

TouchPOINTS

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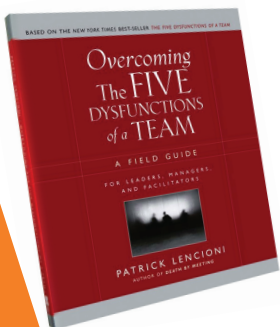
TEAMWORK is the theme for both the article and book review in this issue of *TouchPoints*.

The Meaning and Importance of Teamwork & How to Foster It

Teamwork is too often overlooked as a critical element to the success of an organization. More than likely it is a competency that too many organizations do not articulate and emphasize.

BOOK REVIEW

OVERCOMING THE FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM – A FIELD GUIDE FOR LEADERS, MANAGERS, AND FACILITATORS by Patrick Lencioni



• The Meaning and Importance of Teamwork & How to Foster It

Teamwork is too often overlooked as a critical element to the success of an organization. More than likely it is a competency that too many organizations do not articulate and emphasize. ‘Collaboration’ is another word you might use in lieu of ‘teamwork.’

We hope for, and hopefully work toward, teamwork or collaboration in our families. We want it among our government officials, and in associations and organizations to which belong, in order to achieve common goals intended to benefit the larger group, not any particular individual. Likewise, we aspire to foster collaboration in our work organizations. *Working cooperatively within a group toward common goals or solutions for the benefit of all involved is key.*

Within work environments, we want teamwork within and among functional areas; among ad hoc (temporary) groups brought together for a relatively short period of time for a specific purpose; among business units; among virtual employees and office-based employees; among international offices; and so on.

Teamwork can be thought of as a competency defined in terms of “working cooperatively within a group toward common goals or solutions for the benefit of all involved” or “establishing and maintaining good working relationships.” There are certain behaviors we expect team members to exhibit when practicing teamwork or collaboration, among them:

- ■ Demonstrating respect for the opinions of others.
- ■ Identifying and advocating for solutions that benefit all parties involved.
- ■ Helping and supporting coworkers in order to contribute to overall organization success.
- ■ Keeping others informed and updated by sharing important or relevant information.
- ■ Sharing information and expertise with others to help achieve group goals.
- ■ Subordinating personal goals by placing greater priority on team or organization goals than on one’s own.
- ■ Volunteering assistance by offering to help others in the pursuit of mutual goals.



The Meaning and Importance of Teamwork & How to Foster It *(Contd. from pg 1)*

Managers of teams have unique responsibilities when it comes to fostering teamwork. You might say it requires a higher competency level than that of the team member. Managers or leaders build successful teams by exhibiting these behaviors:

- Ensuring that the purpose of the team is clear (defining the mission or charter) and guiding the setting of specific and measurable team goals and objectives.
- Developing structure to clarify roles and responsibilities of team members.
- Facilitating goal accomplishment
- Involving others by listening to and fully involving others in team decisions and actions, and by valuing the diversity of talent and differences among members.

- Informing members by sharing important and relevant information.

- Modeling commitment by following team guidelines and fulfilling responsibilities.

Team interaction often occurs in meetings. The meeting setting calls for additional behaviors we might look for to gauge the success of a team. Among these are:

- Discussing effectively, establishing the purpose of the meeting.
- Clarifying the current situation by providing and soliciting information and checking for understanding.
- Facilitating agreement on actions and deliverables.
- Using positive interpersonal skills such as valuing others and including others in the discussion.

Foundational to effective teamwork is trust, which can be defined as “interacting with others in such a way as to give them confidence in your intentions.” Again, the behaviors we would seek to observe when one is building trust are:

- Demonstrating honesty and behaving in a consistent way.
- Sharing thoughts, feelings, and rationale so that others understand one’s position.
- Listening to others and objectively considering their ideas and opinions, even when they conflict.
- Treating others with dignity, respect, and fairness, which includes giving proper credit where due and supporting deserving teammates and their ideas even in the face of resistance.

Some helpful tips for building effective teams:

Virtual teams can pose unique challenges to achieving collaboration. Some guidelines that can be helpful in these situations include:

- Setting regular times for team interaction.
- Establishing rules for communication.
- Providing technology and virtual meeting rooms.

Of course, these are useful even if the team is not virtual. When evaluating team members, be they virtual or not, 360-degree feedback instruments can also be quite helpful. Further, depending upon the size of the organization and the availability or lack thereof of internal resources, companies can seek assistance from internal employee relations professionals for building teams.

Smaller firms can look to employ the services of consultants or other service providers who provide relevant assessments and team training.

Executive leaders can model teamwork in their interactions with each other and by setting expectations throughout the organization that collaboration is an expectation (perhaps consider making it an organizational value). Teamwork can be emphasized as part of a company’s performance management system by being recognized and rewarded.

As organizations integrate teamwork and collaboration into their cultures, and work at the process of effectively functioning as teams, much more substantive work can be done on solving problems and creating solutions, not on the mechanics of how to work as a team.

Finally, team successes should be recognized, rewarded, and publicly celebrated to reinforce their importance and possibilities.



Book Review

Overcoming The Five Dysfunctions Of A Team – A Field Guide For Leaders, Managers, And Facilitators

by Patrick Lencioni, published by Jossey-Bass, 2005

What a practical accompaniment and follow-up to Lencioni's **The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable**. That said this field guide for leaders, managers, and facilitators functions quite nicely as a standalone because Lencioni identifies and describes the five dysfunctions in

Section 1, in which he also makes the case for teamwork.

In introductory remarks, Lencioni contends that "Teamwork remains the one sustainable competitive advantage that has been largely untapped." He notes that, because teamwork is

hard to measure, it is often overlooked; instead executives focus on topics such as finance, strategy, technology, and marketing.

He then moves on, in Section 2, to address how to overcome each of the dysfunctions which are:

1. Building Trust
2. Mastering Conflict
3. Achieving Commitment
4. Embracing Accountability
5. Focusing on Results

In Section 3, Lencioni answers common questions, discusses how to overcome typical participant objections, and provides tips on how to avoid obstacles.

Finally, Section 4 provides a road map for using the tools and exercises within this book. He invites the reader/user to pick and choose what they wish to use from the book, acknowledging that "judgment and flexibility are key."

One of the nice things about the exercises outlined near the back of this book is the fact that the author, in addition to providing a brief purpose for each exercise, prescribes time required for each. In the "Team-Building Road Map" chapter, Lencioni offers a framework for a comprehensive team-building process that can occur over a six-month period, or even longer, should the user(s) choose to take that long and commit that much time to the process.

In addition to the original fable and this field guide, Lencioni has also compiled team assessment and participant workbooks that are available, thus offering a truly comprehensive system for building teamwork within any type of organization.

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