

News

Finding Anthony “A.B.” Bourke: Surfing YPO’s Sports Networks



By [Amanda Fletcher](#)

The movie opens on the ocean under the sepia tones of the setting sun. Everything appears painted in bronze—the waves, the boards and the tanned backs of the surfers. A Seminal film for surfers, “The Endless Summer” was released in 1966. Watching the adventures of Mike Hynson and Robert August unfold encouraged many surfers to go abroad, in search of the perfect wave, untouched shores and more temperate water. Seeing the film for the first time at 14-years old, [Anthony Bourke](#) (WPO Northern California) CEO and founder of [Mach 2 Consulting](#) and a member of both the Surfing and Water Sports networks, is no exception.

“One of my life’s dreams since then has been to surf Jeffrey’s Bay in South Africa,” where Mike and Robert found the perfect wave in the movie. “At the GLC in Los Angeles a couple of years ago I shared this dream with [Arnold Vermaak](#) (WPO Durban), who was education chair at the time. Not only did he invite me to come and speak to his chapter in Durban, South Africa, he offered to host me at his home on Jeffrey’s Bay, in South Africa. When I arrived, Arnold introduced me to a professional surfer in the area who was a member of the Durban Surf Club. This provided me an inside look at the Durban surf scene and culture that I never would have had without these two.”

Surfing the Sports Networks

A passionate surfer, snow skier and water skier, A.B. as most people know him, does his best to combine the different areas of his life whenever possible.

“I will often extend a business trip for a few days so that I can ski or surf,” he says.

A highly experienced F-16 fighter pilot who has flown tactical missions across the globe, it is easy to imagine AB like the stars of “The Endless Summer,” in a dark suit and glasses, his hair combed back and a surfboard under his arm, boarding a plane. Much like he makes it a habit to combine work and play, he has made his career

applying his tactical experience to the boardroom.

The Next Wave in Business

“The most powerful tool I have taken from tactical aviation and applied to business is the discipline of a regular feedback loop, based on a process of briefing and debriefing,” he says. “As a team leader, you must find an efficient and effective way to communicate your ideas to your team in order to ensure successful execution. Fighter pilots use a tool called briefing to make sure our teams are aligned and flying in formation every time we fly. In tactical aviation, we have also learned that no matter how great your results are, no fighter pilot has ever flown the perfect mission, and no one in business will ever have the perfect day, week, meeting or project. This is why fighter pilot’s always call time out immediately following our missions and hold a debrief.”

For AB, a debriefing is a safe space, where hierarchy is removed and the sole purpose is to learn and get better. In both tactical aviation and business, debrief is a powerful tool that helps accelerate the experience of individuals and the team, and which also creates a safe environment where leaders can get honest, real time feedback to help them make the right decisions to help keep them ahead of the competition.

The concept of briefing and debriefing can also be found in elite level athletics. “I think athletes are goal oriented and are comfortable working hard to execute plans to achieve their goals,” says AB. In the spirit of competition, “they are always looking for feedback and myriad ways to get better.”

The Perfect Wave

The ocean’s perfect wave can be as elusive as the perfect performance in business. But that doesn’t discount the adventure.

“When flying to Durban on South African Airways, I poked my head in the cockpit and introduced myself to the flight crew. They asked me what was bringing me to South Africa. I shared with them that I was traveling for business, but also to achieve a life dream. I explained the effect ‘The Endless Summer’ had on me as a teenager and that I was headed to Jeffrey’s Bay,” says AB. “The first officer came back to my seat halfway through the flight and told me that his father was the one who had greeted the film’s narrator and director, Bruce Brown, when he arrived, and who had showed the team around J-Bay and Cape St. Francis”

“He wrote down his father’s phone number on a cocktail napkin and Arnold Vermaak and I rang him up and took him to lunch with our wives during our trip. The first officer’s father was 70 years old, still fit and still living less than ¼ mile from Cape St. Francis. He hadn’t lost his passion for surf or people and over lunch, he brought out all of his old memorabilia from the making of both of ‘The Endless Summer’ movies, recounting numerous stories from the making of the film and his life in this beautiful spot.”

For Anthony “AB” Bourke, YPO had allowed him to ride the perfect wave, on a perfect day, 10,000 miles from his home at Jeffreys Bay.

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