

Notebook - Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team (J-B Lencioni Series)

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More than anything else, it comes down to courage and persistence.

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requires levels of courage and discipline—and emotional energy—that even the most driven executives don't always possess.

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When it comes to helping people find fulfillment in their work, there is nothing more important than teamwork.

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a team is a relatively small number of people (anywhere from three to twelve) that shares common goals as well as the rewards and responsibilities for achieving them.

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it's okay to decide that your group isn't a team.

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if your group is not meant to be a team, it's far better to be clear about that than to waste time and energy pretending you're something you're not.

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many teams aren't prepared for this, and try to take shortcuts and half measures.

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most teams can make significant progress in weeks or months, and find the process itself to be one of the most rewarding parts of their professional lives.

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no quality or characteristic is more important than trust.

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When it comes to teams, trust is all about vulnerability. Team members who trust one another learn to be comfortable being open, even exposed, to one another around their failures, weaknesses, even fears. Now, if this is beginning to sound like some get-naked, touchy-feely theory, rest assured that it is nothing of the sort. Vulnerability-based trust is predicated on the simple—and practical—idea that people who aren't afraid to admit the truth about themselves are not going to engage in the kind of political behavior that wastes everyone's time and energy, and more important, makes the accomplishment of results an unlikely scenario.

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The Invulnerable Leader Story

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a lack of trust can destroy years of hard work and accomplishment.

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the executives at Passivity learned to engage in a remarkable game of masquerade, pretending to know things that they didn't and to search for solutions to their problems only in places that wouldn't reflect poorly on them or their departments.

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The idea of putting themselves at risk for the good of others is not natural, and is rarely rewarded in life, at least not in the ways that most people expect.

The key to all of this, then, is to teach team members to get comfortable being exposed to one another, unafraid to honestly say things like “I was wrong” and “I made a mistake” and “I need help” and “I’m not sure” and “you’re better than I am at that” and yes, even “I’m sorry.” If team members cannot bring themselves to readily speak these words when the situation calls for it, they aren’t going to learn to trust one another. Instead, they’re going to waste time and energy thinking about what they should say, and wondering about the true intentions of their peers.

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the key ingredient is not time. It is courage. For a team to establish real trust, team members, beginning with the leader, must be willing to take risks without a guarantee of success. They will have to be vulnerable without knowing whether that vulnerability will be respected and reciprocated.

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At a staff meeting or off-site, go around the room and have every member of the team explain three things: where they grew up, how many kids were in their family, and what was the most difficult or important challenge of their childhood (but not their inner childhood; just the most important challenge of being a kid!).

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when team members reveal aspects of their personal lives to their peers, they learn to get comfortable being open with them about other things. They begin to let down their guard about their strengths, weaknesses, opinions, and ideas.

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People need to feel the gradual progress of opening up to their peers before diving in too deep.

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The fundamental attribution error is simply this: human beings tend to falsely attribute the negative behaviors of others to their character (an internal attribution), while they attribute their own negative behaviors to their environment (an external attribution).

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| not interested in their inner child or their deepest, darkest secrets.

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| proper facilitation.

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| different questions to ask. Like a person's first job, or worst job, or biggest mistake or most influential leader in their life.

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| reveal something personal and relevant. And not silly.

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| Behavioral Profiling

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| a common vocabulary for describing their differences and similarities,

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| A great tool done poorly will fail.

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| Go fast.

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| Apply it to work.

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Anticipate objections.

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Know your stuff cold.

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Behavioral Profiling Story

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Maintaining Momentum

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the power of vulnerability, and the need for unanimity. Everyone on a team has to participate.

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if even one member of a team is unwilling to be open about weaknesses, mistakes, and issues, it will have a profound impact on everyone else. KEY POINTS-BUILDING TRUST Trust is the foundation of teamwork. On a team, trust is all about vulnerability, which is difficult for most people. Building trust takes time, but the process can be greatly accelerated.

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Like a good marriage, trust on a team is never complete; it must be maintained over time.

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Once a team has begun the process of building trust, it's time to think about leveraging that trust.

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productive, ideological conflict: passionate, unfiltered debate around issues of importance to the team. Any team that wants to maximize its effectiveness needs to learn to do this, and doing so can only happen if vulnerability-based trust exists.

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arguments are often destructive because they are laced with politics, pride, and competition, rather than humble pursuit of truth. When people who don't trust one another engage in passionate debate, they are trying to win the argument. They aren't usually listening to the other person's ideas and then reconsidering their point of view; they're figuring out how to manipulate the conversation to get what they want. Or worse yet, they're not even arguing with the other person face-to-face but venting about them in the hallways after a meeting is over.

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when a team recovers from an incident of destructive conflict, it builds confidence that it can survive such an event, which in turn builds trust.

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establish a conflict culture that everyone understands and adjusts to.

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are they holding back their opinions? Members of great teams do not.

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Like so many other aspects of team-building—and life—the best way to do it is simply to talk about it.

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having clear norms gives teams a huge advantage when it comes to ensuring the exchange of good ideas.

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Team Effectiveness Charter.

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“We will address conflict-laden issues, put on the table and get to the heart of issues about which we disagree or feel passionately. When discussing these issues, we will not withhold commentary

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Even when norms have been set, most people will shy away from conflict when they aren’t accustomed to it. And that’s why a team leader must become a miner of conflict.

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unearthing buried conflict and forcing team members to address those issues.

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when a group of people who are not accustomed to having open, honest disagreement begin to do so, they are going to feel uncomfortable. Guilty, probably, too.

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interrupt team members who are in the midst of an uncustomary debate, simply to remind them that what they are doing is okay.

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the lack of conflict is precisely the cause of one of the biggest problems that meetings have: they are boring.

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But it’s not enough for a movie to have conflict. It has to give its audience a glimpse of that conflict

right away.

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“the hook.”

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Team leaders must give members a reason to care at the beginning of a meeting or discussion. They must raise the anxiety of the team about why the issues about to be discussed matter, and what could go wrong if bad decisions are made. By doing so, they immediately get everyone engaged.

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Conflict Resolution Obstacles

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environmental obstacles (the physical environment where the conflict is taking place), relationship obstacles (an unresolved legacy event between the team members involved), and individual obstacles (an emotional or social deficiency on the part of one particular team member).

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KEY POINTS-MASTERING CONFLICT Good conflict among team members requires trust, which is all about engaging in unfiltered, passionate debate around issues. Even among the best teams, conflict will at times be uncomfortable. Conflict norms, though they will vary from team to team, must be discussed and made clear among the team. The fear of occasional personal conflict should not deter a team from having regular, productive debate.

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Teams that commit to decisions and standards do so because they know how to embrace two separate but related concepts: buy-in and clarity. Buy-in is the achievement of honest emotional support. Clarity is the removal of assumptions and ambiguity from a situation.

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Let me be crystal clear about something: commitment is not consensus. Waiting for everyone on a team to agree intellectually on a decision is a good recipe for mediocrity, delay, and frustration, which is why it amazes me that so many of the teams I work with still seem determined to achieve consensus.

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When a group of people know that their colleagues have no reservations about disagreeing with one another, and that every available opinion and perspective has been unapologetically aired, they will have the confidence to embrace a decision and abandon whatever their initial opinion might have been. But of course, this assumes that someone has to break the tie.

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Good leaders drive commitment among the team by first extracting every possible idea, opinion, and perspective from the team. Then, comfortable that nothing has been left off the table, they must have the courage and wisdom to step up and make a decision, one that is sure to run counter to at least one of the team members, and usually more.

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I've come to understand that most people don't really need to have their ideas adopted (a.k.a. "get their way") in order to buy in to a decision. They just want to have their ideas heard, understood, considered, and explained within the context of the ultimate decision.

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Unfortunately, even when teams master this ability to "disagree and commit" (this is something that the folks at Intel came up with years ago), they can still fail to benefit from their commitment. That's because many teams fail to achieve clarity and alignment around a decision. Instead, they make well-intentioned assumptions about what they've agreed to, and they end up creating confusion and frustration among employees who wonder whether their leaders are even talking to one another. I've seen this happen often and it's worth describing.

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Commitment Clarification With five minutes to go at the end of a meeting —

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| What exactly have we decided here today?

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| It is amazing to me how a group of intelligent, highly educated adults, all of whom speak the same language, can sit in a room for two hours of discussion, and then leave the room under the false impression that everyone is on the same page. Such is the nature of nuanced communication,

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| Cascading Communication

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| communicate the decisions to their staff members within twenty-four hours of the meeting.

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| behavioral norms,

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| Teams must commit to rules of engagement around timeliness at meetings, responsiveness in communication, and general interpersonal behavior.

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| purpose, values, mission, strategy,

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| The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive, which happens to be written by me.

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a “thematic goal.” This is nothing more than a single common unifying goal for the team, something that everyone on the team should be thinking about and working toward in the course of their daily responsibilities.

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KEY POINTS-ACHIEVING COMMITMENT Commitment requires clarity and buy-in. Clarity requires that teams avoid assumptions and ambiguity, and that they end discussions with a clear understanding about what they’ve decided upon. Buy-in does not require consensus. Members of great teams learn to disagree with one another and still commit to a decision.

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I define accountability as the willingness of team members to remind one another when they are not living up to the performance standards of the group.

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based on the notion that peer pressure and the distaste for letting down a colleague will motivate a team player more than any fear of authoritative punishment or rebuke.

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most leaders I know have a far easier time holding people accountable for their results than they do for behavioral issues.

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behavioral problems almost always precede results.

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when teammates stop holding one another accountable, what ultimately happens over time is that they lose respect for each other, and those good feelings begin to fade.

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when they fail to provide peers with constructive feedback they are letting them down personally. By holding back, we are hurting not only the team, but also our teammates themselves.

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Team Effectiveness Exercise (TEE).

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During an off-site meeting, or any other session where you have well over an hour available, have everyone on the team write down their answers to two simple questions about every member of the team, excluding themselves. The first question: “What is the single most important behavioral characteristic or quality demonstrated by this person that contributes to the strength of our team?” The second: “What is the single most important behavioral characteristic or quality demonstrated by this person that can sometimes derail the team?”

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By the time the exercise is over, two separate but related feelings fill the room. The team members, even the difficult ones, are genuinely flattered by the specific positive feedback they’ve received. And they’re collectively amazed by the clarity and simplicity of what they all need to do to improve for the team to grow.

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First, team members must know what each of the others is working on in order to hold them accountable. The best way to do this is to do something I call the “lightning round” at the beginning of regular meetings. This entails asking team members to each take no more than thirty seconds to update the team about their three top priorities that week.

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KEY POINTS-EMBRACING ACCOUNTABILITY Accountability on a strong team occurs directly among peers. For a culture of accountability to thrive, a leader must demonstrate a willingness to confront difficult issues. The best opportunity for holding one another accountable occurs during meetings, and the regular review of a team scoreboard provides a clear context for doing so.

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The key lies in keeping results in the forefront of people's minds. There is a reason that old saying "out of sight, out of mind" is used so often: it's true!

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because subjectivity is attractive. I know how easy it is to fall into this trap, because I do it myself. I don't like to be limited in how I measure my success to a few numbers that might not tell the whole story. But I know that this is just an excuse, or better yet, a manifestation of my desire to change my mind and reinterpret my success based on what's going on at a given point in time. Ultimately, ambiguity and loose interpretation catch up to you, usually in the form of the bottom line.

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Distraction #1: Ego Ego is the ultimate killer on a team, and it is an insidious one. That's because it lurks deep in the heart of every team member. As much as we want our teams to win, at a basic level we want to win as individuals first.

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I've worked with many executive teams that were failing as a group, but somehow, the majority of the people on the team seemed to be in good spirits. Looking under the covers, I discovered that only the individuals who were failing were unhappy. It was as though the others were saying, "Well, at least my area is doing well."

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Distractions #2 and #3: Career Development and Money Even the most altruistic team members will at times have to focus on their own career advancement and financial needs.

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Distraction #4: My Department This is perhaps the most subtle and dangerous distraction of all because well-intentioned team members often succumb to it, and because they actually wear it as a badge of honor. The departmental distraction is the tendency of team members to place a higher priority on the team they lead than they place on the team they are a member of. I call this the "Team #1 Dilemma."

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In reality, employees want their leaders to be strong team members on the teams above. They know that they ultimately pay the price when their manager doesn't get along with or cooperate with managers of other departments, leaving the staff to navigate the treacherous and bloody waters of organizational politics.

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Aside from the creation and publication of a team scoreboard, there is no real activity or tool for ensuring results. The best tools and exercises for doing this are the ones that ensure trust, conflict, commitment, and accountability, because these will ultimately pave the way for team success.

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POINTS-FOCUSING ON RESULTS The true measure of a great team is that it accomplishes the results it sets out to achieve. To avoid distractions, team members must prioritize the results of the team over their individual or departmental needs. To stay focused, teams must publicly clarify their desired results and keep them visible.

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Okay, now that I've sufficiently qualified my answer, let me say that if I were forced to provide a concrete time frame, on average I would say that a new team can make substantial progress in two or three months. That assumes that the team members have one or two off-site meetings during that span, and that they regularly spend time together during meetings and various working sessions.

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And while there is no way to answer it definitively for every organization, I believe the range is from three to twelve.

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More important, it's difficult for team members to get to know one another, develop bonds of trust with one another, when there are too many people in the room.

But perhaps most important of all, having too many people on a team makes team dynamics during meetings