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## Power of 2

### How to Make the Most of Your Partnerships at Work and in Life

#### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Many of the greatest accomplishments can be reached only by two people working together. Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary were the first to scale Mt. Everest; Karl Malone and John Stockton were the key to each other's success on the basketball court; Michael Eisner was never as effective at Disney without Frank Wells.

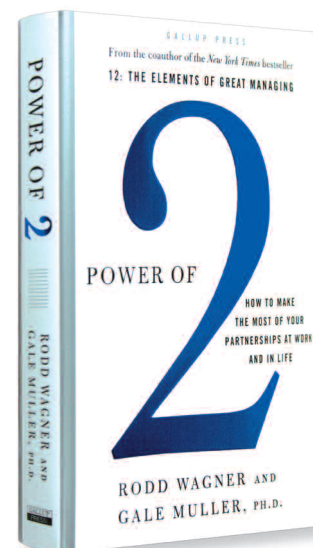
But while some partnerships reach great heights, others fall short. If you are like most people, you've had some good ones. You may even have a few of them now. Yet chances are you don't make the most of the collaborative opportunities all around you. Powerful partnerships — the kind in which you and a collaborator regularly work together, reach goals together you never could have accomplished apart, and gain the deep satisfaction only such an alliance can bring — are evasive.

Somehow our televisions, e-mail, headphones, cell phones, car radios, and personal computers trick our brains into thinking we are with other people, interacting, when we are, in fact, working in isolation. We are crowded in offices, airports, subways — frequently within arm's reach of dozens of people — but often on a very lonely pursuit. Wired? Yes. Networked? Yes. Collaborating? Not much.

Seeing these patterns at numerous client companies, authors Rodd Wagner and Gale Muller teamed up to lead a five-year endeavor to crack the code on collaboration and to discover what elements are crucial for two people becoming a successful team. *Power of 2* details the eight elements that prepare partners to succeed in their most important endeavors.

#### IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- Why some people click while others clash.
- What great pairs have in common.
- Why the adults you work with still need the playground rules of childhood.
- How to find the upside in a breach of trust.
- Why the quality of your partnership cannot exceed the quality of your communication.



by Rodd Wagner and  
Gale Muller, Ph.D.

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# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: POWER OF 2

by Rodd Wagner and Gale Muller, Ph.D.

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Gale Muller is vice chairman and general manager of the Gallup World Poll. He oversees a global team of researchers in more than 150 countries. He has worked with many of Gallup's key clients in the automotive, entertainment, telecommunications, health care and broadcast industries.

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## Complementary Strengths

Several decades ago, a junior high shop teacher wanted to impress upon his new students the dangers of the oxyacetylene torch. "Pay attention, class," he said, pulling a balloon from his pocket and holding it to the nozzle of the torch. "I am going to fill this balloon with oxygen." When the balloon was full, he lit a match under it, producing a strong pop.

He pulled another balloon from his pocket. "Now this time, I am going to fill the balloon with acetylene," he said. Following the same procedure, he made a short flare as the fuel caught fire.

The teacher pulled yet another balloon from his pocket. "You've seen what happens to each of these elements separately. Now let me show you what happens when I put them together." He repeated the procedure a third time, opening the valves for the oxygen and the acetylene as the balloon grew larger. "You might want to plug your ears," said the teacher, putting the flame to the latex.

BAM!

Was it the oxygen or the acetylene that caused the explosion? Neither. Or rather, both. Separately, they are impressive. Together, they create a mixture so hot it can melt steel. The power is in the combination.

## Understanding Your Strengths

Your partnerships work on the same principle. The best partnerships happen when you and someone who has strengths that complement yours join forces and

focus on a single goal. Your strengths cancel out your partner's weaknesses and vice versa. You accomplish together what could not be done separately.

Before you can forge a successful alliance, you must understand what you bring to the combination and, equally important, what you don't. Collaboration is more than doubling up — more than just twice the oxygen or twice the acetylene. The key to achieving success is not trying to be someone else or striving to be as good as your collaborator at whatever he or she does best or seeking to be universally proficient. It's in discovering your own exceptional abilities, recognizing your weaknesses and understanding how someone else's abilities complement your own.

A successful collaborator must resist the ego-gratifying temptation to take too much credit. If a person honestly recognizes that his or her counterpart does some things much better and that the other person is needed to get the job done, he or she is less susceptible to fall into the trap of conceit. In a strong partnership, both participants are always promoting the abilities of the other. They constantly speak in terms of "we" or "us," rather than "I" or "me." ●

## A Common Mission

Collaboration is more than friendship or collegiality, more than being in the same office or working for the same firm, more than proximity or mutual appreciation. It occurs only when you and an ally strive for a definitive accomplishment — passing work between your-



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selves, “putting your heads together” or doubling up on a task neither of you could accomplish alone. For this reason, the relationship is unique. It exists to serve the goal. It lasts only until the mission is accomplished. Once the objective is reached, the partnership must adopt a new goal or it dissolves.

Although you and your collaborator must agree on your mission, you don’t need to have the same reasons for pursuing it. Successful partners often have different motivations for making the climb. This usually does not hinder the alliance, particularly if both of you understand the driving force motivating the other and work to see those hopes fulfilled.

### Sharing the Goal

Although a shared mission is essential, maybe even obvious, the lack of basic concurrence is where many pairs fail. Only one in four people in poor partnerships agree that they have a common goal or purpose with the other person. In many cases, both think they are on the same page, but when limits of time, money or attention force difficult choices, it becomes clear the two have conflicting priorities. Only 9 percent of those in poor partnerships say they were “very successful” at reaching their goal. It’s difficult to do if you’re not aiming at the same target. ●

## Fairness

Particularly at the beginning of a working relationship, colleagues cannot avoid making comparisons between their own rewards and those of their counterpart as they decide how earnestly to maintain the collaboration. Even if you have no formal authority over the pay, promotion or recognition of your collaborator, you should make sure he or she gets a fair deal.

As logical as the need for fairness may be, feelings of being used are often at the heart of what destroys a working relationship. This is especially true when one of the two people has the ability to impose terms on the other.

Research indicates that we also disengage and retreat if we feel as if someone is taking advantage of us. People do irrational things when others violate their sense of justice. In a partnership, it’s not what’s smart or what’s logical that matters, but what’s equitable. The emotional reactions of collaborators drive them toward interacting fairly or not interacting at all.

### Fairness and Equality

There are different, opposing forms of fairness that

## Fairness: What the Research Shows

Several statements about fairness proved crucial for successful collaboration. Respondents were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each of these statements:

- We share the workload fairly between us.
- We do not have to keep track of who does what and who gets credit for what.
- We see each other as equals — one is not better than the other.

Your partnership has little chance of succeeding unless both of you believe it is fair. On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), it takes an average above 3.6 on these statements to reach the range considered “good.” Only respondents who strongly agree to all three statements have excellent alliances.

apply, depending on the situation. The most basic form is equality, a 50–50 division of the work and the rewards. Such a perfect split rarely occurs in practice. Any objective measurement of the work two people put into a project or the rewards they get from it would find at least a slight imbalance. Yet the symbolic value of an even division is often the assumed starting point and the ideal to which both partners aspire. It is the magnetic North Pole of most collaborations — intuitively appealing and difficult to argue, which is why it emerges in so many successful pairs.

However, a powerful partnership does not need to be equal to be fair. There are many times when one member of a dyad does more of the work, brings a rare talent, has far more experience or otherwise “deserves” — the term is unavoidably subjective — a larger share of the reward. Giving identical benefits to those whose workloads differ substantially is as unfair as giving vastly different rewards for the same work.

In successful partnerships in which there is an uneven division of responsibilities, a corresponding division of rewards also occurs. You and your counterpart do not need to divide the work evenly, but you must make the rewards proportionate to the workload. Productive working relationships can be built on a 70–30 division of the work if there is a corresponding 70–30 division of the rewards. In the strongest relationships, there is even a certain degree of latitude or wiggle room. For example, some partners are happy doing 60 percent of the work and receiving just half the rewards.

### Relative Contributions

To make your partnership fair, you will need to keep in mind that although you are aware of everything you do for the joint effort, much of what your partner does escapes your notice. If you are like most people, you also have an inflated opinion of the value of your contributions. Selfishness and the natural bias toward believing one has done more than a comrade creates a pothole in the road of many joint projects.

To be a great partner, you must continuously consider how much of the work your counterpart is shouldering and what he or she is getting for the effort. What rewards are most meaningful to your counterpart and is he or she receiving them? Would you be willing to trade your work and rewards? Are you truly working as equals? Addressing these issues requires candid conversations and a willingness, if needed, to take on more of the work for less of the rewards. Your collaborator needs to be similarly accommodating to you. Only when both partners are assured the other is more invested in the common mission than in a selfish pursuit do they not have to keep track of who does what and who gets credit for what. ●

### Trust

Every partner needs to be able to depend on his or her counterpart. Every partner takes a risk that the other person might fail, intentionally or innocently. Every partner needs the dependable backup that is the difference between success and failure.

Trust is the linchpin of a partnership. With trust, both people can concentrate on their separate responsibilities, confident that the other person will come through. One brain-imaging study discovered that once trust is created, a person's brain will process his or her counterpart's cooperative move before it even happens.

### The Partner's Dilemma

Without trust, it's better to work alone. Both people doubt whether the other will fulfill his or her end of the bargain. Both must verify the other's actions. Both must make contingency plans in case their counterparts fail. The frustration and inefficiency of not being able to count on someone is more hassle than the burden of handling the full load alone.

You face a dilemma every time you interact with someone new. If the person can be trusted, and if he or she learns to trust you, the two of you can be more successful working together than going it alone. But if one of you is not trustworthy, it's better that you never even

### The Partner's Dilemma

Imagine you are paired with a stranger to play the following game. You receive an empty red envelope. The other person receives an empty blue envelope. The instructor tells both of you to secretly place either \$100 of your own money or nothing inside your envelope. Then he will take both envelopes, double whatever money he finds in each, and return them, but only after switching them so that you get the blue envelope and your counterpart gets the red one.

Would you put \$100 in the red envelope? The question starkly illustrates the issue of trust. Your answer cuts to the essence of who you are as a collaborator.

There are four outcomes to this experiment:

**Mutual trust:** If you both risk your money, you both double your investment. You make \$100, and so does your ally. This is the only way you both come out ahead.

**Your counterpart betrays you:** If you risk your money, but the other person puts in nothing, you'll lose \$100, and he or she will gain \$200. Your trust is abused and you end up on the losing end.

**You betray your counterpart:** Should you fail to put in the money and the other person does, you gain \$200 while risking nothing. This is the most profitable short-term strategy and, therefore, a real temptation, but you can employ it only by abusing the trust of your counterpart.

**Mutual betrayal:** If both of you risk no money, neither of you will lose any. But from your reticence or competitiveness, you both lose the chance to multiply your funds.

try to collaborate.

In a working relationship, being trustworthy is not a matter of putting \$100 in an envelope or hitting the right button. It is showing up for an important meeting on time, doing more than your share of the work, quickly returning e-mails and phone calls, giving all your creativity to a project, jumping in rather than having to be asked, not being a burden to your partner, fighting for the success of the project, working hard on physical jobs and smart on mental ones, and hundreds of other acts large and small.

In the early stages of a collaboration, both partners take a wait-and-see attitude, still in the clutches of the dilemma, not sure the other person is going to do his or

her part. But if one cooperative move is matched by another, solid reputations form. The fear of being taken advantage of fades. Trust removes doubt. Trust eliminates the dilemma.

### Reaping What You Sow

The most important element in forming and maintaining a variety of strong partnerships is not your craftiness, but your willingness to take the risk of trusting numerous potential partners and your diligence in repaying the trust they place in you.

Your first moves, friendly or hostile, tip the balance for future interactions. When you exhibit trust, you will most often find trustworthiness. When you are selfish, you will most often find selfishness. When you compete, others must resort to competition. If you choose to play the game strictly for your own advantage, your attempts at collaboration will indeed be solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.

In the end, the degree to which you succeed in forming trusting partnerships is less a reflection of how much people trust you than how much you trust them — less a reflection of their trustworthiness than of your own. ●

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## Acceptance

One fact about partnerships is so uncomfortable that your first reaction is to deny it: You form partnerships fastest and easiest with people most like yourself. Deep-seated biases make you more trusting of those who look most like you, who think like you or with whom you have the most in common, whether you're from the same town, attended the same school, are fans of the same team or mirror each other on more controversial factors such as race, age, religion or sex.

Sociologists call the degree of similarity between people “social distance.” Its consequences for collaboration are often more important than the physical distance separating two counterparts. Humans are tribal creatures, constantly drawing boundaries — sometimes prejudicial boundaries — between friends and foes.

This creates a problem, not only because it restricts your collaborative field, but because it makes you less likely to create strong ties with those who would bring something you lack to the partnership. Many of the potential collaborators you need most are those who will be, because of their differences from you, most difficult to learn to accept.

You don't need an identical twin as much as you need an opposite, a relative stranger who shares the common mission and the same sense of fair play, but whose

approach to the challenge may seem quite foreign.

### Egocentrism

Differences between partners can easily spark antagonism. Even if the social distance between you and your partner is small, incorporating his or her personality into your preferred way of working can be difficult. Mutual irritation is common in partnerships, particularly in the early stages. There is a natural propensity to believe you are normal and that the other person, to the degree he or she differs from you, is a bit off.

We tend to forget or disregard information that disagrees with us, but we remember what reinforces our own views. We are inclined to believe positive news about those we like and negative information about those we don't. We suffer the hubris of “egocentric infallibility,” thinking what we believe must be true because we would not believe something unless it were true. And we are hypocrites, believing or professing one thing and doing another, sometimes not even noticing the contradiction in ourselves while having a finely honed sense for spotting it in others.

Egocentrism kills partnerships. It's impossible to work effectively with someone if you — blind to your own failings — spend too much energy finding fault with your comrade. Partnerships require both people to accommodate each other's foibles.

### Coping With a Frustrating Situation

Collaborators look for ways to handle aspects of their opposites they would prefer to change.

One is denial, pretending the problem does not exist. Ignoring the issue, according to psychological research, is a poor strategy that has shown itself to be “clearly related to higher levels of stress and impaired psychological well-being.” If your partner does something that bothers you, you need to recognize it before you can resolve it.

Another tactic is called “resigning acceptance.” This attitude, although it recognizes the problem, also includes a feeling of cynicism or powerlessness in dealing with the issue. “Typical,” say people who use this method. “These things always happened to me.” This kind of approach is much like denial, leading to bitterness, decreased mental health and less control over your actions.

The best way to deal with a frustrating situation is called “active acceptance,” neither denying the situation nor surrendering to it. “Active acceptance means acknowledging a negative, difficult situation and dealing with it in a constructive way,” according to Gallup

researchers. “The individual dispenses with fruitless attempts to control what is neither controllable nor changeable.”

In a partnership, it is epitomized by focusing on your partner’s strengths rather than his or her weaknesses, accepting your partner as he or she is and being understanding when he or she errs. In the best collaborations, partners come to appreciate what they once found aggravating. ●

### Forgiveness

When a partnership is going well, all kinds of wonderfully unselfish things happen. Partners change their goals to better match each other’s objectives. They strive to be fair to each other. They focus on their counterpart’s strengths. They overlook each other’s foibles. At the zenith of collaboration, both partners make great personal sacrifices for the other’s happiness.

But when things turn negative, a parallel set of emotions and reactions kicks in. The partners see themselves as pursuing opposing ends. Fairness becomes less about a considerate division of rewards and work and more about what one partner feels the other owes him or her. The counterpart’s strengths don’t seem so impressive any more. His or her personal ticks become full-fledged character flaws. At the nadir of collaboration, not only will the partners refuse to sacrifice for each other’s benefit, they eagerly go out of their way to cause their one-time colleague pain.

The same emotional wiring that makes great partnerships so effective and rewarding creates corresponding and equally powerful negative forces if things go wrong. In a good collaboration, partners make statements such as “two heads are better than one.” In a bad one, the two make comments such as “I would have been better off working by myself” or “I wish I’d never even met him or her.”

Trust between two collaborators is like the rope between mountaineers on a snowy ledge. If the line is cut, the gravity of powerful negative emotions kicks in. The cord may have been separated one fiber at a time, as when a snide remark, showing up late for an important meeting or letting a shared project slide a little leads to a matching dereliction from the other partner.

### How to Patch Things Up

One of the most difficult collaborative decisions you will face is whether to patch up a partnership if your counterpart violates your trust. There is no perfect answer. Anyone who tells you to just let it go is failing

### Partnerships: What the Research Shows

As far as keeping a collaboration from going negative, two statements in Gallup’s research differentiate good and bad partnerships:

- There have been times when either my collaborator or I have violated the other’s trust.
- When either of us has violated the other’s trust, we have been able to forgive each other.

Although minor disruptions occur in good and bad partnerships, serious violations of trust are rare in the best pairs. Only 18 percent of good partnerships suffer a real rift. Among poor partnerships, the number jumps to 40 percent. When something serious enough to require forgiveness transpires, 85 percent of those in good partnerships do forgive. Those in poor partnerships patch things up only 14 percent of the time.

to consider the intensity of his or her own emotions under these circumstances.

Yet failing to continue working together can forfeit the benefits of what was otherwise a solid combination. Common sense indicates what needs to be done by the offender: Apologize. Make your good intentions clear. Make a peace offering. Be demonstrably more reliable to build trust.

The more intriguing question is what to do if you were the one betrayed. You need a tremendous amount of discernment, self-control, ability to give your counterpart the benefit of the doubt, and desire for a better outcome to turn a vicious circle into a virtuous one.

How you manage your own thinking is as important as the offense itself. In many cases, whether a person forgives the misdeed says less about the seriousness of the wrong than about the personality of the partner whose trust was abused. ●

### Communicating

Most collaborators, even many of the best, do not realize the role communication plays in creating a powerful partnership. Of course, two people working together must synchronize their efforts to avoid getting their wires crossed. It’s obvious that silence can breed misunderstandings. Two heads cannot be better than one if the two people do not talk enough to each other.

Rarely appreciated, however, is how communicating itself is collaborative, an issue of trust within the larger

partnership that surrounds it. Communication is more than a purely functional aspect of working together. Every time two counterparts talk, their relationship changes. What goes on beneath the surface is more important than the information exchanged.

### Constant Contact

From a practical perspective, staying in contact with your partner allows the two of you to be aware of the other's next move, to make your intentions clear, to brainstorm or perhaps stumble onto an idea you would not have had separately, and to share your candid assessments with each other.

Silence creates the opposite effects. Suspicious counterparts administer to themselves a sort of mental Miranda warning, worried that anything they say can and will be used against them. But whether or not you intended to do so, failing to communicate creates a threat in your partner's mind that you are not committed to the collaboration, that you do not trust him or her, or that you just might make a run for the goal by yourself and claim all the credit.

It's much easier to vilify someone who has not explained his or her motivations, much easier to read into the silence the threat of an unpleasant surprise.

### Recursive Thinking

Communication in a partnership is complicated by the unique and incredible human capacity for reading into a situation what the other person must be thinking. Scientists call it *recursive thinking*, the two- or three-layered awareness of what your collaborator is experiencing.

Recursive thinking is a double-edged sword. There is no sympathy without recursion. A great partner who understands that his or her colleague is struggling will shoulder more of the burden and offer support. It's impossible to understand how a collaborator's desire for the goal differs from your own unless you can mentally put yourself in his or her shoes.

Yet too much recursion and too little discussion inevitably lead to wrong assumptions. Rather than explain their rationale, collaborators routinely assume the other person knows the reasons. Rather than compliment the other person on a good job, partners assume their praise would be redundant. Rather than ask for more information and listen closely, people assume they already know what the other person would say.

Assuming without verifying is dangerous. We are not mind readers; we are mind guessers. Sometimes we guess wrong. This is the reason why in partnerships that involve a risk of death such as piloting an airplane, rock

## Communication: What the Research Shows

Three statements about communication within a partnership from Gallup's research demonstrate the importance of both people keeping the other informed about what they are doing:

- We rarely misunderstand each other.
- We are good listeners for each other.
- We show appreciation for what the other does.

On a 1-5 scale, people in good partnerships average at least 3.6 on these statements, while excellent collaborators score a perfect 5. The most successful collaborators spend enough time communicating to know what the other is thinking and they encourage each other along the way. The implied motivations behind the messages are crucial.

climbing and scuba diving, the most important messages are mandated and standardized to remove ambiguity. ●

## Unselfishness

The sacrifices some partners make for each other don't make sense. A partnership is based on the assumption that by working together, both people will achieve heights neither could have accomplished alone. You and your collaborator are supposed to be better off than you would be without the working relationship. While looking out for the other person creates trust, endangering your life for him or her seems to miss the point. What good is a partnership to a person who gets him- or herself killed for someone else?

Scientists are not impressed by most partnerships. They usually find some way to explain that what appears to be unselfishness on the surface pays off for the one who did the good deed. "Instrumental reciprocity," they call it — a means to a self-serving end: If I can keep my partner happy, he or she will do what I need him or her to do for me.

Instrumental reciprocity is common and can be quite constructive. All partnerships begin as instrumental agreements. In the early stages, they could even be called mutually selfish. For many collaborations, the coming together so that both partners go away richer is enough to carry the partnership all the way to the goal.

### Mutuality

Unselfishness changes everything about collaboration. When you value your partner's rewards as much as you

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do your own, concerns over fairness either melt away or go in the opposite direction. “What’s in it for me?” becomes “What is my counterpart getting out of this?” If a person values his or her comrade getting a reward as much as he or she does getting one, the optimal solution is always collaborative. ●

### Looking Within

If you want to have great partnerships, be a great partner. Get beyond yourself. Give up the notion that you are well-rounded and stop expecting your colleagues to be universally proficient. Incorporate someone else’s motivations into your view of the accomplishment. Put aside your competitive nature, your prepackaged view of how the thing should be done, and your desire not to be inconvenienced with imperfections of a fellow human being. Focus more on what you do for the partnership than what you get from it. Demonstrate trust in more people, and see if they don’t surprise you with their trustworthiness. Be slower to anger and quicker to forgive. And along the way, communicate continuously.

As you do, incredible things will happen. You will discover more comrades among your colleagues. You will find greater strengths in yourself and in your collaborators. You will achieve greater heights than you thought attainable. Most important, you will not stand alone on these summits. That is the Power of 2. ●

### Additional Insights for Businesspeople

#### For Managers

An employee’s collaborative relationship with his or her supervisor is more than twice as likely to show up in the negative column than in the positive one, according to Gallup’s research.

The most fundamental misunderstanding about partnerships between managers and the managed is that they should not exist at all.

The same attributes that make a good partnership between equals make a good alliance between managers and employees: complementary strengths, a common mission, fairness, trust, acceptance, forgiveness, communicating and unselfishness.

Although most employees understand that running the business requires some people to give direction and others to take it, they still value being treated as an equal by their manager. Executives, managers and other higher ranking partners do better when they build a partnership

### Unselfishness: What the Research Shows

Three statements about unselfishness from Gallup’s research proved to be the ultimate measures of the strength of a partnership:

- We take as much satisfaction at seeing the other succeed as we do from our own success.
- My partner will risk a lot for me, and I will do the same for him or her.
- My partner is like a brother or sister to me.

Good working relationships average at least 3.3 on these statements on a 1-5 scale. Those in excellent partnerships strongly agree with all three statements.

than when they exercise command.

With their managers as much as with their peers, people mirror what they perceive coming from the other person. To what’s given begrudgingly, they return begrudgingly. To what’s given generously, they reciprocate generously.

Workgroups headed by a “partner” have nearly twice the proportion of engaged employees compared to those led by a “boss.”

#### For Leaders

In their eagerness for results, executives frequently allow or even encourage internal competition. They say they want salespeople to work together, but what they want most is the sale, and if elbows fly in the process, so be it. Companies give lip service to partnerships and then create financial incentives for beating the other guy. The result is often a defeat for the organization caused by two generals spending as much time outmaneuvering each other as they do pursuing the objective.

An enterprise that sets out to collaborate without building partnerships throughout will be worse off than one that never pretended to enter that dimension. The partnerships begin at the top. ●

#### RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *The Power of 2*, you’ll also like:

1. ***Never Eat Alone* by Keith Ferrazzi with Tahl Raz.** This title deals with true relationship building rather than simple networking. Ferrazzi helps readers build skill-sets and mind-sets to establish a community of colleagues.
2. ***Team Players and Teamwork* by Glenn M. Parker.** Departmental and cross-functional teams are the fast track to industry leadership. Learn how team players can achieve the greatest productivity.
3. ***Silos, Politics and Turf Wars* by Patrick Lencioni.** Management expert Lencioni tackles the vertical structures that can turn colleagues into competitors and kill productivity.