Review by Rob Carlson

## THE 5 DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM
By Patrick Lencioni

Introduction
1. 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.
2. The fact remains that teams, because they are made up of imperfect human beings, are inherently dysfunctional.
3. Success comes only for those groups that overcome the all too human behavioral tendencies that corrupt teams and breed dysfunctional politics within them.

Key Ideas
1. A fractured team is just like a broken arm or leg; fixing it is always painful, and sometimes you have to rebreak it to make it heal correctly.
2. Our job is to make the results that we need to achieve so clear to everyone in this room that no one would even consider doing something purely to enhance his or her individual status or ego. Because that would diminish our ability to achieve our collective goals. We would all lose.
3. Definition: Politics is when people choose their words and actions based on how they want others to react rather than based on what they really think.
4. Two critical truths: First, genuine teamwork in most organizations remains as elusive as it has ever been. Second, organizations fail to achieve teamwork because they unknowingly fall prey to five natural but dangerous pitfalls, which I call the five dysfunctions of a team.

The Model
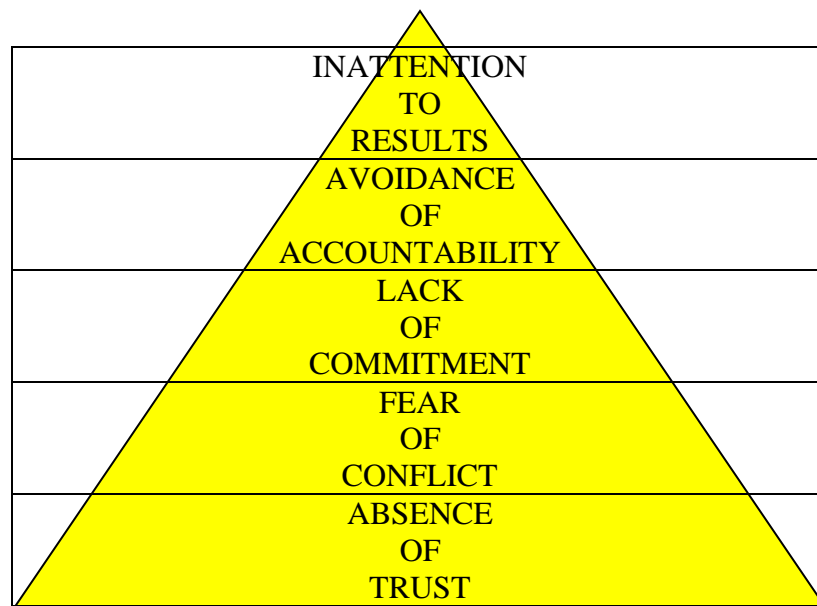
1.   The first dysfunction is **absence of trust** among team members. Essentially, this stems from their unwillingness to be vulnerable within the group. Team members who are not genuinely open with one another about their mistakes and weaknesses make it impossible to build a foundation for trust.

2.   This failure to build trust is damaging because it sets the tone for the second dysfunction: **Fear of conflict**. Teams that lack trust are incapable of engaging in unfiltered and passionate debate of ideas. Instead, they resort to veiled discussions and guarded comments.

3.   A lack of healthy conflict is a problem because it ensures the third dysfunction of a team: **lack of commitment.** Without having aired their opinions in the course of passionate and open debate, team members rarely, if ever, buy in and commit to decisions, though they may feign agreement during meetings.

4.   Because of this lack of real commitment and buy in, team members develop an **avoidance of accountability**, the fourth dysfunction. Without committing to a clear plan of action, even the most focused and driven people often hesitate to call their peers on actions and behaviors that seem counterproductive to the good of the team.

5.   Failure to hold one another accountable creates an environment where the fifth dysfunction can thrive. **Inattention to results** occurs when team members put their individual needs (such as ego, career development, or recognition) or even the needs of their divisions above the collective goals of the team.

And so, like a chain with just one link broken, teamwork deteriorates if even a single dysfunction is allowed to flourish.

Cohesive Teams
    1.   Trust each other.
    2.   Engage in unfiltered conflict around ideas.
    3.   Commit to decision and plans of action.
    4.   Hold one another accountable for delivering against those plans.
    5.   Focus on the achievement of collective results.

If this sounds simple, it's because it is simple, at least in theory. In practice, however, it is extremely difficult because it requires levels of discipline and persistence that few teams can muster.

Understanding & Overcoming the 5 Dysfunctions
Dysfunction #1: Absence of Trust
1.   Trust lies at the heart of a functioning, cohesive team. Without it, teamwork is all but impossible.

2.   Trust is the confidence among team members that their peers' intentions are good, and that there is no reason to be protective or careful around the group. In essence, teammates must get comfortable being vulnerable with one another.

3.   It requires team members to make themselves vulnerable to one another, and be confident that their respective vulnerabilities will not be used against them. The vulnerabilities I'm referring to include weaknesses, skill deficiencies, interpersonal shortcomings, mistakes and requests for help.

4.   As a result, they can focus their energy and attention completely on the job at hand, rather than on being strategically disingenuous or political with one another.

5.   The costs of failing to do this are great. Teams that lack trust waste inordinate amounts of time and energy managing their behaviors and interactions within the group.

MEMBERS OF TEAMS W/ AN ABSENCE OF TRUST	MEMBERS OF TRUSTING TEAMS
Conceal their weaknesses and mistakes from one another	Admit weaknesses and mistakes
Hesitate to ask for help or provide constructive feedback	Ask for help
Hesitate to offer help outside their own areas of responsibility	Accept questions and input about their areas of responsibility
Jump to conclusions about the intentions and aptitudes of others w/o attempting to clarify them	Give one another the benefit of the doubt before arriving at a negative conclusion
Fail to recognize and tap into one another's skills and experiences	Take risks in offering feedback and assistance
Waste time and energy managing their behaviors for effect	Appreciate and tap into one another's skills and experiences
Hold grudges	Offer and accept apologies w/o hesitation
Dread meetings and find reasons to avoid spending time together	Look forward to meetings and other opportunities to work as a group

6.   Suggestions for overcoming Dysfunction #1: It requires shared experiences over time, multiple instances of follow-through and credibility, and an in-depth understanding of the unique attributes of team members. Tools--

    a.   Personal Histories Exercise (# of siblings, hometown, unique challenges of childhood, favorite hobbies, first job, and worst job)

    b.   Team Effectiveness Exercise (what is the single most important contribution that each peer makes to the team, as well as the one area that they must either improve upon or eliminate for the good of the team)

    c.   Personality and Behavioral Preference Profiles (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI—minimum time required—4 hours)

    d.   360-Degree Feedback (Peers make judgments and provide one another with constructive criticism. Use as a development tool void of compensation repercussions.)

    e.   Experience Team Exercises (Physical activities—rope courses, etc. Not as widely used anymore.)

Dysfunction #2: Fear of Conflict

1.   All great relationships, the ones that last over time, require productive conflict in order to grow. This is true of marriage, parenthood, friendship, and certainly business.

2.   It is important to distinguish productive ideological conflict from destructive fighting and interpersonal politics. Ideological conflict is limited to concepts and ideas, and avoids personality-focused, mean-spirited attacks. However, it can have many of the same external qualities of interpersonal conflict—passion,

        emotion, and frustration—so much so that an outside observer might easily mistake it for unproductive discord.

3.   Teams that engage in productive conflict know that the only purpose is to produce the best possible solution in the shortest period of time.

4.   Ironically, teams that avoid ideological conflict often do so in order to avoid hurting team members' feelings, and then end up encouraging dangerous tension. When team members do not openly debate and disagree about important ideas, they often turn to back-channel personal attacks, which are far nastier and more harmful than any heated argument over issues.

TEAMS THAT FEAR CONFLICT	TEAMS THAT ENGAGE IN CONFLICT
Have boring meetings	Have lively, interesting meetings
Create environments where back-channel politics and personal attacks thrive	Extract and exploit the ideas of all team members
Ignore controversial topics that are critical to team success	Solve real problems quickly
Fail to tap into all the opinions and perspectives of team members	Minimize politics
Waste time and energy with posturing and interpersonal risk management	Put critical topics on the table for discussion

5.   Suggestions for overcoming Dysfunction #2: Along as team members believe that conflict is unnecessary, there is little chance that it will occur. But beyond mere recognition, there are a few simple methods for making conflict more common and productive.

    a.   Mining (Assign a member of the team to be a "miner of conflict" and look for buried disagreements and extract them for discussion and resolution.)

    b.   Real-Time Permission (During debate and conflict take a break to remind the team that such discussion is helpful. Do it at the close of the session as well.)

    c.   Other Tools (Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, aka TKL)

Dysfunction #3: Lack of Commitment

1.   Commitment if a function of two things: 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.

2.   The two greatest causes of the lack of commitment are the desire for consensus and the need for certainty.

    a.   Consensus (Great teams understand the danger of seeking consensus, and find ways to achieve buy-in even when complete agreement is impossible.)

    b.   Certainty (Great teams pride themselves on being able to unite behind decisions and commit to clear courses of action even when there is little assurance about whether the decision is correct. They also realize that it is better to make a decision boldly and be wrong—and then change direction with equal boldness—that it is to waffle.

    c.   Regardless of whether it is caused by the need for consensus or certainty, it is important to understand that one of the greatest consequences for an *executive* team that does not commit to clear decisions is unresolvable discord deeper in the organization.

A TEAM THAT FAILS TO COMMIT	A TEAM THAT COMMITS
Creates ambiguity among the team about direction and priorities	Creates clarity around direction and purpose
Watches windows of opportunity close due to excessive analysis and unnecessary delay	Aligns the entire team around common objectives
Breeds lack of confidence and fear of failure	Develops an ability to learn from mistakes
Revisits discussions and decisions again and again	Takes advantage of opportunities before competitors do
Encourages second-guessing among team members	Moves forward without hesitation
	Changes direction without hesitation or guilt

3.   Suggestions for overcoming Dysfunction #3. How does a team go about ensuring commitment? By taking specific steps to maximize clarity and achieve buy-in, and resisting the lure of consensus or certainty. Here are a few effective tools:
   a.   Cascading Messaging (End meetings by reviewing key decisions and action steps to make sure everyone is on the same page. This will insure clarity and buy-in and make sure there is alignment.)
   b.   Deadlines (Use clear deadlines for when decisions will be made. Be rigid.)
   c.   Contingency & Worst-Case Scenario Analysis (Can quiet fears.)
   d.   Low-Risk Exposure Therapy (Gain confidence by making decisions in low-risk situations.)

Dysfunction #4: Avoidance of Accountability
1.   Accountability in the context of teamwork, refers specifically to the willingness of team members to call their peers on performance or behaviors that might hurt the team.

2.   The essence of this dysfunction is the unwillingness of team members to tolerate the interpersonal discomfort that accompanies calling a peer on his or her behavior and the more general tendency to avoid difficult conversations. Members of great teams overcome these natural inclinations, opting instead to "enter the danger" with one another.

3.   Team members who are particularly close to one another sometimes hesitate to hold one another accountable precisely because they fear jeopardizing valuable personal relationships. Ironically, this only causes the relationships 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 relationship by holding one another accountable , thus demonstrating that they respect each other and have high expectation for one another's performance.

4.   The most effective and efficient means of maintaining high standards of performance on a team is peer pressure. One of the benefits is the reduction of the need for excessive bureaucracy around performance management and corrective action. More than any policy or system, there is nothing like the fear of letting down respected teammates that motivates people to improve their performance.

A TEAM THAT AVOIDS ACCOUNTABLITY	A TEAM THAT HOLDS ONE ANOTHER ACCOUNTABLE
Creates resentment among team members who have different standards of performance.	Ensures that poor performers feel pressure to improve.
Encourages mediocrity.	Identifies potential problems quickly by questioning one another's approaches without hesitation.
Misses deadlines and key deliverables.	Establishes respect among team members who are held to the same high standards.
Places an undue burden on the team leader as the sole source of discipline.	Avoids excessive bureaucracy around performance management and corrective action.

5. Suggestions for overcoming Dysfunction 4. Here are some tools:
    a. <u>Publication of Goals and Standards</u> (The enemy of accountability is ambiguity. A good way to make it easier for group 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.)
    b. <u>Simple and Regular Progress Reviews</u> (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 of accountability.
    c. <u>Team Rewards</u> (By shifting rewards away from individual performance to team achievement, the team can create a culture of accountability. This occurs because a team is unlikely to stand by quietly and fail because a peer is not pulling his or her weight.

Dysfunction #5: Inattention to Results
1. The ultimate dysfunction of a team is the tendency of members 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.

2. Every good organization specifies what it plans to achieve in a give period.

3. Things teams members focus on rather than results:
    a. <u>Team status</u> (For some, merely being a part of the group is enough.)
    b. <u>Individual status</u> (Personal advancement more important than team goals.)

4. Some teams are just not results focused. They do not live and breathe in order to achieve meaningful objectives, but rather merely to exist or survive. Unfortunately for these groups, no amount of trust, conflict, commitment, or accountability can compensate for a lack of desire to win.

A TEAM THAT IS NOT FOCUSED ON RESULTS	A TEAM THAT FOCUSES ON COLLECTIVE RESULTS
Stagnates/fails to grow	Retains achievement-oriented employees
Rarely defeats competitors	Minimizes individualistic behavior
Loses achievement –oriented employees	Enjoys success and suffers failure acutely
Encourages team members to focus on their own careers and individual goals	Benefits from individuals who subjugate their own goals/interests for the good of the team
Is easily distracted	Avoids distractions

5.   Suggestions for overcoming Dysfunction 5. By making results clear, and rewarding only those behaviors and actions that contribute to those results.

   a.   <u>Public Declaration of Results</u> (Teams that are willing to commit publicly to specific results are more likely to work with a passionate, even desperate desire to achieve those results. Teams that say, "we'll do our best," are subtly, if not purposefully, preparing themselves for failure.)

   b.   <u>Results-Based Rewards</u> (An effective way to ensure that team members focus their attention on results is to tie their rewards, especially compensation, to the achievement of specific outcomes. Letting someone take home a bonus merely for "trying hard," even in the absence of results, sends a message that achieving the outcome may not be terribly important after all.)

<u>Strong Teams Spend Time Together</u>
1.   Annual planning meeting and leadership development retreats. (3 days off site)
2.   Quarterly staff meetings. (2 days off site)
3.   Weekly staff meetings. (two hours on site)
4.   Ad hoc topical meetings. (two hours on site)