

A Guide to Building Teams for Catholic Parishes

...and a messy one. And while progress can be made fairly quickly, getting teamwork to take root – and continue – takes ongoing work and real courage on the part of a pastor and team members.

By Patrick Lencioni
author of the New York Times best-seller,
The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

Greetings in the name of Christ!

Much of this document has been extracted from my previous writing on teamwork. It was written for leaders of any kind of organization, but based on my experience working with churches, the majority of it applies to parishes as well.

After all, a parish is an organization (probably the most important of all organizations) that happens to be led by a pastor. Because no two parishes are exactly the same, and because no two pastors are exactly the same, each leadership team in a given parish will look a little different. However, the basic process for going about building that team will be quite similar from parish to parish.

It will begin with **trust**, building relationships of vulnerability, humility and transparency among team members, including the pastor. Trust allows the parish leadership team to engage in productive, guilt-free **conflict** around important issues. Conflict is a good thing on a team – yes, even in a parish – because it allows the team to arrive at real **commitment**. If people on a team have not weighed in on a given topic, sometimes passionately, they cannot really commit to a decision. Commitment gives team members the courage to embrace **accountability**. When everyone on a parish team has agreed to something, then they are much, much more likely to lovingly hold one another accountable for actions or behaviors that are not productive. Finally, accountability is what ensures that a team is focused on **results**. And a parish, more than any organization, needs to be focused on results: bringing people to Christ.

As you go through this guide, feel free to adjust the advice and exercises in any way that best suits your parish. And avoid the temptation to expect perfection, because even the best corporation, athletic team, small company or parish is a messy one. Because our teams are made up of imperfect, broken, fallible people, perfection is not possible. But, by following much of the advice in this book, every parish leadership team can get a lot better.

God bless you all,

Pat Lencioni

SECTION ONE: GETTING CLEAR ON THE CONCEPT

THE CASE FOR TEAMWORK

Building an effective, cohesive team is extremely hard. But it's also simple.

What I mean is that teamwork doesn't require great intellectual insights or masterful tactics. More than anything else, it comes down to courage and persistence.

And so, if you're committed to making your team a healthy one, and you can get the rest of the team to share your commitment, you're probably going to make it. And just in case you're not sure this will be worth the time and effort—and risk—let me make a case for going forward.

I honestly believe that in this day and age of informational ubiquity and nanosecond change, teamwork remains the one sustainable opportunity for transformational improvement that has been largely untapped. In the course of my career as a consultant to executives and their teams, I can say confidently that teamwork is almost always lacking within organizations that fail, and often present within those that succeed.

So why don't we hear more about the competitive importance of teamwork from business scholars and journalists? And why do so many leaders focus most of their time on other topics like finance, strategy, technology, and marketing?

"Teamwork remains the one sustainable opportunity for transformational improvement that has been largely untapped."

First, because teamwork is hard to measure. Why? Because it impacts the outcome of an organization in such comprehensive and invasive ways that it's virtually impossible to isolate it as a single variable. Many executives prefer solutions that are more easily measurable and verifiable, and so they look elsewhere for their competitive advantages.

But even if the impact of teamwork were more easily measurable, executives probably would still look elsewhere. Why? Because teamwork is extremely hard to achieve. It can't be bought, and it can't be attained by hiring an intellectual giant from the world's best business school. It requires

levels of courage and discipline—and emotional energy—that even the most driven executives don't always possess.

As difficult as teamwork is to measure and achieve, its power cannot be denied. When people come together and set aside their individual needs for the good of the whole, they can accomplish what might have looked impossible on paper. They do this by eliminating the politics and confusion that plague most organizations. As a result, they get more done in less time and with less cost. I think that's worth a lot of effort.

One more thing is worth mentioning. When it comes to helping people find fulfillment in their work, there is nothing more important than teamwork. It gives people a sense of connection and belonging, which ultimately makes them better parents, siblings, friends, and neighbors. And so building better teams at work can— and usually does—have an impact that goes far beyond the walls of your office or cubicle.

A QUICK OVERVIEW OF THE MODEL

As difficult as teamwork can be to achieve, it is not complicated. And so, if I can't describe it in a page or two, then I've probably made it too complex. Here goes.

The true measure of a team is that it accomplishes the results that it sets out to achieve. To do that on a consistent, ongoing basis, a team must overcome the five dysfunctions listed here by embodying the behaviors described for each one.

★ **Dysfunction #1: Absence of Trust:** Members of great teams trust one another on a fundamental, emotional level, and they are comfortable being vulnerable with each other about their weaknesses, mistakes, fears, and behaviors. They get to a point where they can be completely open with one another, without filters. This is essential because . . .

★ **Dysfunction #2: Fear of Conflict:** . . . teams that trust one another are not afraid to engage in passionate dialogue around issues and decisions that are key to the organization's success. They do not hesitate to disagree with, challenge, and question one another, all in the spirit of finding the best answers, discovering the truth, and making great decisions. This is important because . . .

★ **Dysfunction #3: Lack of Commitment** . . . teams that engage in unfiltered conflict are able to achieve genuine buy-in around important decisions, even when various members of the team initially disagree. That's because they ensure that all opinions and ideas are put on the table and considered, giving confidence to team members that no stone has been left unturned. This is critical because . . .

★ **Dysfunction #4: Avoidance of Accountability:** . . . teams that commit to decisions and standards of performance do not hesitate to hold one another accountable for adhering to those decisions and standards. What is more, they don't rely on the team leader as the primary source of accountability, they go directly to their peers. This matters because . . .

★ **Dysfunction #5: Inattention to Results:** . . . teams that trust one another, engage in conflict, commit to decisions, and hold one another accountable are very likely to set aside their individual needs and agendas and focus almost exclusively on what is best for the team. They do not give in to the temptation to place their departments, career aspirations, or ego-driven status ahead of the collective results that define team success.

That's it.

TWO IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Before embarking on a team-building effort, your team needs to answer two big questions:

Question #1: Are we really a team?

Sometimes a team improvement effort is doomed from the start because the group going through it isn't really a team at all, at least not in the true sense of the word. You see, a team is a relatively small number of people (anywhere from three to twelve) that shares common goals as well as the rewards and responsibilities for achieving them. Team members readily set aside their individual or personal needs for the greater good of the group.

If your "team" doesn't meet these criteria, you might want to consider whether you have a smaller subset of the group that is a real team. Or maybe the group is simply a collection of people who report to the same manager, but with relatively little interdependence and mutual accountability (that is, not a team).

And remember, it's okay to decide that your group isn't a team. In a world where teamwork is rarer than we might think, plenty of non-teams succeed. In fact, if your group is not meant to be a team, it's far better to be clear about that than to waste time and energy pretending you're something you're not. Because that only creates false expectations, which leads to frustration and resentment.

Question #2: Are we ready for heavy lifting?

Having said all that (in question #1), let me be very clear: the advantages of being a true team are enormous. But they can't be achieved without a willingness to invest considerable time and emotional energy in the process. Unfortunately, many teams aren't prepared for this, and try to take shortcuts and half measures. Not only does this prevent them from making progress, it can actually lead to a decrease in the team's performance.

It's important that you go into this process with eyes wide open, and with no illusions about what is required. That doesn't mean becoming a team takes years, or that it will be unpleasant. In fact, most teams can make significant progress in weeks or months, and find the process itself to be one of the most rewarding parts of their professional lives. If they do it right. Let's talk about how to do just that.

SECTION TWO: OVERCOMING THE FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM

OVERCOMING DYSFUNCTION #1

BUILDING TRUST

Based on my experience working with teams during the past twenty years or so, I've come to one inescapable conclusion: no quality or characteristic is more important than trust. In fact, my work with teams revolves around trust more than any other topic, and that's why this is the longest, most important section in this book.

Unfortunately, there is probably no quality or characteristic that is as rare as trust, either. But I suppose that's good news for your team, because if you can be the first on your block to build trust, the possibility of achieving a real competitive advantage is great.

So why is trust so rare? Two reasons. First, people use the word inconsistently, and so *trust* means different things to different people. Second, because it's just plain hard. Let's start by defining what we mean by trust, and the best way to do that is to clarify what trust is *not*.

Defining Trust

Trust is not the ability of team members to predict one another's behaviors because they've known each other for a long time. Even the most dysfunctional teams, or families for that matter, can learn to forecast

"No quality or characteristic is more important than trust."

one another's words and actions based on observable patterns over a long period of time. So when, for example, a person says, "I trust that Bob will start swearing at me if I mention his inability to arrive at a meeting on time," know that this is not the kind of trust I'm talking about.

When it comes to teams, trust is all about vulnerability. Team members who trust one another learn to be comfortable being open, even exposed, to one another around their failures, weaknesses, even fears. Now, if this is beginning to sound like some get-naked, touchy-feely theory, rest assured that it is nothing of the sort.

Vulnerability-based trust is predicated on the simple—and practical—idea that people who aren't afraid to admit the truth about themselves are not going to engage in the kind of political behavior that wastes everyone's time and energy, and more important, makes the accomplishment of results an unlikely scenario.

Here's an example of how damaging a lack of trust can be in an organization.

The Invulnerable Leader Story

I once worked with a large company—one that, if you haven't used their products, you've certainly heard of—that demonstrated how a lack of trust can destroy years of hard work and accomplishment. Let's call the company Passivity.

"People who aren't afraid to admit the truth about themselves are not going to engage in the kind of political behavior that wastes everyone's time and energy."

Passivity had been a highly respected and accomplished company over the years, but had recently fallen on hard times at the hands of a larger, more aggressive competitor. Still, the company had legions of dedicated customers and employees, if not Wall Street analysts.

Enter the new CEO of Passivity, a man who neither valued nor elicited trust among his executive team. As the company, under the guidance of its new leader, watched its demise accelerate, journalists and industry-watchers attributed the spiral to unwise decisions about products and strategy. And while those decisions certainly contributed to the problem, they were merely symptoms of a bigger issue.

That issue could only be observed behind the scenes, at executive staff meetings. It was there that a tornado of distrust was raging, leaving in its wake a sea of bad decisions and real human suffering. Not to mention drowning stock options.

As is often the case, the trust vacuum emanated from the leader, a brilliant man whose intelligence was rivaled only by his inability to acknowledge his own limitations. This was made apparent to me, and the rest of his team, on many occasions, but none more painfully so than when he reluctantly “shared” the results of his 360-degree feedback during a staff meeting.

Standing before his team with his 360-degree report in his hands, the leader of Passivity started by addressing his weaknesses. “It says here that I’m not a good listener,” he announced, with a puzzled look on his face. “Hmm. What do you guys think?” After a brief and awkward moment of silence, the executives around the table assured their boss that he was not a bad listener at all, and that he was indeed better than many of the other leaders they had known. He accepted their reassurance without a fight.

“Okay. What about this next one? It says I don’t give enough praise.” Again, one by one the team shrugged and nodded their assurance that this was not really a problem.

It was at that moment that I kindly reminded the team that they were, in fact, the only people who had completed the 360-degree survey, and that someone had to have given the CEO low scores in these areas. After an awkward pause, a lone brave soul raised his hand. “Okay, I’ll admit it. I think you could give a little more positive feedback,” he offered almost apologetically. “I mean, my people don’t usually hear anything from you unless they’ve screwed up. It would be nice if we, or they, knew what they were doing well.”

After yet another awkward moment, one of the other executives in the room declared, in the direction of the CEO, “I don’t see it. I think you give more praise than most CEOs I know.” This set off a wave of head nodding, leaving the lone brave soul out in the cold, wondering why he’d bothered telling the truth.

As humorously pathetic as this example may seem, I am afraid to admit that it actually happened, proving again that truth is stranger than fiction. What it illustrates is the difficulty that people have in admitting their weaknesses, their faults, their mistakes, even when there is *real data* indicating otherwise. Of course the real point of this story is not what actually happened that day. It is what it created. The members of that team learned a lesson: don’t be vulnerable. After all, if the CEO isn’t capable of being honest about his own issues, why should his direct reports fess up about theirs?

And so, the executives at Passivity learned to engage in a remarkable game of masquerade, pretending to know things that they didn't and to search for solutions to their problems only in places that wouldn't reflect poorly on them or their departments. Remarkably, as the company's results tanked, the resilience of the leaders' invulnerability held firm. Today, the company is a shell of what it once was, having lost most of its leaders and many of the employees who built the firm. A few years ago it was sold to another company and exists now in name only.

When journalists write the epitaphs of companies like Passivity, they cite unwise strategic decisions and product defects. But if they really wanted to understand the root causes of their failure, they would look at the inability of executive team members to be vulnerable with one another—to build trust.

The Difficulty of Vulnerability-Based Trust

The second reason why vulnerability-based trust is so rare is that it is just plain hard to achieve, even when teams understand the definition. That's because human beings, especially the adult variety, have this crazy desire for self-preservation. The idea of putting themselves at risk for the good of others is not natural, and is rarely rewarded in life, at least not in the ways that most people expect.

So we learn things like “look out for number one” or “don't let 'em see you sweat” or whatever other cliché calls for us to think of ourselves before others. And while this may be wise counsel if you're in prison, on a team it's lethal.

“The key ingredient to building trust is not time. It is courage.”

The key to all of this, then, is to teach team members to get comfortable being exposed to one another, unafraid to honestly say things like “I was wrong” and “I made a mistake” and “I need help” and “I'm not sure” and “you're better than I am at that” and yes, even “I'm sorry.”

“Asking them to be too vulnerable too quickly is not only unfair, it often provokes a resistance that is hard to overcome later.”

The key to all of this, then, is to teach team members to get comfortable being exposed to one another, unafraid to honestly say things like “I was wrong” and “I made a mistake” and “I need help” and “I'm not sure” and “you're better than I am at that” and yes, even “I'm sorry.” If team members cannot bring themselves to readily speak these words when the situation calls for it, they aren't going to learn to trust one another. Instead, they're going to waste time and energy

thinking about what they *should* say, and wondering about the true intentions of their peers.

Now, as hard as it is to achieve vulnerability-based trust, it is entirely doable. And better yet, it doesn't have to take a lot of time. In fact, I've seen remarkable distrust on teams that have worked together for years and years, and I've seen teams that have been together for six months develop amazing amounts of trust. No, the key ingredient is not time. It is courage.

For a team to establish real trust, team members, beginning with the leader, must be willing to take risks without a guarantee of success. They will have to be vulnerable without knowing whether that vulnerability will be respected and reciprocated.

KEY POINTS—BUILDING TRUST

- ★ Trust is the foundation of teamwork.
- ★ On a team, trust is all about vulnerability, which is difficult for most people.
- ★ Building trust takes time, but the process can be greatly accelerated.
- ★ Like a good marriage, trust on a team is never complete; it must be maintained over time.

OVERCOMING DYSFUNCTION #2

MASTERING CONFLICT

Once a team has begun the process of building trust, it's time to think about leveraging that trust. That's right. Trust is important because it is a requirement for overcoming the next dysfunction, which is the all-too-common fear of conflict.

When I talk about conflict on a team, I'm talking about productive, ideological conflict: passionate, unfiltered debate around issues of importance to the team. Any team that wants to maximize its effectiveness needs to learn to do this, and doing so can only happen if vulnerability-based trust exists.

That's not to say that some teams that lack trust don't argue. It's just that their arguments are often destructive because they are laced with politics, pride, and competition, rather than humble pursuit of truth.

When people who don't trust one another engage in passionate debate, they are trying to win the argument. They aren't usually listening to the other person's ideas and then reconsidering their point of view; they're figuring out how to manipulate the conversation to get what they want. Or worse yet, they're not even arguing with the other person face-to-face but venting about them in the hallways after a meeting is over.

"If team members are never pushing one another outside of their emotional comfort zones during discussions, then it is extremely likely that they're not making the best decisions for the organization."

In contrast, when vulnerability-based trust exists, team members say everything that needs to be said, and there is nothing left to talk about behind closed doors.

The Inevitability of Discomfort

But this probably makes conflict sound too easy, too comfortable. The fact is, even among the best teams, conflict is always at least a little uncomfortable. No matter how clear everyone is that the conflict they're engaging in is focused on

issues, not personalities, it is inevitable that they will feel under some degree of personal attack. It's just unrealistic for a person to say, "I'm sorry, Jan, but I don't agree with your approach to the project," and not expect Jan to feel some degree of personal rejection.

But that is no reason to avoid conflict. In fact, if team members are not making one another uncomfortable at times, if they're never pushing one another outside of their emotional comfort zones during discussions, then it is extremely likely that they're not making the best decisions for the organization.

One way for a team to know if they are having enough conflict is for them to think about how an outsider to the team would feel sitting in on a team meeting. A great team will look at least a little strange to an outsider who isn't accustomed to the direct and unfiltered dialogue taking place. Like a friend invited to dinner at a close family's house, they would probably be a little taken aback, at least at first.

The Fear of Personal Conflict

Now, many people often ask me: "how do you avoid the conflict getting personal?" The answer has a few different angles. First, based on my experience working with hundreds of executive teams, it is extremely rare that people attack each other openly on a personal level. In fact, I can recall only a handful of

incidents in which a teammate stepped over the line, and even in those cases, it was relatively mild. The bigger problem I see among most teams is that they never get close to anything remotely resembling personal conflict.

Think about conflict this way. Imagine a continuum. On one end, there is artificial harmony with no conflict at all, and on the other there are mean-spirited, personal attacks. In the exact middle of that continuum there is a line where conflict goes from constructive to destructive or vice versa, depending on which direction you're going. Now, the vast majority of teams I've encountered live close to the harmony end of the scale, fearing that any movement toward the middle is one step closer to murder.

"If team members are never pushing one another outside of their emotional comfort zones during discussions, then it is extremely likely that they're not making the best decisions for the organization."

Theoretically, the best place on the continuum is close to the middle, just to the left of the dividing line. This is the point where a team is having every bit of constructive conflict possible, without stepping over the line into destructive territory.

In reality, however, this isn't possible. Even the best teams will rarely but occasionally step over the line. And that's not only okay, it actually can be a good thing, as long as they're committed to working through it. Because when a team recovers from an incident of destructive conflict, it builds confidence that it can survive such an event, which in turn builds trust. This is not unlike a husband and wife recovering from a big argument and developing closer ties and greater confidence in their relationship as a result.

"When a team recovers from an incident of destructive conflict, it builds confidence that it can survive such an event, which in turn builds trust."

KEY POINTS—MASTERING CONFLICT

- ★ Good conflict among team members requires trust, which is all about engaging in unfiltered, passionate debate around issues.
- ★ Even among the best teams, conflict will at times be uncomfortable.
- ★ Conflict norms, though they will vary from team to team, must be discussed and made clear among the team.
- ★ The fear of occasional personal conflict should not deter a team from having regular, productive debate.

OVERCOMING DYSFUNCTION #3

ACHIEVING COMMITMENT

Like trust, conflict is important not in and of itself but because it enables a team to overcome the next dysfunction. And like its predecessors, commitment needs to be correctly defined before it can be achieved.

Teams that commit to decisions and standards do so because they know how to embrace two separate but related concepts: buy-in and clarity. Buy-in is the achievement of honest emotional support. Clarity is the removal of assumptions and ambiguity from a situation.

Buy-In

Let me be crystal clear about something: commitment is not consensus. Waiting for everyone on a team to agree intellectually on a decision is a good recipe for mediocrity, delay, and frustration, which is why it amazes me that so many of the teams I work with still seem determined to achieve consensus.

“Commitment is about a group of intelligent, driven individuals buying in to a decision precisely when they *don’t* naturally agree. In other words, it’s the ability to defy a lack of consensus.”

Ironically, commitment is something of the opposite. It’s about a group of intelligent, driven individuals buying in to a decision precisely when they *don’t* naturally agree. In other words, it’s the ability to defy a lack of consensus.

The great teams I’ve worked with embrace disagreement and actually enjoy moments of temporary indecision. They take pleasure in making and rallying around and buying in to decisions when the “right” answer seems nowhere to be found.

“Most people don’t really need to have their ideas adopted (a.k.a. “get their way”) in order to buy in to a decision. They just want to have their ideas heard, understood, considered, and explained within the context of the ultimate decision.”

The key to making this happen has everything to do with conflict—and leadership.

When a group of people know that their colleagues have no reservations about disagreeing with one another, and that every available opinion and perspective has been unapologetically aired, they will have the confidence to embrace a decision and abandon whatever their initial opinion might have been. But of course, this assumes that someone has to break the tie.

And that’s one of the most critical roles of the leader. Good leaders drive commitment among the team by first extracting every possible idea, opinion, and perspective from the team. Then, comfortable that nothing has been left off the table, they must have the courage and wisdom to step up and make a decision, one that is sure to run counter to at least one of the team members, and usually more.

The amazing thing about this is that nineteen and a half times out of twenty, everyone sitting around that table will leave the room actively committed to implementing the solution that the leader has stipulated, even when that decision does not mesh with their own recommendation. Even when it is diametrically opposed!

How can this be possible? Because most human beings are drastically more reasonable than we think they are. In my work with teams, I've come to understand that most people don't really need to have their ideas adopted (a.k.a. "get their way") in order to buy in to a decision. They just want to have their ideas heard, understood, considered, and explained within the context of the ultimate decision.

Clarity

Unfortunately, even when teams master this ability to "disagree and commit" (this is something that the folks at Intel came up with years ago), they can still fail to benefit from their commitment. That's because many teams fail to achieve clarity and alignment around a decision. Instead, they make well-intentioned assumptions about what they've agreed to, and they end up creating confusion and frustration among employees who wonder whether their leaders are even talking to one another. I've seen this happen often and it's worth describing.

Lack of Clarity Story

At a large technology company I worked with, the CEO and his team had a meeting to discuss how to respond to a downturn in the company's revenue. After two hours of discussion and debate, the team left the conference room with a decision: to freeze hiring until the company's bottom line had improved. The head of HR was charged with communicating the decision, and so she immediately sent out a note to all managers announcing the decision.

Within five minutes of the note being sent, three of the six executives who had attended that meeting went to her office claiming, "I didn't think that applied to my organization!" "We can't freeze hiring in Sales!" "That doesn't include Product Development, does it?!"

As this example demonstrates, commitment cannot occur if people are unclear about exactly what is being committed to. Unfortunately, this is not a rarity among many of the teams I've worked with.

KEY POINTS—ACHIEVING COMMITMENT

- ★ Commitment requires clarity and buy-in.
- ★ Clarity requires that teams avoid assumptions and ambiguity, and that they end discussions with a clear understanding about what they've decided upon.
- ★ Buy-in does not require consensus. Members of great teams learn to disagree with one another and still commit to a decision.

OVERCOMING DYSFUNCTION #4

EMBRACING ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability. It's a word that has become so overused, and misused, within the halls of many companies that it has lost much of its power. When it comes to teamwork, I define accountability as the willingness of team members to remind one another when they are not living up to the performance standards of the group.

The key to this kind of accountability is that it shouldn't always require the participation of the team leader. It is direct, peer-to-peer accountability, and it is based on the notion that peer pressure and the distaste for letting down a colleague will motivate a team player more than any fear of authoritative punishment or rebuke.

Ironically, for peer-to-peer accountability to become a part of a team's culture, it has to be modeled by the leader.

That's right. Even though I said earlier that the best kind of accountability is peer-to-peer, the key to making it stick is the willingness of the team leader to do something I call "enter the danger" whenever someone needs to be called on their behavior or performance. That means being willing to step right into the middle of a difficult issue and remind individual team members of their responsibility, both in terms of behavior and results.

"Peer pressure and the distaste for letting down a colleague will motivate a team player more than any fear of authoritative punishment or rebuke."

But most leaders I know have a far easier time holding people accountable for their results than they do for behavioral issues. This is a problem because behavioral problems almost always precede results. That means team members have to be willing to call each other on behavioral issues, as uncomfortable as that might be, and if they see their leader balk at doing this, then they aren't going to do it themselves.

I've found that senior executives at large companies are some of the most egregious violators when it comes to failing to hold people accountable for behaviors, large or small.

The Lack of Accountability Story

One particular CEO I worked with could not bring himself to confront one of his staff members who was publicly and unapologetically criticizing the leadership development program that the CEO himself was sponsoring. "That's just how he is," was his response to a request to confront the problem. Another chief executive claimed "I don't have the time or energy for that" when someone suggested that he tell one of his direct reports to stop spreading unfounded rumors about his own promotion to president of the company.

Neither of these two CEOs would be considered wimpy; they wouldn't hesitate for too long to fire an executive who wasn't producing. However, like most of the CEOs I've worked with, they just didn't like the thought of having to tell someone that they needed to behave better.

Another Lack of Accountability Story

I once attended a staff meeting where one of the executives had his laptop open and was intermittently typing away during discussions. After the meeting I asked the CEO, “Does that bother you when he does that?” He told me, “Yeah, I find it distracting.” So I asked the obvious question: “Why don’t you tell him to stop?” A pained look came across the CEO’s face as he answered, “I don’t know. I’m not his parent. Who am I to tell him how to act . . .” I wanted to interrupt him and scream, “You’re the friggin’ CEO! That’s who you are!” But I didn’t. That’s because I too sometimes struggle with accountability.

Why are the team leader’s actions so important when it comes to setting a tone? Because if the rest of the team knows that the leader will eventually step in and call someone on something, they won’t feel like they’re stepping over the line doing it themselves. “He’s going to tell you eventually anyway, so I thought I might as well save you the time and trouble.”

But if everyone knows the leader doesn’t have the courage to hold people accountable for their behaviors, they’re going to reason with themselves, “Why should I play the heavy? Besides, he’ll probably just let them off the hook eventually anyway.”

Finally, perhaps the most important challenge of building a team where people hold one another accountable is overcoming the understandable hesitance of human beings to give one another critical feedback. Sometimes the tightest teams are the most reluctant to do this, even when the feedback is clearly constructive, because they don’t want to risk the positive emotional environment that exists, which they probably value greatly.

Of course, when teammates stop holding one another accountable, what ultimately happens over time is that they lose respect for each other, and those good feelings begin to fade. Still, human beings often choose a path of slow, uncomfortable decline rather than risk a dramatic drop in morale caused by an ugly incident.

“The most important challenge of building a team where people hold one another accountable is overcoming the understandable hesitance of human beings to give one another critical feedback.”

I’ve found that the most effective way to overcome this hesitance is to help people realize that when they fail to provide peers with constructive feedback they are letting them down personally. By holding back, we are hurting not only the team, but also our teammates themselves. Sometimes this is the only compelling argument that can convince a well-meaning and caring teammate to step into the discomfort of telling someone what they need to hear. I know it works for me.

KEY POINTS—EMBRACING ACCOUNTABILITY

- ★ Accountability on a strong team occurs directly among peers.
- ★ For a culture of accountability to thrive, a leader must demonstrate a willingness to confront difficult issues.
- ★ The best opportunity for holding one another accountable occurs during meetings, and the regular review of a team score-board provides a clear context for doing so.

OVERCOMING DYSFUNCTION #5

FOCUSING ON RESULTS

Okay, if team members trust one another, engage in healthy conflict around issues, commit to the decisions they make, and hold one another accountable for those decisions, there is a pretty good chance they're going to make it.

Unfortunately, when we build teams we rarely, if ever, go about it in a linear, chronological way. For instance, I don't wait until my clients have completely addressed all of the first four dysfunctions before moving on to the fifth.

But even if we could, even if a team had overcome each dysfunction and seemed on the verge of the teamwork hall of fame (there isn't one, by the way), there would still be a chance that it would stumble and lose sight of the ultimate measure of a great team: results. And that's because your team is made up of extremely fallible human beings.

"We have a strong and natural tendency to look out for ourselves before others, even when those others are part of our families and our teams."

What is it about us that makes it so hard to stay focused on results? It's this thing called self-interest. And self-preservation. We have a strong and natural tendency to look out for ourselves before others, even when those others are part of our families and our teams.

And once that tendency kicks in on a team, it can spread like a disease, quickly eroding the roots of teamwork until eventually even trust has been destroyed.

How do we avoid this? The key lies in keeping results in the fore-front of people's minds. There is a reason that old saying "out of sight, out of mind" is used so often: it's true! A good way to focus attention is to use a visible scoreboard of some kind. Why a scoreboard?

"Teams have to eliminate ambiguity and interpretation when it comes to success."

Consider a football team. On a football field, a scoreboard focuses everyone's efforts on one thing: winning. It doesn't display defensive statistics or offensive statistics or individual player statistics. It provides unambiguous information about how the team is doing, and how much time the members have left if they want to improve the final outcome. That leaves little room for individual interpretation.

Imagine the quarterback of a team that is losing by fourteen points with three minutes to go in the game saying to the coach, "Well, I feel pretty good about things. I mean, my performance was not bad, and my stats look good." The coach would be furious. He wants that quarterback, and everyone else on the team, to be focused on one thing: winning. And the only thing a team has to do to know whether it's winning is to look at the scoreboard.

Teams within organizations need to do the same thing. They have to eliminate ambiguity and interpretation when it comes to success. It's ironic that so many teams don't do this, because they have an advantage over sports teams: they often get to create their own scoreboard! They decide what it is they want to achieve, and how they want to measure their success.

Certainly, many large and public companies don't have the same kind of luxury, because they're accountable for quarterly numbers and a stock price. But even those companies, and certainly the smaller

ones, get to decide how they want to go about running their businesses. And even within large, public companies, the departmental teams that make up the company have a say in what they do. And that means they construct their own scoreboards.

But should they measure their team's success in terms of market share? Client satisfaction? Pure revenue? Profit? Growth over last year? Growth versus competitors? Versus the industry average? Key milestones? There are only two consistently *wrong* answers: *none of the above* and *all of them*. Pick one. Or maybe two. But by all means, pick something so that team members have something they can collectively focus upon and around which they can rally.

Far too many teams assess their success using subjective and unreliable means like politics ("Is the CEO happy with us this month?"), feelings ("I *feel* like we're doing pretty well right now"), or outside opinion ("Did you see what that analyst wrote about us in his industry report?")—but none of this really matters.

Results-oriented teams establish their own measurements for success. They don't allow themselves the wiggle room of subjectivity. But this is not easy, because subjectivity is attractive.

"Results-oriented teams establish their own measurements for success. They don't allow themselves the wiggle room of subjectivity. But this is not easy, because subjectivity is attractive."

I know how easy it is to fall into this trap, because I do it myself. I don't like to be limited in how I measure my success to a few numbers that might not tell the whole story. But I know that this is just an excuse, or better yet, a manifestation of my desire to change my mind and reinterpret my success based on what's going on at a given point in time. Ultimately, ambiguity and loose interpretation catch up to you, usually in the form of the bottom line.

So how does a team avoid this pitfall? By committing, early and publicly, to what it will achieve, and by constantly reviewing its progress against those expected achievements

(a.k.a. the score-board). If it's a regular meeting where the key metrics are reviewed and discussed, great. If it's an online scoreboard where every major goal is tracked, terrific. If that's a piece of butcher paper on the wall with the updated numbers, good enough.

But remember, this isn't about measuring *everything*. That creates just as much confusion by overwhelming people. This is about giving people a simple way to gauge their success and to stay focused on the right priorities so that they aren't distracted by something else.

Distractions

What might that something else be? How about their individual career advancement? Or their compensation? Or their ego? Their standing within the department? When players on a team stop caring about the scoreboard, they inevitably start caring about something else. And that something else is usually not the team.

The Individual Over the Team Story

Years ago, when basketball superstar Michael Jordan retired (for the first time) from the Chicago Bulls, a great player, Scottie Pippen, became the leader of the team. Even without Jordan, the Bulls were considered one of the best teams in the league, and had just as much chance to win the championship as anyone else.

During the playoffs that year, the Bulls were tied with their rival, the New York Knicks, with just a few seconds to go in the game. The coach of the Bulls called time out and drew up a set play for his team to take the final shot of the game. His play called for that shot to be taken by a player other than Pippen.

"When players on a team stop caring about the scoreboard, they inevitably start caring about something else."

Disappointed that he wouldn't be playing the key role in deciding the game, Pippen refused to go out on the court for the last few seconds. Fans and announcers, not to mention the players themselves, were dumbfounded. In essence, Pippen was

announcing to the world—and certainly to his teammates—that the collective results of the team were not as important as his own stardom.

The Bulls made their shot and won the game. And to his credit, Pippen went into the locker room after the game and took his lumps from his teammates, later admitting that what he had done was wrong.

And just in case we're tempted to believe that this would never happen in a corporate environment, consider the following examples.

The Second Individual Over the Team Story

A client's products were growing obsolete, and the CEO announced to his team that they would need to focus on innovation in order to prevent an imminent revenue problem. The chief scientist of the company, whose job it was to run research and development, seemed less than enthusiastic about the charge. When pressed, he finally admitted, "I don't get paid enough to innovate. I want to get paid royalties for what I invent."

"There is always that little voice in your head saying, 'What about me?' Sometimes that little voice drowns out the cry of the team, and the collective results of the group get left behind."

Yet Another Individual Over the Team Story

Another client, this one a start-up, had just hired its final executive team member, a highly sought-after chief technology officer. When the CEO indicated that everyone in the company should be willing to do whatever was necessary to make the company fly, "including sweep the floors," the CTO replied, "I don't have near enough stock to sweep floors."

In both of these situations, the difficult executives quickly left their teams.

The point of these stories is that human beings are naturally self-interested. Only by ensuring that the people on your team are committed to collective results ahead of their own needs, and by keeping them focused on those results, can you avoid the kind of individualization that breaks teams apart.

Because these self-oriented distractions are such powerful destroyers of teams, it is worthwhile to look at and understand them all.

Distraction #1: Ego

Ego is the ultimate killer on a team, and it is an insidious one. That's because it lurks deep in the heart of every team member. As much as we want our teams to win, at a basic level we want to win as individuals first.

As a kid, I remember playing on some bad Little League teams, but making the all-star team. If you had asked me then if I would have traded my all-star status for a few extra wins, I'd probably have said "no way."

As an adult, I've been fortunate to learn to enjoy the collective benefits of team accomplishments more than individual ones, but there is always that little voice in your head saying, "What about me?" Sometimes that little voice drowns out the cry of the team, and the collective results of the group get left behind.

I've worked with many executive teams that were failing as a group, but somehow, the majority of the people on the team seemed to be in good spirits. Looking under the covers, I discovered that only the individuals who were failing were unhappy. It was as though the others were saying, "Well, at least *my* area is doing well."

This is probably one of the top two or three things that separate good teams from bad ones. On strong teams, no one is happy until everyone is succeeding, because that's the only way to achieve the collective results of the group. Of course, this implies that individual egos are less important than team achievements.

Distractions #2 and #3: Career Development and Money

Even the most altruistic team members will at times have to focus on their own career advancement and financial needs. After all, they have families, mortgages, and tuition payments to think about.

A great team will understand those needs, and the validity of them, but not let them distract the team from achieving the collective goals. The key to doing that is being open about what people need, and not making them feel guilty or selfish for acknowledging those needs. That might sound unrealistic, but remember, if team members trust one another, then they're willing to be vulnerable. And admitting that you're uncomfortable with your career advancement or salary or anything else that is personal is nothing if not a statement of vulnerability. If there is trust among team members, no one will take the comment as selfish or anti-team. In fact, they should be glad that the person put the issue on the table for everyone to help with, because if they don't, then it will eventually fester and create problems that impact the team's performance.

And after all, the performance of the team is what matters. Anything that stands in the way of performance must be addressed openly and directly, even if it is something that is sensitive to one or more members of the team.

Distraction #4: My Department

This is perhaps the most subtle and dangerous distraction of all because well-intentioned team members often succumb to it, and because they actually wear it as a badge of honor. The departmental distraction is the tendency of team members to place a higher priority on the team they lead than they place on the team they are a member of. I call this the "Team #1 Dilemma."

The Team #1 Dilemma

Give a group of team members some truth serum and ask them which is their first priority—the team they manage or the team they’re a member of—and many of them will admit that it is the team they lead. And when you think about it, this makes sense.

After all, they probably hired (a.k.a. picked) the people on their team. They might very well spend more time with them. As a result, they will probably like their own team more. They probably feel a sense of responsibility for their team, and convince themselves that their people would feel betrayed or abandoned if their leader felt a slightly stronger allegiance to the team above than to the one below.

In reality, employees want their leaders to be strong team members on the teams above. They know that they ultimately pay the price when their manager doesn’t get along with or cooperate with managers of other departments, leaving the staff to navigate the treacherous and bloody waters of organizational politics.

In truth, many leaders who choose the teams they lead over the ones they belong to are doing so because they like being leaders more than they like being followers.

As understandable as this is, it is a recipe for team disaster. When members of a team fail to make that team more important than their own teams, they create something I like to call the “United Nations Syndrome.” Or you can call it the “Congressional Syndrome.” Rather than coming together to make the best possible decision for the entire organization, they become lobbyists for their own constituents. In essence, whenever push comes to shove, they compete with their teammates rather than collaborate with them.

“Employees know that they ultimately pay the price when their manager doesn’t get along with or cooperate with managers of other departments, leaving the staff to navigate the treacherous and bloody waters of organizational politics.”

Now this is usually okay for the United Nations or Congress, groups that are explicitly not teams. The founding fathers of the United States, for instance, recognized what they called “self-interest rightly understood” and created a government that respected it and provided a sense of balance. (Okay, that’s the end of today’s civics lesson.)

A team, however, is a different kind of institution. The key to success for a team is that its members go beyond barter and compromise to embrace a collective pursuit of the best interests of the whole. Like a family, they make sacrifices for one another with the only expectation of repayment being

greater team success.

They offer up their own headcount, budget, accolades, and prestige without hesitation or complaint. Why? Because their sense of self-esteem and achievement is not individual but rather collective.

If you stop and think about that for a moment, it is pretty powerful. How does a group of people who are more interested in their own individual needs compete against such a team? They usually lose.

KEY POINTS—FOCUSING ON RESULTS

- ★ The true measure of a great team is that it accomplishes the results it sets out to achieve.
- ★ To avoid distractions, team members must prioritize the results of the team over their individual or departmental needs.
- ★ To stay focused, teams must publicly clarify their desired results and keep them visible.

SECTION FOUR: BUILDING THE TEAM

This segment provides a framework for a comprehensive team-building process over a six-month period. Some teams may want to use a more aggressive time line, while others may take a slower approach. In any case, the following is a general outline of the steps any team should be prepared to take.

Warning: There is one big point I want to make here, and it is critical:

DON'T DO EVERYTHING EXACTLY THE WAY IT IS DESCRIBED HERE!

The purpose of this field guide, and this section in particular, is to give you as much framework and structure as you need to make your team better, not to prescribe or dictate a detailed agenda.

I've provided detail not to limit your freedom of judgment but to give you as much information as you might need to fully understand how these ideas can be implemented. However, as in all important undertakings, judgment and flexibility are key.

TIME LINE

Week 1: Preliminary Work for the Initial Off-Site

Before the initial off-site takes place, team members will have to spend approximately one hour completing two assessments:

- Five Dysfunctions Team Assessment
- Behavioral Profile Assessment (such as Myers-Briggs). We strongly recommend that teams do these assessments ahead of time to ensure that the time spent during the off-site is as focused and productive as possible. And because the advance work is extremely quick—even enjoyable—there is usually little if any resistance.

Week 2: Initial Off-Site

This is the one-and-a-half to two-day session that is the anchor of your team-building effort and the formal kickoff of your new approach to teamwork. It will include a review of your team's assessment, as well as various exercises around trust, conflict, commitment, accountability, and results. A comprehensive description of the initial off-site is provided in the next segment.

Off-Site Follow-Up

Immediately after the off-site ends, it is critical to distribute important notes to team members as a confirmation of the commitments they made, and for their ongoing reference and use during the months to follow.

Week 3: First Review Session

To maintain the momentum coming out of the initial off-site and avoid the lull that can sometimes occur, it is critical that teams meet and review the commitments they made the prior week. They should take a few minutes to review their behavioral and team profiles and tie up any loose ends that were left.

Weeks 4–12: Ongoing Reference and Discussion

During the weeks that follow the off-site and review session, team members should be referencing and discussing all relevant aspects of their team development process as they arise in the course of normal business activity. These will probably involve—but are not limited to—the team assessment, behavioral profiling, conflict profiles and norms, goal commitments, and team effectiveness development areas, as well as the team scoreboard.

Keep in mind that a *real* team should be spending considerable time together in meetings and working sessions. In fact, it is not uncommon that as much as 20 percent of each team member's time is spent working through issues and solving problems with the team as a whole.

Week 13: Quarterly Off-Site Review

This is a one or two-day session during which team members review many of the assessments and profiles from the initial off-site, and more important, assess progress made by individuals and the team as a whole. Common activities would include a discussion of the level of productive conflict on the team, as well as a second pass at the Team Effectiveness Exercise. The first quarterly off-site review is a good opportunity to review progress made against the team's goals as well, as these are the best indication of real progress.

Weeks 14–25: Ongoing Reference and Discussion

During the next twelve weeks, team members should again be referencing and discussing relevant aspects of their team development process as they arise in the course of normal business activity. However, team members should now be more comfortable than before in holding one another accountable for any deviations from team norms and personal commitments.

Week 26: Final Off-Site Review

This is the last off-site within the context of the initial team-building effort, but certainly should not be the last such meeting for the team. During this session, team members should step back and assess progress made over the course of the past six months. This should include the reevaluation of the team using the same team assessment that was completed during Week 1. New areas for improvement should be identified and action plans for the future should be put in place.

Week 27 and Beyond

Like a marriage, a team is never completely finished developing itself. And so the team should be constantly addressing areas of deficiency, and it should be periodically stepping back to assess progress. And again, members of *real* teams spend considerable time working together.

THE INITIAL OFF-SITE

Another Warning: The agenda that follows is not meant to prescribe or dictate how you build your team. It is simply a structure my colleagues and I have found to be useful with many of our clients. But keep in mind that every situation is a little different, and requires a measure of judgment, even art, on the part of the facilitator and leader.

So don't be afraid to deviate from this agenda—or from anything else in this guide, for that matter—to best serve the needs of your team and your unique situation.

Overview and Assessment (one or two hours)

Overview of the Five Dysfunctions (around half an hour)

Begin the off-site by providing the team with a clear and complete overview of the model; it is critical that everyone understands and embraces it. You can do this by presenting the model yourself and providing your own stories, or by showing The Table Group's video on *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. In either case, it is certainly helpful if team members have read *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* ahead of time.

Review of Team Assessment Report Results (about one hour)

If the team completed the team assessment before the session, walk them through the results. If they have not, you can have them take the short-form assessment in the book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*.

Once the team has reviewed—but certainly not resolved—the issues highlighted by the team report, you are ready to move on to the first part of team building: building trust.

Building Trust (two to four hours)

Personal Histories Exercise (around fifteen minutes)

The first step in building trust is helping people get comfortable being vulnerable with one another.

Behavioral Profile Exercise (around two to four hours)

The next step in ensuring vulnerability-based trust is giving team members a tool for understanding themselves, and one another, in a deeper way. Behavioral profiling tools such as the Myers-Briggs make it easier for people to reveal their own strengths and weaknesses.

Consider revisiting the findings from the Team Assessment Report that you reviewed at the beginning of the off-site. Often, a team's collective profile provides insights into why a team may or may not struggle with a particular dysfunction.

Trust Review

During a two-day off-site, the team should begin Day 2 by taking time to review team members' individual insights around their profiles and potential areas for improvement.

Mastering Conflict (one or two hours)

Conflict Profiling (around thirty to sixty minutes)

The next step in building your team is learning to engage in productive conflict around issues. To make this possible, it is important for the team to understand its collective and individual preferences for dealing with conflict.

Your team may want to use other models, such as the Thomas-Kilmann Instrument and the Depth-Frequency Model to better assess its conflict profile.

Conflict Norming (around thirty minutes)

Once the team has determined its profile, it can then establish a set of norms around how the members will engage one another in conflict. (Details in the next section.)

Conflict Resolution Obstacles (around thirty to sixty minutes)

Even teams with clear norms around conflict can often struggle to resolve issues that they are debating because they encounter distractions unrelated to the issue being discussed. The Conflict Resolution Obstacle model can help them understand these distractions and eliminate them during conflict. (Details in the next section.)

Achieving Commitment (two to six hours)

Clarification of Team and Organizational Principles

This is the part of the off-site where the team begins diving into business-related topics.

Using the conflict norms and trust-related insights from the previous exercises, it is now time to clarify and commit to a variety of operational and behavioral principles, which may include core purpose, values, strategy, goals, roles, and team expectations around behavior.

Topics will vary depending on the nature of the team and its role in the organization (for example, executive leadership team, line management team, employee task force). All teams will want to clarify their thematic goals and supporting categorical objectives.

Embracing Accountability (one or two hours)

Team Effectiveness Exercise

To create a culture of accountability, team members must learn to provide one another with direct feedback, both positive and constructive, around their behavior and performance.

Focusing on Results (one hour)

Establishment of a Team Scoreboard

The team should create a means for quickly and effectively gauging its ongoing success against its goals.

Off-Site Wrap-Up and Follow-Up

Commitment Clarification

To ensure alignment and clarity coming out of the off-site, the team must review what it has agreed upon and resulting actions that must be taken.

Cascading Communication

To ensure consistent messaging, the team must be clear about when members are to communicate results of the off-site to their teams or others within the organization.

Initial Off-Site Follow-Up

To ensure that momentum coming out of the off-site is not lost, it is important for team members to take specific steps to review, communicate, and follow up on the actions discussed and the commitments made.

SECTION FIVE: TOOLS AND EXERCISES IN DETAIL

This is the segment where we provide step-by-step instructions for using the tools and exercises mentioned in the earlier parts of the book.

PRELIMINARY WORK

Review of the Online Team Assessment - To learn more and to purchase *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* Online Assessment visit www.tablegroup.com/teamwork.

Purpose of exercise: To help the team identify its current strengths and weaknesses, and prepare them for the rest of the off-site.

Time required: One or two hours.

Instructions: This example assumes the team took the online version of the assessment and received their final team report, and thus has all the analysis that is included in it. Here is how to take them through that report:

1. Review the overall team profile and scores.
2. Ask the team to individually review the next three sections— Strengths, Areas for Improvement, and Areas of Key Difference—and look for particularly interesting highlights.
3. Have different team members read aloud the list of team strengths, areas for improvement, and areas of key differences.
4. Ask the group for their insight as to why the team scored the way it did, on all three areas. (You may also want to break the team up into smaller subgroups of three or four people and have them discuss why certain questions scored particularly high or low.)
5. Record their responses on flip charts for reference during the remainder of this session.
6. Clarify any misunderstandings or confusion that may arise around any particular question that has been highlighted.

BUILDING TRUST

Personal Histories Exercise

Purpose of exercise: To improve trust by giving team members an opportunity to demonstrate vulnerability in a low-risk way, and to help team members understand one another at a fundamental level so that they can avoid making false attributions about behaviors and intentions.

Time required: Fifteen to twenty-five minutes, depending on the size of the team.

Instructions:

1. Go around the table and have everyone answer three questions about themselves, so they tell the group:
 - Where they grew up
 - How many siblings they have and where they fall in the sibling order (oldest, youngest, or whatever)
 - What was the most difficult or important challenge of their childhood

(Note: Other questions could be used here, as long as they elicit responses calling for moderate vulnerability. For instance, “What is your favorite food?” would be bad because—in addition to being ridiculous—it would involve virtually no vulnerability. Conversely, “How do you feel about your mother?” would be bad because it would be unnecessarily personal and invasive.)

2. Ask team members what they learned about one another that they didn’t know. This reinforces the purpose of the exercise and allows for a natural ending to the conversation.

BUILDING TRUST

Behavioral Profiling

Purpose of exercise: To improve trust by giving team members an opportunity to demonstrate vulnerability in an objective, in-depth way, and to help team members understand one another’s strengths and weaknesses so that they can avoid making false attributions about behaviors and intentions.

Time required: Two to four hours, depending on the size of the team, the skills of the certified facilitator, and the team members’ level of knowledge of the profiling tool.

Instructions: The following instructions are written with the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) in mind. However, the basic flow can be adapted for other tools.

1. Have all team members complete an MBTI diagnostic questionnaire at least a few days before the session begins, leaving enough time for the scores to be tabulated.
2. At the beginning of the session, present an overview of the Myers-Briggs model and the related Temperament model, giving team members an opportunity to ask questions as well as to do some qualitative assessments of their types.
3. Present team members with their MBTI scores, and help them to identify their own true type by reviewing multiple sources of data (such as indicator results, qualitative assessments, and other reading material).
4. Once all types have been identified, have team members each read a short description of their own type out loud to the rest of the team. In those instances where more than one person has the same type, have each member with that type reread the description, giving other team members an opportunity to hear the description in the context of that particular person. It is often best to stagger the reading of similar types, rather than have them read in succession, to avoid confusion and repetition.
5. List all types on a white board, and discuss with the team how the collective type of the team manifests itself. Discuss any areas where there is great consistency among the team. When there is consistency across multiple areas, identify the team type, read the one-page description of that type, and discuss its ramifications.
6. Identify potential team weaknesses or blind spots that the group must avoid as a result of its particular inclinations. Acknowledge strengths, too.
7. After the exercise has been completed, have team members read a more comprehensive description of their own type, highlighting sections that they find particularly insightful and descriptive of their tendencies. Also, have them choose one or two areas that they would like to improve about themselves, based on their Myers-Briggs type. Have all team members report these findings to the group, preferably on day two of an initial off-site.
8. Within a week of completing this exercise, have team members go back to the teams they lead and discuss their MBTI profiles. This provides an opportunity for them to demonstrate vulnerability with their staff members, and to give them a better understanding of their probable strengths and weaknesses as a manager.

MASTERING CONFLICT

Conflict Profiling

Purpose of exercise: To identify individual and collective conflict tendencies.

Time required: Thirty to sixty minutes.

Instructions:

1. Have team members review their behavioral profile from the trust exercise, highlighting implications specific to conflict.
2. Have the team members each share those implications, along with other conflict influences in their lives, including family and life experiences as well as cultural background.
3. Discuss the similarities and differences of the team in terms of the collective outlook on conflict, as well as the potential implications.

MASTERING CONFLICT

Conflict Norming

Purpose of exercise: To provide clarity to team members about how they expect one another to engage in discussion and debate.

Time required: Thirty minutes.

Instructions:

1. Have all team members write down their individual preferences relating to acceptable and unacceptable behaviors around discussion and debate. Areas might include use of language, tone of voice, emotional content, expectations of involvement and participation, avoidance of distractions, or timeliness of response.
2. Have the members each review their preferences with the rest of the team, while someone captures key areas of similarity and difference.
3. Discuss collective preferences, paying special attention to areas of difference. Arrive at a common understanding of acceptable and unacceptable behavior that all members of the team can commit to. The leader may have to play a key role in breaking a tie.
4. Formally record and distribute behavioral expectations around conflict.

MASTERING CONFLICT

Conflict Resolution Exercise

Purpose of exercise: To teach team members how to apply the conflict resolution model.

Time required: Thirty to sixty minutes.

Instructions:

1. As a team, choose an issue that the team has wrestled with recently—one that was (or continues to be) particularly difficult to resolve. The more difficult and complicated the issue, the better.

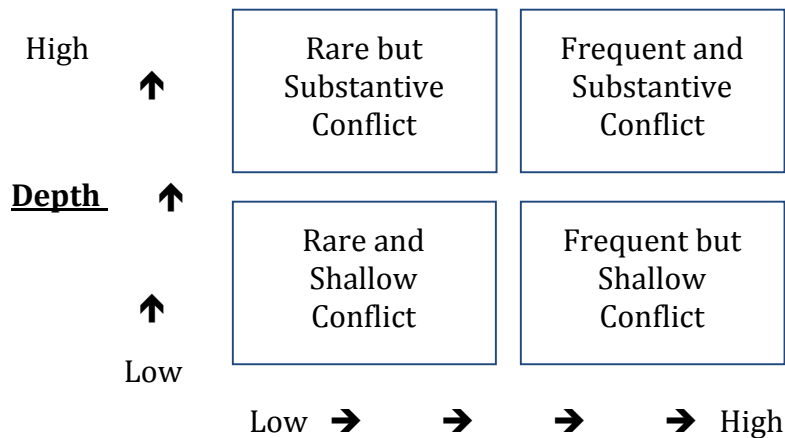
2. Have each member review prior discussions of the issue and analyze them according to the Conflict Resolution Model, looking for as many as possible of the different obstacles that were present during discussions.
3. Compare each team member's answers, discussing the impact that various obstacles had on the decision-making process.
4. Discuss how to address these obstacles in the future (or immediately if the example issue remains unresolved) to improve the way the team engages in conflict and makes decisions.

MASTERING CONFLICT

Depth-Frequency Conflict Model

Purpose of exercise: To help teams assess their conflict tendencies and identify areas for improvement.

Time required: Thirty minutes.



Instructions:

Frequency

1. Review model with team.
2. Have the members each recreate the model on a blank sheet of paper, writing their name at the top.
3. Have them pass their sheet to the person on their left, who then places an X on the chart in the location that best indicates their perception of how the person listed at the top engages in conflict and passes the sheet along to the next member, and so on around the room.
4. When all sheets have been returned to their original owners, have team members review their own charts and indicate to the team their style according to the aggregate input of their team members.
5. Plot all team members' results on a model drawn large enough to fill a flip chart.
6. Have team members discuss the collective implications of their results, with special attention to areas of clear similarity and difference.

MASTERING CONFLICT

Thomas-Kilmann Model

Purpose of model: To help teams identify and understand their conflict tendencies and profile.

Description: The Thomas-Kilmann Model describes five different approaches to conflict according to how people think about the importance of a task versus the importance of their relationship with people they are working with. The main point of the model is to encourage people to be purposeful in how they confront and collaborate with others, rather than relying on their natural—and often inappropriate—tendencies.

For more information about this model, go to www.cpp.com.

ACHIEVING COMMITMENT

Commitment Clarification

Purpose of exercise: To ensure that teams leave meetings with no ambiguity about what they've agreed upon.

Time required: Five minutes.

Instructions:

1. Toward the end of a meeting, the leader or facilitator should go to the white board and ask the team: "What have we agreed upon today?"
2. Team members then provide their individual responses.
3. If there is no consensus, the leader then provokes further discussion to eliminate any discrepancies and clarify commitments and agreements.
4. The leader then records all commitments on the board, and has all team members record them as well.

ACHIEVING COMMITMENT

Cascading Communication

Purpose of exercise: To ensure that team members fully commit to agreements made during meetings, and to achieve alignment in the greater organization.

Time required: Five minutes. **Instructions:**

1. After the Commitment Clarification Exercise has been completed, the team then decides which of the commitments and agreements should be communicated to the rest of the organization.
2. Then team members go back to the teams they lead within a given time frame (twenty-four to forty-eight hours, usually) and communicate those commitments and agreements.

* Note that it is critical for cascading communication to occur either in person or live on the phone (that is, not via e-mail or voice mail) so that employees can ask questions for clarification, and so that they get a clear sense of their manager's level of commitment.

ACHIEVING COMMITMENT

Clarification of Team Principles

Purpose of exercise: To create clarity within the team around how members will deal with one another on an ongoing basis.

Time required: One or two hours.

Instructions: Have the team discuss and come to resolution around the following issues—and any others that the team deems important:

- The structure and schedule for meetings
- Acceptable behavior during meetings (for example, laptop use)
- The preferred methods for communication (for example, e-mail, voice mail, and so on) and the norms around how to use them
- The timeliness of responding to one another using those methods
- The use of common resources, human and otherwise
- The availability of team members during non-work hours
- The level of freedom in which team members can engage one another's staffs
- The extent to which being on time is a priority

ACHIEVING COMMITMENT

Clarification of Organizational Principles

Purpose of exercise: To create clarity within the team, and the rest of the organization, around a variety of fundamental issues.

Time required: Two to five hours.

Instructions: Have the team discuss and come to resolution around some or all of the following, depending on the nature of the team and its place in the organization.

- Core purpose
- Core values
- Business definition
- Strategy
- Goals
- Roles and responsibilities

(See the book *The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive* for more details.)

ACHIEVING COMMITMENT

Establishment of Thematic Goal

Purpose of exercise: To provide the team with a common sense of purpose so that it can achieve greater alignment and avoid the emergence of silos.

Time required: Thirty to sixty minutes.

Instructions: Discuss and agree upon the thematic goal by answering the following question: *What is the single most important goal that we must achieve during this period if we are to consider ourselves successful during that time?*

The goal should not be quantitative, but rather a general achievement. Examples of common thematic goals include the following:

- Improve customer satisfaction
- Get expenses under control
- Increase market awareness
- Launch a new product
- Strengthen the team
- Rebuild the infrastructure
- Grow market share

The Challenge of Deprioritization

One of the challenges teams often face when choosing a thematic goal is best described in the questions they ask: “But don’t we *always* want to be growing market share? And don’t we always want to keep expenses under control?” Essentially, they’re wondering if, by choosing one particular thematic goal, they’re being allowed to completely ignore other areas.

Of course, the answer is no. Even when the team is focused on growing market share, it will have to keep an eye on expenses. And even when the goal is to launch a new product or establish its brand, it will have to make its numbers in terms of revenue.

However, the point of having a thematic goal is to ensure that the entire team places *extra* emphasis on a single area of priority, so that when push comes to shove, everyone understands what matters most. This helps team members avoid pulling in different directions, which leads to paralysis, frustration, and a collective silo-mentality.

The Specialist’s Dilemma

Another challenge for teams trying to choose and rally around a thematic goal is this type of objection: “Hey, I’m the chief legal counsel. What do I have to do with growing market share?” Or even, “As the head of Sales, I cannot afford to take my eye off of revenue. I don’t think I should be involved in getting expenses under control.”

The key to overcoming this is getting everyone to understand that they must wear two different hats when they are together as a team. One of those hats, and the most important one, is that of “generic team member.”

For executives, it is their “generic executive” hat. This means that they are not a functional executive, the head of a particular department. And they are not a specialist, someone who is valued because of their technical skills. They are team members who are expected to contribute to the team in any way they can. That means the head lawyer should be contributing to conversations about marketing, and that the head of Engineering should be actively involved in decisions about sales.

Now there are times when team members must put their functional hats back on so they can focus on what they must go back and accomplish within their departments. The divisions of labor that exist in any organization exist for a reason, and must be honored.

However, when team members are together, most of their focus and mind-set should be centered around collective team issues, not their own department or functional area.

Determining the Length of the Period

The time frame of the period for a thematic goal will depend on the nature of the business and industry, as well as the particular situation of the organization and team. For instance, the executive team of a start-up company will probably want to have relatively short time frames (say, two or three months), while a university might have longer cycles (for example, a year).

EMBRACING ACCOUNTABILITY

Team Effectiveness Exercise

Purpose of exercise: To give team members a forum for providing one another with focused, direct, and actionable feedback about how their individual behavior can improve the performance of the team.

Time required: One or two hours, depending on the size of the team and the skill of the facilitator.

Instructions:

1. Have all team members answer the following questions about each member of the team other than themselves:
 - What is that person's single most important behavioral quality that contributes to the strength of the team? (That is, their strength.)
 - What is that person's single most important behavioral quality that detracts from the strength of the team? (That is, their weakness or problematic behavior.)

(Note: Team members should write down their answers so that they can commit to and remember their responses, and are not tempted to change them based on what others have said.)
2. Beginning with comments about the leader of the team, have all team members read their positive responses, one by one, until everyone has finished.
3. Ask the leader to respond to what people have said. (For example, "Any surprises? Any questions for clarification?")
4. Continuing to focus on the leader, have all team members read their negative responses, one by one, until everyone has finished.
5. Continue with this sequence for every member of the team.
6. When all team members have received input from their peers, have them each summarize aloud for the team the one or two key take-aways that they will work on individually. Have them e-mail those takeaways to the leader.
7. At the next team off-site, have the members each report on the progress they've made in regard to each of their areas for improvement. Solicit input from team members about their observations.

FOCUSING ON RESULTS

Establishment of Team Scoreboard

Purpose of tool: To provide the team with a clear and useful means of quickly assessing its success so that it can organize meetings and discussions around relevant topics.

Time required: One or two hours

Instructions: After identifying the thematic goal, have the team discuss and agree upon the handful of supporting objectives that must be accomplished if the thematic goal is to be achieved.

For instance, if the thematic goal is to focus on aggressively increasing revenue in a given period, the supporting objectives might include the following: increase marketing support, reestablish pricing and discounts, increase executive involvement in sales, expand sales efforts into new territories, hire more salespeople.

Or if the thematic goal is to increase market awareness, the supporting objectives might be to increase advertising, clarify the brand and value proposition, increase trade-show activities, and improve public relations.

All of this will depend on the unique situation of each team, as well as what is going on in the organization and the industry as a whole.

In addition to these supporting objectives, a team's scoreboard should include a few standard operational objectives such as revenue, expenses, employee turnover, or whatever essential metric is key to the business on an ongoing basis.

FOLLOW-UP

Initial Off-Site Follow-Up

Purpose of exercise: To ensure that progress and decisions made during the off-site are clarified, committed to, and communicated to others outside the team.

Time required: One or two hours over the course of a week.

Instructions: Immediately following the off-site, it is important for team members to follow up on particular actions to ensure the process continues to move forward. The following should happen after the meeting:

1. Team facilitator or team leader should consolidate the notes from the meeting and distribute them to the team. (This should include things like the team's personality profiles, comments from the assessment discussion, a team conflict profile, any goals and decisions that were made, and so on.)
2. Individual team members should summarize their personality profiles into three bullet points or less—things that it would be helpful for the team to keep in mind.
3. Team members need to summarize the feedback from the Team Effectiveness Exercise.
4. Team members should send their summaries to the facilitator for consolidation and distribution to the team.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PATRICK LENCIONI is the founder of The Table Group and the author of ten books, which have sold over four million copies and have been translated into more than 25 languages. *The Wall Street Journal* called him one of the most sought after business speakers in America; he has addressed millions of people at conferences and events around the world over the past 15 years. Pat has written for or been featured in numerous publications including the *Harvard Business Review*, *Inc. Magazine*, *Fortune*, *Fast Company*, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *BusinessWeek*.

As president of The Table Group, Pat splits his time between his leadership and management duties, writing, speaking and consulting to CEOs and their leadership teams. Since founding the firm in 1997, Pat has worked with thousands of executives in organizations ranging from Fortune 500 corporations and professional sports teams to non-profits and churches.

Prior to founding The Table Group, Pat worked at Bain & Company, Oracle Corporation, and Sybase. Pat lives in the Bay Area with his wife, Laura, and four boys.