

# CHIEF OF STAFF ARCHETYPES FRAMEWORK

## Healthy Expression



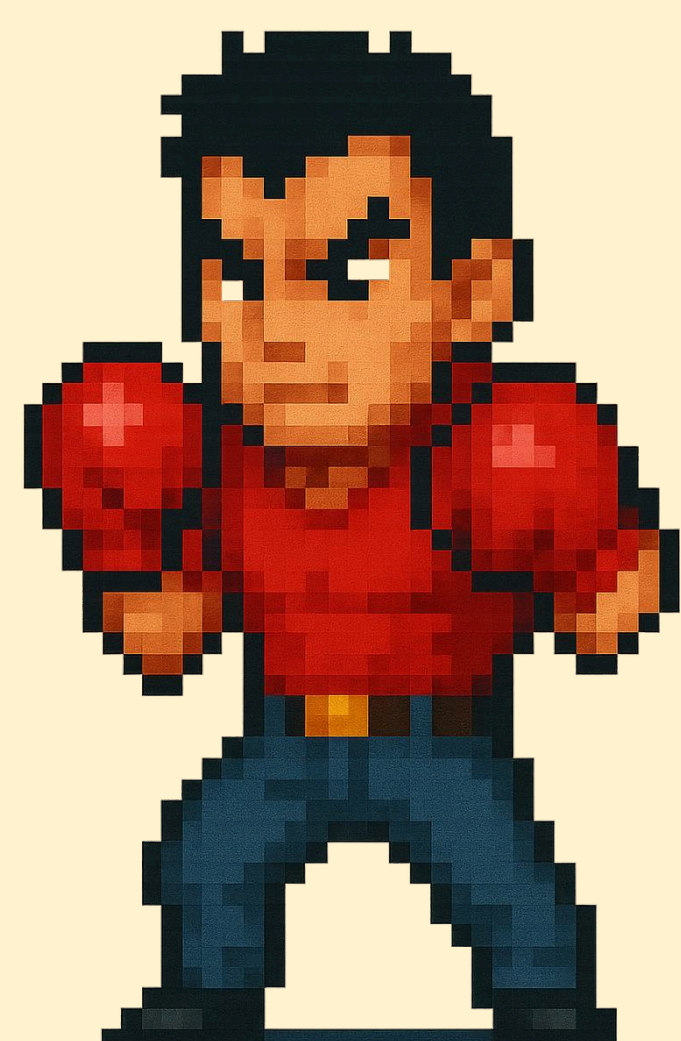
CONSIGLIERE



AIR-TRAFFIC  
CONTROLLER



SWISS-ARMY  
KNIFE



SPARRING  
PARTNER



INTEGRATOR



CATALYST

## Shadow Expression



PUPPET  
MASTER



RADAR JAMMER



PLATE-SPINNER



SABOTEUR



BOTTLENECK



WHIRLWIND





# Archetypes & Shadows

This framework outlines the core inputs to any Chief of Staff relationship and describes the resulting archetypical relationships that emerge from those inputs. It also describes the failure modes of these relationships - “shadow” archetypes.

Finally, this framework offers suggestions for how an ambitious Chief of Staff can expand their relationship archetype to improve their relationship with their Principal, deepen their impact, and advance their career.

These archetypes are designed to be tools, not the definitive judgement on you and your relationship with your principal. Use them to understand your role more deeply, avoid unproductive behavioral patterns, and chart your path to an expanded role.

## Inputs

There are four dimensions, or inputs, that determine the qualities of a principal-CoS relationship. They are as follows:

### Trust and Alignment

Every great relationship is built on a foundation of trust. Does the Principal have complete trust in the CoS that they are capable of doing the work required?

Does the CoS trust in the Principal as a leader and believe that the Principal is motivated to help the CoS succeed in their career? Do they share the same vision for the mission and strategy of the company?

### Information Flow

What does the information flow between the CoS, the Principal, and the rest of the organization look like? What communication modalities are used? Does the CoS see everything that the Principal sees?

### Decision-Making Speed

How are decisions made in the pair, and how quickly? Are debates lengthy and intense, or does the Principal delegate a lot? Do important decisions take hours, days, or weeks? Who else gets involved?

### Emotional Regulation

The temperature and tenor of emotions between the CoS and the Principal is very important. Are they easy-going or stressed? Easy to anger or calm under pressure? Open with each other or walking on eggshells?





# Archetypes & Shadows

Each Chief of Staff archetype represents a distinct mode of operating shaped by the quality of inputs – trust, information flow, decision-making, and emotional regulation between the Chief of Staff and their Principal.

These archetypes are not fixed roles, but dynamic patterns that can express in both healthy and shadow forms. In their healthy state, they amplify impact and trust across the organization; in shadow, they can stall progress, sow confusion, or create misalignment. Understanding your primary archetype and its shadow is a powerful tool for self-awareness, growth, and building a more effective partnership with your Principal.





# Archetypes & Shadows

## Consigliere

### Healthy Expression

Deep mutual trust and constant strategic check-ins give the pair real-time clarity & calm velocity.

### Why the CEO Loves Them

Deep mutual trust and strategic candor

### Fastest Growth Lever

Expand formal decision rights & portfolio (e.g., own an OKR or P&L line).

### Practical Tips for Growing as a Consigliere

- Don't be a 'yes man': you have strong mutual trust, so make sure you use it to challenge decisions and offer critical feedback when you feel strongly about something.
- Actively put yourself in the shoes of other stakeholders in the organization to ensure you're not just seeing situations through the lens of your Principal.
- Find something that your Principal seems frustrated with or doesn't like doing and offer to take it off their plate completely. This will help you build the muscle of owning things.
- If your organization is growing rapidly, consider proposing an "Office of the CEO" or offering to take on some of your Principal's direct reports.
- Identify a major strategic priority of the organization, or a big opportunity that doesn't have a clear owner today. Start a discussion with your Principal about how you can get the ball rolling on it.



### Shadow Expression: The Puppet Master

Seizes the puppet strings: hoards access, controls narratives, and smothers fresh insight in the name of "protection."

### Signs You're Headed Off Track

- You find yourself more worried about keeping your position than doing what's best for the company
- You feel paranoid frequently on behalf of your Principal
- You find yourself wanting to "protect" your Principal from information or people





# Air-Traffic Controller

## Healthy Expression

Keeps the CEO's runway clear and data flowing, but firefighting spikes stress during crunch periods.

## Why the CEO Loves Them

Brings operational sanity to a chaotic org; keeps planes from colliding.

## Fastest Growth Lever

Close the loop by owning outcomes, not just calendars (drive "done," not simply "scheduled" or "discussed").

## Practical Tips for Growing as an Air Traffic Controller

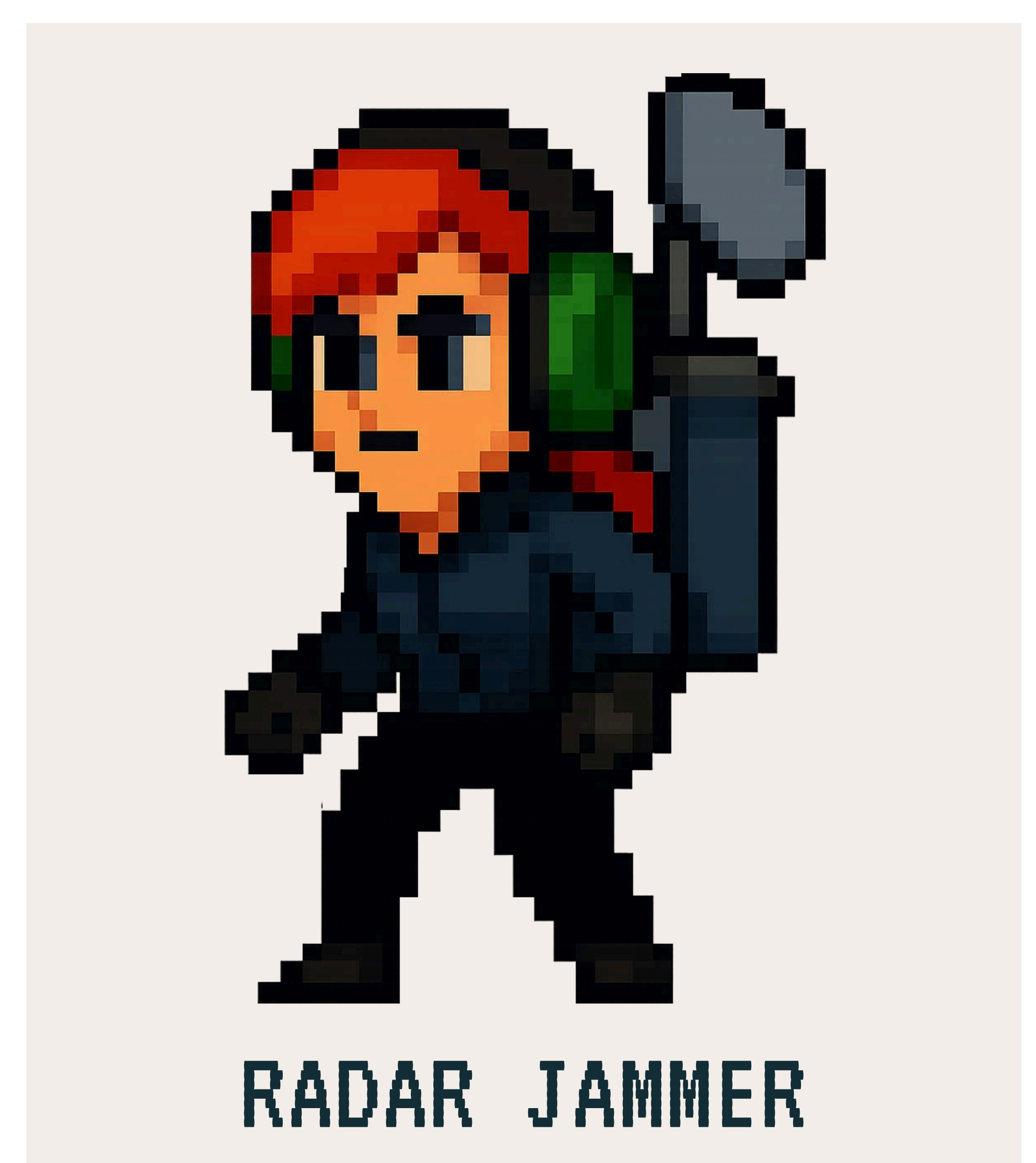
- Identify repetitive processes or meetings that other people in the organization can own, whether it's training a department to prepare their own Monthly Business Review or handing off a portion of All Hands prep.
- Commit to an aggressive (but achievable) SLA on responses.
- Create a public-facing project management kanban or dashboard that key stakeholders can reference to see the other things on your plate and where their request sits.
- Choose one workstream to project manage to completion - and put your name against - rather than just coordinating stakeholders.
- Make sure that every meeting ends with clear action items and owners, and send an email after the meeting outlining them.

## Shadow Expression: The Radar Jammer

Scrambles signals, blocking critical intel from reaching the cockpit and forcing would-be collaborators into endless holding patterns.

## Signs You're Headed Off Track

- Your calendar is so jam-packed that you don't have time to focus on the highest priorities
- On a weekly basis you have colleagues following up with you to remind you of something that needs to be done
- You find yourself caring more about checking something off your list than the result of the initiative
- If you were polishing your resume, you'd struggle to articulate clear bullet points about what you've gotten done in your role





# Swiss-Army Knife

## Healthy Expression

Leaps into any gap quickly, yet context-switching dilutes trust and drives moderate churn.

## Why the CEO Loves Them

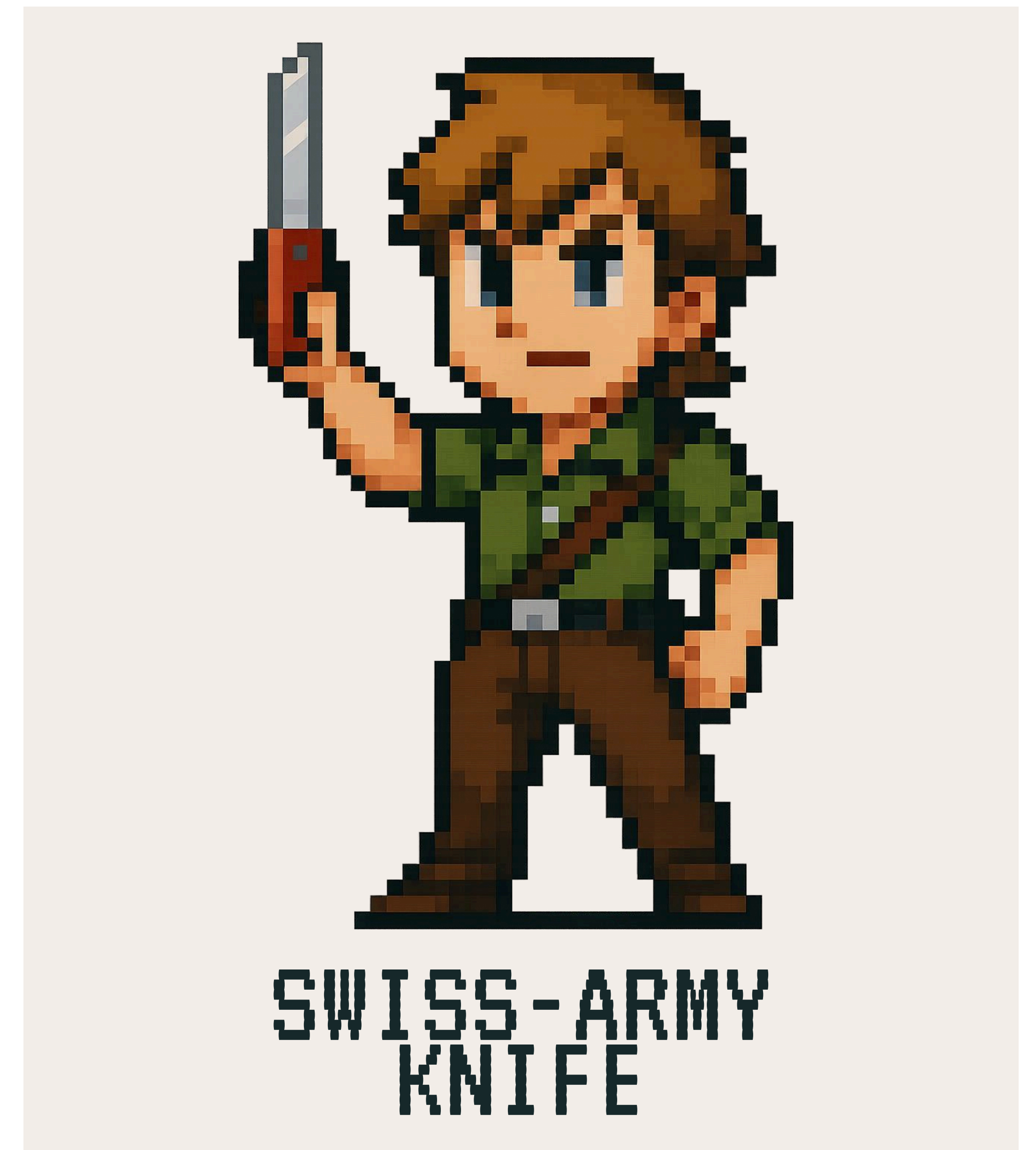
Brings operational sanity to a chaotic org; keeps planes from colliding.

## Fastest Growth Lever

Close the loop by owning outcomes, not just calendars (drive “done,” not simply “scheduled” or “discussed”).

## Practical Tips to Grow as a Swiss-Army Knife

- Ask your Principal what they see as your biggest differentiator and consider leaning into that as a skill to further develop.
- Assess your calendar on a monthly basis and identify low-impact tasks to delegate or decline going forward.
- The next time that someone asks you to get involved in a new initiative, ask yourself: is this in the top 25% of all priorities that you have and could have (and does it suit your skill set)? If not, find someone else to delegate it to.
- Take 30 minutes to sit down and write out all of the tasks, projects, and initiatives that you’ve really enjoyed doing over the past couple of years. Be brutally honest with yourself. Then, think about how much of your time goes to those things versus everything else and start planning how you could devote more of your time and energy to them.



## Shadow Expression: The Plate-Spinner

Furiously spins every plate in sight and never pauses to ask whether those plates even matter.

## Signs You’re Headed Off Track

- Every time a problem comes up, you volunteer to solve it, rather than thinking about the right person for the job
- You find yourself asking ‘why do I have to do everything around here?’
- If you were polishing your resume, you’d struggle to summarize your current role in under five bullet points





# Sparring Partner

## Healthy Expression

Trusted to challenge ideas; probing debates can slow calls and raise the emotional temperature.

## Why the CEO Loves Them

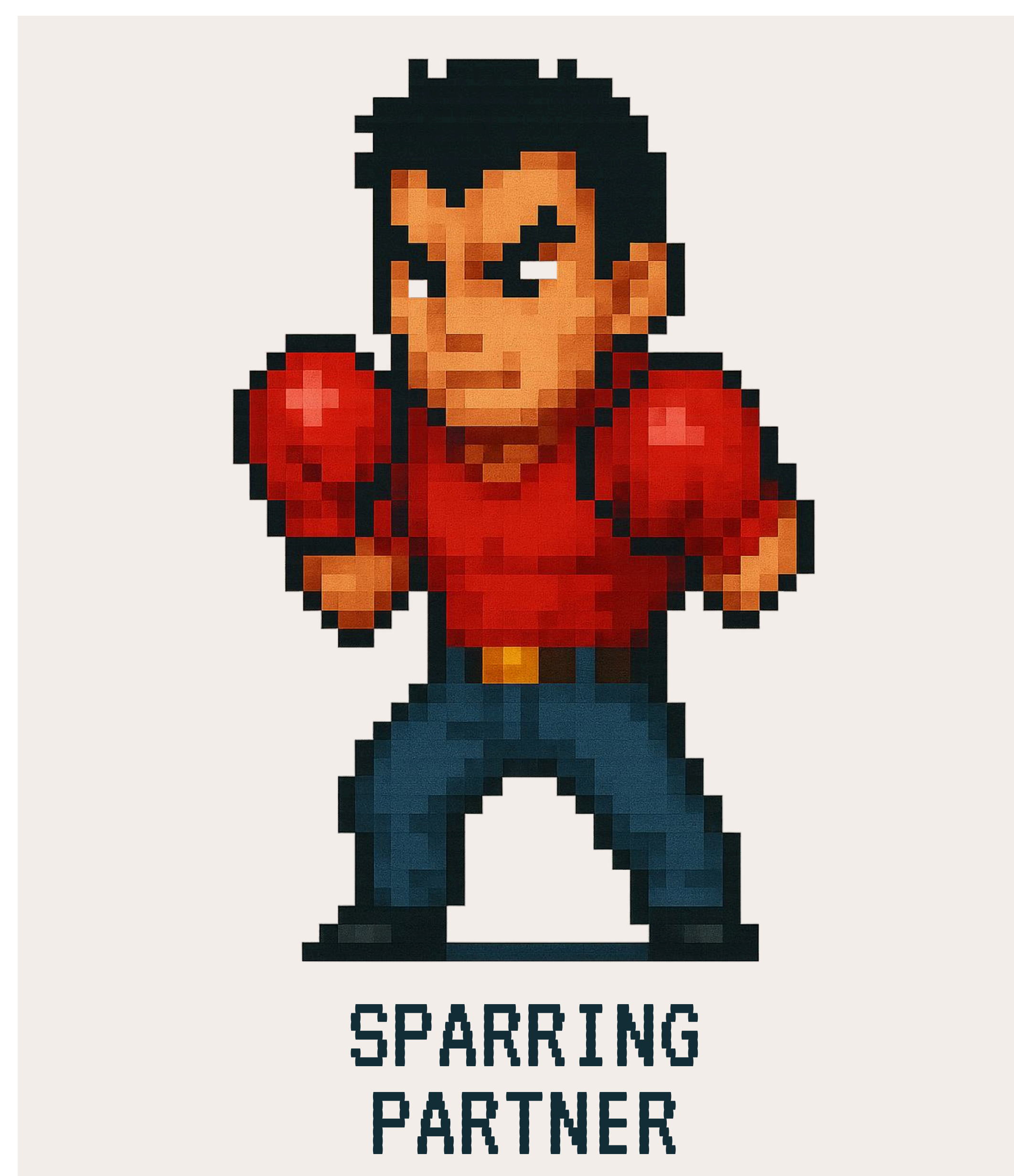
Sharpens ideas: shoots down bad ones, stress-tests good ones. Isn't afraid to speak truth to power.

## Fastest Growth Lever

Pair critique with a positive vision & next-step framing (move from "why not" to "how about").

## Practical Tips to Grow as a Sparring Partner

- For the next big initiative, if it's discussed 1on1 with your principal, make sure you play your typical 'counterpoint' role, but label it verbally - then also take time during the conversation to lay out why you think it's a good idea (or how it could be a good idea).
- Whenever you review documents or proposals and take notes, write at least one thing that you think works well from the document before you jump into critique mode.
- The next time you find yourself in a discussion with the executive team (on something non-existential to the business), restrain yourself from saying anything negative. Instead, think about the 'yes and' technique from improv and try to put it into practice.
- The next time you see an initiative that you think could be promising, take the time to write out a full vision of what it could look like if it was a big success. Then, working backwards, write a step-by-step plan for what it would take to get there.
- Ask your principal to let you know when they think you're being overly critical.



## Shadow Expression: The Saboteur

Stops progress in its tracks: shreds ideas, sows doubt, and never offers a path forward.

## Signs You're Headed Off Track

- You find yourself playing devil's advocate in most meetings
- You're growing increasingly risk-averse, focusing more on what could go wrong than what could go right
- You start to get left out of brainstorming or early planning meetings





# Integrator

## Healthy Expression

Rich cross-functional intel and diplomacy keep tension low, but can sacrifice progress at the altar of team unity.

## Why the CEO Loves Them

Diplomacy & alignment across execs; the connective tissue.

## Fastest Growth Lever

Anchor diplomacy with explicit accountability & deadlines to ensure deals actually stick.

## Practical Tips to Grow as an Integrator

- Make sure you leave every meeting with clear next steps and owners for those action items - and distribute that information to the full group.
- The next time there's conflict in the meeting, stop yourself from intervening and wait to see who else jumps in to help.
- For the next initiative that you're project managing, lay out from the beginning the exact people who have decision-making authority and who needs to be consulted. 'Everyone' is not the right answer.



## Shadow Expression: The Bottleneck

Grinds progress to a halt. Insists on unanimous buy-in and endless consensus rounds to keep everyone smiling.

## Signs You're Headed Off Track

- You frequently ask colleagues "but won't that make X person feel bad?"
- Meetings you run often end without clear decisions or next steps
- Back channels are your best friend





# The Catalyst

## Healthy Expression

Ignites bold initiatives fast, but doesn't stick around to help them flourish or see them flounder.

## Why the CEO Loves Them

Entrepreneurial creativity; momentum starter for new bets.

## Fastest Growth Lever

Identify the single pivotal lever and drive to hand-off or full completion (avoid the 80% whirlpool).

## How to Grow as a Catalyst

- Write down every project you're working on and
- rank them by importance. Are you spending your time on the right things?
- Review the whole business. What gaps do you see? Pick one and propose it at your next 1on1 with your principal as something that you'd like to own from start to finish.
- Have a discussion with your principal about wanting to grow by owning things from beginning to end.
- The next time someone asks you to lead an initiative, before you say yes ask yourself 'am I really the right one to be leading this?' If not, find that person and delegate to them.



## Shadow Expression: The Whirlwind

Starts new initiatives but never finishes them, leaving a wake of half-built prototypes or ambitious project plans.

## Signs You're Headed Off Track

- You can list several projects that you started in the past year that never made it to completion
- Your honest resume bullet points would read "Launched X initiative" but not "Drove X outcome"
- You get bored easily
- Your CEO or peers sigh or look worried when you tell them "I have an idea"



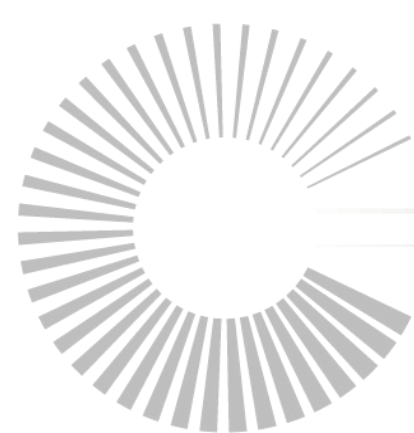


# Trait Profile – Healthy Archetypes

Healthy Archetype	Trust & Alignment	Information Flow Quality	Decision-Making Cadence	Emotional Regulation	Rationale
Consigliere	High	High	High	High	Deep mutual trust and constant strategic check-ins give the pair real-time clarity & calm velocity.
Air-Traffic Controller	High	High	High	Medium	Keeps the CEO’s runway clear & data flowing, but firefighting spikes stress during crunch periods.
Swiss- Army Knife	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Leaps into any gap quickly, yet context-switching dilutes trust and drives moderate churn.
Sparring Partner	High	Medium	Medium	Medium	Trusted to challenge ideas; probing debates can slow calls and raise the emotional temperature.
Integrator	Medium	High	Medium	High	Rich cross-functional intel and diplomacy keep tension low, but full CEO trust is still building.
Catalyst / Change Agent	Medium	Medium	High	Medium	Ignites bold initiatives fast; incomplete hand-offs erode trust and fray nerves.

# Trait Profile – Shadow Archetypes

Shadow Archetype	Trust & Alignment	Information Flow Quality	Decision-Making Cadence	Emotional Regulation	Rationale
Puppet-master	High	Low	Medium	Medium	Hoards access and manipulates narrative, eroding trust and starving the org of information—yet moves pieces quickly when it suits.
Radar Jammer	Medium	Low	Low	Medium	Claims to protect the CEO but scrambles critical signals, forcing decisions into endless holding patterns while remaining outwardly controlled.
Plate-Spinner	Medium	Medium	Low	Low	Frantically juggles every task, shares half-baked updates, and stalls progress as stress spills over.
Sniper	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Snipes from the sidelines—shreds ideas, sows doubt, and never offers a path forward.
Bottleneck	Medium	High	Low	High	Gathers every stakeholder and datum, but demands unanimous consensus—stalling action while keeping a calm façade.
Whirlwind	Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	Sparks a flurry of new initiatives and data, then moves on—leaving teams unsettled and deliverables half-finished.







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