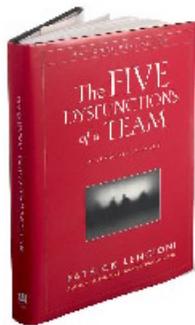




Book Corner

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team and
Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team
by Patrick Lencioni

A best seller, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* is an excellent book to help a team see why it is not functioning at a level of high performance. Lencioni uses a story of a struggling team to illustrate the five dysfunctions. They are:



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

Lencioni followed the first book with *Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. This field guide provides more depth on each dysfunction as well as specific exercises, activities, tools and discussions the team can use to work on their dysfunction.

These two books together provide a compelling case for teams to ask themselves, “Are we really a team?” “How are we performing?” “Are we prepared to invest the time and energy to be a great team?” I highly recommend both.

Tilting At Windmills?

Question: *I spend a lot of time focused on issues and problems that seem to be impossible to do much, if anything, about. It drains my energy and eats up a lot of my time. Give me some help – please.*

Collaborations Response: You don’t give us much to go on here. Undaunted by the lack of details about the actual issues involved, we would venture some comments based on our collective observations after working with individuals and groups for many, many years.

Time management?

We’re guessing that the problem is not time management. However, if it is, in the last two issues of *Collaborations* we have had advice on time management. So, if the real problem presented is time management we refer you to those articles. They are posted on Susan’s website www.susangerke.com and on Dave’s website at www.davecarey.com.

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This field guide provides... specific exercises, activities, tools and discussions the team can use to work on their dysfunction.

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Tilting at Windmills?

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Problems and issues come in categories

Repeatedly we see in our work a lack of clarity about which issues and problems ought to be tackled and which ought, for the most part, to be ignored.

We suggest that problems and issues can be sorted into three general categories. The first category is those issues and problems that are completely out of our control. They are beyond our ability to solve – or even have a reasonable hope of impacting.

The second category is those issues and problems that are clearly ours. They are the issues and problems that are within our purview - they are ours, we own them!

The third category is those problems or issues that we don't own. However, perhaps we could influence them, or maybe even with some assistance, solve them.

Let's work our way back through those three categories in some detail.

1. Issues and problems out of our control

We repeatedly observe people spending lots of time and energy on the first category when clearly the problem is entirely out of their hands.

Oh yes it's fun, and often cathartic, to vent and commiserate on many of these issues. But realistically, in a practical sense, we really can't do anything about them. In fact they aren't problems at all they are the "givens," the "predicaments," the "circumstances" with which we must learn to live.

Problems that are out of our control can absorb a great deal of energy and time. It is important to recognize things that fall into this category. There is only so much time and energy available – do you want to spend yours in areas where you can make no progress and have no impact?

By the way, since this category is out of our control and there is nothing we can "actually" do, it's a great place to avoid really doing something. We recommend spending the absolute minimum amount of time with this category. One

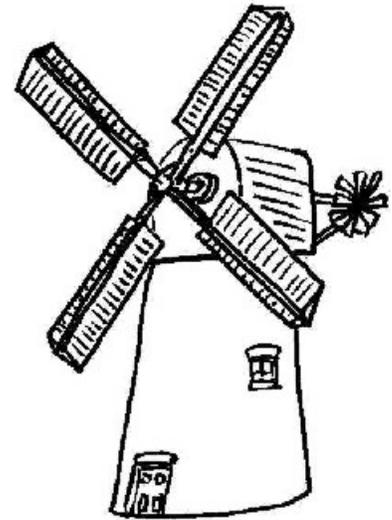
way to "let go" of the issue is to write all your concerns and frustrations in an e-mail to yourself. The act of communicating it can then help you move on to something more productive.

2. Issues and problems we own

At the opposite end of the spectrum is the category of issues and problems that we clearly own. They are ours to work on and to solve. Now here is a category into which we can sink our teeth! Here is a place where it ought to be profitable, and satisfying to spend our time and energy.

Many of these problems involve us directly. They represent growth areas for us, both in terms of interpersonal development as well as technical and professional growth. Of course, the down side is we really do have to work on these issues. We typically need to push ourselves into unfamiliar and sometimes risky arenas.

Since we clearly own the issues and problems in this category there is also a high risk of failure if we don't succeed – and it is usually rather evident and visible to others when we do fail. Nonetheless we would want to argue that this category represents the area where we ought to be spending the clear majority of our time and energy.



3. Issues and problems we don't own

So, we now arrive at the last category. The issue or problem clearly isn't ours. However with some thought, strategy, help, initiative, we may be able to influence the situation.

This category is often the largest. Many of these issues or problems comprise part of our normal work and lives. Committees, project teams, task forces all represent joint effort. Solutions and initiatives are arrived at together and require joint effort. So, while we don't own the issue, we can be part of the solution. In other situations, including those that are HR-related, while the problem isn't necessarily ours, we can often use our influence to sway the thinking of others.

This category must be approached thoughtfully. It is often a very large grey area. Some issues are quite worthy of our time and effort. In fact, they demand our best. Other issues and problems in this category are very much toward the "out of our control" end of the spectrum and ought to be avoided.

Into which category does this present situation fall?

That is the question we need to keep before us, and repeatedly keep asking. As we sort our problems into the appropriate categories, we then will have a much clearer sense of how much time and effort, if any, we should give the problem.

Decision Making and Authority

When managers are frustrated about decision making, a common theme is often related to authority. Susan recently was working with a client and together they identified five authority scenarios and some possible ways to deal with the situations. We share that here with the permission of Marty Holtzman and Melissa Dugan of Zebra Technologies.

I have no authority

- Ask permission
- Clarify what you do and don't have authority for (boundaries)
- Ask conditionally (with conditions)
- Do ground work and then ask yes or no.

They won't take authority

- Keep pushing it back
- Set boundaries – start small
- Provide guidance (e.g. 3 things to think about)
- Ask for proposed solution vs. just the problem

They assume authority that they don't have

- Tell them they don't have it (performance management)
- Clarify what they can and can't do (boundaries)
- Set up check-in meetings
- Have them accept the consequences – don't rescue them

There is no designated authority

- Break down the project and assign pieces
- Ask for authority when you want it
- Clarify the approach and process for decisions
- Appoint a leader from the group

I granted authority and they made a bad decision

- Include them in the post-mortem
- Guide them more closely next time
- Involve them in the fix
- Focus on learning and share the learning in the organization.





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Time Management Tips

In our last two issues, we've been providing some ideas for time management. Here are some additional tips.

- A. Tackle mentally taxing jobs when you're most alert and energetic. "One trivial task usually leads to another."
- B. Spend 1 hour a week (about 10 minutes per day) sorting what to do vs. not do.
- C. Use Post-Its -- repetitive items, reminders (put them in a calendar -- they will be there for you when you turn the page)
- D. Create 1-31 tickler file -- open it daily and add those items to your list
- E. Create index cards - 1 per task -- sort into 3 categories
Must Do, Want to Do, Don't Want to Do
Focus first on the Must Do and try to find a way to delegate the Don't Want to Do



We'd Like to Hear From You

If you'd like to contribute to Collaborations or if you have a question or topic for us, we'd love to hear from you. Send an e-mail to sgerke@sbcglobal.net with your ideas or questions. We will respond based on topics of most interest.