

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team — A Leadership Fable

By Patrick Lencioni

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"Not finance. Not strategy. Not technology. It is teamwork that remains the ultimate competitive advantage, both because it is so powerful and so rare" (p. vii). This is the opening statement of Lencioni's book on teamwork. A special book that has been rightfully applauded by many entrepreneurs and became a New York Times best-seller. Lencioni really knows how to draw the reader into the story by incorporating theory into a novel-like structure. The story is divided into four parts: Underachievement, Lighting the fire, Heavy lifting and Traction. The book ends with an overview of the model, a team assessment questionnaire and recommendations on how to overcome the five dysfunctions.

Lencioni shows that teamwork does not come easily and that it should not be taken lightly. As he rightfully mentions, teamwork comes down to mastering a set of behaviours that look theoretically simple at first but appear to be extremely difficult to put into practice consistently. This message is passed on very well by taking the reader into the story about DecisionTech, a fictitious company that is not doing too well anymore. Due to the deterioration in performance, CEO and founder Jeff Shanley had to step down and a new CEO was appointed. This is where the main character Kathryn Petersen comes in. She is a 57-year-old retired woman with a lot of managerial experience. The board is, however, not cheering for their new CEO. She does not seem to fit the high-tech culture and has a lack of in-depth software experience. Nonetheless, she decides to take on the challenge to build a team out of the seven board members: Jeff Shanley — former CEO (now business development), Michele Bebe (Mikey) — marketing, Martin Gilmore — chief technologist, Jeff Rawlins (JR) — sales, Carlos Amador — customer support, Jan — CFO and Nick — COO. The whole team is introduced in the first part of the book, based on Kathryn's careful observations.

In the second part, Kathryn faces some hiccups with a few board members, before heading off to Napa Valley for the first of a series of off-site sessions. The tension and resistance are almost tangible. During their first off-site session, Kathryn explains the five dysfunctions of a team:

- (1) Absence of trust
- (2) Fear of conflict
- (3) Lack of commitment
- (4) Avoidance of accountability
- (5) Inattention to results

These dysfunctions are accompanied by their "symptoms", invulnerability, artificial harmony, ambiguity, low standards and status plus ego respectively.

In part three, when returned to the office, JR — head of sales — quits his job. After the second off-site session takes place, another team member leaves the team. Marketing director Mikey is forced to leave DecisionTech due to her sarcastic and destructive demeanour. In the fourth and final part, things start to calm down. During the last off-site session, the team's progress is assessed. Three months later, at the end of the book, Joseph Charles, a new board member and replacement of Mikey, is introduced during a two-day staff meeting. A competitor called "Green Banana" wants to buy DecisionTech. The group refuses the interesting offer, since no one wants to let go of a team they put so much effort in to. Finally, Kathryn re-organises and downsizes the executive team. Former CEO Jeff chose to work in Nick's COO team to do what is best for the company. His transfer shows his ability to tackle the fifth dysfunction, putting his ego and (former) status aside.

The book gives insights into the habits people have, and their pitfalls. The need for harmony, self-protection, status and recognition can disrupt a team and the effectiveness of their work. This can easily be linked to psychological issues in hospitality where employees are in constant contact with people, whether they are guests or colleagues. An effective hospitality business will stand or fall by the team performance of the employees. When team members know how to cooperate effectively with colleagues to achieve results together and how to work together with guests to cocreate, the business will thrive. To achieve this, team members should trust each other and dare to be vulnerable, engage in honest conflict without holding back, be committed, hold each other accountable and pay attention to results.

This book is readable, compelling and relevant for everyone who works in a team, whether you are a student, manager, or just an interested reader. It can guide you towards a more pleasant collaboration or will help you as a manager to understand human behaviour in the workplace and how to get the best out of a team. As Lencioni compellingly shows: It is teamwork that matters most in generating sustainable business success.

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