

Five Dysfunctions of a Team – By Patrick Lencioni

Book Summary

The “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team” by Patrick Lencioni is written as a “leadership fable” a story of a technology company that is struggling in the marketplace to find customers. The new CEO recognizes that the company has innovative products and great talent, however the executives are not working together as a team, negating the advantages of the company’s innovative products and talented people. The team members are struggling with their situation and are unable to come to agreement on an appropriate solution to their problems. The team dynamics erode into naming, blaming and shaming, no one is accepting responsibility, deadlines are being missed and moral is on the decline. The executive team is unable to make important decisions and as a result the company is losing the battle for market share....

“If you could get all the people in an organization rowing in the same direction, you could dominate any industry, in any market, against any competition, at any time.”

To get the people in a team aligned and rowing in the same direction requires leaders to address the following **five dysfunctions of a team**.

Dysfunction 1: Absence of Trust

The first dysfunction is the absence of trust amongst team members. The type of trust of which the author is speaking, is the ability of group members to show their weaknesses, to be vulnerable and open with one another. Trust is never generated in teams when team members are not prepared to be *vulnerable*. Instead they feel the need to be right, to be strong and competent, so much that they are unable to be vulnerable and open with one another. Trust requires that team members have confidence in each other intentions, that intentions are good, and therefore have no reason to be protective and careful in the team. The “when I’m vulnerable” will not be exploited and used against an individual by the team. The lack of trust amongst teams is a huge waste of time and energy, as team members invest their time and energy in defensive behaviors, reluctant to ask for help or to assist others.

The key to overcoming a lack of trust is shared experiences, multiple follow-throughs and integrity. In the fable the team completes a Myers Briggs assessment to get the team talking about one another's strengths and weaknesses and so become comfortable with one another.

"...teamwork begins by building trust. And the only way to do that is to overcome our need for invulnerability."

The primary role of the leader is to lead by example, be the first one to be vulnerable, and create an environment where it's safe to be vulnerable. Building trust makes conflict possible!

Dysfunction 2: Fear of Conflict

Trust is the foundation of great teams and it's trust that makes team conflict possible. Teams become dysfunctional when they are unable to productively deal with conflict. All meaningful relationships require productive conflict for them to grow. Healthy conflict occurs when people talk about the issue at hand, avoid personal attacks, and look for the best solution for the team. Teams tend to avoid conflict by replacing it with an artificial harmony.

"Harmony itself is good, I suppose, if it comes as a result of working through issues constantly and cycling through conflict. But if it comes only as a result of people holding back their opinions and honest concerns, then it's a bad thing."

We wear masks and focus on being nice to everyone, however; productive conflict is required for teams to become functional. This allows for meaningful dialogue where people are open to share, without feeling fearful of reprisal or criticism. One of the worst team dysfunctions is when you have a team of "yes men."

Leaders need to encourage debate, support it, and keep it productive. Teams who avoid conflict spend much time "off-line" never making decisions that the group can commit to. Healthy and productive teams accept that conflict is a normal part of being on a team, and that conflict helps to learn to deal with it productively.

"...meetings and movies have a lot in common...A movie, on average, runs

anywhere from ninety minutes to two hours in length. Staff meetings are about the same...And yet meetings are interactive, whereas movies are not...And more importantly, movies have no real impact on our lives... [and]...Every great movie has conflict. Without it, we just don't care what happens to the characters."

When working with teams, leaders need to understand the importance of conflict in teams, and take care not to try and steer the team towards premature resolution of conflict because of a desire to protect people. It's important for leaders to help team members to learn, and develop positive conflict resolution skills. The best way for a leader to do this is to "lead by example," and to model appropriate behaviors, versus simply trying to smooth over conflict.

Dysfunction 3: Lack of Commitment

When teams engage in productive conflict they can confidently commit and buy-in to decisions. Commitment is a function of *clarity* and *buy-in*. Productive teams make clear decisions and are confident that they have the support from every team member. A lack of commitment usually arises from not hearing all the teams concerns before making a decision. There can be no commitment without debate. People will not buy into something when their opinions and thoughts on the matter were not included and discussed. *"If they don't weigh in, then they won't buy in."* This is not as much about seeking consensus as it is about making sure that everyone is, has been, and feels heard.

"The point here is that most reasonable people don't have to get their way in a discussion. They just need to be heard, and to know that their input was considered and responded to."

At the end of the day everyone needs to get to the point where they can say, *"I may not agree with your ideas but I understand them and can support them."*

"When people don't unload their opinions and feel like they've been listened to, they won't really get on board."

Leaders can help to facilitate commitment by reviewing all key decisions made at the end of team meetings, and by making responsibilities, and

deadlines clear.

Dysfunction 4: Avoidance of Accountability

Without team commitment you cannot have accountability. If the team is to be accountable, everyone must have a clear understanding of what is expected of them.

“People aren’t going to hold each other accountable if they haven’t clearly bought in to the same plan.”

At the end of the day it’s about each team member being accountable to the team. This means that a team member never lets the team down when it comes to meeting commitments. The team needs to hold their peers responsible for achieving results and working to high standards. It’s the responsibility of each team member to hold one another accountable and accept it when others hold them accountable.

It’s often the case, that when teams are not holding one another accountable it’s usually because they’re not measuring their progress. It’s important to make clear what the team’s standards are, what needs to get done, by who and by when. Ambiguity is the enemy of accountability.

Dysfunction 5: Inattention to Results

When teams are not held accountable the team members tend to look out for their own interests, rather than the interests of the team. A healthy team places team results as the most important goal. When all team members place the team’s results first, the team becomes results orientated.

“Our job is to make the results that we need to achieve so clear to everyone in this room that no one would even consider doing something purely to enhance his or her individual status or ego...because, that would diminish our ability to achieve our collective goals. We would all lose.”

Leaders need to make the teams results clear for all to see, rewarding the behaviors that contribute to the team’s results. It’s the responsibility of the leader to keep the teams focus on results.

Cohesive Teams

By addressing these dysfunctions, what results is a cohesive team...

“...Imagine how members of truly cohesive teams behave:

1. They trust one another.
2. They engage in unfiltered conflict around ideas.
3. They commit to decisions and plans of action.
4. They hold one another accountable for delivering against those plans.
5. They focus on the achievement of collective results.”

Summary

The is a great book on team dynamics and team work, in fact it's one of the best books on the subject that I've read. The book is written as a fable, which helps one get a really vivid picture of how a healthy team interacts and what it feels like to be part of a successful team. Although written as a fable, the book provides practical advice, which leaders can use in their own teams.

By: George Ambler for RSS