

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

by Patrick Lencioni

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Reviewed by David W. Gill www.ethixbiz.com

Why add another review of a book that was published six years ago? When I saw *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* reappear on the *Wall Street Journal* business best seller list again recently, I finally decided I needed to find out what's going on. What keeps this little book in the stratospheric company of *Good to Great* and *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* year after year? What does Patrick Lencioni know—or do---that other business authors don't?

Patrick Lencioni is president of The Table Group, a management consulting firm based in the San Francisco Bay Area. Earlier in his career he worked at Bain & Company, Sybase, and Oracle. Among his other books are *The Five Temptations of a CEO*, *The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive*, *Death by Meeting*, *Silos, Politics, & Turf Wars*, and most recently, *The Three Signs of a Miserable Job*.

Five Dysfunctions (like Lencioni's other books) starts with an extended business "fable" (184 pages of the total 225), followed by a brief summary of the lessons of the fable. In *Five Dysfunctions* the story is about a company Lencioni calls "DecisionTech." The young Silicon Valley start-up is floundering after a promising beginning. A new CEO, Kathryn, is brought in to try to right the ship. The fable introduces a half-dozen individuals on her leadership team and describes her challenges and strategies in building an effective leadership team for the company. There is some drama, conflict, complexity, and texture to Lencioni's story. It feels real and doesn't paper over the ambiguities and trade-offs involved in actual business situations. Basically, pretty plain stuff. No gratuitous sex or violence (not that we should expect any but I was wondering why over a million people bought this book!).

Here are the dysfunctions: First, an *absence of trust* among team members. This leads to the second problem: a *fear of conflict*. Without no-holds-barred productive conflict, teams cannot generate their best ideas. And that leads to the third dysfunction: *lack of commitment*. Teams don't get buy-in unless everyone's voice has been heard and taken seriously. Without commitment, problem four arises: *avoidance of accountability*. Without commitment to clear directions, accountability is elusive; and this leads to the fifth dysfunction, *inattention to results*. Without the foundational trust, clarity, and accountability team member attention drifts away from what should be the goals of the team's existence.

Bottom line: you couldn't call Lencioni's fable great or gripping literature but it obviously works as a learning vehicle for many, many readers. His five basic points are insightful, no doubt about it, and I wouldn't hesitate to recommend this book. It is very well-written and a relatively quick read.

Personally, though, I prefer to read biographies, histories, and analyses of real companies, leaders, and teams. In fact, I urge all managers and leaders to commit to a regular diet of such reading. Remember the old adage: "Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it." As for the *content* of Lencioni's argument, it strikes me as more of a trouble-shooting commentary than a serviceable formula for building effective teams. By itself, Lencioni's book will help overcome some critical dysfunctions---and this is great. But it is insufficient as a general blueprint for building functionally great teams.