

SKIP LEVEL

strategic leadership for leaders ready to think two levels up

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Your Next Ally Is Not Like You

Do you have to like someone to trust them at work? Drawing on Adam Grant's Vibe, Maya and Marcus sort connections into four kinds, show why sponsorship lives mostly in allies and companions, and why asking one person to be all four is an impossible task.

KEY STRATEGIES & IDEAS

1. Four Kinds of Connection

Associates trade help and resources. Allies share a goal. Pals share interests. Companions share values, and they carry the emotional weight. Connection is not a trait you either have or you do not. It is a skill you build, on purpose.

2. Sponsorship Lives in Allies and Companions

Allies share your mission. Companions have your back when the mission gets hard. Pals are wonderful, but a pal is not a sponsor, and confusing the two is how people get passed over while feeling popular.

3. Three, Not Four

You can find someone who covers three kinds. Four is an impossible task, because too much is required to meet on all four levels. That is four jobs for one lunch, and no lunch can carry all four.

4. Mismatch, Not Character

You expected a companion and got an associate, or you treated an ally like a pal and wondered why the hard conversation never happened. Name the kind first, and the disappointment usually explains itself.

5. Wavelengths Change

Sometimes you are on different wavelengths, and wavelengths can change as the relationship moves on, so a connection that feels strong can still disappoint. It is not only the kind.

The proof: Astronauts Katie Coleman and Paulo Nespoli were paired by NASA even though they did not naturally click. They learned to trust each other anyway. Not by becoming friends. By sharing the work, the risk, and the routine, until each of them had seen the other deliver.

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ACTION & REFLECTION STEPS

- [ ] **Step one — map your four.** Write down one associate, one ally, one pal, and one companion at or above your level. Then notice where you are asking one person to do another kind of job. That mismatch is where the disappointment lives.

My associate, ally, pal, and companion:

- [ ] **Step two — engineer proximity.** Pick the senior leader you need as an ally, and get into shared work with them. A project, a problem, a recurring meeting. Do not wait for chemistry. Create contact, and let the contact do the work.

The senior leader I need as an ally, and the shared work:

- [ ] **Step three — ask one real question.** Skip the small talk and ask something like, what do you love to do, or what are you trying to make happen this year. One real question tells you more about a person than ten polite ones, and it is what turns contact into connection.

- [ ] **Step four — name the shared goal out loud.** Allies run on a mission, so say it plainly. Here is what I am working toward, and here is the one thing I need from you. People cannot sponsor a goal they have never heard.

The goal I will name, and the one thing I need:

Think two levels up. — Maya & Marcus

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