

Who's Packing Your Parachute? By Darren Hardy

A couple years ago I interviewed Charlie Plumb, who was a U.S. Navy jet pilot in Vietnam. I learned a very valuable leadership lesson that I'd like to pass on to you here.

Charlie flew 74 consecutive successful combat missions. However on his 75th mission his F4 Phantom fighter plane was shot down by a surface-to-air missile. The plane exploded with some 12,000 pounds of jet fuel, flipping the plane topsy-turvy, end-over-end, down toward a rice paddy below.

Charlie was forced to eject. The only thing between him and imminent death was his parachute that he prayed would open...

Then finally he felt the opening shock of the parachute. During the 90 seconds of descent he was being shot at. "The audacity of this enemy," Charlie said, "they just knocked down my multimillion-dollar airplane and now they're trying to kill the pilot!"

Charlie made it down to the ground alive, but was then captured and spent 2,103 brutal days as a prisoner of war in a communist Vietnamese prison camp.

Many years after being repatriated, Charlie, his wife and another couple were sitting in a little restaurant in Kansas City together before going to a theater show that night.

Two tables over was this guy who kept looking at him. Charlie would look back but didn't recognize him, but he kept catching this guy staring at him. Finally the guy stood up and walked over to Charlie's table and pointed at him with a sort of a stern look on his face and he said, "You're Captain Plumb." Charlie looked up at him and said, "Yes, I am Captain Plumb." The guy said, "You're that guy. You flew jet fighters in Vietnam. You're a fighter pilot, part of that 'Top Gun' outfit. You launched from the aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk*, you parachuted into enemy territory and you spent six years as a prisoner of war."

Somewhat dumbfounded Charlie looked up at the guy and asked, "How in the world did you know all that?" The man chuckled, smiled and said, "Because I packed your parachute."

Charlie was speechless. The man grabbed Charlie's hand and pumped his arm and said, "I guess it worked" and walked off.

Charlie laid awake that night thinking about all the times he had walked through the long narrow room, below sea level on the aircraft carrier, with the tables where the men packed the parachutes. How many times he must have walked past this man without even saying "hi," "good morning" or "good job" or "I appreciate what you do."

"How many times did I pass the man whose job would eventually save my life... because I was a jet jockey, a Top Gun racing around the sky at twice the speed of sound. Because I was a fighter pilot and he was just a sailor."

Think about this for yourself. How many times in life do you pass the people who help you out the most? The people who come out of the far corners of your life just when you need them the most and pack your parachutes for you? The people who go the extra mile, the people who don't look for the kudos or the accolades or the achievement medal or even the bonus check—the folks who are just out there packing parachutes?

So here's what I want to challenge you to do. Look around your organization for the people who might not be the 'Top Guns' of your organization, the loud and brazen leaders, but the ones who support the system that

enables the Top Guns to fly. And if something goes wrong it will be because they did their job that no one gets hurt or a customer doesn't go neglected.

This week find 5 parachute packers in your organization and tell them how much you appreciate them and how important are the things they do for the organization. Because, in the end, it might just be them who save your life or your business, or at least save the day.