

THE WISDOM AND PRAGMATIC VALUE TO TEAM BUILDING FROM PATRICK LENCIONI'S "THE FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM"

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A. CONTEXT

For the health club industry the Hockessin Athletic Club (HAC) is a very large independent business with a 105,000 sq.ft facility, 11,000 members; and 300+ employees. But in reality, we are a small start up business less than a year old -having opened in June 2007- figuring out how to best make things work for staff and members.

I consciously placed "staff" before "members" in the preceding sentence because my bias is members/customers/clients will recommend our business highly if we all do our job well. At this point in time we are consciously working to become an effective- to use Patrick Lencioni's phrase- TEAM. He begins his insightful book, "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team" with this paragraph:

"Not finance. Not strategy. Not technology. It is teamwork that remains the ultimate competitive advantage, both because it is so powerful and so rare."

Based on my three decades working in or running businesses and non-profit organizations Lencioni's conclusion regarding the importance of teamwork seems to me absolutely on target. How many times have you heard employers say, "I can teach the technical skills, what I can't teach is the people skills"? I would take this a step further by saying most businesses do not pay sufficient attention to knowing the "natural talents" of their employees. They do not focus sufficiently on and making sure fellow employees are doing things that allows them to use these "natural talents" a lot. Organizations that possess a truly effective team environment are the exception not the rule

One of the unique things we are doing at the Hockessin Athletic Club is to have senior management staff and supervisors share with the team their personal results and insights from the Strength Finders test. This web based test is found in Don Clifton & Marcus Buckingham's book "Now Discover Your Strengths". Via their work through Gallup organization's surveys, interviews, and research Clifton and Buckingham conclude that the happiest and most productive employees are able to spend more time at work utilizing what they term their "signature" natural talents. Our company wants to gain insight into a person's core natural talents before we hire them- and we certainly endeavor to make sure these talents have a high correlation to the needs of a particular position or project at a particular point in time. We are moving quite nicely in this direction. However, what we know from our brief history already is that this focus as a key element of our business culture is not enough.

B. FIRST MANAGEMENT RETREAT HELD USING “THE FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM” AS THE FOCUS

Like most young organizations- we are not yet functioning at the level of teamwork Lencioni so correctly espouses. I frequently use the phrase: “We (the Hockessin Athletic Club) really need to be running on all eight cylinders” if we are going to achieve our goal of being one of the best health clubs in the United States and a model for the industry. I suspect Pat Lencioni would say before any organization is able to run on all its cylinders it must be a well functioning team. Bob Carpenter, my partner, Greg Maurer our General Manager, and I all agreed with this premise. And as a first step in a conscious process to get HAC running on all eight cylinders we held a one day retreat for our 27 managers and supervisors in April at a nearby golf club. In preparation for the retreat each participant was required to read “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team” beforehand. We consciously hired a professional facilitator to run the retreat and instructed him to use Lencioni’s book as the basis for our work that day.

My partner Bob Carpenter gave a terrific opening presentation at the retreat about where we had been (eg closing down a 35,000 sq. ft club one day and opening a 105,000 sq. ft Club ten days later and living to tell about it. He also articulated his vision for HAC’s future. Then Bob, myself, and General Manager, Greg Maurer spent most of the rest of the day just listening which was probably the smartest thing we could have done. In our post retreat evaluations the three things that managers most valued was (1) the personal telling exercise where each person talked about their fondest childhood memories; their career experience before HAC; their family; and their hobbies; (2) the chance after lunch to get outside, take a brief chipping and putting lesson from a golf pro and then compete as teams; and listening to Bob talk about a vision for the future for the Hockessin Athletic Club.

Bob and I gave special embroidered HAC shorts or polo shirt to retreat participants. I also handed out a version of a write up I had done on “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team” I did this anticipating that our managers in the future could be readily reminded of something from Lencioni’s book that rings true to their own experience- something that would stimulate them to “take it down the line”. This I believe is critically important in building the culture of an organization and growing it. One of my quarrels with conventional “Leadership Literature” and even with a piece of Lencioni’s insights is the conscious distinctions made between leaders and managers and between upper management and middle management----as if managers cannot be leaders or leaders cannot be managers or the building and grounds crew chief will not be able to see the wisdom in applying the same principles in his work that his boss is learning.

For those of you who have not read “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team” it is a real world business fable about how a new CEO, technologically inexperienced 57 year old Kathryn Petersen, took the reins of a high tech Silicon Valley company with 150 employees and went about turning it around. Her approach and methods seem true to me whether it’s a

high tech company like hers, a customer service oriented retail business, or a small non-profit organization. As Kathryn says at the beginning of the book, none of this is easy. At the end she makes a crucial point for leaders and managers trying to make their teams effective:

“These dysfunctions- (1) Absence of Trust; (2) Fear of Conflict; (3) Lack of Commitment; (4) Avoidance of Accountability; and (5) Inattention to Results- can be mistakenly interpreted as five distinct issues that can be addressed in isolation of the others. **But in reality they form an interrelated model, making susceptibility to even one of them potentially lethal for the success of the team.**

With the exception of the paragraph below related to Emotional Intelligence, I have repeated verbatim Lencioni sentences that struck a particular cord with me. Each provides, in my view, a real world experience, language, or insight that leaders and managers can use to help themselves and others be more effective as team leaders, managers, and supervisors. Unless otherwise noted all the words and thoughts are DecisionTech’s new CEO, Kathryn Petersen. It goes without saying the best thing to do is to read the book for yourself and use your talents to help improve the teams you work with. I don’t know Patrick Lencioni personally but I do know he is a wise man.

C. EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND “THE FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM”

In 1995 Daniel Goleman a Harvard Professor published his seminal work, “Emotional Intelligence” in which he identified five domains of Emotional Intelligence (EI): (1) self-awareness; (2) self-regulation; (3) motivation; (4) empathy; and (5) social skills. (To see a chart of Goleman’s EI domain and the 25 related Emotional Competencies google Emotional Competency Framework and then go to Emotional Intelligence & Emotional Competency Framework). In 1998, Goleman a former New York Times science writer and Harvard trained Phd. psychologist, published “Working with Emotional Intelligence” His research led him to the conclusion that one’s Emotional Intelligence (EI) quotient and depth of Emotional Competencies is the strongest predictor of success in the workplace for jobs requiring leadership and managerial skills. Since the book’s publication a virtual EI industry has been spawned by the academic and business communities- there are nearly 500,000 web pages about Emotional Intelligence. Research by the Center for Creative Leadership found that the primary cause for derailment in executives involved deficits in emotional competencies. The primary ones according to the Center are (1) difficulties in handling change; (2) not being able to work well in a team; and (3) poor interpersonal relations.

I have placed the quotes picked from Patrick Lencioni’s “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team” under one of five emotional intelligence categories identified by Goleman as I believe there is a connection between Lencioni’s and Goleman’s concepts in the real

world of business. My hope in this regard that thinking about this connection and whether it is relevant to team building will make us better leader/managers.

D. WORDS: HOW THEY ARE PUT TOGETHER AND HOW THEY ARE SAID ARE FACTORS IN LEADERSHIP AND HOW PEOPLE RELATE TO YOU

Again, the sentences below other than the italicized phrases after Goleman's Emotional Intelligence categories are from Lencioni's book. I have taken the liberty of adding my own additional category after Goleman's "Social Skills". I've titled this "Business Instinct" and have placed Lencioni's sentences within it that did not readily fit elsewhere but which I thought worth noting. I'd encourage you to capture in words your own work experiences and insights that you can use to help teammates and the people that work for them learn and do better. With this said, I cannot emphasize enough the importance of tone, body language, style, and attentiveness to the responses you get as you talk to others. We all have had the experience of reading a transcript, or an e mail, or a memorandum and had a totally different reaction than when we hear the same things said. Emotionally Intelligent folks are always more conscious of this important reality.

SELF-AWARENESS *(includes the ability to read one's emotions; recognize their impact on others; and a strong sense of one's self worth.)*

The fact is, if we don't trust one another- and it seems to me we don't- then we cannot be the kind of team that ultimately achieves results

I think my biggest strength, at least the strength that will have the biggest impact on our success, is my ability to see through the fluffy superfluous information and cut to the point that matters. I have a way of eliminating unnecessary details and getting to the heart of an issue, and that should save us a lot of time.

First of all I am sorry if my comment sounded flip. You're right, I haven't worked in high tech, and so my reference point could be a little off.... And I certainly don't want to come across as condescending to you, because that doesn't help us get where we need to go.... At the same time I don't want to down-play the very dangerous situation that we are all in. We have big problems, and I've observed enough of this group to know that politics are alive and well here.

First, about the meeting this morning. I (Nick Farrell, COO) was out of line. I should have made sure Mikey (Michele Bebe marketing director who was later fired) was there, and that comment I made about her was not fair. I need to make a change. I need to find a way to contribute to this team, and the company. And I need you guys to help me. Otherwise, I should leave. But I'm not ready to do that just yet.

Mikey, (Katherine noting Mikey's lack of self-awareness) you have an extremely distracting and demotivating impact on all of them including me.

And frankly I would rather overstate the problem rather than understate it. But only for the good of the team, not for my own satisfaction. I can assure you of that.

I don't have as much of a problem telling my direct reports what I think. I seem to hold them accountable most of the time, even when it's a sticky issue.

SELF-REGULATION *(the ability to control one's emotional impulses and adapting to changing circumstances; flexibility in handling change; comfortable with novel ideas, information and approaches)*

She (Kathryn) resisted the temptation to avoid a confrontation with Martin (Martin Gilmore, DecisionTech's Chief Technical Officer) by firing off an e mail reply, Kathryn decided that this would be her first moment of truth as a CEO, and moments of truth, she knew, are best handled face to face.

Whatever sense of accomplishment that Kathryn had felt just a few minutes earlier had diminished significantly. As much as she wanted to put a quick and violent end to JR's (Jeff Rawlings, Director of Sales) suggestion, Kathryn wanted to see if anyone would do it for her. Just when she thought no one would help her, Jeff spoke up and demonstrated that he had indeed taken many of Kathryn's ideas to heart.

Nick, would you rather have this conversation right here, or one-on-one.

MOTIVATION *(striving to improve; drive for excellence; persistence in pursuing goals despite obstacles and setbacks).*

I want to assure you that there is really only one reason that we are here at this off-site, and at the company, to achieve results. This, in my opinion, is the only true measure of a team.

First of all, I have only one priority at this point: we need to get our act together as a team, or we're not going to be selling anything

EMPATHY *(ability to place yourself in someone else's shoes; to be aware of the group's mood and sensing other's development needs)*

Okay, what I am about to say is not meant in any way to be defensive or rude. "I know that, Kathryn." Good because I'm not going to mince my words-not with you. "And I

(this is the Chairman of her Board) appreciate that.” You may not after you hear what I have to say.

Whatever the case, it was clear Mikey’s behavior was having a very real impact on the rest of the group.

I don’t think anyone ever gets completely used to conflict. If it is not a little uncomfortable then it’s not real. The key is to keep doing it anyway.

SOCIAL SKILLS *(working with others toward shared goals; wielding effective tactics for persuasion; inspiring and guiding individuals and groups; listening openly)*

Kathryn wasted no time. Okay, here’s the deal. Before we leave this meeting, we are going to establish something I call our overreaching goal for the rest of the year. There is no reason we can’t do this now, right here, today. Someone take a stab.

For the next several hours the group took Joseph (Mikey’s replacement as Marketing Director) through the five dysfunctions. Nick explained the importance of trust. Jan and Jeff (Jeff Shanley, former DecisionTech CEO Kathryn replaced who stayed on raising capital) together covered conflict and commitment. Carlos (Carlos Amador, Customer Support Manager) described accountability within the context of the team, and Martin finished off results. They then reviewed Joseph’s Myers-Briggs results and explained the roles and responsibilities of his new peers, as well as their collective goals.

Jeff, I understand your opinion, and I’m fine with your disagreeing with me, especially when you tell me face to face

Chairman interrupts and Kathryn responds interrupting politely saying Hear me out, this is important

BUSINESS INSTINCT *(I’ve, as noted earlier, created this category for sentences that I think reflect “real world” business insights and instincts that don’t ready fit into the Goleman EI/EC categories above.)*

Re meetings: Basically, I want you all to do two things, be present and participate.

Kathryn was shocked at her unlikely star pupil. And if that wasn’t enough, Mikey went on to say: “This actually makes sense.” Everyone looked at one another as if to say, Did you hear what I heard. On that note Kathryn excused the team for their last break of the day.

I'd like to take a few minutes to deal with the elephant that's sitting in the corner. I want to know what everyone is feeling about Mikey leaving. Because we need to make sure that we deal with this as a team before I stand in front of the company and explain it to them next week.

Our job is to increase revenue, profitability, and customer acquisition and retention and maybe even put ourselves in a position for an IPO. But none of this will happen if we don't function as a team

No, we will definitely have a revenue goal. It's just that revenue is not the ultimate measure of our success right now. We've narrowed it down to market share and new customers. Someone tell me why market share is the right answer?

And what I am about to say is more important than any other comment I've made since we arrived yesterday. During the next two weeks I am going to be pretty intolerant of behavior that demonstrates an absence of trust, or a focus on individual ego. I will be encouraging conflict, driving for clear commitments, and expecting all of you to hold each other accountable.

You have to decide what is more important: helping the team win or advancing your career.

First team? Yes, your first team. And all of this relates to the last dysfunction-putting team results ahead of individual issues. Your first team has to be this one. She looked around the room to make it clear that she was referring to the executive staff.

Kathryn stepped out of her facilitating role and added to Jan's (Jan Mersino, CFO) perspective. And there is no way that you could figure that out on your own. I don't think anyone here is smart enough, and has the breadth and depth of knowledge, to know the right answer without hearing from everyone else and benefiting from their perspective.

Nick then suggested redeploying the engineers from those projects and training them to assist sales reps with product demonstrations.

Nothing around here has changed. Maybe the problem wasn't Mikey (who was fired) after all. Hold on said Kathryn. I don't see anything wrong here. This is the kind of conflict we've been talking about for the last month. It's perfect. You are fighting but about issues. That's your job. Otherwise, you leave it to your people to try to solve problems that they can't solve. They want you to hash this stuff out so they can get clear direction from us.

I can assure you that we're going to find the right person. This means everyone here will be interviewing candidates and pushing to find someone who can demonstrate trust,

engage in conflict, commit to group decisions, hold their peers accountable, and focus on the results of the team, not their own ego.

D. SOME CHALLENGES TO OUR TEAM

1. What can you do to make our senior management team produce results more effectively?
2. Will you in the next six months use what you've learned to make the teams that work for you more effective?
3. What things do you see we are not doing or even thinking about that HAC needs to do to be the best family oriented health club in the U.S.?