



## YOUR TEAM SUCCESS PODCAST

# The Partnership Mindset — A Relationship Superpower

**Shannon Waller:** Would you like to experience more confidence, more progress, more genuine relationships at work? Stay tuned to learn about having a partner mindset and why this is truly a relationship superpower.

Hi, Shannon Waller here, and welcome to Team Success. Today I am going to talk about something that I have realized is a bit of a relationship superpower. And I wanted to share it with you because it's proven incredibly useful for me. It means I can have conversations that are easy, that other people have told me they find really challenging. And I thought, "What is the difference between how I am handling situations and people from how other people are doing it?" And I'm like, "Oh," then I figured it out.

So here's the difference, is that I really look at people as being potential partners, and I really treat them as people rather than their status, their title, or their position. I actually don't really care about those things. Those things give me an indication perhaps about their past or their stories that might be interesting or their intelligence, which I'm a big fan of, but it doesn't tell me anything about the person. So I actually don't relate to their title, position, or power or status. I really don't actually care.

What I want to know is: who are they as a human being? And I want to know, "Oh, is there a way that I can contribute to them? Is there something that I can help with? Is there something that they're about that is in connection, that is in accordance and synchronous with what I'm up to?" Is there a message, something I would like to have on my podcast, for example—which is why I have so many fabulous people on the podcast. And I realize that a lot of people don't have this, what I would call "partner mindset." And I find it kind of curious because it ends up being a true superpower. When I'm relating to high-level people as people, as opposed to what other people are paying attention to with them, they treat me differently as well—and they treat me as a partner. And that's how the title of this podcast came about.

It was a really fun realization because I jokingly say I can get away with murder. Not true, of course. And I can communicate things to people that other people are very scared to. They feel very timid, very reserved, they're very cautious. Now I'm attentive, but I'm not innately cautious (I'm just saying), which probably helps a little bit. But what I've found is that as I've gotten older (that has not hurt at all), I realize it's really about the people; who are they as an individual as opposed to their title, again, their status, their position, all the things.

And I think it's really refreshing for them too. They're used to people sucking up, fawning over them, name-dropping. It sort of is like a little ego-ish, which again, I'm not terribly interested in. I want to know whether or not there's a way we can collaborate. Is there's some kind of simpatico connection that we can have? Do we resonate on the same frequency, if you want to use an energetic term. That's what I am interested in.



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So I just find this really intriguing because there are a number of situations recently where I'm the one having the more challenging conversations, the more potentially confronting conversations. I'm like, "Okay, lucky me. Why me?" And then I realize, "Oh, this is why me": because I'm not put off, I'm not scared by people's positions, and I'm not comparing myself to them. I think this is really the core of it, is that I'm not comparing myself to them. We'll get into more strategies in just a moment.

I want to delve into what the significance of this is. So what happens when you're relating to someone in a position of power that you perceive as being bigger than you, or more capable, or more successful, while kind of automatically—if you're familiar with the Strategic Coach concept of "The Gap and The Gain"—you're automatically in "The Gap." You're putting them up on a pedestal. You're seeing what their accomplishments, their success, their personality, their money, their looks, whatever it is, as the ideal, and you're comparing yourself to them and then you're falling short.

That immediately puts you into "The Gap." And "The Gap" is not a great place. You can't come from a partnership mindset if you're in "The Gap." It just doesn't work, because you're not appreciating your strengths, you're not appreciating your gains and your capabilities. It's just not fun. I mean, a couple of people have said some stuff to me lately. They're like, "Oh, you're amazing, your reputation and your blah, blah, blah." And I find it really odd. I'm like, "Mm, just me here." I mean, I'm very confident about what I can do well, and I'm trying to be very humble about everything else. And I appreciate someone finding value in my work.

I don't know how to explain it. It doesn't feel like it's about me as a person. And I'd rather someone just be really curious and interested in me, and they're going to get much more of me and we'll see whether or not we have something we can collaborate on. What can we partner on? How can we be of value to one another? How can we have a relationship? It's very tough to have a relationship if you're in "The Gap." And if you are putting someone way above you, that's not a relationship. I mean, that's having an idol. Why would you want to do that?

And what I know, after being on the planet for a while and meeting the hundreds and thousands of people I've met, is that everyone's just people. We're all just folks, as the expression goes. And I just think it'd be so much more fun and productive and healthy and more in "The Gain" if we related to one another that way. It's certainly how I want to be related to. And if someone isn't there, and they don't actually know what they can bring to the table, I have to do a lot of extra work. I have to make them feel comfortable. I have to ask them questions. I have to help them see how they're of value, as opposed to them being aware of that already. So it's just a little more challenging.

When someone comes in to meet me, to work with me, and they know themselves, they know what they're great at, they know what they're not great at, I'm like, "Whew, awesome. Let's



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partner up.” Especially if we’re on a project together. And that feels really easy; it feels really hard the other way.

So there’s a cost: firstly, if you’re the one who’s in “The Gap,” it’s not healthy for you, first of all. And you’re also not paying attention to the real human. And you’re probably will miss what their goals are. You’ll miss what’s keeping them up at night. You’ll miss what their opportunities are. You’ll miss what their strengths are because you’re just relating to them kind of as a thing. You’re not really relating to them as a human. You’re relating to them as a position of power or money or accomplishment, any of that kind of status. And that you’re not really relating to them as a person. And there’s a cost to that. You cannot have a genuine relationship unless you look at who the person is. And we could debate that, but I’m pretty sure I got that one right.

So if you really want to relate to the person as a person, you have to treat them that way. And you have to recognize that they have strengths, they have non-strengths. They’ve got goals and ambitions. They’ve got regrets, probably. They’ve got ways that they live their lives that are similar to you, that are different than you. They’re interesting, they’re complex. You want to learn more about them, and don’t assume that you already know. That’s the other big part of this. When you assume that you already know, you can pretty much be 100% confident you’re wrong in that one. And everyone knows the schoolyard version of assume: yes, it makes an ass of you and me. Let’s not do that.

I’ve just been watching this dynamic for a while now and I just wanted to bring it to the fore, because I think it’s really important. And if you’re someone who’s done the idolizing and other people have been idolizing you, you’ve been in both seats, you know it’s kind of weird. And wouldn’t you rather just be treated as a human being? Now, if you are fully invested in your status and your title and your position, then this conversation’s probably not for you. Because if you’re not getting that, if you’re not being idolized for that, you’re probably not happy when people just want to treat you as a person. You may have, in fact, forgotten who you are inside there—but that’s a whole different conversation. In that case, you’re probably will stop listening about now, and I say that with love.

But this is if you want to have genuine, real connections and collaborative relationships where you can contribute to one another, that’s what this is about. And I just think this whole relating to people as their things rather than who they actually are as a human being, it just gets in the way. And it’s time to clear that clutter, and let’s just focus on how each of us can be a great contributor to one another.

So what is it that you can do to make sure that you feel like you’re a partner and to be a great partner? Let’s talk about both of those things. One of the things that I know for sure is that you have to, “know thyself.” If you do not know who you are, if you’re not confident in your strengths, this is why I’m such a big fan of profiles like CliftonStrengths—used to be StrengthsFinder if you’re more familiar with that.



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I love Kolbe profiles (kolbe.com), because it tells you how you strive and how you problem solve. CliftonStrengths gives you your talents, times effort, equals a strength, which is where you can experience, “near-perfect performance.” How awesome is that? I want near-perfect performance, thank you very much. And I found it to be incredibly insightful and gave me a great growth path. Kolbe has been very validating, tells me where I need teamwork especially. So I love that.

Through Strategic Coach we’ve been using the PRINT profile, which is your motivational imprint. Brilliant to see what’s underneath the surface of the water, if you think of an iceberg analogy, what is deeply motivating to you. And that one’s been a total game-changer. Also, a fan of WHY.os—been having phenomenal conversations with both partners actually, Gary and Jerry, about that. Highly recommend that one. Knowing your what, why, and how? Super cool. Myers-Briggs, DISC, all the things. The more you can know yourself, the better. And then there’s your own life experience. How much have you learned from that?

When you know what you have to bring to the party, super easy to stay in “The Gain” as opposed to being in “The Gap.” And are you following your path or are you following someone else’s path? So taking full ownership and agency over yourself is crucial for this partner mindset to work. And what I love about it is it completely transcends positions of power. When I work with people who have very complimentary talents ... I’ve been at Coach since 1991. That’s a very long time. And I might be working with someone who’s been at Coach for a year. But guess what? They have a complementary set of talents I don’t have and I desperately need.

So am I a better person than them? Heck no. In fact, in many ways they’re much better than I am. But how can we work together? How can we contribute to one another? How can we collaborate? How can we both contribute our strengths, talent, skills, motivations, so we can produce something even bigger than what either one of us could do together? That’s the conversation I want to be having. But I can’t have it with someone if they don’t value and see their own strengths, their own capabilities.

I do remember when I first started working with my previous support partner, Nicole, one of the things that impressed the heck out of me, one is, she’s done as many profiles as I had, maybe more. But the other thing is, she was so clear that she wanted to be in a support role. She goes, “I’ve tried different roles,” and she’s super smart. She goes, “I’ve got the brain for it.” She wasn’t bragging. She goes, “And I’ve gotten bored in each of my previous roles.” I’m like, “Well, you won’t be bored with me. I can promise you that.” But she said, “I realize I’m not the one in the leadership seat. I’m not the one in the driver’s seat. I want to support a really great person. That’s where I do best.” And I was like, “Whoa, that degree of self-awareness is amazing.”

And then the other thing is true, and this is true of all great support people by the way, they’re picky about who they will support. So if you qualify, if you rate, that’s saying something because you’re a good human. You are worth working for. I mean, they have standards. It’s not just



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people with more longevity or experience or title that have standards. Everyone has standards. At least I hope they do. So if you rate, you could feel really good that that person has chosen to support you. Because they have their pick, let me tell you. Really great support people are vital. If you don't have a strategic assistant, you need one, or and you are one. So anyone who has an assistant knows what I'm talking about. Again, very, very important to know yourself, know your strengths, know your experience, have that self-awareness. That is absolutely key.

And I also think one of the things that helps me in terms of my partner mindset is that I assume the relationship. So I make sure that people know that I'm for them. And that's 100% true, because I am or I'm not in relationship with them. I'm not a half-hearted person. I'm either all in or all out. And that's how I live my life the best way that I know how. I'm not a good half-hearted person in anything. So if I'm in, I'm in. And if I'm not, I'm checked out. So I've just learned that about myself. Other people maybe have some capacities that I'm not aware of. But I know for me it's like, I'm in. So I assume the relationship. I assume that we're going to be able to contribute and collaborate with one another, especially on a project. So that's really important.

And then the other thing is I'm focused on the big picture. I'm focused on the results and what we can accomplish. I'm not focused on them. One of the pictures I always remember seeing was in an Olympic race and it was Michael Phelps. And there's a great picture of him: he's not looking anywhere else other than head in the water or looking ahead to the rim of the pool, but his competitor is looking at him. And that's kind of the difference. Where are you looking? Are you looking beside you at other people to see how each of you is ranking in the hierarchy? Or are you focused ahead on the goal? And what I know is that I get incredible buy-in and, frankly, latitude to have some of these conversations, because people know I am for them. I am for the same result that they are.

One of my entrepreneurial attitudes that I wrote about in *The Team Success Handbook* is to make sure that you are aligned. If you're not aligned, what are you doing there? That makes no sense to me. I make sure I'm aligned with the big picture, with the small picture (or whatever I need to be aligned with), the goal of the project, the result that we're trying to accomplish if it's done and done well. So I make sure of that. And if I can't be, you'll know about it. Again, I can't do things half-heartedly.

So when I'm focused on the big picture, when I assume the relationship, when I'm treating people as people—which means I care, I know their profiles, I look them up, I'm interested in what their future holds—I'm not trying to be interesting (that's more status oriented), I'm interested, then people trust me. Because I'm trustworthy. And it's this bloody superpower. It's kind of amazing. And I want more people to have this superpower, but it seems to be a little bit unusual.

My strong, strong encouragement is know yourself. Figure out your Unique Ability. Figure out your passions. Be brave enough to have standards and say no. Say it gracefully, graciously. Be



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kind about it. You don't have to be... Well, you know what the word is that I'm going to throw in there. You're not going to be super like eh about it, but that's appropriate. Be wholehearted in what it is that you do, and know that you have something absolutely incredible to bring to the table. I want to work with incredible people. And I don't care if they're 40 years younger than me, 30 years younger than me, 30 years older than me—I don't care. I'm interested in who you are as a person. And that means that I have access to teamwork that seems challenging for other people. And it takes so much of the fear out of the situation because I'm coming in as a partner. I'm not coming in as better than and not coming in as worse than.

And that's where the power is. It takes all the fear out. It's more like, "Yes? No? Is this going to work or isn't going to work?" And I love it. It's calming, it's peaceful, it's not stressful. It feels very genuine and real and authentic to me. And it's how I like to operate. And it's how, when I see other people operating that way, it's like, "Oh, great, we can work well together." But if someone's focused on the other things—status, title, position, power, all that sort of stuff—can't really do that. And so only people at an equal level, in terms of...not equal—and it doesn't have to be in terms of money or title or accomplishments—but equal in terms of awareness of their contribution, that's who can work well together. So I think it's really important that we all approach things this way; and that's just as true for visionary owners as it is for anyone, anyone in the company.

Now the younger you are, you're probably still figuring some of this stuff out. But this is the mission. Know yourself, know what you can contribute, know the kind of thing you want to contribute to, find other people who are up to the same thing and go make some magic together. Because again, this partner mindset is 100% a superpower that I think we all have access to.

Let me give you some examples of what I'm talking about in terms of how to operate like a partner. For example, I work incredibly closely with Dan Sullivan, Babs Smith, co-founders of Strategic Coach. As far as I'm concerned, I work with them. Technically, I guess, you could say I work for them, but that's not how I think. That's not how I relate to them. As far as I'm concerned, Strategic Coach is my company too. And so I just have a very different mindset about the company than most other people in it do. And I have to tell you, it gives me so much more freedom, so much more latitude, and frankly more room to make a contribution. So that's how I think of it.

And I've been very, very clear, when I first hired... As I mentioned, Nicole, was my first support partner. Katrina is my fabulous second support partner. Technically when you hire, you can't hire for a "Support Partner" because no one has any clue what the heck you're talking about; so you advertise for an "Executive Assistant." But as soon in the interviews—and this is twice now, I've been very fortunate to be supported by brilliant humans—is, I'm like, "Let me be really clear.



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You are not my assistant. You technically work for me and Coach, but actually we are equals.” So support partner, as I mentioned was the term that I came up with.

Now Nicole, being incredibly strategic in her CliftonStrengths and all the things, she goes, “How about ‘Strategic Support Partner?’” I’m like, “Perfect.” So that was her email address, that was her title on her emails. That was how I would introduce her in conversations by email. It’s like, “Let me introduce you to Nicole, my Strategic Support Partner. She’ll take care of this and this and this,” because she was so much better at it. Because here’s the deal, I didn’t want to be managing her, I want her to manage me.

Same is true with Katrina. It’s like when she started, now just over a year ago, it was like, “Okay, the normal relationship doesn’t work for me. I’m not good enough. I’m not good enough about at least half of these accountabilities for you to...what you’re going to expect. So we are collaborators. I want your full use of your strengths and I’m going to make full use of mine. And together, again, we’re going to create some really spectacular results.”

It was different. It was a little bit uncomfortable. No one says this, by the way; this was highly unusual in most people’s work experience. But we both grew, and it gave her the courage to speak up and to say when things were working for her and when they weren’t, and what we could do to make better. And because she’s my partner, not my employee, it was super easy to make that work. It sets up so much a better dynamic and a healthier relationship.

So this is key. When you are in that position of power, when you let people know that they are your partner and what you’re expecting of them, which frankly is more than just an employee, you’re expecting more of an ownership attitude of their role—whereas EOS, Entrepreneurial Operating System, would say, “Own their seat”—they step up. You will bring the best out in people. They will...helps them figure out their Unique Ability. I cannot recommend highly enough that you set people up as your partner. This is a very practical, tangible step you can take to put this into play.

Those are my thoughts for the day. Thank you so much for listening. If you have any questions or comments, please let me know at [questions@strategiccoach.com](mailto:questions@strategiccoach.com). And as always, here’s to your team success.