

An alliance is a tool that can help define the framework of a relationship, set mutual expectations and enable clear communication. An alliance creates a psychologically safe space for individuals and teams to communicate and even challenge one another. Perhaps most importantly, an alliance builds trust – between individuals and across teams. Trust is the foundation upon which successful relationships can grow and change.

## The 1-1 Alliance

Alliances are helpful for all types of relationships – with friends, a partner, and with individuals on your team at work. Start by building 1-1 alliances based on trust:

- **Be open and collaborative:** Share why you want to build a lasting, trust-based relationship with each individual. Invite them to share their expectations – and even their fears – of engaging in this process.
- **Be specific:** Define both the qualities of the alliance you are trying to build and the specific expectations you each have for it. Make an agreement that you both commit to that outlines your mutual expectations.
- **Commit time and attention:** Building an alliance is not a “one and done” process. It takes consistent, focused time for both you and your partner in order to succeed. Decide together how this happens: how often you’ll meet, where, and how/when you can communicate outside of face-to-face meetings.

## Some sample prompts/guiding questions for building a 1-1 alliance could be:

- What would have this be a powerful relationship?
- How will we know if it’s working?
- What can we count on from each other?
- When we are challenged, how do we want to be?
- How will I know when you are stuck?
- What intention (plan or aim) are we out to fulfill?
- What values will we hold together?
- What’s the tone of the relationship we are creating (empowering, supportive, vulnerable, challenging, direct, no-nonsense)? What works best in our interactions?
- How do you prefer to be acknowledged? What is good acknowledgment to you?
- How do you prefer to be critiqued? What is good feedback to you?
- How do you generally prefer to communicate (email, in person, meetings)? When is the best time to communicate with you?
- What would increase trust between us?

## The Team Alliance

*“If you could get all the people in an organization rowing in the same direction, you could dominate any industry, in any market, against any competition, at any time.”*

*– Patrick Lencioni, The FIVE Dysfunctions of a Team*

Once you have designed your individual alliances, bring the practice and process to your team. It's not enough for you to have built individual alliances; the organization (whether it's a business, family or interest group) must also be aligned as a team – and they need to trust each other.

**Give them the tools, then let go.** Setting up a team alliance for success means encouraging everyone's input and creating a safe, collaborative space for everyone to contribute. Start by having the team build clear agreements for working together. This allows them to take shared responsibility for the climate they wish to create and, in the process, builds trust as they agree to hold themselves accountable to the agreement. The team should decide what this looks like; let them create the alliance in the way that works for them.

**Take note of team dynamics.** Over time, if your team alliance has been well-designed and all members are committed to its success, you may notice some positive changes in your organization, including increased trust between team members. Check in with the team alliance occasionally to see how it's going and offer guidance if asked.

### Sample Prompts/guiding questions for building the team alliance could be:

#### Creating the atmosphere

- What is the culture/atmosphere you want to create together? (How would you know you had that?)
- How do you want it to feel (empowering, supportive, spacious, oppositional, vulnerable)?
- What would help the partnership/team to flourish?

#### Creating co-responsibility

- What accountability will each of you have?
- What can your team count on from you?
- What will you each commit to for one another? How would you know you had that?

#### Behavioral agreements

- How do you want to be together when it gets difficult? (Who do you want to be?) How would you know you had that?
- What are the ground rules around conflict, decision making, and other team behaviors?
- How do you want to behave together when things get difficult, or when there is conflict? (Who do you want to be together?) What are the team's conflict protocols?



## About Diane Hopkins Coaching

With decades of experience transforming lives and careers, Diane Hopkins has coached executives and corporate professionals at Fortune 500 companies, start-ups, and nonprofits. Partnering with organizations in challenging times, Diane has coached thousands of leaders about their personal “why” and guided many to achieve their mission and goals.

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