

Top Gun Tactics

Pilot applies what he learned flying a fighter to options trading.

■ **By Andrea Downing Peck**



After a decade in the Navy and Navy Reserve, F/A-18 pilot Matthew “Whiz” Buckley was taking aim at the smooth-as-glass transition to the civilian workplace he had been working toward. American Airlines had hired the then-

Dallas based pilot to fly commercial jets, ending a rough 10-month stint flying the graveyard shift for FedEx.

“I thought I had won the lottery,” says Buckley, who was assigned to a reserve squadron at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve (NAS) Base Fort Worth. “I was going to be an airline pilot and fly the Hornet on weekends. I had a very short airline career.”

Buckley’s transition plan included one impossible-to-predict flaw. His first scheduled flight for American Airlines was on Sept. 11, 2001. When the Twin Towers were attacked, Buckley’s first day of work for American Airlines became his last. Instead of kicking off his airline career piloting a flight from Dallas to Miami to Cancun, Mexico, Buckley raced to NAS Joint Reserve Base Fort Worth. He joined a handful of other military pilots who stood up a combat air patrol over the skies of Texas.

“That was my brief airline career in a blink of an eye,” explains Buckley, who a few days after the 9/11 attack flew one flight for American before receiving his furlough notice.

The 9/11 attacks transformed Buckley’s final five years in uniform. Buckley mobilized in support of Operation Noble Eagle, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, deploying twice to the Arabian Gulf and flying 44 combat sorties over southern Iraq. He also attended Navy Fighter Weapons School (Top Gun). The additional time in uniform helped Buckley pay his bills, while a series of fill-in-the-gap civilian jobs had him recalculating his civilian career path. Ultimately, he catapulted from the cockpit to a leadership and management consulting position before landing at an equity options trading firm as the managing director of strategy and later as CEO of the company’s financial-media company.

Today, Buckley, 49, is CEO of Top Gun Options (TGO), an online platform that trains members how to trade options. Options are contracts that grant holders the right, but not the obligation, to buy or sell a stock at a set price on or before a specific date.

While flying Navy jets might appear to be unusual preparation for a Wall Street career, Buckley says his military experience actually provided excellent training for the rough-and-tumble world of options trading.

“Trading is a form of combat because somebody is going to win and somebody is going to be on the losing



end of that equation. I just apply everything I learned flying a fighter jet – having a strategy, being disciplined, managing risk and contingency planning – to trading,” he says. “Flying a fighter jet was like breathing to me. I applied that to investing, and it worked incredibly well.”

Nonetheless, Buckley admits his initial weeks as an executive in the Chicago-based options trading firm felt like a scene from the Eddie Murphy movie “Trading Places,” with the military aviator forced to navigate an unfamiliar landscape. He quickly got up to speed.

“At the sake of exposing Wall Street for what it is, it is not rocket science,” Buckley points out. “Once I got into the boardrooms of these huge Wall Street trading firms, [I saw] they put their pants on the same way you and I do. The biggest most important investing technology is the seven inches of gray matter between your ears. It’s not that tough. It just isn’t.”

Buckley says his Navy pilot training also provided the roadmap for designing his TGO trading school. His company uses military-style instruction and terminology to teach an investment tactic many people either do not understand or consider too risky.

“I owe my success to the Navy because Navy flight training can literally take somebody who has never seen the inside of a plane before and in a short amount of time can turn them into a naval aviator flying off the pointy end of an aircraft carrier,” Buckley says. “I take the same approach when teaching people how to trade options.”



Subscriptions range from a \$28 introductory offer to \$195 per month or \$2,995 per year for access to all TGO services. Once members progress through the TGO training system and learn the ins-and-outs of options trading, Buckley says trading options becomes less risky than stock investments. That's because options require a smaller initial outlay of capital, can protect investors from downside risk and offer the potential to profit in bull, bear or flat markets.

"You buy a stock and it's the buy, hope and pray method," he says. "You buy it. You hope it goes up and if it doesn't, you pray. With options, I don't care which way the market is going because we can potentially profit in any market condition."

On the TGO website (go.topgunoptions.com), Buckley displays 2017 results of +\$15,934 (35 percent return on risk) in his \$100,000 Primary Portfolio, while his Urgent Alerts portfolio lists a +\$63,575 (85 percent ROR) and the Accelerated Retirement Portfolio boasts +\$49,906 (63 percent ROR). These returns are not audited, and Buckley does not release each portfolio's return on investment (ROI). ROI is more familiar to most investors because it is the calculation commonly used when measuring the percentage gained or lost on a stock or mutual fund investment.

Retired Navy CDR Scott Karvedt, a member of TGO, praises the TGO education program and its flight school-like format, with primary, intermediate and >

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Matthew “Whiz” Buckley / Former Navy Pilot



advanced training syllabuses. Karvedt believes his military experience provides him with an advantage as a retail options trader.

"I think it makes me an emotionless trader because I'm purely metric-based," he says. "That's the way I think and that's the way Whiz trains and teaches as well. If you can take the emotion out [of trading] and go purely based on metrics and numbers, it makes the decision almost like a military-type of decision where you hope for the best and plan for the worst."

TGO does not give trading advice. The company's goal is to teach investors how to trade.

"Trades are tracked and monitored in paper trading accounts," explains Buckley, who points out that TGO operates as a newsletter under the Securities and Exchange Commission's publishers' exemption. "However, I obviously personally trade many of the positions. We train people how to trade. Just like in naval aviation, you need to spend a lot of time in the simulator building before you fly the real airplane. And before members put any real capital at risk we remind them to reach out

to a RIA or broker dealer to see if options are suitable for them and their personal situations."

Buckley, now Florida-based, is active in the United Way's Mission United, a program dedicated to helping transitioning veterans navigate the services and support needed to acclimate back to civilian life. He suggests veterans should not be afraid to transfer their military skills to new civilian industries.

Don't worry about what brand 'X' or company 'Y' does," maintains Buckley, who authored the book *From Sea Level to C Level*, an autobiographical look at the leadership and business lessons Buckley learned as a fighter pilot and C-suite executive. "They will teach you what they do. It's the process, the leadership and the execution that military folks have [that is important]. When I built my own companies or ran other companies, I always looked to hire veterans because they can be trained, whether it's options trading or selling vacuums door to door. I'll teach what the product is, but all the other intangible stuff, veterans have that second nature." 🙌

4 Tips for Veterans Aspiring to Own a Business

By Matthew "Whiz" Buckley

Transitioning from combat to corporate does not have to be difficult. Take the tools you learned in your training and on the battlefield, and apply them to your business strategy.

1. Accountability is Everything

In combat and in business, it is imperative to maintain an "I've got it" attitude in order to make progress. Rather than leaning on others for support, try to be as self-sufficient as possible. When you are responsible for your own actions and for your own success, nothing can stand in your way. And when you do add business partners to your team, make sure they are people you can count on.

2. Debrief

Incorporate a business debriefing as part of your strategy and analyze the moving parts. What worked? What didn't? Not every idea or business venture is going to be successful. But every unsuccessful attempt is an opportunity to grow. Don't miss those opportunities. Just as soldiers debrief following combat, review your business strategies after a product launch or business mission. Encourage and listen to feedback from your team, and use this information as tools for future ventures.

3. Keep Your "Future Picture" in Mind

How do you envision your business in five years? Not only should you know the answer to this question, but you should live and breathe it. Do not rely on short-term goals to get your business to where you want it to be. Let your long-term goals be your guiding light. Your future picture will help you to make better business decisions rather than quick decisions that can hurt you in the long run. And don't keep your goals to yourself. Share your goals with your team so that everyone understands what they are striving toward.

4. Identify Your Competition and Beat Them to the Punch

When building your team, set aside three to five strong employees as your enemy team to be introduced into the process after the planning and implementation - with their main goal being to find weaknesses in your strategy. The red team's mission is to break down your plan, piece by piece, identifying everything that can go wrong. Your mission is to take notes and patch your holes until you have a solid plan. Because if you don't designate your own red team, your competition will find your weaknesses for you and use them against you.