

# THE UPLINK

THE RIGHT ALTITUDE · FLIGHT MANUAL SERIES

Strategy for Dana, my VP.

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This upward strategy is based on the leader's self-assessment and observations. It is a preparation tool, not a political playbook.

## THE READ

Here's the core dynamic: you've built your entire case for advancement on a flawed premise — that delivery is a language Dana speaks fluently. It isn't. You value results and you assume Dana reads results the same way you do: as proof of readiness. But Dana operates in an 'after the room' decision style, which means the platform-strategy assignment won't be decided by who delivered most. It'll be decided by who Dana can defend in a room you're not in. Right now, you are not a name Dana can easily put forward, because you've never told Dana you want it. Dana cannot advocate for a desire you haven't voiced.

The trust between you is high — that's your biggest asset and, ironically, the thing that's worked against you. High trust made you reliable, the steady engine. But reliability and visibility are different currencies, and you've been paid exclusively in the first. The 'competing voices' detail matters enormously here: someone less proven but more visible is actively in the conversation, putting their name forward, while you wait to be discovered. In a competitive political landscape, silence isn't humility — it reads as disinterest or as someone who's already optimally placed where they are.

What you probably don't see: Dana's anxiety about who keeps Atlas steady isn't a minor logistics question — it's the real blocker dressed as a practical one. Every time Dana imagines moving you up, the next thought is 'then who runs Atlas?' If you don't answer that before Dana asks it, Dana's risk-averse instinct fills the gap with 'better keep Jordan where they're indispensable.' Your indispensability is a cage you built.

## HOW TO FRAME THE ASK

Frame this as de-risking, not requesting. Dana's worry is continuity — who keeps Atlas steady. So you lead with the answer, not the ask. The platform work should be presented as something that's good for Dana's portfolio, with the Atlas transition already solved. You're not asking Dana to take a risk on you; you're handing Dana a clean trade: a proven operator stepping into high-leverage strategy work, with succession already handled. That reframes you from 'flight risk for the engine room' to 'leader ready for the next gear, no downside.'

Speak to Dana's defensibility. Because Dana decides after the room, give Dana the ammunition to defend choosing you when you're not present. That means concrete: what you'd bring to platform strategy, why your delivery track record is exactly the de-risking the high-visibility initiative needs (visible initiatives that fail are far more damaging than quiet ones — Dana knows this). The less-proven-but-more-visible candidate is a political risk to Dana. You are the safe high-upside pick. Make that case explicit so Dana can repeat it.

Finally, frame the Reese handoff as proof, not promise. Don't say 'I could transition Atlas.' Say 'Reese owns Atlas — here's the plan, here's the timeline.' This does two things: it removes Dana's primary anxiety before Dana can voice it, and it demonstrates exactly the strategic, succession-minded thinking the platform role requires. The handoff plan is itself a work sample for the job you want.

## THE LANGUAGE TO USE

Open with BLUF, because that's how Dana takes in information and because your over-preparing instinct will tempt you to build a 10-minute runway. Don't. Say it in the first fifteen seconds: 'Dana, I want to be put forward for the platform-strategy work. I think I'm the right person for it, and I've already solved the Atlas question so it's not a risk to you.' That's the whole ask, front-loaded. Everything after is support, not buildup.

Then the de-risk, immediately: 'Reese owns Atlas now in practice — I've mapped a clean handoff, full transition in [timeframe], no disruption to delivery. So moving me doesn't cost you the engine.' Notice you're answering the unasked question in the same breath as the ask. Dana's anxiety never gets to surface because you've already addressed it. That's how you keep Dana from defaulting to 'keep Jordan where they are.'

Then, the sentence that breaks your pattern: 'I want to be straight with you — I've been hoping the work would speak for itself, but that's not fair to you. I'm telling you plainly: I want this.' This matters because Dana cannot read intent you've never stated, and a high-trust relationship can absorb that directness. It also signals self-awareness, which reads as maturity, not neediness. Keep it factual and calm — results-oriented language, not emotional appeal: 'Here's what I'd bring, here's why the timing works, here's why I'm the lower-risk choice than the alternative.'

### WHEN TO MAKE THE MOVE

The window is open — you said it yourself, the work is forming now. That means this is not a 'wait for the perfect moment' situation; the perfect moment is decaying. Once the assignment crystallizes around the more-visible candidate, you're asking Dana to reverse a forming decision, which is far harder than shaping one that hasn't set. Move within days, not weeks. Specifically, ask for a dedicated 1:1 slot — not a tag-on at the end of a status meeting, where your over-prepared case gets compressed and Dana's in operational mode.

Time it to follow a delivery win, but don't let the win do the talking — you do. The day after Atlas hits a visible milestone is ideal: Dana's associating you with results, and you convert that goodwill into a forward ask in the same window. Avoid moments when Dana is under pressure — you noted Dana tightens under pressure, and a tightened Dana defaults to risk-aversion, which is exactly the mode that keeps you in the engine room. Watch for a calm week, a recent win, and an open 1:1. That's your green light.

### WHAT TO EXPECT

Dana's first reaction will likely be the continuity worry — even if you've pre-empted it, expect 'but who keeps Atlas steady?' to surface in some form. This is reflexive. Your job is to not re-explain (over-preparers re-explain); just point back: 'Reese — and the plan I just walked you through.' Calm repetition, not escalation. If Dana keeps circling Atlas, that's a sign the real hesitation is political, not operational, and you need to name the political question directly.

Dana's second reaction, given the 'after the room' style, will probably be non-committal: 'Let me think about it' or 'There are a few people in the mix.' This is not a no. This is Dana signaling there's a room you're not in and competing voices in it. Don't read it as rejection. Read it as: 'Give me what I need to defend you in that room.' That's your cue to ask what would make the case stronger, not to retreat.

Watch the silence carefully. With Dana, a pause after your ask is processing, not disapproval — high trust means Dana's actually weighing it. But a deflection to an unrelated topic is a tell that the political blocker is live and Dana doesn't want to surface it with you yet. If that happens, you bring it back once, gently, then schedule a follow-up rather than forcing resolution in a tightened moment.

### WHAT NOT TO SAY

Do not bury the ask in preamble. Your default is to over-prepare, and the failure mode of over-preparation is that you spend ninety seconds building context and Dana's already wondering what you actually want. Worse, a long runway lets your nerve fade and you soften the ask into 'I was wondering if maybe I could be considered...' That hedge is fatal with someone who decides on defensibility — Dana can't put forward a maybe-want. Lead with the ask, naked, in sentence one.

Do not let your delivery record argue for you in silence. The instinct that got you here — 'the work proves I deserve it' — is the exact instinct to override in this room. If you find yourself listing accomplishments and waiting for Dana to connect the dots to the platform role, stop. State the connection yourself. Dana will not do the inference work for you, and waiting for it is how the visible-but-less-proven person walks past you.

And critically: when Dana pushes back, do not fold. You flagged this yourself — under pushback you retreat. If Dana raises the Atlas worry again or mentions competing voices, your instinct will be to say 'no worries, I understand, just wanted to flag it' and exit gracefully. That graceful exit is you handing away the thing. Pushback is not rejection; it's the negotiation starting. Stay in it. The moment you fold, you confirm Dana's safest assumption — that you're fine where you are.

### IF THEY SAY NO

Dana's no is conditional — that's the most important thing to remember. A flat 'no' from Dana almost always carries an unspoken '...unless.' So your move is to surface the condition: 'What would have to be true for this to be a yes?' That single question converts a wall into a map. Dana likely has a specific concern — political timing, a peer's claim, an unproven dimension of your readiness — and naming it is the only way to address it.

If the no is about the competing voice or political timing, don't argue against the other person — that backfires and looks like you're campaigning. Instead, sharpen your own defensibility: 'Understood. What would make me the clear choice if this comes up again?' You're asking Dana to coach you toward the yes, which a high-trust boss will often do. That keeps the door open and gets you intelligence on the real blocker.

Accept the no only if Dana gives you a hard structural reason — the assignment is already committed, or there's a constraint above Dana's level. Even then, close with a forward hook: 'If this one's set, I want to be first in line for the next strategic piece — and I'd like you to know I'm actively looking to move up, not just hold Atlas.' That sentence ensures this conversation permanently changes how Dana sees you, even if this specific ask doesn't land.

### IF THEY DEFLECT

Deflection from Dana — 'let's revisit this,' a pivot to operational topics, a vague 'there's a lot in motion' — usually means the political blocker is live and Dana isn't ready to discuss it openly. Don't let it dissolve. Bring it back once, cleanly: 'I hear there's a lot in motion. I just want to make sure my name is actually in the conversation, not assumed out of it. Can you confirm I'm being considered?' That forces a small, concrete commitment without threatening the relationship.

Create urgency through the timing, not through pressure on Dana. 'I know this is forming now, which is why I'm raising it now rather than after it's decided.' This frames your insistence as good judgment — you understand decision windows — rather than impatience. It also gently signals that you know waiting silently is how people get passed over, without accusing Dana of planning to do that.

If Dana deflects twice, stop pushing in the moment — pushing a tightened Dana hardens the no. Instead, lock a specific follow-up: 'Can we put fifteen minutes on the calendar next week specifically on this?' A scheduled return appointment beats an unresolved ambiguity. It signals you're not dropping it, keeps it on Dana's radar, and gives Dana time to do the after-the-room processing that's native to how Dana decides.

### THE FOLLOW-UP

If it's a yes: solidify it in writing within the hour, framed as helpfulness, not paper trail. Send Dana a short note: 'Great conversation — here's the Atlas handoff plan to Reese with timeline, and I'll start ramping on platform strategy as you direct.' This makes the yes real, gives Dana something to forward into the room, and demonstrates the exact follow-through that justifies the bet. Then execute the Reese handoff visibly and early — every clean step reinforces that Dana made a safe choice.

If it's a maybe: don't wait passively (that's the pattern that got you here). Within a few days, send Dana the one piece that strengthens your defensibility — a brief on what you'd do with the platform work, or the completed handoff plan. You're feeding Dana ammunition for the room you're not in. Then check in at the follow-up you scheduled. A maybe converts to yes when you make saying yes effortless and saying no feel like a loss.

If it's a no: do not retreat into silence and reliable delivery — that's how you got invisible. Within two weeks, re-engage on the forward hook: 'Still want to move up, still want the next strategic piece, tell me how to be ready.' The goal is to permanently relocate yourself in Dana's mind from 'engine' to 'rising.' Even a lost assignment is worth it if Dana now knows, unambiguously, that you want more — because the next opening, Dana thinks of you first instead of being surprised you wanted it.

#### THE ONE SENTENCE

"I want to be put forward for the platform-strategy work — I've already cleared the Atlas question with Reese owning it, so this is upside for you with no risk, and I'm telling you plainly because I've waited too long for the work to say it for me."

This sentence matters because it does in one breath the three things you've been avoiding: it states the want plainly (breaking the pattern where you hope to be discovered), it removes Dana's core anxiety (Atlas continuity) before Dana can raise it, and it frames the whole thing as Dana's gain rather than your request. It's BLUF, it's results-oriented, and it's defensible — Dana can repeat it verbatim in the room you're not in. Most importantly, it makes the ask impossible to misread as anything other than what it is: you, finally, asking for the visible thing instead of waiting to be handed it.

*Managing up is not about performing for your boss. It's about making it easy for the right decision to happen. Frame it in their language. Time it to their rhythm. Make the yes smaller than the no.*

— Don