

# The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable

By Patrick Lencioni Jossey-Bass

**Good news-** I loved it! Very good, easy to read, hard to put down (like a mystery “who done it”) and filled with very valuable team, life, organizational, relationship and leadership lessons. I came upon it in preparation for working with a client Leadership Team at ABB. We used it, and it really hit the mark and made a difference with them!

**Bad news-** The author tells a very believable, provocative story using a fictitious dysfunctional team to make some excellent points about teams, team building, assessment, hard work, missions, goal setting, the MBTI and other tools. He also emphasizes the importance of roles, clarity, trust, conflict, commitment, accountability and results; all those things I have been talking about for years. So what’s the bad news? I didn’t write it first!

**Good news-** I have done you yet another favor by reading all of this book, reading the accompanying Field Guide for Leaders, Managers and Facilitators, gleaning the best and most practical ideas from them, and offering you some meaningful applications.

### Summary:

The book is written as a fable, with a fictitious company in very bad shape. A new CEO is brought in to save the day. She has great experience, has been a very successful organization consultant, and has a plan to bring the company back. Her plan revolves around the following model and her belief that it all starts with the Leadership Team.



- **Absence of Trust**
  - Teams are built from clarity and trust
  - Being vulnerable with each other builds trust
  - Without real trust we are stuck with invulnerability
- **Fear of Conflict**
  - Many of us fear or avoid conflict, but dealing with conflict constructively (once trust is built) can be a good thing
  - So, disagree, challenge, and question one another
  - Without this kind of atmosphere and approach, we are stuck with artificial harmony
- **Lack of Commitment**
  - We are more likely to commit to something if we have had our “say” on the issues, made suggestions, and raised concerns, even if we have raised conflict too
  - Unfiltered conflict drives buy-in even without consensus
  - Without commitment we have ambiguity
- **Avoidance of Accountability**
  - Commit to decisions and hold one another accountable
  - A team is a team, because it works together toward common goals
  - Without trust, conflict and real commitment we often set our standards too low

### • Inattention to Results

- Even though teams are often made up of people from different functions or functional leaders, the team’s results (their collective results) must come before individual results or agendas

Think of high performing teams you have been on or seen and also think of teams with members like ex-49er, ex-Eagle, current Dallas Cowboy, Terrell Owens or some other over paid professional @\$\$\$&0/3’s. Do words like status and ego come to mind?

### Applications:

**Have team members read the book in advance and use the five-part model as a guide agenda for your next team (building) meeting.**

- That’s what we did at ABB, and the meeting was a big success with very good discussion, real meaningful feedback, conflict raised and dealt with, clear goals set and results committed to and trust built. The model is simple and with some good facilitation (by someone like me) your next meeting can be very successful too!
- **Use the team assessment to see how your team measures up.**
  - Again, the assessment is pretty simple (as many of the best things are) and can easily be administered before your team meets. You will need to summarize the results and then present them at the meeting. Some rich discussion should follow.
- **Share Personal Histories within your team to build trust through vulnerability.**
  - This is not as touch feely as it might seem. As the model suggests, trust leads to willingness to deal with conflict, which leads to commitment, accountability, etc. We tend to trust people we know well and this is simply a way to get to know team mates better. I have done this many, many times with teams and it has always succeeded.
- **Take the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) with your team.**
  - I have used this for over 25 years with great success. Even if you have taken it before, as soon as you create a team or add a new team member, it is becomes new team and is worthy of another look at this time-tested model. Do I need to say more?
- **Use a Conflict Instrument.**
  - The model suggests that a team that trusts one another is willing to disagree with each other and understands that disagreement, even with conflict, leads to greater buy-in. Some of us “get this” more easily than others, so taking a look at individual conflict styles makes sense. I suggest using the Thomas-Killmann Conflict Instrument. Again, I have had great success with this over the years.
- **Clarify the One Thing.**
  - The fictitious team in Lencioni’s book arrives at a single purpose or goal to focus on. Some teams, of course, will have multiple areas to focus on, but it should have a common vision, a common mission and clarity of purpose. If your team doesn’t, then make those things clear. Teams are built from clarity and trust!



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- **Give each other some real feedback.**
  - As uncomfortable as this can be sometimes, we all need to know how we are doing, how we are perceived, how we can improve, what we should keep on doing, etc. I have found simply asking three questions (and getting real answers) will help.
    - What do you want more of from me?
    - What do you want less of from me?
    - What should I keep doing, just as I have been?
- **Focus on results by creating a team score card.**
  - Team building is not a once and done thing. A team benefits from seeing improvement, and the only way to really see improvement is to agree on and set SMART goals and periodically measure against them.

### And Finally:

I work with many clients on team building and organization change issues and have already put this book to use with some of them. I intend to continue using Lencioni's (and my) wisdom with more clients in the future. If you want more thoughts about this book, or want to add your own, check out my blog. You can visit it at <http://richsteel.blogspot.com>

Or to talk more about this and other topics, e-mail me (Rich Steel) at [rsbvc@aol.com](mailto:rsbvc@aol.com) or call me at my office on 610 388 3680 or on my cell at 610 324 8466.