



(U) How Teams Can Go Awry

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(U) Last week we posted some thoughts on what makes an office [A Great Place to Work](#). Here are some factors that can squelch good teamwork:

(U) Creating a great place to work where teamwork thrives is not always easy. Given the importance of teaming in accomplishing NSA's mission, we can learn a valuable framework from Patrick Lencioni's book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*.

(U) The book has important lessons for any team member or leader. Through the parable of Kathryn, the underdog CEO who is hired to turn around a flailing Silicon Valley high-tech company, and her off-sites with her dysfunctional staff, the reader learns the following lessons that form an interrelated system building from the bottom of a pyramid on up:

Lack of Trust : Teamwork begins by building trust, and to do that we need to let ourselves be vulnerable within the group. Team members -- including the leader -- should feel free to ask questions, admit weaknesses and mistakes, and ask for help when they need it. If you get to know your teammates better and can relate to each other on a more personal level, then you will build trust.

Fear of Conflict : Without trust, there will be no open, constructive debate, and there will be a sense of artificial harmony. Teams that allow conflict will have more interesting meetings, bring difficult topics to the table for discussion, and get to solving the real issues more quickly. A designated devil's advocate may help by bringing alternative views to light.

Lack of Commitment : Without having the unfiltered debate, team members are unlikely to support decisions, though they may feign acceptance. Some teams become paralyzed by the need for consensus or perfect information and cannot move beyond the debate stage. For a team to commit there needs to be clarity around direction and priorities (cascading communication is key). Teams should move forward confidently and be able to change course without hesitation or guilt.

Avoidance of Accountability : Without clarity and commitment, we avoid holding each other accountable for honoring commitments and for high standards of performance and behavior. To overcome this, the team needs to clarify publicly what it needs to achieve, who is to deliver what, and how to behave for success. A team charter should record this information. Process reviews can keep the team on track, and peer pressure as well as team rewards can reinforce the desired behaviors.

Inattention to Results : The ultimate dysfunction of a team is the tendency of team members to seek out individual recognition and attention at the expense of the goals of the team. To encourage individuals to focus on the goals of the team, performance assessments or rewards can be linked to specific team outcomes. Teams will benefit from minimizing individualistic behavior and retaining achievement-oriented employees.

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