"The Five Dysfunctions of a Team"
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A friend of mine...best expressed the power of teamwork when he once told me, "If you could get all the people in an organization rowing in the same direction, you could dominate any industry, in any market, against any competition, at any time." (vii)

Backstabbing among the executives had become an art. There was no sense of unity or camaraderie on the team, which translated into a muted level of commitment. Everything seemed to take too long to get done, and even then it never felt right. (8) Though open hostility was never really apparent and no one ever seemed to argue, an underlying tension was undeniable. As a result, decisions never seemed to get made; discussions were slow and uninteresting, with few real exchanges; and everyone seemed to be desperately waiting for each meeting to end. (19) 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. (30)

Kathryn took a breath and smiled to conceal her frustrations. "First of all, I only have one priority at this point: we need to get our act together as a team or we're not going to be selling anything." (31) You'll notice immediately that none of this is rocket science. In fact, it will seem remarkably simple on paper. The trick is putting it into practice." (43) "Great teams do not hold back with one another," she said. "They are unafraid to air their dirty laundry. They admit their mistakes, their weaknesses, and their concerns without fear of reprisal." (44) "I see a trust problem here in the lack of debate that exists during staff meetings and other interactions among this team." (45)

(Kathryn) "Theoretically, if everyone is completely on the same page and working in lockstep toward the same goals with no sense of confusion, then I suppose a lack of debate might be a good sign." (46) Kathryn sensed that the others might not agree with Mikey, but she wondered if anyone dared challenge her. She was about to do so herself, when Jeff offered tentatively, "I'm not sure I'm with you on that one, Mikey. I don't think we lack the time to argue. I think we're just not comfortable challenging each other..." Kathryn joined the livening conversation. "So you don't agree on most things, and yet you don't seem willing to admit that you have concerns."... (47) "...when we think that we're wasting the group's time by dealing with issues that should be dealt with outside the meeting, then everyone here should feel free to speak up." (50)

As happy as Kathryn was by the interaction that was taking place among the rest of the team, she couldn't overlook the fact that Mike's behavior was speaking volumes about her inability to trust her teammates. (58) Kathryn decided to address their concerns before they started talking among themselves. "I know that you're all probably starting to wonder, 'Didn't we do this yesterday?' And I realize it's repetitive. But this stuff won't stick unless we understand how to apply it completely." (62) She then asked everyone to spend five minutes deciding what they believed were their single biggest strength and weakness in terms of their contribution to DecisionTech's success or failure. "I think my biggest strength, at least the strength that will have the biggest impact on our success, is my ability to see through 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." (64) Kathryn would later kick herself for not calling Mikey on her remark, which at the time Kathryn attributed to her astonishingly low emotional intelligence. (70) "We are going to the top of the chart now to talk about the ultimate dysfunction: the tendency of team members to seek

out individual recognition and attention at the expense of results. And I'm referring to collective results—the goals of the entire team." (71) Nick asked, "Is this about ego?" "Well, I suppose that's part of it," agreed Kathryn. "But I'm not saying that there's no place for ego on a team. The key is to make the collective ego greater than the individual ones." (72) "And as harsh as that may sound, Ken always says that his job is to create the best team possible, not to shepherd the careers of individual athletes. And that's how I look at my job." (74) "…Our job is to make the results that we need to achieve so clear to everyone in this room that no one would even consider doing something purely to enhance his or her individual status or ego." (77)

"The key, of course, is to define our goals, our results, in a way that is simple enough to grasp easily, and specific enough to be actionable." (78) "Anyway, when I talk about focusing on results instead of individual recognition, I'm talking about everyone adopting a set of common goals and measurements, and then actually using them to make collective decisions on a daily basis." (82) Carlos agreed with her. "Yeah, it does seem like we don't really have the same goals in mind when we're at staff meetings. It almost feels like we're all lobbying for more resources for our departments, or trying to avoid getting involved in anything outside our own areas." Kathryn: "The politics around here are astounding, and they're a result of everyone being far too ambiguous about what we're all trying to accomplish, and that makes it easy to focus on individual success." (85) If we don't trust one another, then we aren't going to engage in open, constructive, ideological conflict. And we'll just continue to preserve a sense of artificial harmony." (91)

Kathryn explained, "It's as simple as this. When people don't unload their opinions and feel like they've been listened to, they won't really get on board." (94) "The point here is that most reasonable people don't have to get their way in a discussion. They just need to be heard, and to know that their input was considered and responded to." (95) "People aren't going to hold each other accountable if they haven't clearly bought in to the same plan. Otherwise, it seems pointless because they're just going to say, 'I never agreed to that anyway.'" (99)

"Kathryn paused for effect before delivering her next line. "Let me assure you that from now on, every staff meeting we have will be loaded with conflict. And they won't be boring. And if there is nothing worth debating, then we won't have a meeting." (103) "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." (113) Kathryn stepped out of her facilitating role and added to Jan's 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." (142)

"But I can assure you that we're going to find the right person. That 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." (169) Jan added. "And we're doing better with conflict, although I can't say I'm used to it yet." Kathryn assured here, "I don't think anyone ever gets completely used to conflict. If it's not a little uncomfortable, then it's not real. The key is to keep doing it anyway." (175) With more than 250 employees, Kathryn decided it was time to trim down the number of executives who reported directly to her. She believed that the larger the company, the smaller the team should be at the top. (182)

1. The first dysfunction is an **absence of trust** among team members.
2. This failure to build trust is damaging because it sets the tone for the second dysfunction: **fear of conflict**.
3. A lack of healthy conflict is a problem because it ensures the third dysfunction of a team: **lack of commitment**.
4. Because of this lack of real commitment and buy-in, team members develop an **avoidance of accountability**, the fourth dysfunction.
5. Failure to hold one another accountable creates an environment where the fifth dysfunction can thrive. **Inattention to results** occurs when team members put their individual needs (such as ego, career development, or recognition) or even the needs of their divisions above the collective goals of the team. (189)

It requires team members to make themselves vulnerable to one another, and be confident that their respective vulnerabilities will not be used against them. Achieving vulnerability-based trust is difficult because in the course of career advancement and education, most successful people learn to be competitive with their peers, and protective of their reputations. (196)

Members of teams with an absence of trust...
- Conceal their weaknesses and mistakes from one another
- Hesitate to ask for help or provide constructive feedback
- Hesitate to offer help outside their own areas of responsibility
- Jump to conclusions about the intentions and aptitudes of others without attempting to clarify them
- Fail to recognize and tap into one another's skills and experiences
- Waste time and energy managing their behaviors for effect
- Hold grudges
- Dread meetings and find reasons to avoid spending time together (197)

Members of trusting teams...
- Admit weaknesses and mistakes
- Ask for help
- Accept questions and input about their areas of responsibility
- Give one another the benefit of the doubt before arriving at a negative conclusion
- Take risks in offering feedback and assistance
- Appreciate and tap into one another's skills and experiences
- Focus time and energy on important issues, not politics
- Offer and accept apologies without hesitation
- Look forward to meetings and other opportunities to work as a group (197)

The most important action that a leader must take to encourage the building of trust on a team is to demonstrate vulnerability first. (201) When team members do not openly debate and disagree about important ideas, they often turn to back-channel personal attacks, which are far nastier and more harmful than any heated argument over issues. (203)

Teams that fear conflict...
- Have boring meetings
- Create environments where back-channel politics and personal attacks thrive
- Ignore controversial topics that are critical to team success
- Fail to tap into all the opinions and perspectives of team members

- Waste time and energy with posturing and interpersonal risk management (204)

Teams that engage in conflict...
- Have lively, interesting meetings
- Extract and exploit the ideas of all team members
- Solve real problems quickly
- Minimize politics
- Put critical topics on the table for discussion (204)

In the process of mining for conflict, team members need to coach one another not to retreat from healthy debate. (205) One of the most difficult challenges that a leader faces in promoting healthy conflict is the desire to protect members from harm. This leads to premature interruption of disagreements, and prevents team members from developing coping skills for dealing with conflict themselves. Finally, as trite as it may sound, a leader's ability to personally model appropriate conflict behavior is essential. By avoiding conflict when it is necessary and productive—something many executives do—a team leader will encourage this dysfunction to thrive. (206)

Consensus. Great teams understand the danger of seeking consensus, and find ways to achieve buy-in even when complete agreement is impossible. They understand that reasonable human beings do not need to get their way in order to support a decision, but only need to know that their opinions have been heard and considered. Great teams ensure that everyone's ideas are genuinely considered... (207)

A team that fails to commit...
- Creates ambiguity among the team about direction and priorities
- Watches windows of opportunity close due to excessive analysis and unnecessary delay
- Breeds lack of confidence and fear of failure
- Revisits discussions and decisions again and again
- Encourages second-guessing among team members (209)

A team that commits...
- Creates clarify around direction and priorities
- Aligns the entire team around common objectives
- Develops an ability to learn from mistakes
- Takes advantage of opportunities before competitors do
- Moves forward without hesitation
- Changes direction without hesitation or guilt (209)

And the leader must be constantly pushing the group for closure around issues, as well as adherence to schedules that the team has set. What the leader cannot do is place too high a premium on certainty or consensus. In order for teammates to call each other on their behaviors and actions, they must have a clear sense of what is expected. (212) Members of great teams improve their relationships by holding one another accountable, thus demonstrating that they respect each other and have high expectations for one another's performance. As politically incorrect as it sounds, the most effective and efficient means of maintaining high standards of performance on a team is peer pressure. (213)

A team that avoids accountability...
- Creates resentment among team members who have different standards of performance
- Encourages mediocrity
- Misses deadlines and key deliverables
- Places an undue burden on the team leader as the sole source of discipline (214)

A team that holds one another accountable...
- Ensures that poor performers feel pressure to improve
- Identifies potential problems quickly by questioning one another's approaches without hesitation
- Establishes respect among team members who are held to the same high standards
- Avoids excessive bureaucracy around performance management and corrective action (214)

The enemy of accountability is ambiguity, and even when a team has initially committed to a plan or a set of behavioral standards, it is important to keep those agreements in the open so that no one can easily ignore them. (214) Team members should regularly communicate with one another, either verbally or in written form, about how they feel their teammates are doing against stated objectives and standards. (215)

A team that is not focused on results...
- Stagnates/fails to grow
- Rarely defeats competitors
- Loses achievement-oriented employees
- Encourages team members to focus on their own careers and individual goals
- Is easily distracted (218)

A team that focuses on collective results...
- Retains achievement-oriented employees
- Minimizes individualistic behavior
- Enjoys success and suffers failure acutely
- Benefits from individuals who subjugate their own goals/interests for the good of the team
- Avoids distractions (218)