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HOW DO I TURN ENEMIES INTO ALLIES?

Welcome to The Highly Valued Leader podcast where I make it simple for leaders at all levels to amplify their value. My name is Mel Savage and I went from working in the mailroom at a small ad agency to making multiple six figures in senior management at McDonald's, to running my own multiple six-figure executive coaching business. I've had huge successes in my career and epic failures. All of it taught me the world-class leadership, mind and skill sets that I simplify for my clients and share with you on this podcast. I'll help you reset your leadership style, demystify the politics, and help you become the highly valued leader everyone wants on their team. Get ready for the most honest, direct and revolutionary leadership coaching you've ever heard. Let's simplify leadership together.

Hey there, leaders. Welcome back to the podcast. Today we're talking about turning enemies into allies. I know it sounds extremely dramatic. Obviously, this is just about learning to get along with peers who are important to you and who you're having trouble getting along with and working with effectively. But sometimes it can feel like an enemy. It doesn't have to be quite that dramatic. They don't have to really be enemies. But there are people who get under your skin, or they don't like you, or they just say no to everything that you want, or you want to find ways to work around them, because working with them is just like so exhausting, you don't want to spend the time on it. But really, it is important that you work with these people.

Now, you don't want to have these kinds of relationships at work. Even if nobody really thinks it's a big problem at that moment, if you do find ways to work around them, etc., you don't really want to have these kinds of relationships because they do get in the way of your advancement. Because when the people are sitting around the table deciding who's going to get promoted and who they're going to give the big projects to, they want to know that they're picking someone who knows how to get along with anyone and who can bring people together.

If there's a question mark around you, that might be one more question mark around you that doesn't exist around someone else. So your job is to make the decision to give you the opportunity very simple. And a big part of that is having people want to work with you. I want you to know, I made this mistake. I had 'enemies' that I didn't take the time to turn into allies. And it made people second guess whether they should promote me sometimes because I had challenges with my peers.

So I think it's a really important thing to think about, especially when you have peers that it's important that you have good relationships with them because the relationship you have with them will drive results in the organization. They're critical to the work of your department. It's really important that you spend the time nurturing those relationships. In the end, what you want is people coming up to you in the organization saying, *"How did you get that person to work with you? How can they do everything you want, not what I want? How come you just make it look so easy?"* That's what you want. That's kind of the kind of noise that you want around you not *"This person can't work with this person… There's a problem there. If we promote them, what will that be like?"* You don't want that noise. That's noise that's never going to be able to serve you.

So today, what I want to give you is a step-by-step on how to turn any relationship into an allied-based relationship and get folks on side with you. And we're going to do this without needing to change the other

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person in any way. You don't need to change who they are at all, which is good news because trying to change people and get them to do things and control them is basically impossible. We're not going to do that. That's going to give you a good use of your time. We're going to make it so that you can turn the relationship around without needing to change anyone else because that really is the root of the problem.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying it's all your problem. The solution is definitely in your hands. But I think the root of the problem that you're having right now is that you think the other person is a problem. You think the other person shouldn't be the way that they are. You think they should change in order for you to be able to do your job better, easier, or whatever you want to call it. You think you both need to change a little for things to work out. You need to find a compromise. *If you do this, I'll do this.* I mean, that's certainly the way relationship counselling has been done for a long time. Obviously, it's normal that you think that.

But I don't actually think that's the most effective way of doing things because people are forcing themselves to behave in a way that they don't naturally behave because they're trying to find a way to work with you. And that can be resentment. The minute things get stressful, people don't have the energy to force themselves to do the things they don't want to do so those kinds of negotiations can stop working really quickly.

I want to give you a step-by-step on how to really engage these people who you want to create allies, or an allied-based relationship with. But before I do that, I want to give you three guiding principles that you need to really ground yourself in if you're going to do this. This is what you have to accept that this is going to be your role and who you need to be when you go through the step-by-step that I'm going to give you.

The first guiding principle is, I've talked about it already, *don't try to change them*. Let them be who they are. You need to focus on what you can control. And what you can control are your thoughts, your feelings, and your actions. You might be like, *"Oh, no. I have to think that they're okay."* No, you don't have to think that they're okay. I'm going to tell you what you need to do in a second. But the very first thing I think as a guiding principle is don't try to change them.

I have actually heard my husband even say this, but for some people, that can be a tough pill because you're like, *"Well, that's not fair. Why should I be the first one to change? Why should I have to do all the work and they just get to be who they are? That's not fair."* I can understand why you might feel that way, depending on what's gone, and what's happened in the relationship with this person. But it's not useful to you. I'm just going to offer you that that type of mindset isn't going to get you anywhere, it's just going to keep you stuck in suffering.

So if you're asking yourself, *"Why should I be the 'bigger' person?"* I wouldn't if I were you, but let's say you wanted to put it that way. *"Why should I be the first one to change?"* Here's the answer–for your own peace of mind. You're not doing this for them, you're doing this for you. Because when things aren't going well in the relationship, guess who feels the suffering? You do. You're blaming it on them, but it's actually you who's decided to be upset with them for whatever they're doing. Maybe you have a good reason. I'm not saying you don't. But you're the one who feels it. So why should you put the effort in and try to be the first one to make some changes and adjustments in your own style? The answer is for your own peace of mind. So the first guiding principle is, don't try to change them.

The second guiding principle is *to leverage your humanity*. What I mean by that is, you're just a human, a person trying to do their best. And guess what? So are they. Their point of view, their ideas, and what they should be doing are just different than yours. But you're basically all trying to do your best. You all have insecurities. And ultimately, just as humans, we're all seeking some sense of safety. We all want to feel good about what we're

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doing. We want to feel safe from failure. Those are the kinds of things that sometimes drive us into negative emotions and bad behaviours. And I'd say, into a more defensive posture versus an offensive posture. And it's normal; we all want to feel safe.

So instead of feeling threatened by this person or step, or instead of feeling resentful with this person, I want to challenge you and offer you that you could go into empathy and compassion. You could say, *"You know what, they're just trying to do their best."* I think that's believable. You don't agree with what their best is, but they're doing the best that they can. That's a believable thought. *You know what, they obviously are doing this because they're trying to take care of their team or take care of themselves or not look bad in front of their boss or whatever it is, meet their deliverables, get their promotion.* Guess what? You would do the same. We all do the same thing.

Some people feel more threatened than others, some people are more insecure than others. So what? The more that we can understand that because we've all felt insecure, we all know what that's like, the more that we can come at it from a compassionate place. And what I mean by that is like a place of understanding, a place of acceptance. *This is just a person who's feeling a bit insecure and doing their best and has different priorities than me. I can work with that. I can try to help and understand them. I can connect with them. I can make how they feel not a problem for me.* That's what I mean by leveraging humanity.

You're going to have to be willing to stop thinking about them. I'm just going to put something generic out here, this may not be exactly how you think about it. But you need to stop thinking about them as someone who is maybe working against you and just as someone who is a human doing the best they can in a corporate environment, which is not an easy place to survive.

In fact, I'd say a corporate environment is not a natural place for people to do their best; it's kind of a more natural place to be defensive and protective against ourselves to protect ourselves. It takes a really strong mindset, a lot of intentionality, and a lot of emotional intelligence to learn to be your best and function at your best in a corporate environment. And that is an ongoing learning for all of us. You're not doing it perfectly and neither are they. So number two, leverage your humanity.

Number three is *tenacity*. You need to be tenacious because you're going to say, *"Well, I tried, and it didn't work. I tried. I tried that. I tried to sit down with them and understand them, but it didn't work."* It's not going to work at first. Don't give up. Keep trying. Be tenacious. They are not going to trust you right away. Your relationship with them has always been one way. And now you're shifting gears. You've done the work on yourself to start wanting to shift gears. And guess what, it's a little suspicious. I would be suspicious, you might be suspicious. Maybe it'll work the first time. But if it doesn't, so what? Keep demonstrating that you understand them, you want to understand them, and you don't think they're a problem. They will open up.

And then the last thing in the guiding principles, the fourth one is just *don't take things personally*. They're going to say things and do things, and they're going to keep acting in that defensive way while you're trying to be this new version of yourself. Don't take it personally. Remember what they do is about them and and not about you. And they're just doing the best that they can. It's not easy. I know what I'm saying is not easy, but I'm giving you a set of guiding principles that you can go back to when things get off track.

What is the purpose of doing this work? Because this is not easy work. By the way, it's going to be easier than what you're doing right now. The grief, suffering, anger, resentment, working around them, and the impact on your career, all of that is also hard and we're basically choosing our hard here. And what I'm offering you is if you can do the work on yourself to show up differently with this person, then guess who benefits? Not them. Yes,

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there would be benefits to them, but that's not why you're doing it. You're doing it because your life gets easier, you suffer less, your brand improves, and you get results faster. Leadership looks at you as someone who can solve problems, who doesn't create drama, and who gets results. And you become highly valued. You're doing this for you, so keep that in mind.

Those are your four guiding principles. Then I'm going to go through specific steps around how to connect with this person. The four guiding principles are don't try to change them, leverage your humanity, be tenacious, and do your best not to take things personally.

When you are actually engaging this person, I want to give you some steps to do this, and they're very similar to your guiding principles. They are basically leveraging your guiding principles. The guiding principles are who you're going to be. And what I'm about to give you are some steps of what you can do while you're being this person, this version of you.

The first thing is, you're going to choose your attitude going in there. Before you even engage the person, you need to get intentional about who you want to be as you're having this conversation. You need to manage your emotions. You need to choose your thinking. For instance, when you're going to have this conversation with them, you can create a result for yourself. So the result of a conversation is *'we get along better.'* You cannot control that. You can't control who they are. But the result that you can create in there is, *'I want to go in there and not take things personally."* That's a result you can create.

Or *'I'm going to have this conversation and just be understanding and curious about why they are suggesting the things they're going to suggest.'* You can control that. You can control however you want to be. *'I'm going to go in there and just be understanding… I'm going to go in there and find a way to compromise…'* You can do anything you want. *'I'm going to go in there and just accept them however they show up, and not make it about me.'* You can go in there and do a lot of things. So you need to choose your attitude going in there and create a goal for yourself for that conversation.

And I'm going to suggest an emotion. I like to ground myself in an emotion depending on the conversation–patience, curiosity, understanding, empathy, compassion, focus, mindfulness. Someone suggested today in a session that I was in mindfulness. I love mindfulness because it's present. It's really like, I'm not expecting anything, I'm just going to go with what happens and always be grounding myself in mindfulness, and also compassion. So choose your attitude going in. What's going to be the right attitude for you based on the conversation that you want to have and the goals that you want to set for yourself?

Number two comes back to not making the person a problem. Whatever they say, it's not about you, it's them and their issues. They're not creating a barrier for you, they're just throwing up some things they're concerned about, and that doesn't have to be a problem. They may not be intentional in how they're throwing that up. Maybe they're throwing it up in a tacky kind of way, or a blamey kind of way, or in a suspicious kind of way. I don't know. Whatever they say, just don't make it a problem. And when I say a problem, what I mean is a barrier, like something that they shouldn't be saying, or doing, or thinking. That's what I mean when I say a problem.

We create this definition or aura around the word "problem" like it's a bad thing. They are throwing up a problem in the definition of there's something to be figured out here. That's a problem. Like I like problem-solving. That's kind of fun. You're like, *"Oh, you think this and I think this, but our ultimate goal could be this. How can we solve this? Let's throw up some solutions. Let's figure this out together."* That's kind of fun, problem-solving. But when

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you make them a problem, then you're sort of saying that they shouldn't be who they are being, and that's no fun. Or they shouldn't be saying what they are saying. That's no fun. That's when the conversation stops.

You can make it a fun problem, like something to be solved, but don't make the person a problem. Because when you make the person a problem, you're constantly looking for evidence of why that's true. Even if they're being defensive and angry and insecure, guess what? That's just humans being human. You can handle it because you're a leader. And you're a mature leader and you can make it happen. So number one, choose your attitude. Number two, don't make them a problem. Number three, create safety.

Your job is to create safety. The reason we behave not at our best, I don't want to say behave badly because that's a judgment, we behave not at our best, we get defensive, we create conflict, or whatever, is because we feel unsafe. That's our lower brain creating an alarm bell saying, *"Danger, danger, you need to get protective, you need to get defensive."* That type of signal is rampant in a corporate environment because our jobs are our way to make money and money is our way to create safety in our lives, in our current culture.

So when I feel threatened at work, it actually fundamentally becomes existential for so many people because negative repercussions, conflict, or whatever, actually challenge our sense of fundamental safety in our lives. That's why when I talk to a lot of clients who have a fear of failure, we get down to the root of it because they're afraid of losing their jobs or losing their homes or being homeless or all that stuff. That's how we're wired as humans, remember that.

Your job is to find out what they're threatened by or what makes them feel threatened. I'm not suggesting you go and say, *"Hey, why are you acting so threatened? What are you threatened by?"* That's not going to be useful to you. But be smart about it. And you can find out by saying, *"What's going on? What are you worried about? What are you worried is going to happen? How can I help you with that?"* Get to a place of shared objectives. Right now, your strategies to get to a place might be different, but make sure that you're sharing the objectives. *"Do we agree that we're trying to achieve this?... No? Why not? What are you trying to achieve?... Oh, why are you trying to achieve it?"* Really be curious and interested in the person. Think about someone that you are naturally that way with where, even if you're disagreeing, you want to understand why you're interested, whatever. Do that with them.

When you go into a conversation, really wanting to understand someone and create safety for a conversation, the questions you ask them, and the way you behave come naturally because you're always coming from that genuine place. When you're pretending to want to understand someone, and when you're pretending to want to create safety for them, that's when you need a list of questions because you don't feel comfortable. If you can, ground yourself in a situation where you would want to understand someone and support them.

One of the questions that I was asked recently is what if the safety issue that the other person is having is that they're competing with you for the same position? What if your very presence threatens them? What do you do? And my suggestion is, you can still understand why. You can still remove that threat. You can be honest. Let's say you're competing for the same position, you can be honest that you're running your own race, and that you still want to support them no matter what. And you can offer to be a supporter of theirs, even partner with them in their career growth.

I'm not saying lie and give up your thing and support them. I'm saying, you can still support them and support yourself. It's not like black and white. They're not exclusive. You can support your own career and support the other person. You can tell them that there's room for everyone. Maybe there's only one job, but your belief is, *'If*

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it's not this job, it's another job. I just want to be successful, and I want you to be successful.' And if you mean that, it will come across.

You could say, *"Yeah, it's true there's only this one job, and we're both going for it. But isn't it better if we support each other and we're better together versus trying to tear each other down?"* This is you trying to find some mutual benefits. And that's really the next step. The first three steps, as I said before, are essentially choosing your attitude, not making the person a problem, creating safety for them, and finding mutual benefits. Once you know what makes them feel unsafe, what they do differently, and why, then you can talk about how to create a solution that's a win-win. Like I said, align on the objectives, align on the parameters for achieving those objectives, and just talk about those things. Because maybe they're worried that if they do things their way, it's going to make their department look bad. Let's say that's the case, so how can we do things in a way where both departments look like heroes? And then solve that problem. Make that the objective that you're trying to solve.

Sometimes, as I said before, you can't do all this in one sitting. Sometimes you can, sometimes you can't. And so you need to maybe give it the space that it needs. This is a longer-term play, this isn't just one project. You're going to rebuild this relationship over time. But the more that you show up in this way, consistently, the more they're going to let their guard down, and they're going to show up differently. That's really the final step. It's just continuing to walk the talk. It's not over one conversation. It's not a one-thing-fixes-all, it's an ongoing thing.

You need to be willing to lead the change, even if they fall short. Even if they say one thing and then do another, you need to keep checking in with them. You need to keep giving them the benefit of the doubt. Maybe it's forever. Maybe the relationship only improves 50% and it's never perfect. Who cares? As long as you're showing up as the person that you want to be, and you're giving them compassion, empathy, and understanding, that's what you get to feel. You won't feel resentment, anger, and threatening feelings anymore because you're just choosing not to go there with this person. You're choosing to be understanding. They might still feel it, but you don't have to. That's how you start to create allies with "enemies." It's by being an ally. That's the bottom line.

Be an ally, act as an ally would, and this person is going to come around. And don't just be an ally to them, be an ally to yourself as well. That's really what this is. You're taking care of yourself by taking care of the other person. You're leading the relationship. And in the end, people are going to see that. They're going to see that shift in you, they're going to see what you're trying to do. That's the key, isn't it? No suffering for you, and people see what kind of leader you are. So win-win-win, I say. Ideally, you create better relationships and you get better results. I don't see a downside to this. Is it easy? No. But it's actually easier and gets more sustainable results than what you're doing now, so I would give it a try.

That's what I have for you this week, my friends. Talk to you next week. Bye for now.

Hey, if you want to simplify leadership while amplifying your value, then you need to get your hands on my free training. Head over to melsavage.com/simple for instant access to the training and get a taste of how I help my clients lead with ease and make more money in the process. I'll see you there.

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