VET1ST COMMUNITY · RESTORING HOPE MINISTRIES

VETERAN ADLERIAN GROUP SERIES · MEMBER BOOKLET 01

Wingman

Identity After the Role, Letting Go, and Flying as a Team

A reflection on *Top Gun: Maverick*: a pilot the Navy keeps calling obsolete, a young aviator carrying his father's memory, a hotshot who flies alone, and an old friend who knows it is time to let go.



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Top Gun: Maverick (2022) and its characters are the property of their respective owners. This booklet is an independent educational discussion of the film and is not affiliated with or endorsed by its creators, producers, studio, or the U.S. Navy.

WELCOME

Still a captain

After more than thirty years in the Navy, Pete "Maverick" Mitchell is still a captain. He has turned down promotion after promotion so he can keep flying. Now the Navy is telling him his kind of pilot is on the way out, and it sends him back to teach a group of young aviators, one of whom is the son of the friend he lost. *Top Gun: Maverick* came out in 2022, and many of us have seen it more than once. That makes it a good doorway.

This booklet uses the film as a mirror. Service looks different for everyone: any branch, any era, any job, in combat or not. You do not need to remember every scene; every story you need is told here. There are no right answers. Just notice where you see yourself.

IDEA ONE

You are more than the role

Adler called the whole pattern of a person's life the *style of life*. A role can end or change. The person carries on, and so do the strengths built inside the role.

IDEA TWO

Rules written in hard moments

Private logic is the set of rules we make up to stay safe, often after a loss: "No one else gets hurt on my watch." They made sense once. They can still be running long after.

IDEA THREE

Above, or alongside

Everyone strives. Adler saw a difference between striving to be above other people and striving alongside them. A wingman is the second kind.

IDEA FOUR

Encouragement

Adlerians mean something specific by *encouragement*: honest faith in a person, offered by someone who sees both the struggle and the strength. It is not flattery.

Four pilots, four flight plans

Each one is flying by a rule

MAVERICK

Protect everyone

THE RULE
"No one else gets lost on my watch."

IT SHOWS UP AS
holding people back, keeping his distance

THE TURN
Letting go and trusting the team

ROOSTER

Play it safe

THE RULE
"I can't trust him, and I can't risk it."

IT SHOWS UP AS
resentment and hesitation

THE TURN
Going back for his wingman

HANGMAN

Be the best

THE RULE
"If I'm not first, I'm nothing."

IT SHOWS UP AS
bragging and flying solo

THE TURN
Using his skill for the team

ICEMAN

Encourage

THE GIFT
truth and faith, from someone who has been there

IT SHOWS UP AS
fighting for a friend

THE TURN
Helping someone let go

How to use this booklet Write in it. Skip anything that isn't ready yet. Share only what you choose. This booklet is yours to keep.

Not Today

THE STORY

One last assignment

Maverick is a test pilot. When his program is about to be cut in favor of unmanned aircraft, he flies the jet past its limits anyway. An admiral is ready to end his career and tells him that pilots like him are headed for extinction. Then orders come through. Iceman, now an admiral himself, has arranged one more assignment: teach a small group of elite young pilots to fly a nearly impossible mission. Maverick doesn't want to teach. He has only ever wanted to fly.

BENEATH THE STORY

When the role was everything

For Maverick, flying is not just a job. It is where he knows who he is, what he is good at, and who his people are. He has no family, few friends outside the service, and a relationship he walked away from more than once. The cockpit has been holding his whole life together.

> *"The end is inevitable, Maverick. Your kind is headed for extinction." "Maybe so, sir. But not today."*
>
> THE ADMIRAL AND MAVERICK · TOP GUN: MAVERICK (2022)

Adler said that every life has to answer three great tasks: **work**, **friendship**, and **love**. Military service often answers all three at once: work comes with a mission, friendship comes with the unit, and belonging comes with the uniform. That is a gift. It also means that when the role ends or changes, all three can move at the same time, and a person can feel lost in a way that is hard to explain to anyone who wasn't there. Adler would not call that weakness. He would call it a style of life built for one setting that now has to find its footing in another. The strengths you built are still yours. The question is where they go next.

THE FEELING UNDERNEATH	THE PATTERN	WHAT IT COSTS	THE USEFUL TURN
"If I'm not this, who am I?"	Holding on to the role as long as possible	Everything riding on one thing	Spread your belonging across the life tasks

FOR YOU

1 **What role in your service told you who you were? What did it give you?**

2 **Of work, friendship, and love, which one has felt the thinnest since that role changed?**

3 **What strength did you build in service that you are still using, or could be?**

STORY ONE · MAVERICK · A RULE WRITTEN IN GRIEF

The Promise He Kept Too Long

WHAT HE BELIEVED

If I hold them back, no one gets lost

Decades ago, Maverick's best friend and flight partner, Goose, died in a training accident. Maverick never stopped carrying it. Years later, Goose's widow asked him not to let their son fly, and Maverick quietly pulled the young man's application, setting his career back by years. He never explained why. He stays a captain, keeps his distance from people who love him, and flies alone whenever he can. The rule under all of it: no one else gets lost on my watch.

WHAT THE ROAD SHOWED

Trusting the people he trained

The rule kept nobody safe. It cost Rooster years and turned him bitter, and it kept Maverick stuck. When Iceman tells him it is time to let go, Maverick admits he doesn't know how. He learns by doing it: he teaches the pilots everything he knows, earns their trust by flying the route himself, and then leads them on the mission. In the end he lets Rooster fly beside him, and he trusts him with his life.

> *"It's time to let go." "I don't know how."*
>
> ICEMAN AND MAVERICK · TOP GUN: MAVERICK (2022)

Adler taught that we form *private logic* in the moments that shake us most. After a loss, a mind will often choose guilt over helplessness, because guilt at least says it could have been prevented. Out of that guilt comes a rule: protect everyone, hold everyone back, never let it happen again. The rule feels like loyalty. In practice it can become a way of controlling what can't be controlled, and it quietly takes over other people's choices. Many veterans carry a rule like this from something that happened in service or after. It deserves respect, because it was built out of love and pain. It also deserves a second look. Ask whether it is still keeping anyone safe, or whether it is mostly keeping you stuck.

THE FEELING UNDERNEATH	THE RULE	WHAT IT COSTS	THE USEFUL TURN
"It was on me. It can't happen again."	Hold them back, keep my distance, fly alone	Other people's choices, and his own life	Let go of control, and keep the love

FOR YOU

1 **Is there a rule you made after a hard loss or a bad day? What does it say?**

2 **Who has that rule protected? Who has it held back, maybe including you?**

3 **What would letting go look like, if it didn't mean forgetting?**

My Dad Believed in You

WHAT HE BELIEVED

Careful, and on his own

Bradley "Rooster" Bradshaw is Goose's son. He grew up without his father, and then the man his father trusted most blocked his path into the Navy without a word of explanation. Rooster is a skilled pilot, but in training he flies too carefully. He hesitates at the moments that matter, and he keeps Maverick at arm's length. In his mind, the people he should be able to count on are the ones who let him down.

WHAT THE ROAD SHOWED

Going back for his wingman

On the mission, Maverick is shot down protecting Rooster. Rooster is ordered back to the carrier, and he turns around anyway. He goes back for the man he resented, and in doing it he loses his own plane. Stranded together behind the lines, the two of them have to rely on each other to get home. Asked why he came back, Rooster says simply that it's what his dad would have done.

> *"My dad believed in you. I'm not gonna make the same mistake."*
>
> ROOSTER, TO MAVERICK · TOP GUN: MAVERICK (2022)

Rudolf Dreikurs, Adler's student, said that most of what goes wrong in people comes from **discouragement**: a loss of faith in yourself and in the people around you. Rooster shows both. He doubts his own instincts, so he hesitates. He doubts other people, so he holds on to resentment, which is safer than trusting again. Resentment can feel like strength. It keeps the old hurt in view so it can never sneak up on you twice. It also keeps you flying alone. Rooster's turn is not that he stops being angry. It is that he acts on something deeper than the anger: loyalty, courage, and the kind of person his father was. Courage, for Adlerians, is not the absence of fear. It is moving toward other people while the fear is still there.

THE FEELING UNDERNEATH	THE PATTERN	WHAT IT COSTS	THE USEFUL TURN
"The people I counted on let me down."	Resentment, caution, keeping distance	Hesitating when it counts	Act on your values, not your grudge

FOR YOU

1 **Who do you hold something against? What would it cost you to set it down, and what would it give you?**

2 **Where do you hesitate now, in a place where you used to act?**

3 **Whose example do you want to live up to? What would they do in your shoes?**

STORY THREE · HANGMAN · SUPERIORITY AND SOCIAL INTEREST

Hung Out to Dry

WHAT HE BELIEVED

The best, by himself

Jake “Hangman” Seresin is one of the most talented pilots in the group, and he wants everyone to know it. He trades insults with Rooster, posts the best times, and in one training run he leaves his wingman exposed so he can score his own hit. His teammates know the pattern well enough to explain his call sign: he will always leave you hanging. When Maverick chooses the mission team, Hangman is left off it.

WHAT THE ROAD SHOWED

The pilot who came back

Hangman spends the mission on standby on the carrier, the one place a pilot like him hates most. When word comes that Maverick and Rooster are in trouble, he launches and arrives just in time to save them both. Back on deck he still jokes about how good he is. The difference is where the skill went: for the first time, all of it went to the team.

> *“That’s why we call him Hangman. He will always hang you out to dry.”*
>
> PHOENIX · TOP GUN: MAVERICK (2022)

Adler believed every person strives to move from a felt minus to a felt plus. In the military that striving gets put to good use: ranking, competing, being the best at what you do. Adler asked a further question, though. Is the striving **vertical**, aimed at getting above other people, or **horizontal**, aimed at doing well alongside them? Vertical striving can produce real talent and real results. It also leaves people around you feeling like props, and it leaves you feeling that your worth is only as good as your last score. Adler’s name for the horizontal kind was *social interest*. It doesn’t ask you to be less. It asks what your best is *for*. Hangman did not have to become humble to change. He had to point his talent at someone else’s survival.

THE FEELING UNDERNEATH	THE PATTERN	WHAT IT COSTS	THE USEFUL TURN
“If I’m not first, I’m nothing.”	Competing with your own team	Nobody trusts you on their wing	Point the gift at someone else’s good

FOR YOU

1 **Where do you still compete, even with people who are on your side?**

2 **What are you really good at? Who could use it right now?**

3 **When did someone show up for you at the last minute? What did it mean?**

STORY FOUR · ICEMAN · ENCOURAGEMENT

The Navy Needs Maverick

WHO HE BECAME

From rival to wingman

Tom "Iceman" Kazansky started out as Maverick's rival at flight school. Over the years he became an admiral, the commander of the Pacific Fleet, and Maverick's quiet protector. Every time the Navy wanted Maverick gone, Iceman stepped in. Now he is seriously ill and can barely speak, so when Maverick visits, Ice types out what he wants to say on a screen.

WHAT HE GAVE

Truth, and faith

Iceman doesn't flatter Maverick or tell him what he wants to hear. He tells him it is time to let go of the past. Then, with great effort, he speaks out loud. He tells Maverick why he has fought for him all these years: the Navy needs him, and so does the young man he has been holding back. When they say goodbye, Ice even manages a joke about which of them is the better pilot.

> *"The Navy needs Maverick. The kid needs Maverick. That's why I fought for you."*
>
> ICEMAN, TO MAVERICK · TOP GUN: MAVERICK (2022)

This is what Adlerians mean by **encouragement**. It isn't praise, and it isn't a pep talk. It has two parts: an honest word about what needs to change, and a clear statement of faith in the person who has to change it. Dreikurs taught that people need encouragement the way plants need water. Iceman also shows a later chapter of social interest that many veterans grow into. His flying days are long over, yet he is still contributing: mentoring, opening doors, and fighting for someone who can't see his own worth. Contribution doesn't retire. Sometimes it changes shape and becomes the most important work a person ever does. And sometimes the bravest thing is to be on the receiving end, to let someone who has been there speak into your life.

WHAT HE OFFERS	WHAT IT ASKS OF HIM	WHAT IT DOES	THE USEFUL TURN
An honest word, and faith in the person	Strength he barely has	Helps a friend start to let go	Be someone's Iceman, and let someone be yours

FOR YOU

1 **Who has been an Iceman for you, someone who told you the truth and still believed in you?**

2 **Who could use that from you right now?**

3 **Is it easier for you to give encouragement or to receive it? Why?**

Flying Solo

In the cockpit, nobody flies alone. Every pilot has a wingman who watches their six, calls out what they can't see, and stays with them through the turn. The same is true across the military: a battle buddy, a crew, a squad, a shift that has your back. Then service ends or changes, and for many veterans the wingman disappears without anyone deciding it. The phone calls get fewer. The people around you mean well, but they weren't there. It starts to feel easier to handle everything yourself.

Adler believed that **social interest**, a felt sense of belonging and caring about other people, is the clearest sign of mental health. He didn't mean being social or outgoing. He meant being connected to something larger than yourself, and acting on it. A great many veterans have more of it than they realize. They showed it every day in uniform. The work after service is not to create social interest from scratch. It is to find new places to fly it.

FLYING SOLO SAYS	THE PRIVATE LOGIC ADDS	FLYING WING SAYS
I'll handle it myself. Nobody needs to know.	*"Needing people is weakness. I'm supposed to be the strong one."*	I've got your six, and I'll let you have mine.

SOMETHING TO WATCH FOR

Isolation rarely announces itself. It shows up as skipped calls, invitations turned down "just this once," long stretches without a real conversation, and "I'm fine" on repeat. None of those is a failure. They are signals, the way a warning light is a signal. When you notice them, it is time to call your wingman, or to go find a new one.

MY RULE ABOUT NEEDING PEOPLE

When things get hard, I usually tell myself... _____

The rule behind it is... _____

Where I think I learned it... _____

What it costs me now... _____

A rule I'd rather fly by... _____

FOR YOU

1 **Who used to watch your six? Who does now? If the answer is "no one," where could you start looking?**

YOUR STORY · PART ONE

Before the Uniform

Midway through the film, Rooster sits down at a piano in a crowded bar and plays the same song his father used to play. For Maverick, standing at the window, it is like watching an old memory come to life. Adlerians pay close attention to *early recollections*, because the memories we keep from childhood often hold the rules we still live by. Think back to a time before you were about ten, long before any uniform. Look for one specific day, not "we used to" but "one time." The first memory that comes is usually the right one.

1 What happened?

2 The clearest moment, the snapshot, is…

3 What I felt in that moment was…

4 What I might have decided that day…

I am…

Other people are…

Life is…

So I'd better…

5 Did that rule follow me into service? How did it help me there, and how has it cost me?

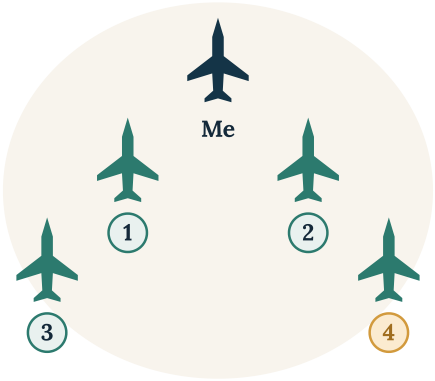
6 Who believed in me back then, the way Goose believed in Maverick?

If no memory comes, that is all right. Write about the earliest one you trust, or about your first days in uniform and what you decided about yourself then.

Who Flies on Your Wing?

In service, the life tasks often came as a package. After service, most of us have to build them one at a time. Fill in each column honestly. There are no wrong answers and no perfect scores. The aim is to see where your wing is strong and where it is thin.

	WORK **Purpose and mission**	FRIENDSHIP **Crew and community**	LOVE **Family and partner**	SELF **Getting along with me**
IN SERVICE, THIS CAME FROM	The job, the mission, the rank	The unit, my crew, my battle buddy	Letters, calls, coming home on leave	Structure, standards, knowing my role
NOW IT COMES FROM				
HOW FULL IS IT? (0–10)				
ONE SMALL STEP				



MY FORMATION

1 *Someone I can call when it's hard...* _____

2 *Someone from my service days...* _____

3 *A place or group where I belong...* _____

4 *Someone I could fly wing for...* _____

An empty spot I want to fill... _____

1 Looking at your formation, what stands out? Who is one person you could reach out to before the next group?

_____

_____

_____

BRINGING IT TO THE GROUP

Flying as a Team

At the start of the film, Maverick flies alone and keeps everyone at a distance. By the end he is flying with Rooster in the back seat, Hangman on his wing, and a whole crew cheering on the carrier deck. He did not stop being Maverick. He stopped flying solo. A group like this one is a place to practice the same things: letting go of an old rule, offering encouragement, and letting a few people onto your wing.

IF YOU SHARE, YOU MIGHT START WITH

- "A role that told me who I was…"
- "A rule I made after a hard day…"
- "Where I fly solo now is…"
- "Someone who was an Iceman for me…"

WHEN SOMEONE ELSE SHARES

- "What I hear underneath that is…"
- "That makes sense, given what you've carried."
- "A strength I notice in you is…"
- "I've got your six on that."

THIS WEEK

Call your wingman

Reach out to one person on your formation: a call, a text, or a cup of coffee. Not to fix anything. Just to stay in formation.

Fly someone else's wing

Find one small way to be useful to someone this week: a ride, a hand, a word of encouragement. Notice what it does for you, too.

DAY	A MOMENT I FLEW SOLO	SOMEONE I REACHED OUT TO	A WING I FLEW FOR SOMEONE
Mon			
Tue			
Wed			
Thu			
Fri			
Sat			
Sun			

Maverick didn't stop flying. He stopped flying alone.

> If things get heavy between meetings, you don't have to carry it alone. Talk with group staff, or contact the Veterans Crisis Line any time: dial 988 and press 1, or text 838255. In an emergency, call 911.

Sources: Adler, A. (1927). *Understanding human nature*. Greenberg. · Ansbacher, H. L., & Ansbacher, R. R. (Eds.). (1956). *The individual psychology of Alfred Adler*. Basic Books. · Carlson, J., & Englar-Carlson, M. (2017). *Adlerian psychotherapy*. American Psychological Association. · Dreikurs, R., & Soltz, V. (1964). *Children: The challenge*. Duell, Sloan & Pearce. · Mosak, H. H., & Maniacci, M. P. (1999). *A primer of Adlerian psychology*. Brunner/Mazel. · Kosinski, J. (Director). (2022). *Top Gun: Maverick* [Film]. Paramount Pictures.