

NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLER

The **FIVE**
DYSFUNCTIONS
of a **TEAM**

A LEADERSHIP FABLE



PATRICK LENCIONI

AUTHOR OF THE NATIONAL BEST-SELLER *THE ADVANTAGE*

CONTENTS

[Cover](#)

[Also by Patrick Lencioni](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Foreword](#)

[Introduction](#)

[The Fable](#)

[Luck](#)

[Part One: Underachievement](#)

[Backstory](#)

[Kathryn](#)

[Rationale](#)

[Grumblings](#)

[Observations](#)

[The Staff](#)

[Jeff—Former CEO, Business Development](#)

[Mikey—Marketing](#)

[Martin—Chief Technologist](#)

[JR—Sales](#)

[Carlos—Customer Support](#)

[Jan—Chief Financial Officer](#)

[Nick—Chief Operating Officer](#)

[Part Two: Lighting the Fire](#)

[First Test](#)

[End Run](#)

[Drawing the Line](#)

[Napa](#)

[The Speech](#)

[Pushing Back](#)

[Entering the Danger](#)

[Getting Naked](#)

[Going Deeper](#)

[Poolside](#)

[Rebound](#)

[Awareness](#)

[Ego](#)

[Goals](#)

[Deep Tissue](#)

[Attack](#)

[Exhibition](#)

[Film Noir](#)

[Application](#)

[Part Three: Heavy Lifting](#)

[On-Site](#)

[Fireworks](#)

[Leaks](#)

[Off-Site Number Two](#)

[Plowing On](#)

[Accountability](#)

[Individual Contributor](#)

[The Talk](#)

[Last Stand](#)

[Flack](#)

[Heavy Lifting](#)

[Rally](#)

[Part Four: Traction](#)

[Harvest](#)

[Gut Check](#)

[The March](#)

[The Model](#)

[An Overview of the Model](#)

[Team Assessment](#)

[Understanding and Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions](#)

[Dysfunction 1: Absence of trust](#)

[Dysfunction 2: Fear of Conflict](#)

[Dysfunction 3: Lack of Commitment](#)

[Dysfunction 4: Avoidance of Accountability](#)

[Dysfunction 5: Inattention to Results](#)

[Summary](#)

[A Note About Time: Kathryn's Methods](#)

[A Special Tribute to Teamwork](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

[End User License Agreement](#)

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The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

A Leadership Fable

Patrick Lencioni



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Published by Jossey-Bass

A Wiley Imprint

One Montgomery, Ste. 1200, San Francisco, CA 94104 www.josseybass.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lencioni, Patrick, 1965-

The five dysfunctions of a team : a leadership fable / Patrick Lencioni.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-7879-6075-9 (cloth), 978-0-7879-6280-7 (ebk), 978-0-4708-9386-9 (ebk)

1. Teams in the workplace. I. Title.

HD66 .L456 2002

658.4'036—dc21

2001008099

*To Dad, for teaching me the value of work.
And to Mom, for encouraging me to write.*

FOREWORD

I would be lying if I said that I expected this little book to become as widely read and adopted as it has been since it was published in 2002. In updating my thinking about teamwork over the past 20 years, it begs the simple question ‘what has changed?’ The answer would be, ‘a lot, and very little.’

Since I wrote *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, much has happened in the larger world around us. For one, I remember putting the final touches on the manuscript on the day after the tragic events of 9/11. I can’t begin to fathom all the ways, large and small, that day impacted how we see life and work and teams.

And then there is technology. In 2002, cell phones were not at all smart. Zoom was the name of a children’s show that I watched as a kid. Electric cars were something you played with on a miniature track in your bedroom. And the term ‘social media’ might have provoked thoughts of a dance party with videos, not an all-consuming, addictive form of interacting without really interacting.

Daily life has changed drastically since Kathryn Petersen assumed control of DecisionTech. and taught the world about these Five Dysfunctions.

On the other hand, and somewhat to my surprise, little has changed. Teamwork remains a deeply personal and human affair, one that I now realize has been the same since people started working together with a common purpose. Whether those people are building a railroad, designing a virtual network, coaching a professional basketball team, running an elementary school or leading a rural church, the

same principles have always applied and continue to do so today.

At the heart of it all, at the foundation of being a team, lies the most precious of all virtues and the antidote for all sin, which is humility. It is the ingredient that makes vulnerability palatable and creates the possibility of trust among human beings who are naturally inclined toward self-protection. Yes, as desirable and powerful as teamwork is, it remains unnatural and requires people to willingly enter into risky discomfort. And it always has.

One of the most important lessons I've learned over the years, and one that I was reminded of two days before I wrote this foreword, is the universal nature of teamwork as it applies in organizations regardless of size and sophistication level. I was in a room with the leaders of one of the largest corporations in America and was amazed—yes, even after 20 years!—how much the behavioral challenges that these men and women faced were no different than the small businesses, non-profits, start-ups and churches I've come to know.

I must admit, however, that I was surprised that the Five Dysfunctions were not quite enough to bring about teamwork within an organization. I came to learn that there are two helpful precursors that make overcoming the Dysfunctions easier and more likely. What I'm referring to is, first, the need to ensure that the people on a team are, in fact, *capable* of being team players. Almost a decade after this book was published, I wrote *The Ideal Team Player* to help people better understand what virtues to look for in potential hires and to foster in themselves and their colleagues, so that they would be more able to engage in this team thing.

And then a few years ago, I developed something called *The Six Types of Working Genius*, a model for understanding how

we can identify the God-given talents and limitations of ourselves and our teammates, so that we can tap into one another's geniuses to improve morale and productivity in tangible, immediate ways.

But even after hiring and developing the right people, and getting them into the right roles, it all comes down to real people having the courage to sit down with one another and accepting the discomfort that is necessary to improve. I am glad to say that the rewards for teams who are willing to do this are as great as they have ever been. Maybe greater, given the societal trends toward isolation and separation.

And so, I'll close this short foreword by repeating the first line of the introduction of this book:

Not finance. Not strategy. Not technology. It is teamwork that remains the ultimate competitive advantage, both because it is so powerful and so rare.

I have no doubt that this is as true today as it was twenty years ago, and that it will be true in another twenty years. I hope you are able to extract all the goodness from this book, and experience the relief, joy and gratitude that comes about when a group of people decide that they want to work together to make things better.

INTRODUCTION

Not finance. Not strategy. Not technology. It is teamwork that remains the ultimate competitive advantage, both because it is so powerful and so rare.

A friend of mine, the founder of a large, successful company, best expressed the power of teamwork when he once told me, "If you could get all the people in an organization rowing in the same direction, you could dominate any industry, in any market, against any competition, at any time."

Whenever I repeat that adage to a group of leaders, they immediately nod their heads, but in a desperate sort of way. They seem to grasp the truth of it while simultaneously surrendering to the impossibility of actually making it happen.

And that is where the rarity of teamwork comes into play. For all the attention that it has received over the years from scholars, coaches, teachers, and the media, teamwork is as elusive as it has ever been within most organizations. The fact remains that teams, because they are made up of imperfect human beings, are inherently dysfunctional.

But that is not to say that teamwork is doomed. Far from it. In fact, building a strong team is both possible and remarkably simple. But it is painfully difficult.

That's right. Like so many other aspects of life, teamwork comes down to mastering a set of behaviors that are at once theoretically uncomplicated, but extremely difficult to put into practice day after day. Success comes only for those groups that overcome the all-too-human behavioral tendencies that corrupt teams and breed dysfunctional politics within them.

As it turns out, these principles apply to more than just teamwork. In fact, I stumbled upon them somewhat by accident in my pursuit of a theory about leadership.

A few years ago I wrote my first book, *The Five Temptations of a CEO*, about the behavioral pitfalls that plague leaders. In the course of working with my clients, I began to notice that some of them were “misusing” my theories in an effort to assess and improve the performance of their leadership *teams*—and with success!

And so it became apparent to me that the five temptations applied not only to individual leaders but, with a few modifications, to groups as well. And not just within corporations. Clergy, coaches, teachers, and others found that these principles applied in their worlds as much as they did in the executive suite of a multinational company. And that is how this book came to be.

Like my other books, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* begins with a story written in the context of a realistic but fictional organization. I have found that this allows readers to learn more effectively by losing themselves in a story and by being able to relate to the characters. It also helps them understand how these principles can be applied in a nontheoretical, real-world environment, where the pace of work and the volume of daily distractions make even the simplest of tasks seem arduous.

In order to help you apply the material in your own organization, a brief section following the story outlines the five dysfunctions in detail. That section also includes a team assessment and suggested tools for overcoming the issues that might be plaguing your team.

Finally, although this book is based on my work with CEOs and their executive teams, its theories are applicable for anyone interested in teamwork, whether you lead a church,

a school, a small department within an organization or even if you're simply the member of a team that could use some improvement. Whatever the case may be, I sincerely hope it helps your team overcome its particular dysfunctions so that it can achieve more than individuals could ever imagine doing alone. That, after all, is the real power of teamwork.

The Fable

LUCK

Only one person thought Kathryn was the right choice to become CEO of DecisionTech, Inc. Luckily for her, that person was the Chairman of the board.

And so, less than a month after the previous chief executive had been removed, Kathryn Petersen took the reins of a company that just two years earlier had been one of the most talked-about, well-funded, and promising start-up companies in the recent history of the Silicon Valley. She could not have known just how far from grace the company had fallen in such a short period of time, and what the next few months had in store for her.

PART ONE



Under- achievement

BACKSTORY

DecisionTech was located in Half Moon Bay, a foggy, coastal farming town just over the hills from the San Francisco Bay. It was not technically part of the Silicon Valley, but the Valley is not so much a geographical entity as a cultural one. And DecisionTech certainly fit within that world.

It had the most experienced—and expensive—executive team imaginable, a seemingly indestructible business plan, and more top-tier investors than any young company could hope for. Even the most cautious venture firms were lining up to invest, and talented engineers were submitting their resumé's before the company had leased an office.

But that was almost two years earlier, which is a lifetime for a technology start-up. After its first few euphoric months of existence, the company began experiencing a series of ongoing disappointments. Critical deadlines started to slip. A few key employees below the executive level unexpectedly left the company. Morale deteriorated gradually. All of this in spite of the considerable advantages that DecisionTech had amassed for itself.

On the two-year anniversary of the firm's founding, the board unanimously agreed to “ask” Jeff Shanley, the company's thirty-seven-year-old CEO and cofounder, to step down. He was offered the job of heading business development, and to the surprise of his colleagues, he accepted the demotion, not wanting to walk away from a potentially huge payout should the company eventually go public. And even in the difficult economic climate of the Valley, the company had every reason to go public.

None of DecisionTech's 150 employees were shocked by Jeff's removal. While most of them seemed to like him well

enough personally, they couldn't deny that under his leadership the atmosphere within the company had become increasingly troubling. Backstabbing among the executives had become an art. There was no sense of unity or camaraderie on the team, which translated into a muted level of commitment. Everything seemed to take too long to get done, and even then it never felt right.

Some boards might have been more patient with a stumbling executive team. DecisionTech's was not. There was just too much at stake—and too high a profile—to watch the company waste away because of politics. DecisionTech had already developed a reputation within the Valley for being one of the most political and unpleasant places to work, and the board couldn't tolerate that kind of press, especially when the future had looked so promising just a couple of years earlier.

Someone had to be accountable for the mess, and Jeff was the man at the top. Everyone seemed relieved when the board announced the decision to remove him.

Until three weeks later, when Kathryn was hired.