes the mind to successful execution in the real world. In sales, this means envisioning the call in your mind – delivering your value proposal, asking the right questions, and rebutting concerns. Remember: Don't just envision a smooth mission with no problems. Instead, envision the mistakes and objections (i.e., missile launches) that might come up and mentally rehearse how you will handle them. (By the way, if you don't have a plan to handle these challenges, it's time to gather more intelligence, seek more training, or ask for help. The goal is to convince your subconscious that you've already succeeded in a perfect mission. Then, when you actually make the call, you will have the confidence that comes from feeling, in your gut, that success is a foregone conclusion.

**Step 5: Brief the mission.** Immediately prior to a mission, jet pilots always review and confirm their mission objectives, roles and responsibilities, latest intelligence, and contingencies. The purpose of this final review process is not just to mentally prepare the pilot, but also to reinforce the right attitude of confidence both individually and as a team! In sales, you should spend at least 15 minutes prior to any sales call going over everything you know about the customer, your overall plan for the sales call, your responses to objections and – this is important – the condition of your equipment. The last thing you want is for your laptop to fail at a critical moment during your presentation. More often than not, a well-executed briefing leads to a well-executed mission.

## Phase Two: Execution

### Step 6: Build Situational Awareness...

**remain aware of your situation.** Jet pilots know that the success of a mission depends upon their Situational Awareness (SA), which is their ability to perceive what's actually going on at any moment in time, such as weather, enemy threat, airspeed, location of wingmen, fuel state, and terrain. In the context of a sales call, SA means listening to the customer. Remember that listening allows you to learn about the prospect and facilitate trust. Ask questions based upon research and then listen to the responses. Continually adapt to your sales environment as it changes with every uncovering of your prospect's challenges. Remember that stress and tension reduce your ability to sense what's really going on, so remind yourself to relax and smile. Let calm and confidence direct your flight path – your customer will lead you into a safe landing.

**Step 7: Document what happens.** Jet fighters always have flight recorders that track exactly what happened at every moment of the mission. This information often proves invaluable after the flight, allowing a pilot to more easily replicate success and avoid future problems. In a sales call, your "flight recorder" is a pen and paper, your sales assistant, or a quiet keyboard if you're on the phone. Record every important detail of the call. You'll need this intelligence to refer to next time you make your call to follow up.

**Step 8: Make your go/no-go decision.** There comes a point in every flight mission where the fighter pilot needs to

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# At Your Next Sales Meeting

**Below are 12 practical steps to help your sales team better prepare for sales missions. This sales meeting should take about 45 minutes.**

- 1.** Prior to the meeting, prepare a slide summarizing the 10 steps to a successful sales mission. Send an email to everyone on the team, asking them to write down a few sentences describing a challenging sales call that they expect to make within the next two weeks.
- 2.** Open the meeting by explaining that you're going to try a sales skill exercise that's based upon the way that the military helps fighter pilots to be successful. Ask everyone to participate fully and to help the session be successful.
- 3.** Present the information on the slide, explaining how the flight mission paradigm applies to sales situations. Emphasize that this is a proven method for getting individuals to work through their fear and perform as near-to-perfect as possible. You should now be 15 minutes into the meeting.
- 4.** Ask for a volunteer. Have the volunteer read his or her description of an upcoming sales call. Note the emotional state of the volunteer during this step. Ask the volunteer what he or she is feeling after describing the difficult but impending call.
- 5.** Have the volunteer sit at the front of the room, facing you. Have three other team members sit behind the volunteer. Explain that these are the volunteer's "wingmen" who are there to help make the sales mission successful.
- 6.** Ask the volunteer to close his or her eyes and imagine that he or she has spent several hours researching the customer and the competition and now understands the customer's business thoroughly. Ask the volunteer if there has been any change in the volunteer's emotional state.
- 7.** Ask the volunteer why he or she thought the sales call would be difficult. As the volunteer surfaces any problems, objections, or unknowns, ask the "wingmen" to come up with suggestions for handling them.
- 8.** While the volunteer still has his or her eyes closed, verbally walk through the sales call, step by step. Raise the problems and objections and have the volunteer explain how he or she intends to handle them.
- 9.** Bring the role-play to a close. Ask the volunteer how he or she now feels about the impending sales call. The volunteer will almost undoubtedly have a more positive attitude about the call. This entire process should take about 15 minutes.
- 10.** Spend five minutes "de-briefing" by asking the rest of the team members for suggestions and comments. Suggest that the volunteer use these suggestions and comments to improve performance during the actual sales call.
- 11.** Repeat steps 4 through 10 with another volunteer.
- 12.** Wrap the meeting up by reviewing the 10 steps and obtain a commitment from the sales team to work through the three phases of this method for at least three sales calls over the next month. At the next sales meeting, review the results of this process.

### Quick Tips for Your Next Sales Meeting

A major key to being a successful fighter pilot, or a successful sales rep, is the ability to overcome fear. Here are three fundamental principles for achieving victory over your fear:

**Focus on your mission.** Ask yourself, "What am I fighting for?" Why are you needed, and who is depending on you to get the job done? Perhaps it is your organization, your family, or the customers you are serving. What are the positive benefits that can result from accomplishing the difficult mission ahead? When you take the focus off of yourself and away from your fear, and direct it toward how your mission will positively impact the lives of others, your fear diminishes.

**Focus on your wingmen.** Who is on your team that you can trust to get

the job done? Who are the trusted and reliable partners in your personal and professional life? Who can you turn to for love, inspiration, advice, and courage? Perhaps it is your spouse, best friend, business partner, or even a co-worker. By focusing on your teammates and all the wonderful, supporting relationships you have, you become more courageous and confident about tackling life's challenges.

**Focus on winning.** See the success you want in your imagination first. Experience the exhilaration of winning in your mind. Remember, the body achieves what the mind has rehearsed! If your mind thinks failure, you are setting yourself up to fail. But if you train your thoughts to envision winning, if you imagine with perfect clarity overcoming your challenges with courage and achieving victory, then you are destined to win.



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decide whether the mission, if pursued, will succeed or fail. Just like a pilot, you need to know when to press on with a call, and when to abort it. Don't get shot down! If you're going after a target that is impossible to take out, you are wasting valuable time and energy when you can be engaging an alternate target. When your objective is met or when you feel the prospect is no longer willing to listen, end the call. Make sure you come up with a follow-up objective/plan for what to do after the call. You may need to wait for the environment to change before calling again.

## Phase Three: Mission Complete

**Step 9: Debrief the mission.** Fighter pilots always debrief a mission, in order to determine what can be learned and how the team can improve. After every sales call, take off your 'rank' so that everyone is on an even playing field. This facilitates open communication and allows your wingmen to admit their mistakes. Review the positive and negative events that took place. Ask yourself: What

went right or wrong? What were the lessons learned? Why did the call develop the way that it did? How can you and your training be improved to ensure better success next time? Finally, share lessons learned and best practices with your sales wingmen so that your entire company can benefit from your mission.

## Step 10: Execute the follow-up/follow-through.

Fighter pilots complete their mission by filing a report, requesting service on the aircraft, expanding their training commitments, and so forth. The idea is to make each mission part of a process of constant improvement. In sales, the follow-through is doing whatever it takes to develop the ongoing customer relationship. It means delivering on your promises! If you really want to win in the future, exceed the customer's expectations. Send information, articles and/or referrals to your prospect that can help them. Be on time and on target for the next step in the sales process. Remember: Keep the focus on the customer!

— GEOFFREY JAMES

## Quick Tips for Your Next Training Session

A top jet fighter pilot is often called an "ace." While that historically refers to the playing card, it's also an excellent acronym for remembering what's important while preparing for a sales mission:

**A is for ATTITUDE.** The right attitude comes from preparation. The attitude that breeds confidence is a by-product of all your disciplined training, intelligence gathering, and chair flying. Not only should you be researching the customer and competition and preparing yourself for each mission, but you should also be laying the groundwork for your future success and growth by studying the sales process, reading sales books, and — especially — understanding and integrating specific sales skills.

**C is for CUSTOMER.** Successful selling is not about you, your company, your sales manager, or your products. It's about servicing the customer. It's about trust! Just as a fighter pilot commits to his customer — the government/citizens that he or she serves — you must commit to meeting the customer's needs, no matter what it takes. If you're not focused on your target — your customer — you shouldn't strap into your jet to fly the mission.

**E is for ENVIRONMENT.** You must constantly improve your Situational Awareness by increasing your understanding of the customer, the customer's business, the customer's industry, the impact of the economy on your customers, your competition, and the ability to bring every part of your organization (your wingmen) to bear in order to help the customer be successful.