

## **Team Time - *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team***

If you saw the Chicago Bulls play basketball in the early '90s, then you were fortunate to witness one of the best teams ever. Even if you weren't a basketball fan, you couldn't help but get sucked into the games where the passion the players possessed was enthralling each player encouraging his teammates toward the goal of another NBA Championship.

Passion, commitment and the ability to focus on goals are all characteristics of a winning team, regardless if the work is done on a basketball court in a beauty salon or a corporate workgroup.

Patrick Lencioni, who recently penned his fourth best-selling book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, says many organizations are not as successful as they can be because the teams, which constitute all or part of the organization, are dysfunctional. Instead of working together, some team members may have their own agendas, which break down team dynamics.

Although teams themselves are quite complex, it's not difficult to determine if a team is dysfunctional, according to Lencioni, president of the San Francisco-based management consulting firm The Table Group.

In his latest leadership novel, Lencioni describes five dysfunctions that teams often face through the fictional story of a Silicon Valley company struggling to survive. In the book, Kathryn Petersen is hired as the new CEO and immediately notices that the executive team is dysfunctional, often working against each other instead of as a team. During several staff retreats, Petersen works on creating a strong executive team by identifying the team's strengths and weaknesses, and which members of the team contribute to the team's dysfunction. With a series of exercises and pointed discussions led by Petersen, Lencioni shows how the group tackles each of the five team dysfunctions.

### **ABSENCE OF TRUST**

At the first off-site meeting, Petersen tells her staff that it is dysfunctional, and that the first group problem they face is an "absence of trust" among members. According to Lencioni, this dysfunction is one of the most important for a team to overcome since it lies at the heart of a team's functionality.

Lencioni writes: "Trust is the confidence among team members that their peers' intentions are good, and that there is no reason to be protective or careful around the group. In essence, teammates must get comfortable being vulnerable with one another." By doing that, they can openly make suggestions for improving one another's actions or behaviors.

There are several exercises team leaders can employ to help build trust within a team. One exercise, which Petersen uses in the book, is to ask each team member to reveal a little bit about his or her personal life, such as unique challenges of childhood, favorite hobbies, first job and worst job.

Another exercise Lencioni likes to use is the Team Effectiveness Exercise, which asks all members of the group to give their opinion on what each person's greatest asset to the team and weakness are. Although this exercise may initially seem intrusive, Lencioni

says that it is often very constructive for the individual. The easiest way for a group or team leader to get a team to open up more is for the leader to display vulnerability, sharing not only triumphs but past failures as well.

Although overcoming trust hurdles is essential to improving a team's effectiveness, gaining trust takes time, so don't rush it, cautions Lencioni.

#### FEAR OF CONFLICT

Before taking over leadership of the company, CEO Petersen observed little discussion of divisive issues at staff meetings. Many individuals possessed a "fear of conflict," the second dysfunction of a team.

"All great relationships require productive conflict to grow," writes Lencioni, although many times conflict isn't embraced in situations like work. The quicker a team can work through its problems, the quicker resolutions can be found. However, if problems aren't discussed, making decisions to move forward becomes almost impossible.

"Teams avoid conflict because members are scared of hurting each other's feelings," continues Lencioni. Although, when there is a lack of discussion and disagreement, team members start to feel resentful, which can cause tension.

To bring out conflicts, one or several members of the group have to be what Lencioni calls "the miners of conflict," or those who draw out problems. During the mining process, team members should encourage each other to bring forth conflict in order to work through it. If conflicts are not brought forth, the leaders of the group may appoint a team member to assume the role of the miner. The leader should help encourage interaction and altercation among team members by not stepping in when the arguments escalate or hurtful things are said.

#### LACK OF COMMITMENT

Teams whose members don't commit to the team's goal, whether it's selling more retail products or performing a scalp massage at the shampoo bowl, suffer from the third

dysfunction--a "lack of commitment." For there to be a commitment, all team members must completely "buy-in" to all decisions made, regardless if they were against them in the first place, says Lencioni.

"It's fine to debate issues and have many disagreements--in fact, it's better," he says. "People can change their minds or see different points of view when points are debated. But once a team arrives at a decision, all members have to stick to it without hedging."

Teams also need to be very clear about the decisions that are made, so there can be a complete buy-in, Lencioni says. To help ensure commitment from all team members, it is imperative to review the direction the team will move at the end of each meeting. Also, creating deadlines helps teams move forward and results in action.

#### AVOIDANCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Regardless if goals are set, a team can't be successful if team members "avoid accountability," the fourth dysfunction. Team members must keep each other accountable on all actions that may hurt the group, such as producing mediocre work or missing dead-

lines. Regardless of how strong a team is, it is still difficult for members to openly criticize one another, even if their actions are hurting the team. So, says Lencioni, they tend to avoid accountability.

An easy way for team members to hold one another accountable is to publicly announce the team's goals and then discuss what everyone needs to do to achieve the goals.

#### INATTENTION TO RESULTS

If the championship basketball team just wanted to play basketball and didn't care about winning any games, then it would be suffering from the final dysfunction, "inattention to results." Once goals are set, the individuals of a team need to work toward their collective goals. When results aren't being met, there can be several reasons, suggests Lencioni. Some members may be simply interested in the status of being named to the team and not necessarily as interested in the goals of the team. Others could be interested in their personal achievement within the group rather than the group's achievement.

"One way to further encourage teamwork is to shift rewards away from individual performance to team achievement," advises Lencioni. "However, it is also important to realize that if people in the group have more experience such as sales, etc., they may achieve more, so some individual rewards in addition to team rewards should also be presented.

"Perhaps more than with any of the other dysfunctions, the leader must set the tone for a focus on results," writes Lencioni. If members of the team think that the leader is interested in something other than achieving the established goals, they will do the same.

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