

“The FIVE Dysfunctions of a Team”

Patrick Lencioni
(Jossey-Bass Publisher - 2002)

Summary by Bob Littell, Chief NetWeaver

Foreward – Why I believe this work is so significant – **Bob Littell**

As a continuing reminder both for those who have attended one or more of our “**Don’t Need to Read the Book**” book club meetings as well as for those attending his or her first one, two of the key elements behind this book club concept have to do with **NetWeaving**: 1) helping people get to know each other below the superficial level, which I have found that book clubs do very successfully; 2) helping people ‘**follow up**’ and ‘**follow through**’ by emphasizing the importance of getting with one or more of the people whom you meet at the book club meeting, either to have a one-on-one ‘**post-meeting**’ meeting just to keep the relationship growing, or even better to ‘**host**’ a followup meeting to introduce your new ‘**friend**’ to someone he or she would benefit meeting.

To me the most rewarding part of these book club meetings is hearing some of the success stories from these follow up meetings which are taking place.

Now to this great book by Pat Lencioni – “**The Five Dysfunctions of a Team**”

Having led, as well as just having been a member of a number of teams, it’s what I might best describe as the ‘**Good**’ . . .the ‘**Bad**’ . . .and the ‘**Ugly**’. And probably more of them would be categorized toward the latter two.

- perfunctory, boring meetings with no real purpose and no real direction.
- meandering discussions which sometimes strayed so far from the original purpose, you weren’t sure if you were in the right meeting.
- meetings dominated by one or more persons who were more interested in hearing themselves speak than contributing to a successful conclusion with healthy debate - with **NO ONE** leaving **committed** to a set of action plans partly since no one seemed particularly interested in getting their input.
- Meetings run without key people present to assure that key decisions made would be actionable.

The list could go on and on and so you don’t think I’m pointing the finger, some of the above were ones that I was supposed to be leading.

Thanks to a new friend, Randy Hain, managing partner of Bell Oaks Executive Search, I was recently invited to hear Pat Lencioni speak and part of this Summary is taken from notes I took at the meeting, in addition to the material in Pat's book.

What is different about this book from any of the other books I have summarized to date is that the first 184 pages of this 224 page book is written and reads more like a fiction novel than as a business book. But through this realistic dialogue, Lencioni does an incredible job of bringing each of the Team Members, including Kathryn the CEO, to life in such a way that you can almost identify each player with someone you know, or with whom you have previously worked.

But what will also be unique about our breakout sessions this time is that we will be having some fun '**role-playing**' with scripts to experience some of the '**crucial**' conversations so you can better appreciate some of the real-world advice Lencioni brings to the table at the end.

In his presentation at the Terry College School Business in Buckhead (co-sponsors of Pat's appearance), Pat laid out what he considers to be the four (4) **Cornerstones of Success** whether it be for a company or an organization trying to accomplish any goal or goals:

- 1) Building and maintaining a healthy leadership team.
- 2) Building organization clarity – this doesn't always mean coming up with the '**right**' answer, but it's a '**cohesive**' answer with which all concur and agree to solidly get behind.
- 3) Communicate the daylight out of these internally as well externally so that people hear the **same consistent message** from different members of the team.
- 4) Put in place a set of guidelines to hire, fire, reward, etc.

The book begins with a brief description of each of the key players in the narrative part of the book and below I'm either directly quoting or paraphrasing Lencioni's insightful descriptions of each of the characters:

Kathryn - the newly selected CEO of DecisionTech, Inc. – hand-picked by the Chairman who knew her reputation as a 'team-builder' but primarily in the automotive industry not in technology. And at age 57, Kathryn was no 'spring chicken' as were many within the fast-moving nearby hi-tech Silicon Valley. The entire management team was 'shocked' at Kathryn's hiring as CEO, and at several points, even the Chairman had second thoughts if he had made the correct decision.

Jeff Shanley – Business Development - when replaced as CEO, Jeff was offered a position heading business development, which to most person's surprise, he accepted. Kathryn actually invited him to continue running the weekly executive staff meetings. Jeff was a networking whiz and had been responsible for raising much of the initial company seed capital, and he had attracted many of the current executives. His management skills though left much to be desired but unlike many other high-tech companies, Jeff's meetings usually began on time – with a set agenda which people had prior to the meeting – and they always concluded right on schedule.

Rather than resenting Kathryn replacing Jeff as CEO, she grew to conclude that he was happy to be relieved of his management responsibilities.

Mikey (Michele Bebe) - Marketing – Known within the Valley Tech world as a ‘**branding**’ genius, Mikey, as she liked to be called, was lacking in some of the ‘social graces’ and was very unaware of some of her own behaviors and how they turned off others on the team. *“During meetings, she talked more than the others, occasionally coming up with a brilliant idea, but more often complaining about how the other companies she worked for did everything better than DecisionTech. It was almost as though she were a spectator or, better yet, a victim of circumstance, at her new company.”* Her most annoying habit was rolling her eyes in apparent disgust when one of the other team members disagreed with anything she had to say about marketing. *“So in spite of her talent and accomplishments, it was no surprise that Mikey was the least popular among the rest of the staff. With the possible exception of Martin.”*

Martin Gilmore – Chief Technologist – Known within the company as “*the keeper of the crown jewels*” due to his reputation for having designed the company’s **flagship product**, *“Martin considered himself to know as much about technology as anyone else in the Valley, which was probably true.”* British and with advanced degrees from Berkley and Cambridge, he had a successful track record and had been chief architect with two other technology companies. *“Unlike Mikey, Martin didn’t disrupt staff meetings. In fact, he rarely participated.”* Instead, pulling out his laptop, he seemed to always be writing emails or working on something unless he heard an incorrect statement being made, at which time he would correct the person – usually with some note of sarcasm . At first, due largely to the seeming awe in which Martin’s intellect was held, his behavior was tolerated – even considered amusing by some – but as the company struggled, this began to grate more and more.

JR (Jeff Rawlins) – Sales - As an experienced sales person and a little older than the others – in his mid-forties, “He was usually tan, never rude, and always agreed to do whatever the staff asked him to do, although he **RARELY** followed through. His short-comings – always accompanied by apologies to whomever he had let down - were tolerated because at least his track record showed – prior to coming to DecisionTech – *that he had never missed a quarterly revenue number in his entire sales career.*

Carlos Amador – Customer Support – Having worked with Mikey at two previous companies, she brought him to the company but the two of them had almost nothing in common. And even though the company didn’t have that many customers, Carlos was hired with the idea of investing in customer service prior to their major growth. “Carlos spoke very little, but whenever he did, he had something important and constructive to say. He listened intently during meetings, worked long hours with no complaint, and downplayed his prior accomplishments whenever someone asked about them. Carlos took responsibility for product quality and any other duties that someone else had let fall through the cracks.

Jan Mersino – Chief Financial Officer – A critical position in that DecisionTech’s ultimate goal was to go public, Jan played a key role supporting Jeff as he raised impressive amounts of money from VC’s and other investors. A real industry expert, she was a “*stickler for detail, and treated the company’s money as though it were her own.*” It was her conservative philosophy (maybe **overly conservative** is a better description) and past track record which allowed the board to give Jeff and the staff ‘free rein’ knowing Jan had her foot on the brake.

Nick Farrell – Chief Operating Officer – Prior to DecisionTech, Nick had been VP of field operations for a large computer manufacturer and on paper had the most impressive credentials. He had moved his family to California from the Midwest with an understanding that he would spearhead Decision Tech’s growth which included building a operational infrastructure, opening new offices around the world, and leading the firm’s acquisition and integration efforts. Unfortunately, although he carried the ‘title’ of COO, insisting upon this as a condition of coming, due to the company sputtering start, none of these more grandiose plans were being undertaken. Instead of these activities, Nick was spending most of his time simply working hard to build relationships – mostly pretty shallow ones – with each of his colleagues – whom he had quietly deemed to be inferior to him. Nick also saw himself as the only executive in the company qualified to be CEO.

So there you have the players. Now if you’ve ever been in a situation like this where the boat is leaking, and a new captain has been brought aboard to save the sinking ship, but the new captain turns out to be an Air Force pilot, you get to watch all the political maneuvering which starts taking place.

For the first several weeks, Kathryn simply roamed the hallways, sitting in merely as an observer of as many meetings as she could. Her first ‘test’ came when an email arrived saying the Martin, her sour-puss chief engineer, and JR (head of sales), had scheduled a sales call at **ASA**, a prospective company’s offices, the next week, and that meant they would be missing a good bit up front of Kathryn’s planned executive retreat.

Rather than responding to the email, “*Kathryn decided that this would be her first moment of truth as a CEO, and moments of truth, she knew, are best handled face-to-face.*”

You can read the actual dialogue (pages 30 – 31) in the book to see.

Without examining everything that was said, it suffice to say that everyone from Jeff to the Chairman who had hired Catherine disagreed with Kathryn’s decision since it seemed that making a promising ‘sales call’ should trump a company retreat, especially with the company in the struggling position it found itself.

The dialogue between Kathryn and Jeff (pp. 32-34) shows how you diplomatically tell the CEO you’ve just replaced why this is necessary without putting all the blame on the way he’s run things in the past?

You can also read the dialogue between Kathryn and the Chairman (pp. 35-37) who is now beginning to wonder if he made the right decision in hiring Kathryn.

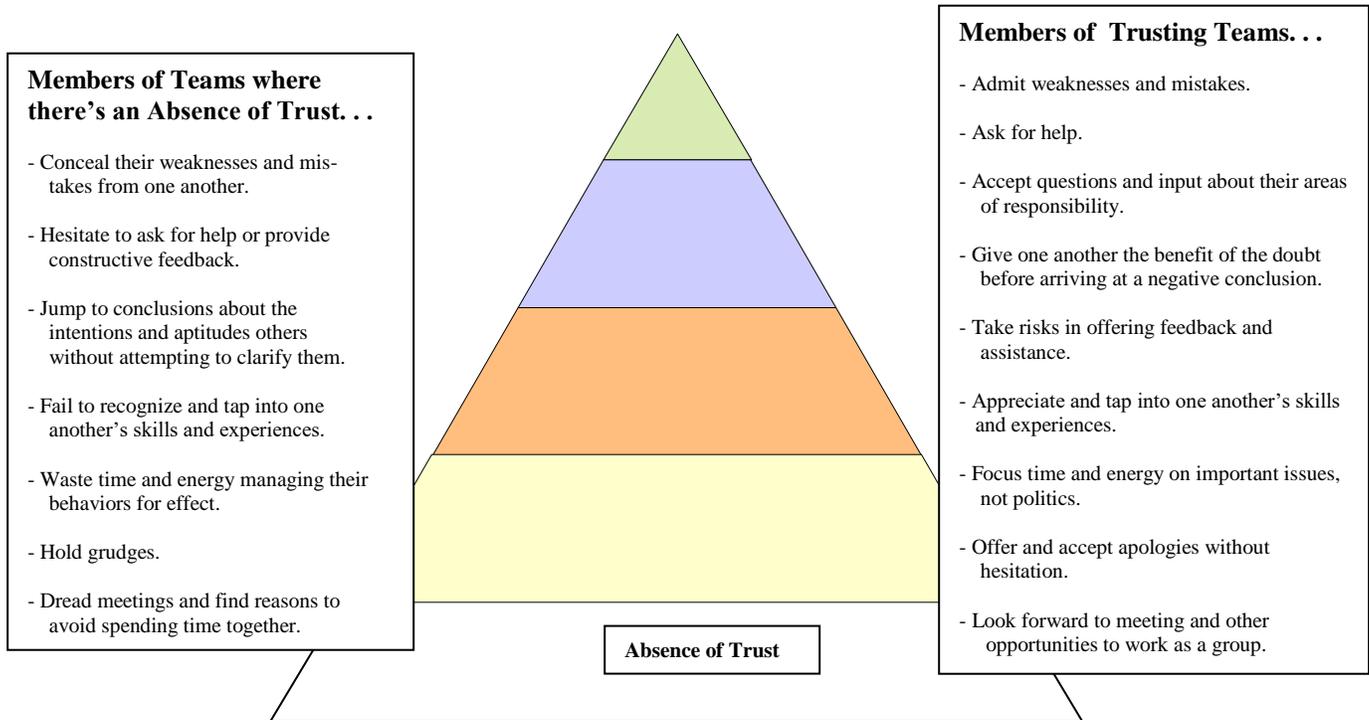
Ok, I’ll give it away. Kathryn wins and Martin (although it’s a close call with him arriving just a couple of minutes before the start of the meeting) and JR come to the retreat instead of skipping the retreat to make the sales call.

The next dialogue will be parts of Kathryn’s first ‘**team speech**’ and some serious ‘**push back**’ results, which she gets from several members of the team.

Kathryn now launches into her explanation of what it means to be a team, and the five reasons why teams are ‘**dysfunctional**’.

At this point, I’ve going to jump to Lencioni’s explanation of the FIVE Dysfunc-tions and then I’ll come back to some of what I consider to be the most enlightening and inspirational dialogue from the narrative offering great insights as to how things can actually be handled in real life situations.

The FIVE Dysfunctions of a Team



According to Lencioni, the word ‘**trust**’ is often misused. *“In the context of building a team, trust is the confidence among team members that their peers’ intentions are good , and that there is no reason to be protective or careful about around the group. In essence, teammates must get comfortable being vulnerable with one another.”*

Lencioni differentiates between “**Predictive Trust**” -If you do this, then I can predict what your behavior will be. . .and “**Vulnerability Trust**” – Genuinely communicating with each other. Not holding anything back. Willing to make a mistake and admit it and also be willing to praise and give credit.

And as Pat notes, *“Achieving vulnerability-based trust is difficult because in the course of career advancement and education, most successful people learn to be competitive with their peers, and protective of their reputations. It is a challenge for them to turn those instincts off for the good of a team, but is exactly what is required.”*

Suggestions for overcoming Dysfunction 1 – Achieving Vulnerability-Based Trust:

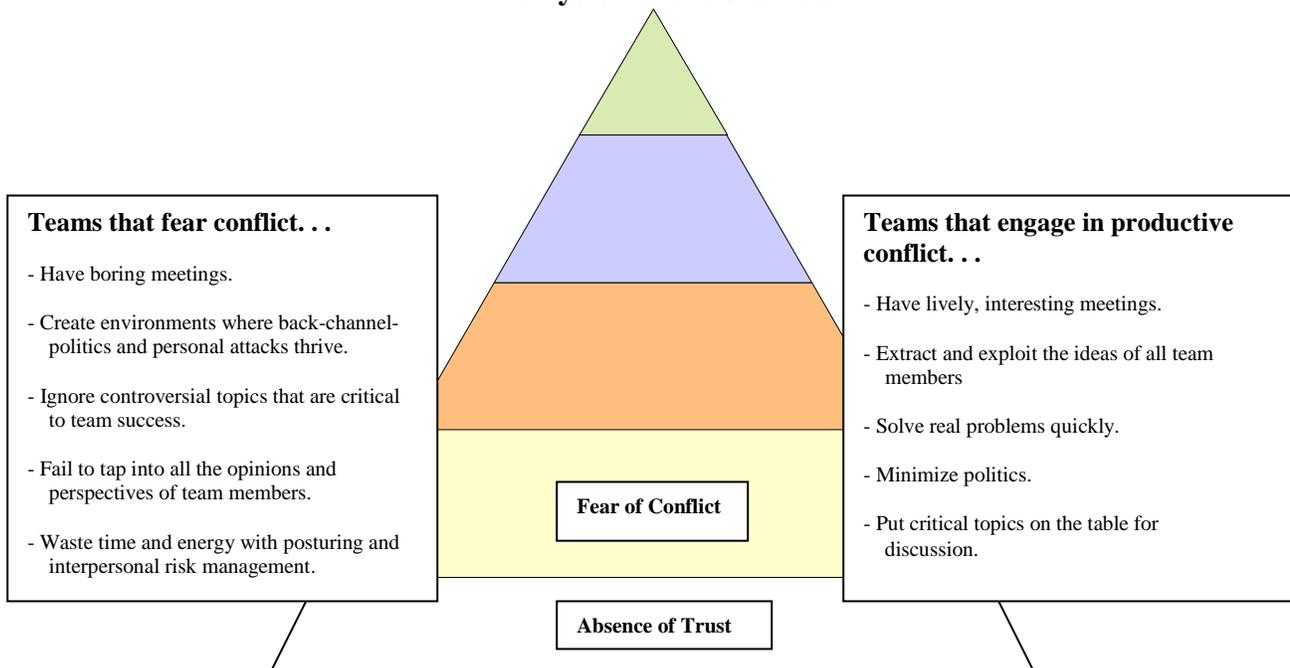
This takes shared experiences, multiple instances of follow-through creating trust and an in-depth understanding of the unique attributes of team members:

- 1) Use a **Personal History Exercise** – low-risk exercise sharing personal info about each other: Number of siblings, hometown, unique challenges of childhood, favorite hobbies, first job, and worst job. (**NOTE:** this is very similar to what I talk about in NetWeaving – “**Inspiring Meaningful Dialogue**” – where there is learning and growth which raises appreciation and acceptance for the other person).
- 2) **Team Effectiveness Exercise** – One person at a time, team members identify the single most important contribution that that team member makes to the team, as well as the one area that the person must either improve upon or eliminate for the good of the team. Best to let the team leader be first and show vulnerability and willingness to self-critique.
- 3) **Personality and Behavioral Preference Profiles** – Understanding the behavioral preferences and personality styles of each member of the team can help break down barriers by allowing people to better understand and empathize with one another.

Lencioni provides a couple others which you can read – 360-Degree Feedback and Experiential Team Exercises on page 200.

Pat points out that the role of the leader is to demonstrate vulnerability first. “This requires that a leader risk losing face in front of the team, so that subordinates will take the same risk themselves.” He also emphasizes that the display of vulnerability **MUST** be ‘**genuine**’, not ‘**staged**’. “*One of the best ways to lose the trust of a team is to feign vulnerability in order to manipulate the emotions of others.*”

Five Dysfunctions of a Team



Lencioni points out that, “All great relationships, the ones that last over time, require productive conflict in order to grow. This is true in marriage, parenthood, friendship, and certainly business.” He distinguishes ‘**productive ideological conflict**’ from ‘**destructive fighting and interpersonal politics**’. The former discussions are limited to concepts and ideas, and not personality-focused, mean-spirited attacks.

Suggestions for overcoming Dysfunction 2 – Fear of Conflict:

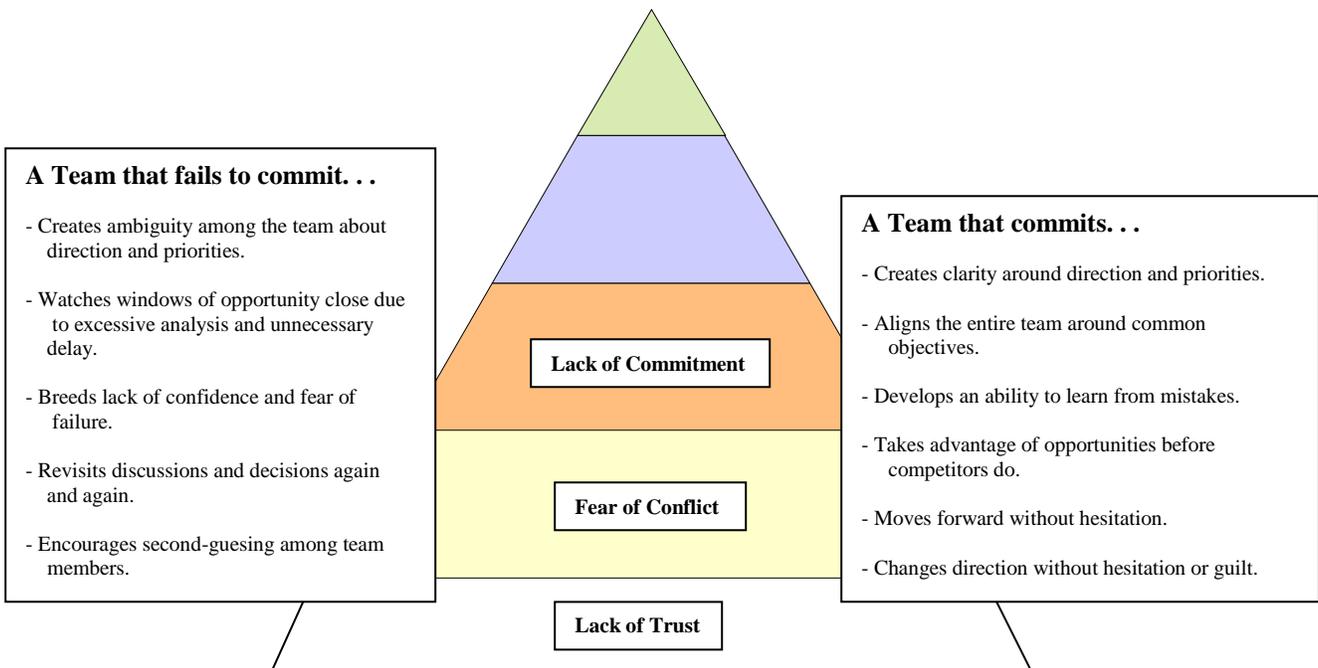
Pat stresses that you not only need to stress to the team that ‘**productive conflict**’ is good, but he also says you need to remind folks – interrupting sometimes in the middle – sometimes also at the end of a session- to do so where there has been healthy debate - that this is just what’s needed to build the team.

Some ways he suggests include:

- 1) **Mining** – Getting persons to engage in ‘**productive conflict**’ often requires work and ‘**extracting buried disagreements within the team**’: “*They must have the courage and confidence to call out sensitive issues and force team members to work through them.*” He suggests that sometimes it’s helpful to actually assign a member of the team to take on the responsibility of being ‘**the extractor**’.
- 2) **Personality Profiles Tools** – Personality Styles and Behavioral Preferences – he mentions Myers-Briggs but there are a number of them.

Lencioni says that the role of the leader is to see that this kind of ‘productive conflict’ takes place and to use restraint and to not prematurely interrupt disagreements which can prevent team members from developing their own coping skills. Sometimes this will make a leader feel he or she is losing control, but it’s essential to do it.

Five Dysfunctions of a Team



Lencioni ascribes two important elements to team commitment: “clarity” and “buy-in”: *“Great teams make clear and timely decisions and move forward with complete buy-in from every member of the team, even those who voted against the decision. They leave meetings confident that no one on the team is quietly harboring doubts about whether to support the actions agree upon.”*

According to Pat, the two greatest causes of lack of commitment are the ‘**desire for consensus**’ and the ‘**need for certainty**’, both which on surface sound as if they should be goals to attain. Under ‘**consensus**’, Lencioni notes *“Great teams understand the danger of seeking consensus, and find ways to achieve buy-in even when complete agreement is impossible”*. . . *“Great teams ensure that everyone’s ideas are genuinely considered, which then creates a willingness to rally around whatever decision is ultimately made by the group.”*

The danger Lencioni stresses with ‘**the need for certainty**’ is that the team ends up ‘**hedging their bets**’. . . ‘**delaying important decisions until they have enough data to feel certain**’ which causes a paralysis and a lack of confidence within the team.

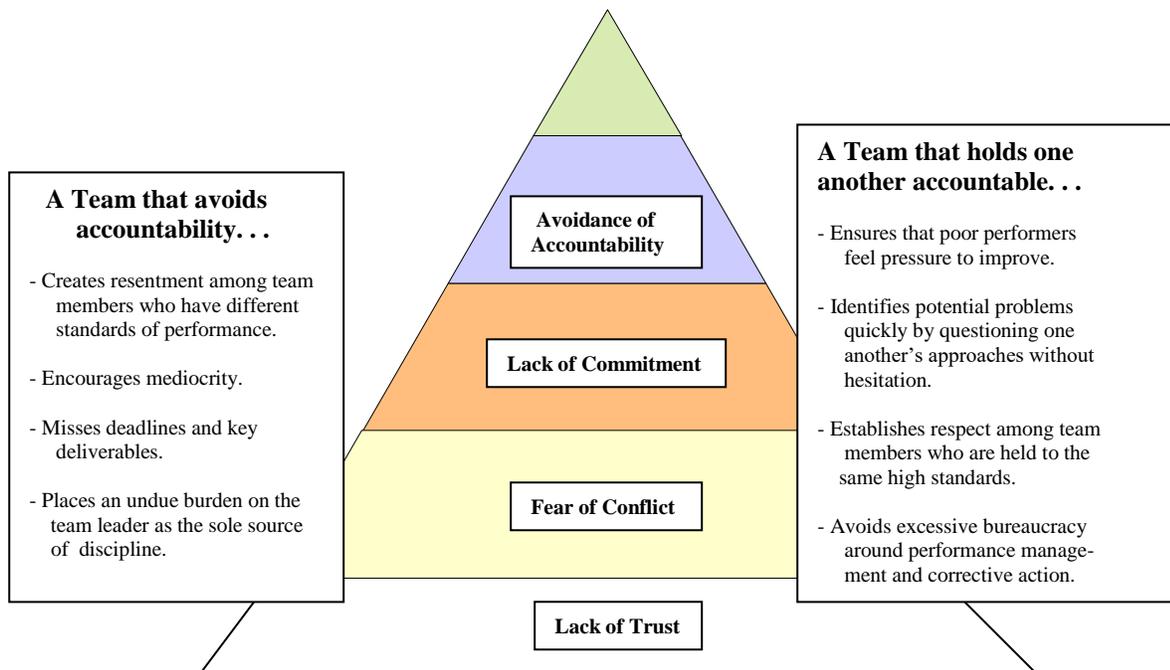
Suggestions for overcoming Dysfunction 3 – A Lack of Commitment

- 1) **Cascading Messaging** – Following a staff meeting or off-site retreat , the team reviews the key decisions made during the meeting and agrees on what needs to be communicated to the various audiences – internal as well as external. When these are written out, Pat notes that often it becomes apparent that everyone isn’t on the same page and that some person’s interpretation of what happened, or what actions were decided upon, may not be consistent with what others thought. Therefore clarifying what will go out and to whom, as well as what should remain confidential from the meeting, prevents contradictory messages from being communicated.
- 2) **Deadlines** – Setting clear deadlines is one of the simplest ways Lencioni suggests for ensuring commitment. And he notes that committing to ‘**intermediate**’ deadlines are just as important as final deadlines.
- 3) **Contingency and Worst-Case Scenario Analysis** – According to Lencioni, having contingency plans and clarifying a ‘**worst-case scenario**’ often allows a team to overcome its reluctance to move forward and take action. *“This usually allows them to reduce their fears by helping them realize that the costs of an incorrect decision are survivable, and far less damaging than they had imagined.”*
- 4) **Low-Risk Exposure Therapy** – *“When teams force themselves to make decisions after substantial discussion but little analysis or research, they usually come to realize that the quality of the decision they made was better than they had expected. What is more, they learn that the decision would not have been much different had the team engaged in lengthy, time-consuming study.”* Lencioni doesn’t downplay the importance of research and analysis, but rather than too often teams overdo and overvalue them.

I found this to be an interesting statement. Pat says that the role of the leader in gaining commitment is *‘to be comfortable with the prospect of making a decision that ultimately turns out to be wrong’*. The leader’s role is to **‘push for closure around issues’** as well as **‘adherence to schedules that the team has set’** – NOT to place too much emphasis on **‘certainty’** or **‘consensus’**.

Before moving to Dysfunction 4 – the **Avoidance of Accountability**, Lencioni stresses that all 3 three of the previous dysfunctions lead up to the reluctance of team members to call each other on their behaviors and actions. *“Even the most ardent believers in accountability usually balk at having to hold someone accountable for something that was never bought in to or made clear in the first place.”*

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team



According to Lencioni, the buzzword, **‘accountability’** is overused. *“In the context of teamwork, however, it refers specifically to the willingness of team members to call their peers on performance or behaviors that might hurt the team.”*

Entering the **‘danger zone’** as Lencioni calls it refers to overcoming the tendency to avoid difficult conversations, and he adds, **‘it’s easier said than done’**. Often it’s because *“. . . team members who are particularly close to one another sometimes hesitate to hold one another accountable precisely because they fear jeopardizing a valuable personal relationship. Ironically, this only causes the relationship to deteriorate as team members begin to resent one another for not living up to expectations and for allowing the standards of the group to erode. Members of great teams improve their relationships by holding one another accountable, thus demonstrating that they respect each other and have high expectations for one another’s performance.”*

Suggestions for Overcoming Dysfunction 4 – Avoiding Accountability

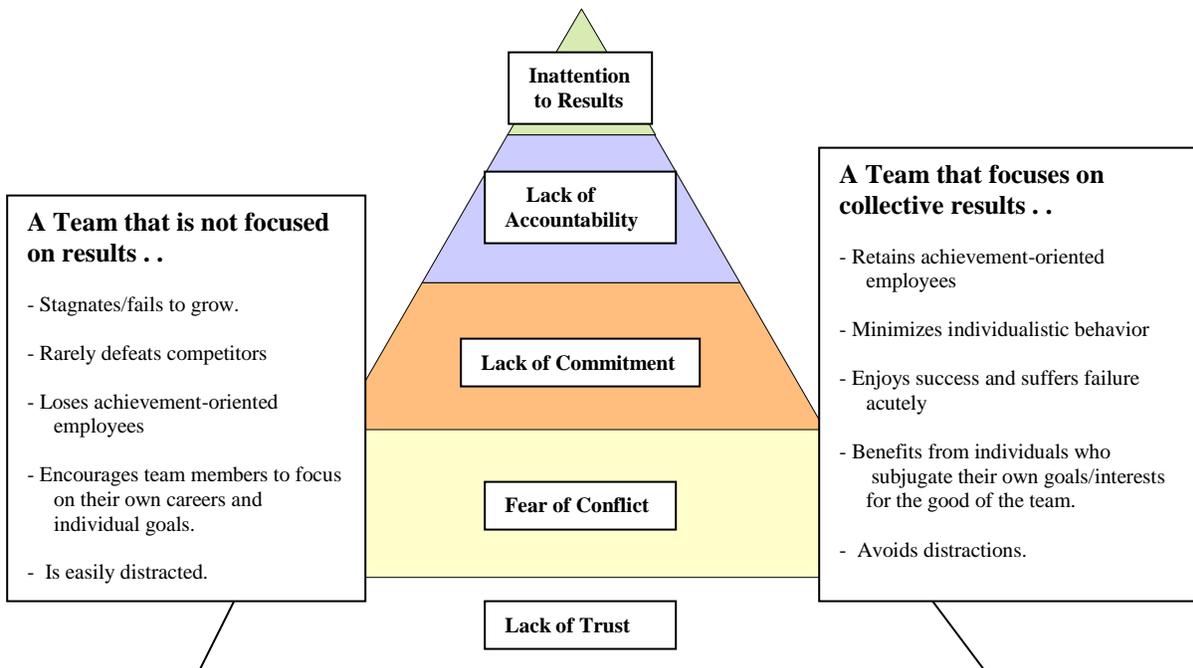
- 1) **Publication of Goals and Standards** – Following the old adage, if you believe you’re going to achieve a goal you’ve set for yourself, tell others, Lencioni says the same thing is true for teams. *“A good way to make it easier for team members to hold one another accountable is to clarify publicly exactly what the team needs to achieve, who needs to deliver what, and how everyone must behave in order to succeed.”*
- 2) **Simple and Regular Progress Reviews** – Lencioni says ‘**structure**’ here is important to give people feedback on their behavior and performance: *“Team members should regularly communicate with one another, either verbally or in written form, about how they feel their teammates are doing against stated objectives and standards. Relying on them to do so on their own, with no clear expectations or structure is inviting the potential for the avoidance or accountability.”*

Another suggestion of Lencioni’s is to shift rewards away from individual performance to team achievement, which helps emphasize ‘accountability’.

The role of the leader at this level requires the leader to ‘**instill accountability**’ in the team and to “. . .encourage and allow the team to serve as the first and primary accountability mechanism.” Pat notes that strong leaders sometimes tend to create an ‘**accountability vacuum**’ by becoming the sole source of discipline.

All of the previous 4 lead up to 5th dysfunction which is “**an inattention to results**”:
“If teammates are not being held accountable for their contributions, they will be more likely to turn their attention to their own needs, and to the advancement of themselves or their departments.”

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team



Lencioni's main point is the ultimate dysfunction of a team is its tendency “. . . to *care about something other than the collective goals of the group. An unrelenting focus on specific objectives and clearly defined outcomes is a requirement for any team that judges itself on performance.*”

Pat cautions that some teams assign a certain ‘status’ to simply being a member of a team. “*For them, the achievement of specific results might be desirable, but not necessarily worthy of great sacrifice or inconvenience.*” Perhaps more common is what Pat refers to as “**Individual Status**” – “*enhancing their own positions or career prospects at the expense of their team.*”

In both situations, Lencioni stresses that as obvious as this function might seem, “*many teams are simply not results focused. They do not live and breathe in order to achieve meaningful objectives, but rather merely to exist or survive.*”

Suggestions for overcoming Dysfunction 5 – Inattention to Results

- 1) **Public Declaration of Results** - As Pat draws the difference from successful sports team where bragging about an opponent you're going to beat incites and rallies the other team, in this case, “. . . *it can be helpful to make public proclamations about intended success.*”
- 2) **Results-Based Rewards** - Tie achievement of results to rewards, especially compensation.

As Pat says, “*More than any of the other dysfunctions, the leader must set the tone for a focus on results. If team members sense that the leader values anything other than results, they will take that as permission to do the same.*”

Now that you have a clear understanding of the 5 dysfunctions, as well as suggested ways to deal with them and hopefully overcome them, let's apply these to several other parts of the narrative part of the book. I'll describe the setting and the players involved and then we will do similar ‘role-playing’ and take special note of the LANGUAGE Kathryn uses.

I'm only covering her explanation of 4 of the 5 Dysfunctions with the idea that between the summary I've done and the role-playing narrative, this is one book you will definitely want to buy and read on your own – both to learn how the story ends and to simply have it in your library for reference and as a refresher from time to time. And find out:

Is Kathryn successful in turning this group of individuals into a real ‘team’?

Do all the players ‘make it’ or do some just not fit and if so who do you think that will be? Hint: one who doesn't make it will really surprise you.

Thanks again for being a part of this most interesting project.