

CHMN760 Advanced Leadership  
Book Reflection by Steven Poenitz  
*The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*  
Author: Patrick Lencioni

I have read the above book and am impressed with Patrick Lencioni's creation of a fabled, but very real encounter with little growth of a stalled, high-tech, Silicon Valley business venture. Resources were there, but two other companies were out-competing Decision Tech. The major focus of the book is team building.

For Kathryn to come out of retirement and rebuild a team of VP's with gutsy flourish almost leaves me spinning. She seemed to accomplish this feat with such flair and relatively ease from her past business leadership in the automotive industry!

While some details may not transfer from the business community to the world of church and spirituality, I do see where the major dysfunctions 1) absence of trust, 2) fear of conflict, 3) lack of commitment, 4) avoidance of accountability, and 5) inattention to results described by Lencioni become major issues in the leadership systems of the church and team building.

Dealing with Conflict

As I read the book (in spite of some raw language and yet affirmation of the Lord at the end), my heart kept coveting Kathryn's experience with our church staff/pastors, elders, and church board. Due to presumptive leadership over the Community Services Center (CSC) and a vacuum of poor lay leadership, I thought of the time when confrontation with an elder, could have been handled better. For several reasons the conflict and confrontation could have gone better. Maybe trust was absent? Maybe this pastor needed to be willing to face conflict without fear sooner? Maybe commitment to Community Services was missing from the larger body of the church? Those five dysfunctions listed

by Lencioni in pyramid fashion have definite value for consideration when team-building.

This pastor must be willing to invade situations earlier and confront in a gentle, Christian way the challenges of people problems and team ministry. To ignore developing and brewing controversy won't make it go away. I still remember taking two elders with me to confront the military-trained elder who took over the vacuum of leadership in CSC. Yes, a number of times I had chatted by phone and in person with this self-appointed CSC leader. But, I encouraged him to pursue options for broader leadership in disaster work with the Georgia-Cumberland Conference that expanded the problem, rather than resolving it. In reflection I was too chicken to simply say, "Bro. P this simply is not going to work. His style of leadership took control of all the reins without a proclivity towards delegation.

In the book I noticed on occasion that Kathryn communicated constantly and effectively as well as delegated some leadership to a VP (Nick) when appropriate. Dealing with a military mind-set still leaves me cold and wondering what tactics I could have taken to forestall Bro. P's style of take-over leadership? From this experience of conflict I do know that early ascertainment of dysfunction could have headed off the problem.

In the end, after consulting with the nominating committee and a variety of leaders, I do realize that God providentially oversaw the controversy and brought new effective and efficient leadership to our CSC. The new leader knew how to delegate and has fifty volunteers involved in ministry. I'm thinking that military-oriented styles of leaders need to be especially puzzled into clear and definite boundaries of leadership.

Also, it could be valuable to do the Myers-Briggs Temperament Inventory on leadership to head of potential misunderstandings of leadership before a conflict arises.

Over the past year or so I have mentally beaten myself up for the last meeting with Bro. P and the two other elders. Some of that flagellation is justified and some is not; because confrontation needed to take place to get Bro. P's attention. From reading the book, I am not as wary of confrontation as before; because it has potential for change and growth. On the other hand, it might have been well to invite another supporter to stand beside Bro. P in the confrontation process to give equal perspective and support in the conflict. The other issue is my state of emotion in the context of the meeting. By the grace of God I need not fear a confrontive experience. I also must avoid allowing my anger to attack someone like Bro. P when dealing with conflict. There is healing of the relationship now, but some scars from our lashing out in anger with each other over misconstrued issues. Probably, waiting so long to actually tell Bro. P that he would not be leading CSC the next year allowed my emotional anger to build up. I simply need to deal with conflict earlier.

### Team Building Sessions

So many points of good team building were offered by Lencioni, but one that prominently rises to attention is Kathryn's first couple of weeks' observation of the leadership challenges in Decision-Tech along with her off-site team building sessions. Staff and lay leadership socials and planning retreats need to occur more often in my ministry. Either I need to train leaders myself or bring in specialists that can assist in accomplishing our church's overall vision and goals. Obviously, that is where Kathryn Petersen guided the Decision Tech business staff to build a team. As they hammered out

their fears, prejudices, desires, and aspirations for their departments, a team was built. It seemed so valuable too that Kathryn helped the team realize their lack of cohesiveness. The department leaders were loyal and trust with most of their department staff, but very little team loyalty existed among the upper-level VP's.

There are times when team building events for our staff seem like a waste of time, but this book helped me realize that team building is so crucial as a starting point for net results and success as an organization.

This year I did deliver my understanding of the church's vision for 2007 with the church board, but I do realize this is not the best starting point or operational style for the ownership of vision and goals. I must create an environment where the leadership team can retreat for a weekend and spend time in processing our vision and goals. Then, we need to share this with the larger body of the church for more complete ownership.

One of our major projects right now is church renovation. So, we have just completed a process of developing ownership of this project together in December 2007. However, a more complete visioning process and goal-setting needs to be established in the future with all constituents involved and feeling like they have ownership. That will build more complete trust.

In thinking about our immediate staff, I personally realized that we relate quite well in most areas (even after taking the team assessment on pages 192 and 193), but our willingness to challenge each other demonstrates that our trust has a ways to go. While there is accountability on our staff and things get done, we rarely, if ever, challenge one another on issues. There are issues which we just don't bring up. That may be out of fear

or a desire to keep the peace. But from reading the book, self-disclosure and pure openness are crucial to team building and successful results.

This area of accountability has been appealing to my heart for some time. It all seems to stem from trust and then clear commitment to the vision and goals that are established. My project is focused in this area of mentoring and accountability; so, I'd like to pursue transparency with some colleagues that I've been building relationships with. In a year of transition with our assistant/youth pastor, I need to be ever so intentional in developing a trusting and accountable relationship with the new staff member. Some of this team building accountability will come naturally as the new staff member integrates with us, but I need to be intentional and offer books such as this one for reference and team building to the new assistant/youth pastor.

### Communication

An overall theme from this book reminded me of the value of clear communication. I believe that I am improving in clear communication, but still face the challenge of hedging my conversation with leaders or members when issues are delicate and tense. I pray for a spirit of integrity on revealing with tact issues that are delicate. My heart sympathizes with Kathryn as she squarely faced Mikey in her resignation process. I can totally relate and realize that Kathryn took on this staff member's uncooperative spirit early on in the team building process. It is my purpose from past experiences of firing a secretary with a huge severance package to avoid delaying the inevitable by detecting and meeting early-warning signals of unclear communication.

Recently, our Pathfinders and Spanish group have been using the same space on alternate schedules. A conflict developed over usage of the space and leaving the facility clean and

re-arranged. By working with representatives early on in a meeting, the issue was settled quickly and with the potential for a new church to be established soon.

Further on communication, I am aware that in meetings (such as church boards), issues must be dealt with and not covered up. Kathryn's perspective reveals that growth can occur when we as leaders are willing to face the challenge and deal with conflict.

An excellent book for crawling into the head of an accomplished and growing leader.

Lencioni's last few pages are helpful also as a reference to the 5 dysfunctions of a team.