

Author Q & A Pat Lencioni - *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*

Q: What is this book about?

A: Essentially, it's about the root causes of politics and dysfunction on the teams where we work, and the keys to overcoming them. It's also a testament to the power of teamwork, and the competitive advantage that it can bring to any organization. Finally, the book is a reminder that success in business may be difficult, but it's not overly complicated. It is more about discipline and persistence than intellectual prowess.

Q: Why are so many teams dysfunctional?

A: Because they are made up of human beings with varied interests and frailties. When you put them together and leave them to their own devices, even the most well-intentioned people will usually deviate toward dysfunctional, unproductive behavior. And because most leaders and managers are not schooled in the art of building teams, small problems are left untreated and spiral further and further into ugliness and politics.

Q: What is the worst behavior you've ever seen on a dysfunctional team?

A: Choosing just one is difficult. But if I had to select one, I would say it was a company where the CEO was unable to confront his direct reports about basic behaviors such as their blatant refusal to attend staff meetings and honor reporting structures. Ultimately, this led to the stifling of conflict around key issues, resulting in massive financial losses and scandal.

Q: What advice do you have for someone struggling with a dysfunctional team?

A: If you're the leader of a team, go back and start by ensuring team members trust one another and are comfortable engaging in open conflict around issues. There is no substitute for trust—it begins with the willingness of team members to open themselves up to one another and admit their weaknesses and mistakes.

In addition, any individual, whether an executive or a line employee, can impact a team in either a positive or negative way. Without holding one another accountable, even the best-intentioned team members can create dysfunctions within a team.

If you're not the leader of the team, find a way to get your leader committed to addressing the five dysfunctions. Or be prepared to take risks calling people on unproductive behaviors. If neither of these options are possibilities, think about finding another team.

Q: Can you apply this model to any current events?

A: Yes. Enron, President Bush and his Cabinet, The New England Patriots, and of course, the break-up of the Go-gos.

Q: What exactly are the five dysfunctions of a team?

A: Lack of trust. Team members are uncomfortable being vulnerable with one another, unwilling to admit their weaknesses, mistakes or needs for help.

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Fear of conflict. Team members are unwilling to engage in passionate, unfiltered debate around important issues.

Inability to commit. Team members fail to achieve buy-in around clear decisions and courses of action.

Unwillingness to hold one another accountable. Team members fail to confront one another around behaviors and deliverables that do not conform to agreed decisions.

Inattention to results. Team members put their individual needs for career development and recognition before the collective goals of the team.

Q: Why do you convey your messages through fables?

A: I believe that readers learn more through fables because they can relate to the characters and more easily internalize the messages. In addition, they are more apt to finish a book if they find it intriguing and fun to read. Finally, because I've had some experience writing screenplays, I enjoy the process of bringing my theories to life through interesting dialogue and character development.