

The 4 Fundamental Strategies of Power

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Some of the [popular literature on power](#) rests on cynicism.

It's easy for cynicism to find fertile ground.Â

Since a lot of the self-help literature is based on politically correct, feel-good BS, cynicism can sound more "real", and "more effective".

However, total cynicism is no more effective than naive self-help is.

And it's *especially* harmful for close relationships and, generally, for a happy life.

What is effective, then?

Well, when we are talking about repeated-social interactions, which include friends, intimate relationships, family members, as well as many business transactions, **collaboration is most effective in increasing your power and influence** (and your well-being, as well).

Collaboration is simple.

Collaboration means that you give value, and they give value back to you.

Collaboration evolved in humans because it was good for everyone. Including the selfish individual.

[Evolutionary psychologists](#) disagree on many things, but they all agree that collaboration yields social and material benefits not just for the group, but for the individual as well.

There is plenty of evidence for that, and contemporary computer simulations support the same conclusion ([Matt Ridley, 1996](#)).

Let me say it again: collaboration is not empty self-help or for the naïve ones. Collaboration evolved because it proved a boon for the individual's self-interest and selfish genes.

What does it mean to you?

It means that **if you structure most of your long-term relationships as collaborations and as win-win, you will gain** (together with your partners, and society at large).

Here is an infographic for long-term power:

Let's review each one of them:

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#1. Seek Win-Win Deals

Business transactions tend to be more transaction and utility-based than non-business relationships.

So your focus is more on *concrete* help ([WIIFT](#)), rather than emotional support, advise, or a good mood.

1.1. Use win-win frames

People must *know* that you seek win-win.

There is plenty of people with a defector and value-taking approach to life, and it's your duty to put others at ease and make them trust you.

How do you advertise win-win?

1. **Internalize within yourself that you seek win-win:** then your vibe, nonverbals and gestures will automatically align
2. **Mind your reputation:** your reputation precedes you, and can open many doors before you even open your mouth
3. **Say that you seek win-win:** simply state that you seek win-win. It works wonders.

Another major benefit of framing as win-win is to influence people's behavior.

Remember: most people have the capacity for both collaboration and defection. **When you use collaborative frames, you increase the likelihood that you will select their collaborative mode.**

And note:

NOTE: You can still be aggressive within win-win

Many people don't explicitly say they seek win-win because they think it means that they can't negotiate hard, if they do.

Baloney!

Win-win is *not* about being nice. And it's not even the same as going 50/50, or being "fair". Even if you reach an agreement that captures 90% of the added value, that is still win-win as they are 10% better.

1.2. Reframe as win-win

You also want to re-frame the interaction as win-win whenever things get too tense.

People have a tendency for losing their head in the fog of negotiation, and they might walk away or start antagonizing you at a *personal* level.

Reframing the interaction as win-win reminds people that the negotiation is not *against them*, but that instead this negotiation -and you- are still going to add value *for them*.

So for example, if it seems like you are reaching an impasse while you negotiate your salary, you would say:

You: Look, what I'm saying here is I can deliver to you exactly what you're looking for. And maybe more. Which is great, because I also want to join your team. There is an opportunity to gain on both sides here, and that's what I want.

We only need to find how we can make this work.
If you could only match this number, which I think is very fair..

That re-sets the frame again towards win-win.

#2. Seek Collaborative Relationships

Collaborative relationships apply the collaboration principle to non-business relationships.

These include friends, sexual partners, spouses, and family members.

Step 1.: Becoming a Giver

Because of the [social exchange law](#), when you give value, people will want to give back.

Those who don't give back, you cut them out of your life.

Those who can't give back (yet), up to you.

To start being a giver:

1. **Avoid value-taking behavior:** [social climbing](#), [ridiculing others](#), back-handed compliments, [undermining](#), these all destroy collaboration
2. **Make people feel good:** yes, it doesn't have to be complex. Being an uplifting force, rather than a mood dampener, gives value
3. **Encourage people:** encouraging people to try new things indirectly says "I'm happy if you grow and expand"
4. **Cheer their successes:** congratulating people indirectly says "I'm on your side", plus it expands on happy threads and makes you a giver of good feelings
5. **Offer value-adding advice:** the more you grow, the more real help you can give. That makes you a value giver, and makes people *want* to give back to you.

An example of increasing collaborations by valuable advice and "mindsets" upgrades:

[In this case, I was indirectly teaching her to act more high-power, and respect her time more. Plus, to combine work and pleasure by meeting me later: win-win](#)

6. **Advanced level: expect better from them:** this is a [value-adding judge approach](#). By expecting them to be better and improve, you pull them up from a judge frame

When you go for collaborative relationships, you have more friends, more allies, fewer enemies, and fewer [frenemies](#).

And as we've said many times: friends and allies empower. Enemies disempower.

The closer the relationship, the more you must seek collaboration

As a rule of thumb:

The closer the relationships, the more important it is that they stay within a mutually-accepted collaborative frame.

Of course, it's not *always* possible.

You can't choose your parents or siblings, for example. But you can still do a lot to hold your side of the collaboration and to spur and encourage their collaboration by making your frames explicit (see

example below).

And, luckily, you *can* choose your closest friends and your spouse.

Donâ€™t even think of making close friends who canâ€™t work within a collaborative frame. And if you pick a spouse who canâ€™t work within a collaborative frame, I will personally come pay you a visit :).

The smart collaborator mindset: give *and* expect back

Needless to say, the goal is not to have 100% of your relationships 100% perfect, at all times.

Thatâ€™s just silly.

It also doesn't mean you have to give to *everyone*.

No, not everyone is worthy of your time, and not everyone is worthy of your giving.

And â€œcollaborativeâ€ doesâ€™t mean you always agree or never have an argument, of course.

But it does mean that you can frame those arguments as “blips” and disagreements in the overall bigger frame of collaboration.

The goal is to develop a collaborative *mindset*.

Better yet, a smart-collaborator mindset.

A smart collaborator mindset seeks collaboration and, as well, *demand*s collaboration back.

2.1. Use Collaborative Frames

Again, same as for win-win.

But possibly even more important here. People need to know that youâ€™re a value-giver and that you want and expect win-win.

2.1. Reframe As Collaboration

Again, same as for win-win.

With some people, itâ€™s very easy to keep collaborative relationships.

With some others, you need to do some more reframing. And you will see more examples in the relationship module.

Some others, you can't fix them.

Maybe they only liked you when you were down on your ass, so that they could give while feeling superior, but they don't accept you as a giver at their same level.

And some others are natural-born takers (leechers).

You can cut these people off.

But with many others, you *can* turn things around with collaborative reframing.

2.3. Turn Competitive Frames Into Collaborative

Frames

I call this technique “[collaborative reframing](#)”.

Collaborative reframing is one of the biggest, best-kept secrets of being successful with people.

I use this one very often, and you will see it across all this website and course (because it works).

- Girl says I’m pushing too much?
I say: maybe it might seem like that, but it’s only because I want you to be happy.
- Friend makes a snide comment?
I sidestep, maybe shake my head with a slight smile, but don’t escalate it. Instead, I make a mental note he’s entering into “competition mode” and that I need to show more warmth (lesson on warmth in the next module).
- Girlfriend says “she’s also good at doing XYZ”?
I think “uh-oh, she’s getting into competition mode”, and I say: “of course you are baby, that’s why we’re together. We’re not in a race at who’s better, we’re a team”

For good examples:

- [Handling shit test with collaboration](#): a real-life example from John
- [Removing the seed of antagonism](#): see an example from my own life

It works within families, too.

My brother was thinking about selling his house and moving in with my aging parents. A big move with potentially big consequences on inheritance and the split of family assets.

When the idea reached me, the family was dangerously thinking whether it was fair, and who was going to gain and lose.

A terrible frame to discuss the topic.

So the first thing I said was this:

Me: It’s a big project to think of. Let’s talk about it and find something we’re *all* happy with. We’re a family, and personally I only want something we’re all happy with, and especially our parents.

Immediate change of mood.

Everyone nods, everyone’s closer -and I become [more leader-like](#), too-.

Remember this: **a frame of collaboration sets the expectation of collaboration**, which in turn also leads people to behave collaboratively.

Also read:

- [Frame control](#)

| [10 Frame Control Techniques to Out-Frame Anyone](#)

#3. Make Friends, Not Enemies

Listen out:

This is especially important to *you*.

If youâre reading here, chances are that youâre high in power.

You want power, you are driven, you want more in your life, and you are ready to work for it.

Many people who are high on power make the mistake of entering relationships with a competitive mindset.

They want to win and dominate, and enter new encounters with the idea of âshowing powerâ and âshowing whoâs bossâ.

That gets you two possible reactions from people: submission, or competition.

Problem is, most winners are also high in power, and that means that **if you compete with other competitive people, you end up competing *against* the people you want on your side.**

And thatâs why in Power University we discuss the importance â[mixing warmth with power](#)â.

Of course, we must be realistic.

It will not *always* be possible to make friends and allies.

But again, this is not about getting that 100% score. Itâs about the mindset.

But by approaching people and life with the mindset that you seek friends first, you will win more often, and more easily in life -plus, youâll be happier-.

#4. Be Warm *And* Powerful

Your focus is dual:

1. Making yourself into the best and strongest giver/collaborator you can be (self-focus)
2. Developing the best and strongest collaborations you can develop (social-focus)

The two go absolutely hand in hand.

The more power you have, the more people want to collaborate with you, and the more you can advance each others' interest.

Applying the Laws: Examples

The above rules don't just apply to people.

They apply to business, and organizations as well.

See here some examples:

1. Powerful Businesses Ally: Peter Thiel & Elon Musk

People love "[Zero to One](#)" by Peter Thiel.

And for good reasons, it's a great book on entrepreneurship.

What Zero to One also is, though, is an ode to *collaboration* in business (and to monopoly).

Peter Thiel:

1. Tells readers to drop the “disrupt” myth BS, because it creates competition against the most powerful and established players (ie.: Thiel exhorts to avoid unneeded fights)
2. Shares how allying with [Elon Musk](#) instead of fighting him made both of them winners (ie.: turning enemies into allies)
3. Exhorts readers to build teams based on cooperation, win-win, and shared meaning (ie.: pick people and partners with whom it’s easier to establish win-win and cooperation)

And BTW, Thiel understood the power of “extreme collaboration”, too.

That’s why he exhorts his readers to build teams that he (shamefully) calls “mafia”.

Speaking of which:

2. Powerful Organizations Build Powerful Alliances: The Godfather

The same principle of cooperation can be applied to crime.

Think of the difference between “petty crime”, “crime”, and “organized crime”.

Which of the three is most effective in enriching and empowering its members?

It’s organized crime, which is based on building up a web of alliances.

Being a Godfather is less about war than it is about establishing and nurturing alliances.

Including, and possibly especially, with other powerful players: other organized crime families, politicians, and high-ranking cops.Â

Even the name itself, “Godfather”, is used to foster the strong bond and cooperation that reigns among same-blood families.

The organization is also structured to provide win-win.

The organization provides work and opportunities, you share your part with the bosses, and everyone’s happy.

You do great work, “make your bones”, and one day you can enjoy the full protection of that family.

Do you want to see how a mafia boss uses collaborative frames?

Check this one out:

Lorenzo:Â (speaks aggressively and somewhat disrespectfully)

Sonny: Â First of all, I respect you, Lorenzo, you’re a stand-up guy and we’re from the same neighborhood (collaborative frame), but don’t ever talk to me like that again (sets boundaries within the collaborative frame)

[Read the full forum entry here.](#)

3. Powerful Empires Build Powerful Alliances: Rome, England, The U.S.

The same concept applies to countries.

It doesn’t matter how powerful a country is: if it starts wars, it loses power.

And if it starts too many wars, it’s doomed.

Even focusing too much on military power can be counterproductive.

Think of the Assyrians.

Oh wait, you don't know who they are?

That's OK.

Nobody does.

And that's because all they did was investing in war and making war.

And in spite of developing [the most advanced and ruthless army of the ancient world](#), they left no mark on history. Constant and continuous rebellions by their many enemies eventually led to the Assyrians' downfall -in spite of their superior power-.

Wars are often bad news even when you win.

Take Sparta for example, which theoretically won against Athens.

Sparta's victory over Athens was a loss for everyone. It ended the Greek golden age, which never recovered.

And when the bigger guys invaded Greece, Sparta had nobody to ally with.

A more recent example is Germany, which up until World War II was the biggest military power in Europe.

And *still* it lost both world wars and much of its territory.

Why?

Too many wars and too many enemies.

Germany failed to collaborate.

Compare Germany with more long-lasting powers that *did* build empires.

Rome, England, and the US.

Those are the powers that, on average, set up win-wins and collaborations.

And made friends and allies.

The Romans could be ruthless when needed to, as all great powers sometimes need to be.

But the overall frame was one of cooperation. Rome always stressed unity within the empire, freedom for the population it annexed, and common good and trade.

Same for England and its Commonwealth.

They all had plenty of wars, but they also had larger collaborations.

And made friends and allies.

The Romans could be ruthless when needed to, as all great powers sometimes need to be.

But the overall frame was one of cooperation. Rome always stressed unity within the empire, freedom for the population it annexed, and common good and trade.

Same for England and its Commonwealth.

And similar to what the US has been doing.

A superficial look from the critics would have that the US is a warmongering country. But the opposite is true.

What truly allows the US to project its power is its web of alliances, together with the military bases that the US operate in their allies' territory.

The US is the most powerful country in the world. And still, guess which allies it picked?

The US' allies are *also* the most powerful countries in the world. The NATO countries in Europe include all the rich Western countries.

And in Asia, Korea and Japan, both close US allies, are the two most technologically advanced countries in the region.

The richest and most powerful country, allied with the richest and most powerful countries. Is it any wonder the URSS was going to lose?

That's how you build a proper power network.

To strengthen its alliance, the US also made its partners stronger and richer, both with trade and, when needed, even with direct aid (most famously [the Marshall plans](#), which ensured Western Europe remained capitalist and friendly).

The US also created bigger global markets, making the alliance not just more powerful, but richer, more prosperous, and happier.

And everyone gained.

That's proper win-win deals on a world stage.

It's the exact same with people.

People who start personal feuds and wars lose power.

People who seek a web of powerful allies gain power and leverage.

4. Reversal of The Laws. Lots of Enemies Means Less Power: Donald Trump

Donald Trump is a competitive and dominant man.

That's how it should be.

Any driven man is at least somewhat competitive.

The challenge is in channeling that competitiveness in ways that support your goals with cooperation and alliances.

And Trump often struggles to contain his dominant streak, making too many enemies.

Sure, one could say: "but he is the president of the US".

And that's exactly why I picked him as an example.

Is Trump president *because* of his many enemies, or *in spite of it*? Look at what it's costing him.

His constant warfare with the Democrats is making it impossible for him to pass the legislation he wants to pass.

He often battles his own party, turning friends into enemies. And that likely cost him his attempted repeal of Obamacare.

He picks wars with neutral judges and justice department, tarnishing his reputation, which contributed to making him [the most disapproved president](#) (and making his prosecutors even more dogged).

And not to talk about the press, where it looks like it's "Trump against all journalists":

The press certainly isn't going to write anything flattering when Trump is always busy fighting it.

The result is that Trump is the most embattled president in history.

And that's because his belligerence and uncompromising attitude of "with me or against me" makes too many enemies.

The Exceptions

As we have said, these rules refer to relationships that see repeated interactions over time.

However, as for almost any laws, there are exceptions and special circumstances. Even within repeated

interactions, for example, it's possible to *feign* collaboration.

And it's possible to [repress and/or manipulate](#) someone into giving and giving while you take and take.

However, in the long run, it becomes more and more difficult to keep abusive relationships in place.

Also, keep in mind that people who are easiest to swindle rarely are the ones with a lot to give. And the inverse is also true: **the more powerful and resourceful the people are, the better their radar against scammers and manipulators** (and the more power they have to get rid of cheaters).

On average, cheating works comparatively better in:

- One-off exchanges
- When there is no possibility of retribution
- When there is no harm from a damaged reputation
- When the cheated party has no way of finding out about your deceit
- When the cheater does not know how to cooperate: cheating is his way of life
- When the ill-gotten spoils of cheating can be so life-changing that they're worth the risks
- And, very important for your mental and emotional well being, when you don't feel bad about it

This website is built, in good part, to teach you about the exceptions as well, so that you can protect your value-adding alliances from [life's marauders](#).^Â

However, whenever you are in doubt, **always revert to these basic strategies of power**.

Why?

Because the downside of "being wrong" is, often, small.

But the upside can be huge.

Take a friend who's teetering between a friendly collaborator and a competitive frenemy, for example.

If when they act competitively, you escalate, you make an enemy.

Sure, you might later patch things up, but the scar will remain forever.

But if instead you manage to turn him and win him over to a collaborative relationship, you make a friend. And a *good* friend, too, because he now feels he was stupid and unworthy in trying to trip you.

I.e.: you make a friend, from a position of power ([judge role](#)).

This can be shown schematically as well:

See?

Seeking win-win cannot ensure you will *always* get win-win.

But **seeking win-win first is the *only* strategy that gives you a chance at making a friend and ally**, and thus increasing your own well-being as well.

If you go warm first when someone was curt towards you, the risk is small: he might rebuff your attempt, and you potentially lose a bit of status (we will see an example with the "[icy dominance style](#)").

But if you play it well, you will still seem "superior", and you make him look petty and vengeful.

The risk, overall, is small if things go wrong.

But if you manage to turn him, you win big (green quadrant).

Here is what one of the [Power University alumni says](#) when he discovered how this law applies to frenemies:

I recovered, thankfully, but a valuable lesson was learned that day: fight only as a last resort. And seek out friendlier options if possible. If I applied your knowledge to that situation today, I

I am sure things would have turned out differently.

Yep, he's totally right.

Of course, we can't be 100% sure it would have turned out differently.

But life is about odds, and chances are high that it would have turned out better for him, indeed.

The sooner you start applying these laws, the more power to you.

This is a shortened version of a Power University lesson, which contains 2 more fundamental strategies.

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