

Overcome Team Dysfunction

By Patirck Lencioni

Building an effective cohesive team is extremely hard. But it is also simple. What I mean is that teamwork doesn't require great intellectual insights or masterful tactics. More than anything, it comes down to courage and persistence.

The rewards of teamwork are hard to measure because it impacts the outcome of an organization in such a comprehensive manner, which is impossible to isolate a single variable. As a result, leaders tend to look for more verifiable competitive advantages elsewhere. Although effective teamwork continues to be elusive for most, 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.

The measure of a true team is that it accomplishes what it sets out to achieve. To do that on a consistent, ongoing basis, a team must overcome the five dysfunctions listed below:

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

Dysfunction #1: Absence of Trust

This occurs when team members are reluctant to be vulnerable with one another and are unwilling to admit their mistakes, weaknesses or needs for help. Without a certain comfort level among team members, a foundation of trust is impossible.

Dysfunction #2: Fear of Conflict

Teams that are lacking on trust are incapable of engaging in unfiltered, passionate debate about key issues, causing situations where team conflict can easily turn into veiled discussions and back channel comments. In a work setting where team members do not openly air their opinions, inferior decisions are the result.

Dysfunction #3: Lack of Commitment

Without conflict, it is difficult for team members to commit to decisions, creating an environment where ambiguity prevails. Lack of direction and commitment can make employees, particularly star employees, disgruntled.

Dysfunction #4: Avoidance of Accountability

When teams don't commit to a clear plan of action, even the most focused and driven individuals hesitate to call their peers on actions and behaviors that may seem counterproductive to the overall good of the team.

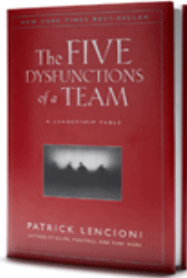
Dysfunction #5: Inattention to Results

Team members naturally tend to put their own needs (ego, career development, recognition, etc.) ahead of the collective goals of the team when individuals aren't held accountable. If a team has lost sight of the need for achievement, the business ultimately suffers.

The Rewards

Striving to create a functional, cohesive team is one of the few remaining competitive advantages available to any organization looking for a powerful point of differentiation. Functional teams avoid

wasting time talking about the wrong issues and revisiting the same topics over and over again because of lack of buy-in. Functional teams also make higher quality decisions and accomplish more in less time and with less distraction and frustration. Additionally, "A" players rarely leave organizations where they are part of a cohesive team. Successful teamwork is not about mastering subtle, sophisticated theories, but rather about embracing common sense with uncommon levels of discipline and persistence.



About Patrick Lencioni

Patrick Lencioni is the founder and president of the Table Group, a firm dedicated to providing organizations with ideas, products, and services that improve teamwork, clarity, and employee engagement. Lencioni is the author of nine best-selling books with over four million copies sold. After ten years in print, his book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* continues to be a fixture on national best-seller lists.