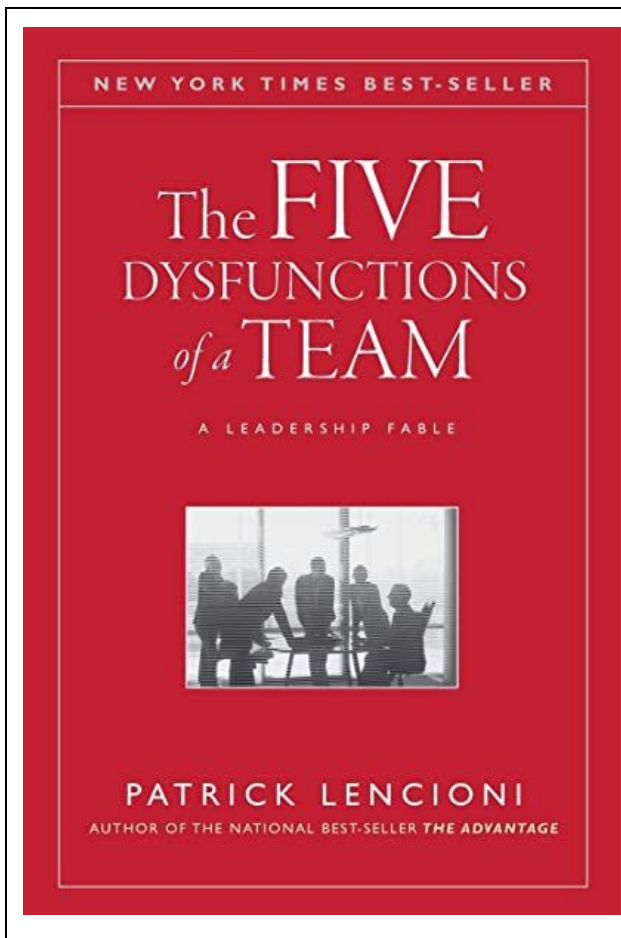


“The fact remains that teams, because they are made up of imperfect human beings, are inherently dysfunctional.”



Summary: fictitious software company DecisionTech is in trouble: executive turnover, wavering revenue, and competitors increasingly capturing market share.

New CEO, Kathryn Petersen, has been instated to right the ship. Through her eyes we witness the five dysfunctions of her team:

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

Perhaps more intriguing, however, are the clues (**in bold**) that your team might be dysfunctional:

1. Absence of trust → **Invulnerability**
2. Fear of conflict → **Artificial harmony**
3. Lack of commitment → **Ambiguity**
4. Avoidance of accountability → **Low standards**
5. Inattention to results → **Status & ego reign**

The antidote for dysfunction? Embracing vulnerability to build trust. Engaging in healthy conflict. Getting crystal clear on commitments (even if you disagree). Holding yourself and peers accountable. Putting collective outcomes ahead of any individual goals.

“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.” --Patrick Lencioni

Patrick Lencioni



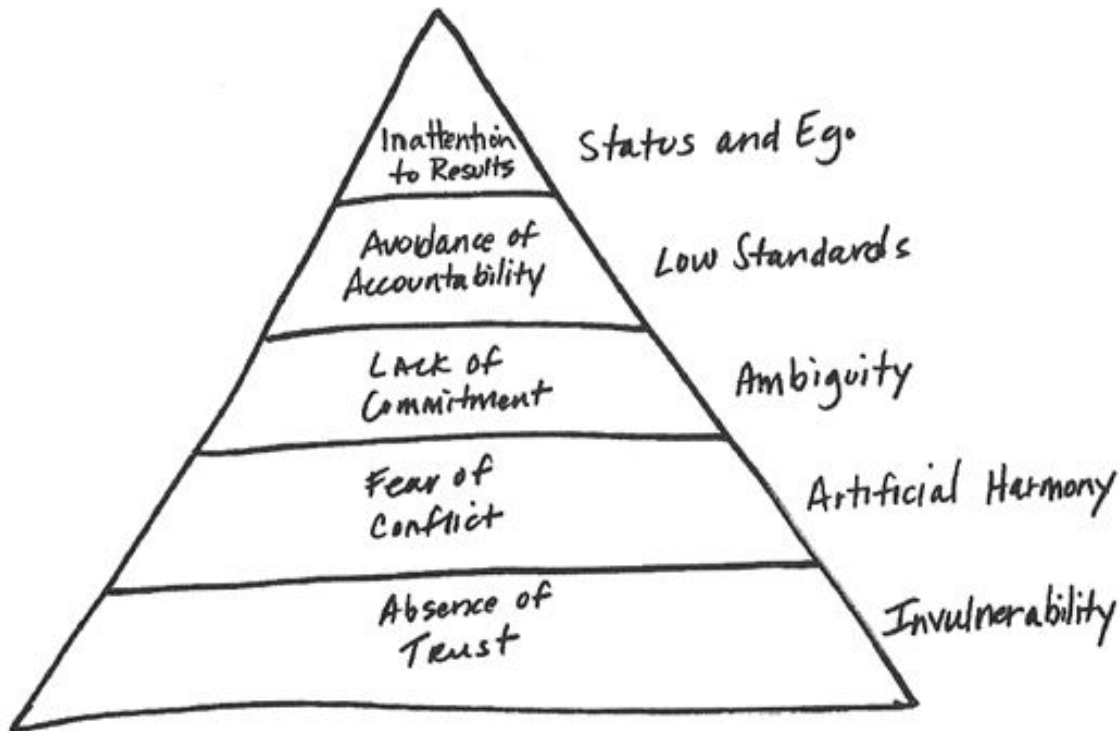
Author bio: [Patrick Lencioni](#) is married with four sons and lives in Alamo, California. He is a writer and business consultant.

In 1997, at the age of 32, he founded [The Table Group](#) through which he delivers content, consulting services, and speaking engagements (currently a team of 11).

Patrick wrote his first book at 33 years old. Four years later—at the age of 37—he wrote *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* which gained him some notoriety in executive business circles.

Most of Patrick’s business experience comes from his work at management consulting firm Bain & Company, Oracle Corporation, and Sybase, where he was VP of Organization Development.

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team:



This book in 12 sentences: The first dysfunction is an 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. 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. A lack of healthy conflict is a problem because it ensures the third dysfunction of a team: lack of commitment. Without having freely 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). Because of this lack of real commitment and buy-in, the fourth dysfunction sets in: team members develop an avoidance of accountability. Without committing to a clear plan of action, even the most driven people hesitate to call their peers on actions or behaviors that seem counterproductive to the good of the team. Failure to hold one another accountable creates an environment where the fifth dysfunction can thrive: inattention to results. This terminal dysfunction metastasizes when team members put their individual needs—such as ego, career development, recognition—above the collective goals of the larger team.

If you're wondering if your team is dysfunctional, try looking for the following symptoms at your next team meeting:

- Arguments are exceedingly rare
- You can sense a latent tension in the meeting, even via Zoom
- Decisions are seldom made, and when they are they're fuzzy and non-committal
- The meeting is downright BORING and you find yourself checking Slack and email
- Lots of disengaged awkward silences
- You can't wait for the meeting to end. . .

Though open hostility was never really apparent and no one ever seemed to argue, an underlying tension was undeniable. As a result, decisions never seemed to get made; discussions were slow and uninteresting, with few real exchanges; and everyone seemed to be desperately waiting for each meeting to end.

I like how the new CEO, Kathryn Petersen, sets expectations after taking over as the new leader of DecisionTech:

"I want to say right up front that DecisionTech is going to experience some changes during the next few months, and it is very possible that some of us here won't find the new company to be the kind of place where we want to be. That isn't a threat or a dramatic device, and I don't have anyone in particular in mind. It's just a realistic probability, and it's nothing to be in denial about. All of us are eminently employable, and it wouldn't be the end of the world for anyone to leave if that is the right thing for the company—and the team."

1

Dysfunction

Absence of trust

"Trust is the foundation of real teamwork. And so the first dysfunction is a failure on the part of team members to understand and open up to one another."

"Great teams do not hold back with one another. They are unafraid to air their dirty laundry. They admit their mistakes, their weaknesses, and their concerns without fear of reprisal." [they are also not shallow]

Can I interest you in an icebreaker? At an offsite in Napa, the new CEO suggests some icebreaker questions. Nothing terribly remarkable occurs, but I liked the icebreaker questions to inject some levity and personality into a low-energy Zoom meeting:

- What is your hometown?
- Number of kids in your family?
- Interesting childhood hobbies?
- Biggest challenge growing up?
- First job?

Team / Leadership Exercise: “Spend five minutes deciding what they believed were their single biggest strength and weakness in terms of their contribution to DecisionTech's success or failure.”

- This is essentially an exercise to test for self-awareness and vulnerability. Powerful.

On subordinating the individual ego:

“I’m not saying that there’s no place for ego on a team. The key is to make the collective ego greater than the individual ones.” → while this passage sounds good, the “collective ego” is not really an accepted psychological principle. Nevertheless, “team before self” is the message here, and an important one at that.

2

Dysfunction

Fear of conflict

“If we don’t trust one another, then we aren’t going to engage in open, constructive, ideological conflict. And we’ll just continue to preserve a sense of artificial harmony.”

On politics & posturing:

“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.”

→ A lot of this book comes down to choosing discomfort over politics.

How to make meetings less boring: “Let me assure you that from now on, every staff meeting we have will be loaded with conflict. And they won’t be boring. And if there is nothing worth debating, then we won’t have a meeting.”



Great leaders incite and encourage debate. They don't just want to hear themselves talk and feel in charge. They illicit ideological conflict with peers and within their own ranks to build trust and inoculate the team against their fear of conflict.

Like making a fire, they add kindling (by asking a question, or suggesting a topic), and then they fan the flame.

And when someone doesn't fully engage, put them on the button with this superb question:

"Are you shrugging because you don't agree and you're giving up, or because you feel like he made a more compelling point than you can counter?"

3

Dysfunction

Lack of commitment

People aren't going to hold each other accountable if they haven't clearly bought into the same plan. Otherwise, it seems pointless because they're just going to say, 'I never agreed to that anyway.'

After aligning the group on her operating principles, the new CEO makes her intentions crystal clear:

"During the next two weeks I am going to be pretty intolerant of behavior that demonstrates an absence of trust, or a focus on individual ego. I will be encouraging conflict, driving for clear commitments, and expecting all of you to hold each other accountable. I will be calling out bad behavior when I see it, and I'd like to see you doing the same. We don't have time to waste."

What is the concept of your "first team"? In short, your first team should always be your cross-functional leadership peers. If you are a C-level executive, your first team is to the C-team. Your loyalty to your first team must be greater than that to your functional team.

“As strongly as we feel about our own people and as wonderful as that is for them, it simply cannot come at the expense of the loyalty and commitment we have to the group of people sitting here today.”

4

Dysfunction

Avoidance of accountability

“Some people are hard to hold accountable because they are so helpful. Others because they get defensive. Others because they are intimidating. I don’t think it’s easy to hold anyone accountable, not even your own kids.”

What does it mean to be a “team player”?

Find someone who can demonstrate trust, engage in conflict, commit to group decisions, hold their peers accountable, and focus on the results of the team, not their own ego.

If all of 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.

5

Dysfunction

Inattention to results

“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.” Impact: business/team failure.

The 5 functions of a team (what good looks like):

1. They trust one another.
 2. They engage in unfiltered conflict around ideas.
 3. They commit to decisions and plans of action.
 4. They hold one another accountable for delivering against those plans.
 5. They focus on the achievement of collective results.
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