MICROGUIDES

BUILDING TEAMS

Proven methods to take your team's performance to the next level

adaptive
adapt | develop | transform

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INTRODUCTION

The MircoGuides are your shortcut to staying current on the world's top Business, Leadership, and Personal Development books. They are used by individuals looking to better themselves, as well as by teams and organizations looking to create and foster cultures of continuous learning and development.

The MicroGuides are meant to serve as your starting point for identifying your goals and the obstacles that are standing in your way of achieving them. In addition to participation in regular ActionClasses, we urge leaders to use the content in these guides as inspiration for developing your own unique ActionPlan to make your ideal state a reality.

BUILDING TEAMS

Team Building is an essential skill shared by all successful leaders and managers. Effective team building leads to more engaged employees, who are in turn more productive and achieve greater results. Additionally, team building builds trust, enhances communication, and creates alignment on key goals and objectives.

Every manager wants to have engaged and productive teams, but the reality is that creating the ideal team atmosphere is an investment that requires high effort on behalf of the leader. Keep reading to learn more about how you as a leader can develop high-performance teams.

01

Leaders Eat Last

by Simon Sinek

01

Leaders Eat Last

Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't

by Simon Sinek

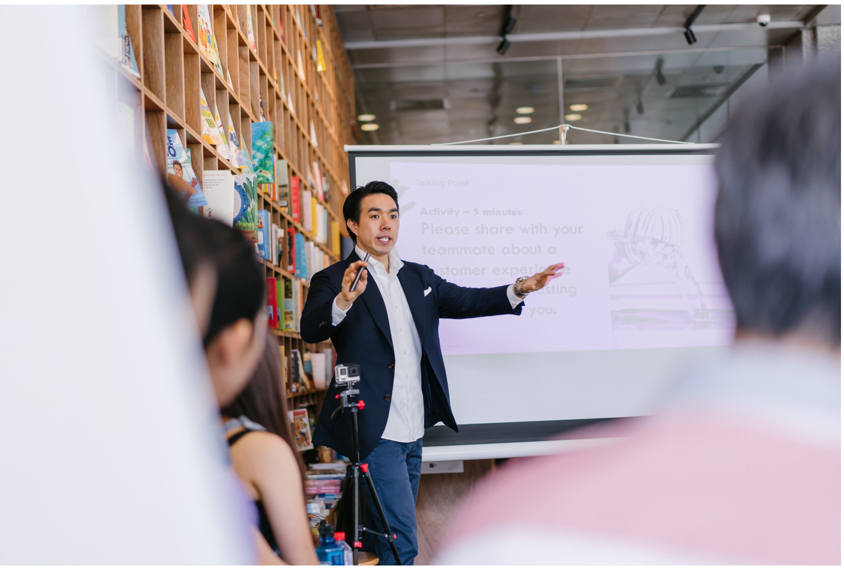
Your leadership style is killing people

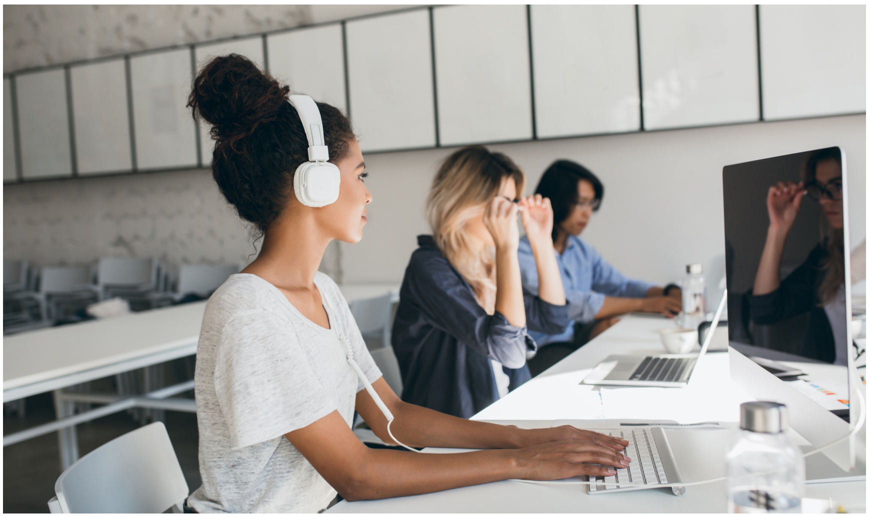
It turns out that your leadership style is killing people. Not in a "man, that guy is killing me today" kind of way, but in a "people are having heart attacks and dying because of you" kind of way.

That would seem a little heavy handed if it weren't for a study at University College London that concluded that people who don't feel recognized for their effort at work were more likely to suffer from heart disease.

So, if you accept the fact that good leadership includes recognizing people for their efforts, you'll have to agree that poor leadership is actually killing people.

According to a Gallup poll, when our bosses ignore us, 40% of us actively disengage from our work.





(There's a nice long section in the book on exactly how the body reacts to stressful work environments, but I'll leave you to read that after you've bought the book).

That's fine, you say, but my mama always taught me that if I don't have anything nice to say about people, to not say anything at all.

Well, here's another shocker for you. Gallup conducted a poll in 2013 called "State of the American Workplace" that concluded that when our bosses completely ignore us, 40 percent of us actively disengage from our work. That's not the shocking part, however. The shocking part is that if our bosses criticize us on a regular basis, 22 percent of us actively disengage.

I was a math major in college, so I know that amounts to a 18 percent increase in engagement when somebody is criticized on a regular basis rather than simply ignored.

Your leadership style is killing your business, too

In the business world we obsess over numbers. In a world where it seems like almost everything can be reduced to a number (how many Facebook friends and Twitter followers do you have?), it's easy to forget that the only way that anything gets done in business is through and with other people.

So when and how did we replace human beings with numbers?

Sinek says that it was on August 5, 1981. That was the date that Ronald Reagan fired more than 11,359 air traffic controllers. PATCO (the union representing the air traffic controllers) had threatened to go on strike, and in preparation for that eventuality, contingency plans were put in place to ensure that the entire travel system didn't grind to a halt. When it became clear that the people working under the contingency plan did an adequate job, the axe fell.

On that date, Sinek argues, Reagan created the precedent for protecting commerce before protecting people.

The most revered business leader for the rest of the next two decades was Jack Welch, who earned the nickname "Neutron Jack" for his relentless focus on "shareholder value". He became notorious for firing the bottom 10% of his managers (the ones that contributed least to the share price) while giving the top 20% of his managers (the ones that contributed most to the share price) stock options and bonuses.

Adaptive reflection question:
What actions are you taking to make sure you team members are engaged at work?

Welch would eventually admit that "on the face of it, shareholder value is the dumbest idea in the world". But that did nothing to stop our relentless drive to measure more and more, and run our businesses based on "the numbers".

Here are just a couple of examples:

While she was at Google, Marissa Meyer famously tested 41 shades of blue to find out which one made people click more often, and thus make Google more money.

The most popular business theory at the moment is The Lean Startup, which includes things like "innovation accounting" and "cohort analysis" to help a business understand whether or not they are on the right track.

Employees are numbers. Customers are numbers. We are all just numbers. And when everything gets reduced to numbers, bad things happen. Not right away, but eventually.

Focusing solely on the numbers has costs that aren't immediately apparent. For instance, according to a report by Mercer LLC one in three employees seriously considered leaving their jobs in 2011. That would be fine if they actually left. The real problem is that all but 1.5% of people voluntarily left their positions in the same time period.

If you've ever been around somebody who is actively looking to leave their job, you'll know that their level of productivity is pretty low.

Another Gallup study suggests that 70% of American workers are "not engaged" or "actively disengaged."

But it gets worse. Another study done by Gallup suggests that 70% of American workers are "not engaged" or "actively disengaged" from their jobs. They estimate that active disengagement costs the U.S. $450 billion to $550 billion per year.

I'll let you do the math to figure out your share of that burden, but let's be clear - poor leadership is costing your business money.

The solution isn't more cheerleaders, is it?

In the forward of the book, George J Flynn - a retired Lieutenant General from the Marine Corps, has this to say about Sinek:

"His vision is simple: to create a new generation of men and women who understand that an organization's success or failure is based on leadership excellence and not managerial acumen."

The danger in reading statements like these - and leadership books on the whole - is that they seem to excuse managerial acumen, and turn the role of a leader into a glorified cheerleader.

Adaptive reflection question:
What actions are you taking to make sure you team members are engaged at work?

However, if you've ever spoken to somebody who works for a leader who has no managerial acumen, you'll know that those types of leaders get no respect.

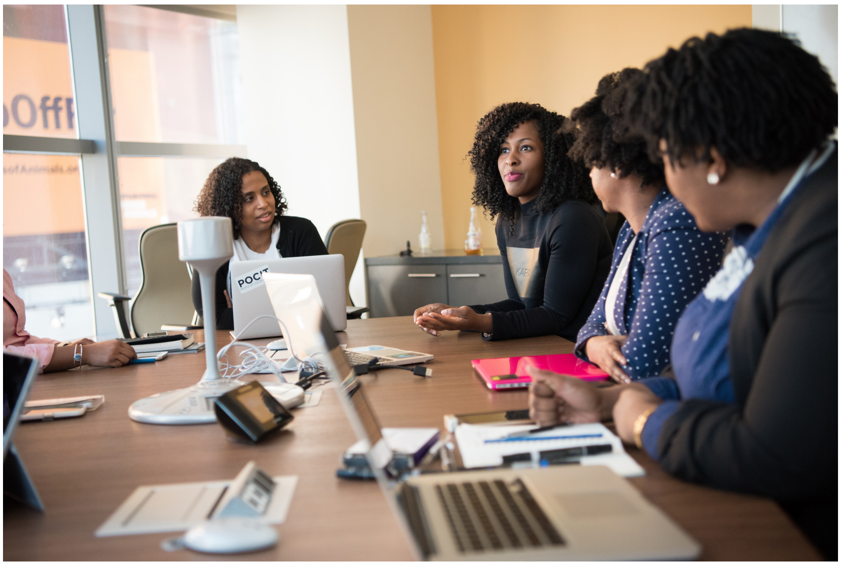
Neither managerial acumen or leadership excellence is enough on their own. Stephen M.R. Covey would tell you that even if a leader is sincere and honest, you won't trust them fully unless they get results.

So leaders without business acumen isn't the answer, either.

The solution is to eat last

As Sinek points out in the book, leadership is not a license to do less - it is a responsibility to do more.

Jim Sinegal understands this well. You might not know his name, but you've probably shopped at one of his stores - Costco. He co-founded and ran the company from 1982 until his retirement in 2012. In many ways he was the "anti-Welch". He believed that if you treated your employees like family, they would respond with trust and loyalty.



It wasn’t easy. He took a lot of heat from Wall Street analysts who said that he was “too benevolent” for refusing to force employees to take on a greater percentage of healthcare costs. Another analyst said “it's better to be an employee or a customer than a shareholder."

Could he have generated more profit out of the company in the short term, like Welch did? Sure.

But if you look at the share price of GE and Costco from 1986 to today, you’d see something very telling. GE’s stock fluctuated wildly from year to year, while Costco’s stock rose gradually and steadily over time. If you invested your money in GE in 1986 your return would have been 600% if you cashed out as of the publication of this book. Your investment in Costco would have returned 1,200%.

Sinegal knew that good leadership was playing the long game. He knew that putting the good of the team ahead of his own self-interest was the only way to deliver value in the long run. He knew that the culture at his company was critical to it’s long-term success. He knew that a positive culture required that Costco’s employees trust the leaders, and vice versa. He knew that he needed to spend time with his employees to make sure that they felt valued and heard.

Many of these points you would have heard before. But now they are backed up by science and numbers to show you that good leadership means better performance.

But it’s also backed up by one of the best leadership metaphors ever created: leaders eat last. In the Marines (not a place you could accuse of being “warm and fuzzy”) the leaders actually do eat last. True leaders, they believe, put the needs of the people they lead above their own.

The irony in all of this is that your best bet for creating success for yourself over the long run is by subverting it to the needs of your team today.

Your choice is simple - are you going to be Jack Welch or Jim Sinegal?

02

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

by Patrick Lencioni

02

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

A Leadership Fable

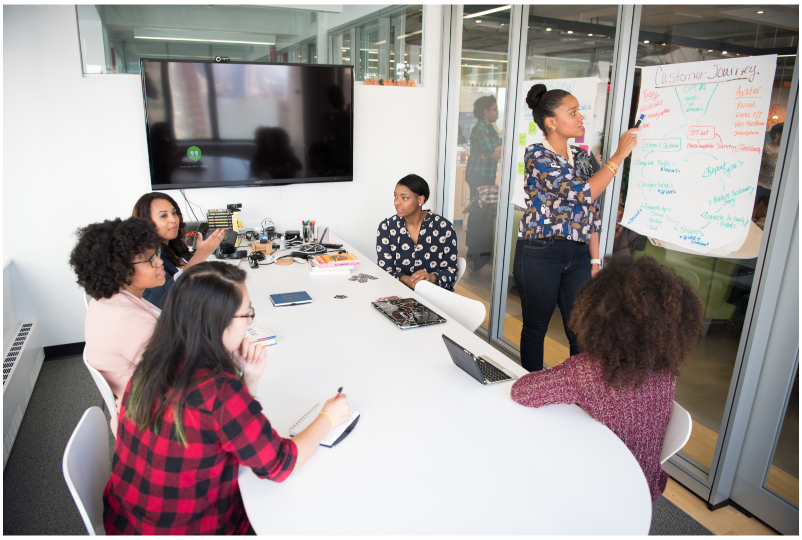
by Patrick Lencioni

"If you could get all of the people in an organization rowing in the same direction, you could dominate any industry, in any market, against any competition, at any time."

The founder of a company that grew to over a billion dollars in annual revenue, once said:

"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."

Like anything worth achieving in life, this is so much easier said than done - especially because teams are made up of human beings, and human beings are the most complicated and dysfunctional organisms on the planet.



While all teams are different, their issues tend to be the same, encountering them over and over again.

In his book, The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, author Patrick Lencioni takes a deeper look at the what these common dysfunctions are and how they impact teams. Lencioni explores the root causes of all the problems you can face as a leader when trying to get your team to "row in the same direction."

So let's uncover each of the five dysfunctions and in turn, explore what you can do as a leader to address them so that you can achieve your greatest goals.

Dysfunction #1: Absence of Trust

This first dysfunction is all about the absence of trust among your team members.

As Lencioni points out, trust is one of those words that gets used so often that it has lost some of its meaning. He says that he intends it to mean: "The confidence among team members that their peers' intentions are good, and that there is no reason to be protective or careful around the group."

Based on this definition, the root cause of this first dysfunction is most people's unwillingness to be vulnerable with the group. The natural tendency of most people is to hide their mistakes and weaknesses from their peers and bosses.

Teams with an absence of trust (a) hide weaknesses from one another, (b) don't ask for help or provide constructive feedback, (c) don't offer help outside their own areas of responsibility, (d) jump to conclusions about the intentions and skills of others quickly, (e) don't recognize and tap into each others' skills and experiences, (f) waste time and energy trying to look good, (g) hold grudges, and (h) dread meetings and find reasons to avoid spending time together.

Adaptive reflection question:
On a scale of 1-5, how open is your team about problems and mistakes?

Teams that exhibit trust (a) admit weaknesses and mistakes, (b) ask for help, (c) accept questions and input about their roles, (d) give each other the benefit of the doubt, (e) offer feedback and assistance to others, (f) tap into each others' skills and experiences, (g) focus time and energy on important issues, not politics, (h) offer and accept apologies without hesitation, and (i) look forward to meetings and other opportunities to work as a group.

Overcoming a lack of trust

There are a few things you can do to get over a lack of trust on your team.

One of the most powerful exercises you can do is a "personal history" for each person on your team, where each team member shares information about themselves. When people find areas to connect with their team members on (i.e. connections in common or shared interests), they are much more likely to trust one another.

You should also consider having your team take one of the many personality and behavioral preference profile surveys. Understanding exactly how people are different on a team can help create empathy for each other, and help them work more effectively with one another.

Finally, as a leader, your most important action is to demonstrate vulnerability yourself.

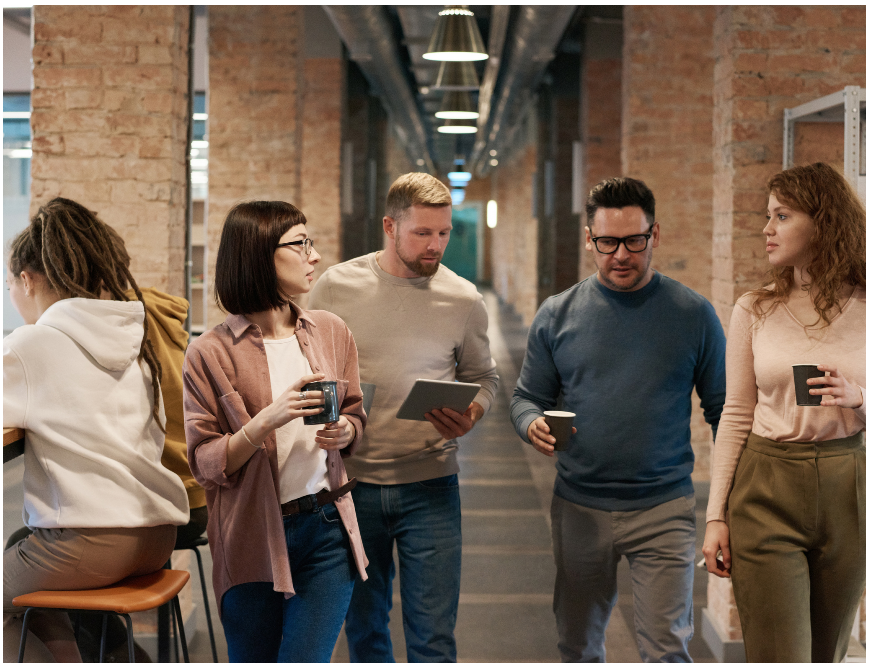
How this relates to Dysfunction #2 - The Fear of Conflict

By building trust with one another, constructive conflict becomes possible. Teams know they can argue and debate with one another without fear of being branded destructive or critical.

Dysfunction #2: Fear of Conflict

Most people dislike conflict and avoid it at all costs. Unfortunately, it's also one of the biggest drivers of dysfunction impacting teams.

Before we hop into the idea of promoting conflict, it's important we make the distinction between ideological conflict (the good kind) and destructive fighting and internal politics (the bad kind). What we are looking for here is more of the good kind and less of the bad kind.



Adaptive reflection question:
How does your team handle conflict?

Teams that fear conflict (a) have boring meetings, (b) create environments where internal politics and personal attacks occur, (c) ignore controversial topics that are critical to team success, (d) don't tap into all the opinions and perspectives of team members, and (e) waste time and energy with posturing to one another.

Teams that engage in conflict (a) have great meetings, (b) pull out the ideas of all team members, (c) solve real problems quickly, (d) minimize politics, and (e) address critical topics on a regular basis.

Overcoming a fear of conflict

The first and easiest step is to acknowledge publicly that conflict is productive.

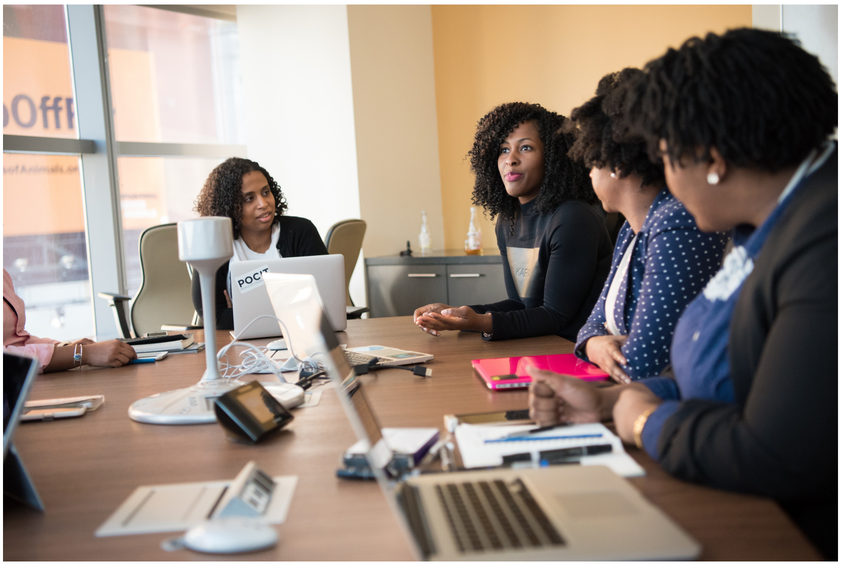
The second step is to mine for any unresolved disagreements among team members and get them resolved. Consider assigning somebody this role.

Coach your team members so that they each have permission to nurture healthy debate amongst one another. If you find them shying away from a tough conversation, coach them towards understanding that what they are doing is important and necessary to the team's success.

Finally, on the flip side, as a leader you should practice restraint when it comes to resolving conflict. Our natural tendency is to eliminate conflict because it is uncomfortable. Resist the urge to step in when constructive conflict is happening.

How this relates to Dysfunction #3: Lack of Commitment

When team members feel free to engage in productive conflict, they can commit and buy-in to a decision that's made - even if they disagree with it - because they feel like they have been heard.



Dysfunction #3: Lack of Commitment

On a team, commitment is a function of two things: Clarity and Buy-in. If there is clarity around decisions and buy-in on what those decisions require from the team, great things can happen.

A team that fails to commit (a) creates ambiguity around direction and priorities, (b) over analyzes and under-acts, (c) creates lack of confidence and fear of failure, (d) revisits old discussions and decisions again and again, and (e) encourages second-guessing among team members.

A team that commits (a) creates clarity around direction and priorities, (b) aligns the entire team around common objectives, (c) develops an ability to learn from mistakes, (d) takes advantage of opportunities before competitors do, (e) moves forward without hesitation, and (f) changes direction without hesitation.

Overcoming a lack of commitment

One of the most valuable things you can do is end each meeting with a thorough review of the key decisions made during the meeting, and agree on what needs to be communicated to other team members about those decisions. This should take you at least 10 minutes to do correctly, and is critical to your success in getting things done.

Another area of discipline that will help with overcoming a lack of commitment, is creating deadlines around decisions. If there are any unresolved decisions that need to be made, set a deadline around when you'll have a decision, and stick to it.

You can also bring contingency plans into your discussions in order to make sure everybody understands the worst-case scenario if you've made the wrong decision. Sometimes teams won't commit because they haven't considered the consequences of things going wrong.

Adaptive reflection question:
Is the decision-making process on your team transparent and open to feedback?

If your team is truly commitment-phobic, start off by having them make decisions concerning low-risk situations.

And, finally, as a leader you need to be comfortable in making decisions that ultimately turn out to be wrong.

How this relates to Dysfunction #4: Avoidance of Accountability

When decisions and commitments are made publicly, team members are much more likely to be able to hold one another accountable.

Dysfunction #4: Avoidance of Accountability

Lencioni suggests that the most effective and efficient means of maintaining high standards on a team is through peer pressure.

That said however, most people avoid accountability like the plague. They don't like others holding them accountable for things they said they would do, and they feel just as uncomfortable in holding others accountable for things that don't get done.

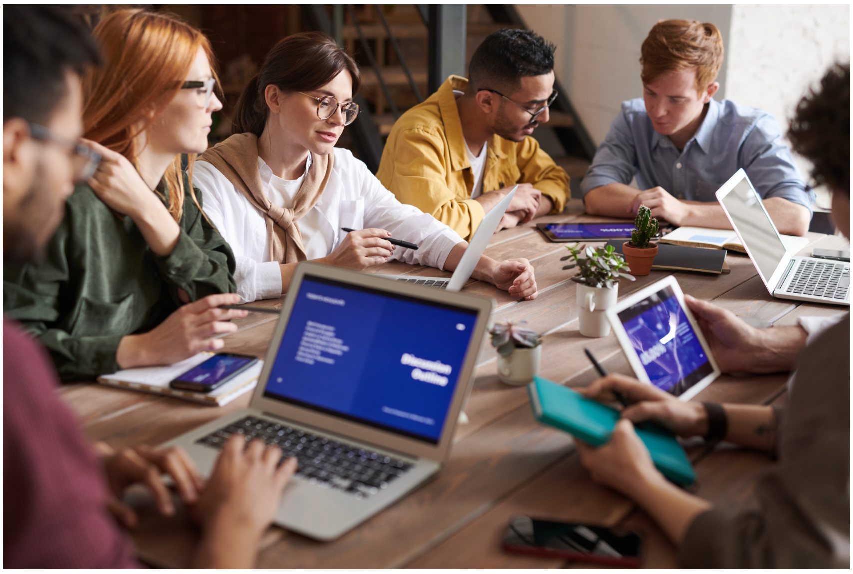
A team that avoids accountability (a) creates resentment among team members who have high standards, (b) encourages mediocrity, (c) misses deadlines and key deliverables, and (d) relies on the leader as the sole source of accountability.

A team that holds each other accountable (a) ensures that poor performers feel pressure to improve, (b) identifies potential problems quickly, (c) establishes respect among team members who are held to the same high standards, and (d) avoids excessive bureaucracy around performance management and corrective action.

Overcoming a lack of accountability

The first and obvious thing you can do is publicly clarify what the team needs to achieve, and exactly what each team member is expected to contribute in order for that to happen. Then, simple and regular progress reviews will ensure that people continue to take action towards the goals you've set as a team.

You may also want to consider shifting rewards away from individual performance to team achievement, so that people feel the need to not only ensure their performance is up to par, but that their team members are also living up to their end of the bargain.



As a leader, your role will be to function as the ultimate arbiter of discipline if and when the team fails. If you've set up the culture correctly, these instances should be fewer and far between.

How this relates to Dysfunction #5: Inattention to Results

When team members are not being held accountable for their contributions, they are more likely to pay attention to their own needs and wants as opposed to the results the team should be achieving together.

Adaptive reflection question:
What mechanisms do you have in place to keep your team members held accountable?

Dysfunction #5: Inattention to Results

Lencioni deems Inattention to Results the ultimate dysfunction of a team. Here, the tendency is for team members to care about something other than the collective goals of the team.

There are a number of reasons why team members might be focussed on something other than results. For some, just being a part of the team is enough to keep them satisfied. For others, focussing on their own career and status is more important than the results the team generates. Whatever the reason, having a team that has this 'illness' ensures everything else will fall apart.

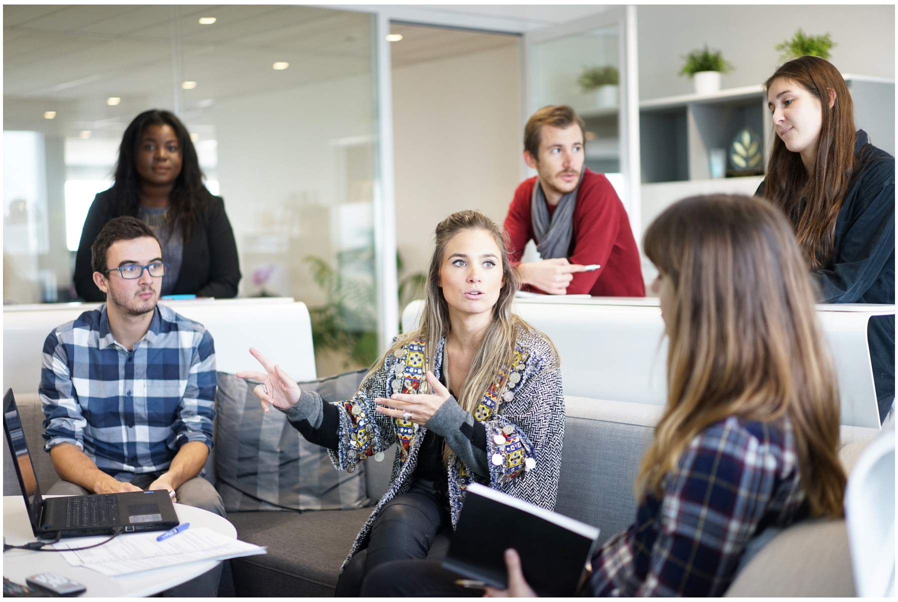
A team that is not focussed on results (a) fails to grow, (b) rarely defeats competitors, (c) loses high performing employees, (d) encourages team members to focus on their own careers and individual goals, and (e) is easily distracted.

A team that focusses on results (a) retains achievement-oriented employees, (b) minimizes individualistic behavior, (c) enjoys success and suffers failure acutely, (d) benefits from individuals who subjugate their own goals/interests for the good of the team, and (e) avoids distractions.

Overcoming inattention to results

There are a number of things you can do to overcome this dysfunction, but by far the most important thing to do is to publicly declare results. Teams that are willing to commit publicly to results will often do whatever it takes to get them done. A public scoreboard that is visible to everybody on your team will help drive this home.

Once you've done this, consider tying compensation and rewards to the achievement of those public goals. As a leader, your role is to model attention to results. If the people on your team get the feeling you are focussing on anything other than results, they'll feel like they can do the same.



03

Building an A Team

by Whitney Johnson

03

Building an A Team

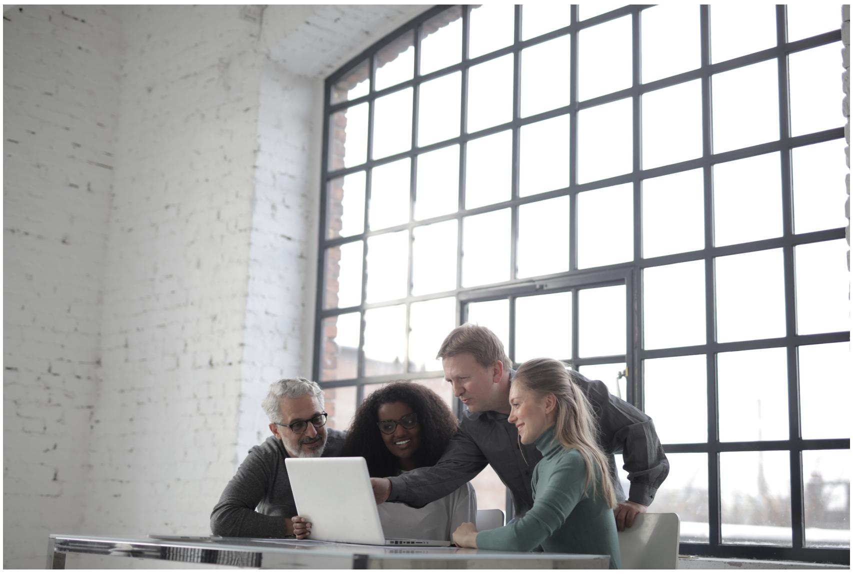
Play to Their Strengths, and Lead Them Up the Learning Curve

by Whitney Johnson

Disruptive innovation, at its simplest, explains how low-end industry insurgents take on—and eventually outcompete—high-end incumbents who seemingly should have known better things take traction and the David beats the Goliath.

It is now generally accepted that disruptive innovation underpins the invention of new products and services. Less generally recognized, is that personal disruption in the workplace—the movement of people from one learning curve to the next, one challenge to another—can drive learning, engagement, and even innovation. Johnson claims we can build an A Team this way. Let's explore how.

"If you could get all of the people in an organization rowing in the same direction, you could dominate any industry, in any market, against any competition, at any time."



The S curve of learning

The S curve of learning represents three distinct phases:

1. The low end, involving a challenging and slow push for competence.
2. The up-swinging back of the curve, where competence is achieved, and progress is rapid.
3. The high end of the curve, where competence has evolved into mastery and can quickly devolve into boredom and disengagement.

An A-Team is a collection of learning curves

Johnson challenges us to visualize our team as a collection of people at different points on their own personal S curves. New team members will be at the low end of their curve for approximately six months depending on the difficulty and aptitude. At the six-month mark, they should be hitting the tipping point and moving onto the steep back of their learning curve. During this second phase, they'll reach peak productivity, which is where they should stay for three to four years. At around the four-year mark, they will have made the push into mastery. In the mastery phase, an employee performs every task with ease and confidence. But ease, and even confidence, can quickly deteriorate into boredom without the motivation of a new challenge. It is time for them to jump to a new learning curve.

Accelerants of Learning and Growth

Johnson gives us pointers to progress on how to get the right Team on the right Learning S-curves.

Adaptive reflection question:
What are you doing as a leader to play to your team members' strengths?

1.Identify the Right Risks

What needs aren't being met on your team? Does it make sense to redistribute responsibilities? Create a new role? Would more high-quality candidates be available if you looked beyond the spec of the current job? As a manager your job is to mitigate the risk of disruption, not to plug gaps with human resource plugs.

2. Play to Individuals' Distinctive Strengths

What does each person do well that other people on the team do not, and what sorts of problems do those strengths equip them to solve? As a manager, your job is to pinpoint what people do uniquely well and pit these abilities against assignments that make their strengths relevant

3. Stepping Backward Is a Way to Move Forward

Why would an employee be motivated to step back from success in a role while resting on their laurels at the top of the curve, enjoying privilege and entitlement? Because stepping back is your slingshot to moving further forward and contributing more. Pull back and accelerate further.

4. Give Failure Its Due

At the low end of the curve, when you hire within the organization you must expect staff to flounder. This gives them support for learning, allowing them to quickly engage in the actual work. With employees in the sweet spot of the S curve it can be harder. You may want to shield them from failure, but when tasked with undemanding assignments their confidence begins to falter. Give them stretch goals to keep the edge.

5. Encourage Discovery-Driven Growth

With discovery driven growth the initial plan is skeletal and is fleshed out as feedback rolls in. We can use this approach when managing people. As you learn about a person's capabilities you can redeploy them to improve the match between strengths and unmet business needs. Job descriptions should be deliberately vague attracting talented prospects who can contribute now, while offering potential unexplored roles.

Hire people who can grow on the job

Begin by reminding yourself that the goal is to approach human resources as raw materials rather than as finished products, the same way you would handle other resources. Johnson suggests we consider the following.

1. Identify the tasks you want a new hire to perform. Don't accept that it has to stay as it currently is. Genuinely understand what you are looking for, then make the effort to find it.

2. Do a team check: consider how the new role will affect the team. How might a new hire enhance the capacities your team already has? Where are the gaps in good team compatibility?

3. Do a sanity check: identify your motivation for the new hire. Having identified these, may require an adjustment to expectations. If we onboard someone who can do the functional job but can't do the emotional job, we won't be satisfied no matter what they do.

4. Write the right job specification. The target should be to attract talented people who are qualified to onboard at the low end of the job's learning curve. They won't be experts, but they will have what it takes to learn and grow into other roles. If we inflate the necessary qualifications to attract the crème-de-la crème we will get a candidate who will become disinterested within the first few months of employment.

Adaptive reflection question:
How do you leverage individual team members' goals?

Manage the hungry new hire

New hires need a vision. Understanding why their job is important will aid them through early stage difficult days. Initially they may struggle and try your patience. You may even wonder why you hired them. But you can increase their odds of moving up the learning curve by laying out a vision from the outset. Just as your new employee needs to understand the company's vision, you'll want to understand theirs. Find out what they are trying to accomplish as a person and how this new role fits with their goals, as well as what they anticipate they will need from you to be successful.

As your employees share their goals with you, clarify expectation that progression by learning is important. Be explicit: I am here to help you help me get my job done. Here's how. I will then reward you for your contributions. And here's how I'll do that. Get your new hire's perspective on your operation. Being able to hear the contrary ideas of others allows us to move more quickly up the learning curve. Learn to solicit ideas and opinions from newcomers who aren't yet blind through familiarity. Future performance and innovation may hinge on it.

Be a Chief Encouragement Officer. Feeling the agitation or disapproval of the boss can cause concern. Remember staff took this job and will stay in this job—or not—largely because of the leader. If you can make them feel safe and acknowledge their efforts, even when imperfect, you're sitting on a gold mine.

Playing to Sweet Spot Strengths

Sweet-spot employees are confident in their abilities, having moved past the daily struggle at the low end of the curve. Yet it is common for managers to be reluctant to provide these employees with stretch assignments. Maybe you don't want to discourage or derail them. But experiencing a genuine risk of failure - working under pressure - is what motivates most of us to step up to the plate. Allow, and even generate, pressure. In the case of your sweet-spot employees, consider imposing constraints that fall into the following categories:

- **Time** - A task that is less demanding becomes a major challenge if you impose a tight deadline. Here are some questions to ask your employees, and yourself. To hit annual targets in nine months instead of twelve, what would you do differently? If you were going to be away for three months, what would you do to make sure things could run without you? What are the most important priorities? Which things aren't as important? What must you absolutely get done so that your manager can advocate for your jump to a new curve?

• **Money** – Trim back the expenditure on the team. Ask questions such as: If your business unit had to be profitable as a stand-alone entity, what would your business model be? If you only had half of the current marketing budget, what would you do differently? If you had to assemble an A-team with only 80% of your current budget, what would you do?

• **Expertise** – Exploit their deep understanding. Ask: If you were CEO for a day and ran the company based on your area of expertise, what would you change? What if everyone on your team were new? No experts, only novices. What would you do differently?

Adaptive reflection question:
How do you encourage development for seasoned, so-called "Master" employees?

Managing Masters

Here's the challenge: after months, maybe years of investment, our employee shoots up the learning curve. They have become our go-to person, willing and able to do whatever is asked. We've become accustomed to an outsized return on their effort. Why would we push them to try something new, when we're still reaping the rewards of our investment? As growth peaks and flattens out, if change isn't on the horizon, our high performer may become a low performer. This is seldom intentional, but it happens anyway, either because they feel stymied or because work has become too easy, and routine is boring.

Have your best workers share what they know

High-end-of-the-curve employees are sought after assets internally but even more so externally. So how can you manage (and keep) this human resource you've worked hard to develop in a way that will work for your organization, your team, and you? There are three important roles they can play:

Pacesetters: pushing low-enders to excel. Put your top performers to good use by showing low-enders what success looks like.

Trainers: conveying corporate memory. Have the top enders create their legacy in the creation of the Organizational Encyclopedia – The business Book of Knowledge.

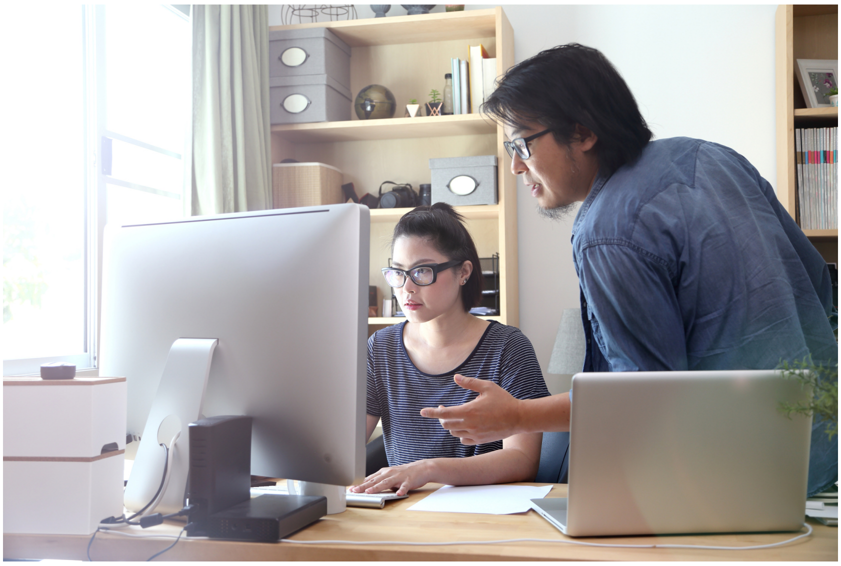
Mentors: the benefits of mentoring offer a fresh angle on the job for someone who may be a bit idle while they await the jump to a new curve, and it disperses the training responsibility through a wider pool of talent.

Keeping Masters Engaged

The goal is always to retain talent, but the more people achieve seniority, the more it becomes a challenge. Not everyone can go up. But it is also true that "up" isn't the only way up: a lot of learning and growth can happen in lateral moves that may give employees the perfect skill set to forge ahead. If lateral moves carry some stigma, then backward moves are often seen as even more so. We tend to assume something's wrong with someone who takes a step back. But sometimes taking a step back is exactly the right move. Like the slingshot, we pull back to get the momentum we need to catapult forward.

Shake things up

Managing people as a series of S curves requires a disruptive mindset on your part. Here are some important questions Johnson says we should consider. How can I shake up employees or teams who have become set in their ways? What goals might be accomplished by shifting people into different roles? How can I create a company culture that encourages and even insists on curve jumping?



Where to climb when you're at the top

For some employees, there may not be a next curve to jump to within the organization, especially those who are approaching retirement. Data tells us that more people are choosing to work past traditional retirement milestones. Some may have the work-life bandwidth remaining to tackle entirely new learning curves, others may not. Efforts to accommodate their needs, perhaps part-time or remote work can keep them contributing at great benefit to everyone involved. Many will be willing to discuss adjustments to compensation that will maintain their high value to the firm while allowing them more flexibility to pursue non-career objectives. The key is to think creatively. Years of experience is a human resource not to be wasted.

"Up" isn't the only way up: a lot of learning can happen in lateral moves that may give employees the perfect skillset to forge ahead.

ABOUT ACTIONCLASS

ActionClasses are short interactive workshops on the Business and Leadership skill that matter most.

Based on 40+ critical leadership and soft skill competencies, ActionClass provides your team members with "no fluff," pragmatic, and action-packed workshops that put goals and objectives at the center of learning.

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THE ADAPTIVE GUIDE TO:

BUILDING TEAMS

ActionClass

The Adaptive Guides

We read and summarized the best books in Business, Leadership, and Personal Development so you don't have to.

The Adaptive Guides are your shortcut to staying current on the world's top Business, Leadership, and Personal Development books. They are used by individuals looking to better themselves, as well as by teams and organizations looking to create and foster cultures of continuous learning and development.

The Adaptive Guides are meant to serve as your starting point for identifying your goals and the obstacles that are standing in your way of achieving them. In addition to participation in regular ActionClasses, we urge leaders to use the content in these guides as inspiration for developing your own unique ActionPlan to make your ideal state a reality.

Summaries included in this guide:

Leaders Eat Last by Simon Sinek
The Five Dysfunctions of a Team by Patrick Lencioni
Building an A Team by Whitney Johnson

Leaders Eat Last

Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't
by Simon Sinek

Your leadership style is killing people

It turns out that your leadership style is killing people. Not in a "man, that guy is killing me today" kind of way, but in a "people are having heart attacks and dying because of you" kind of way.

That would seem a little heavy handed if it weren't for a study at University College London that concluded that people who don't feel recognized for their effort at work were more likely to suffer from heart disease.

So, if you accept the fact that good leadership includes recognizing people for their efforts, you'll have to agree that poor leadership is actually killing people.

(There's a nice long section in the book on exactly how the body reacts to stressful work environments, but I'll leave you to read that after you've bought the book).

That's fine, you say, but my mama always taught me that if I don't have anything nice to say about people, to not say anything at all.

Well, here's another shocker for you. Gallup conducted a poll in 2013 called "State of the American Workplace" that concluded that when our bosses completely ignore us, 40 percent of us actively disengage from our work. That's not the shocking part, however. The shocking part is that if our bosses criticize us on a regular basis, 22 percent of us actively disengage.

I was a math major in college, so I know that amounts to a 18 percent increase in engagement when somebody is criticized on a regular basis rather than simply ignored.

Your leadership style is killing your business, too

In the business world we obsess over numbers. In a world where it seems like almost everything can be reduced to a number (how many Facebook friends and Twitter followers do you have?), it's easy to forget that the only way that anything gets done in business is through and with other people.

So when and how did we replace human beings with numbers?

According to a Gallup poll, when our bosses ignore us, 40% of us actively disengage from our work.

Sinek says that it was on August 5, 1981. That was the date that Ronald Reagan fired more than 11,359 air traffic controllers. PATCO (the union representing the air traffic controllers) had threatened to go on strike, and in preparation for that eventuality, contingency plans were put in place to ensure that the entire travel system didn't grind to a halt. When it became clear that the people working under the contingency plan did an adequate job, the axe fell.

On that date, Sinek argues, Reagan created the precedent for protecting commerce before protecting people.

The most revered business leader for the rest of the next two decades was Jack Welch, who earned the nickname “Neutron Jack” for his relentless focus on “shareholder value”. He became notorious for firing the bottom 10% of his managers (the ones that contributed least to the share price) while giving the top 20% of his managers (the ones that contributed most to the share price) stock options and bonuses.

Welch would eventually admit that “on the face of it, shareholder value is the dumbest idea in the world”. But that did nothing to stop our relentless drive to measure more and more, and run our businesses based on “the numbers”.

Here are just a couple of examples:

While she was at Google, Marissa Meyer famously tested 41 shades of blue to find out which one made people click more often, and thus make Google more money.

The most popular business theory at the moment is The Lean Startup, which includes things like “innovation accounting” and “cohort analysis” to help a business understand whether or not they are on the right track.

Employees are numbers. Customers are numbers. We are all just numbers. And when everything gets reduced to numbers, bad things happen. Not right away, but eventually.

Focusing solely on the numbers has costs that aren't immediately apparent. For instance, according to a report by Mercer LLC one in three employees seriously considered leaving their jobs in 2011. That would be fine if they actually left. The real problem is that all but 1.5% of people voluntarily left their positions in the same time period.

If you've ever been around somebody who is actively looking to leave their job, you'll know that their level of productivity is pretty low.

But it gets worse. Another study done by Gallup suggests that 70% of American workers are “not engaged” or “actively disengaged” from their jobs. They estimate that active disengagement costs the U.S. $450 billion to $550 billion per year.

I'll let you do the math to figure out your share of that burden, but let's be clear - poor leadership is costing your business money.

The solution isn't more cheerleaders, is it?

In the forward of the book, George J Flynn - a retired Lieutenant General from the Marine Corps, has this to say about Sinek:

“His vision is simple: to create a new generation of men and women who understand that an organization's success or failure is based on leadership excellence and not managerial acumen.”

The danger in reading statements like these - and leadership books on the whole - is that they seem to excuse managerial acumen, and turn the role of a leader into a glorified cheerleader.

However, if you've ever spoken to somebody who works for a leader who has no managerial acumen, you'll know that those types of leaders get no respect.

Another Gallup study suggests that 70% of American workers are "not engaged" or "actively disengaged."

Neither managerial acumen or leadership excellence is enough on their own. Stephen M.R. Covey would tell you that even if a leader is sincere and honest, you won't trust them fully unless they get results.

So leaders without business acumen isn't the answer, either.

The solution is to eat last

As Sinek points out in the book, leadership is not a license to do less - it is a responsibility to do more.

Jim Sinegal understands this well. You might not know his name, but you've probably shopped at one of his stores - Costco. He co-founded and ran the company from 1982 until his retirement in 2012. In many ways he was the "anti-Welch". He believed that if you treated your employees like family, they would respond with trust and loyalty.

It wasn't easy. He took a lot of heat from Wall Street analysts who said that he was "too benevolent" for refusing to force employees to take on a greater percentage of healthcare costs. Another analyst said "it's better to be an employee or a customer than a shareholder."

Could he have generated more profit out of the company in the short term, like Welch did? Sure.

But if you look at the share price of GE and Costco from 1986 to today, you'd see something very telling. GE's stock fluctuated wildly from year to year, while Costco's stock rose gradually and steadily over time. If you invested your money in GE in 1986 your return would have been 600% if you cashed out as of the publication of this book. Your investment in Costco would have returned 1,200%.

Sinegal knew that good leadership was playing the long game. He knew that putting the good of the team ahead of his own self-interest was the only way to deliver value in the long run. He knew that the culture at his company was critical to it's long-term success. He knew that a positive culture required that Costco's employees trust the leaders, and vice versa. He knew that he needed to spend time with his employees to make sure that they felt valued and heard.

Many of these points you would have heard before. But now they are backed up by science and numbers to show you that good leadership means better performance.

But it's also backed up by one of the best leadership metaphors ever created: leaders eat last. In the Marines (not a place you could accuse of being "warm and fuzzy") the leaders actually do eat last. True leaders, they believe, put the needs of the people they lead above their own.

The irony in all of this is that your best bet for creating success for yourself over the long run is by subverting it to the needs of your team today.

Your choice is simple - are you going to be Jack Welch or Jim Sinegal?

Leadership is not a license to do less - it's a responsibility to do more.

"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."

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

A Leadership Fable
by Patrick Lencioni

The founder of a company that grew to over a billion dollars in annual revenue, once said:

"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."

Like anything worth achieving in life, this is so much easier said than done - especially because teams are made up of human beings, and human beings are the most complicated and dysfunctional organisms on the planet.

While all teams are different, their issues tend to be the same, encountering them over and over again.

In his book, The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, author Patrick Lencioni takes a deeper look at the what these common dysfunctions are and how they impact teams. Lencioni explores the root causes of all the problems you can face as a leader when trying to get your team to "row in the same direction."

So let's uncover each of the five dysfunctions and in turn, explore what you can do as a leader to address them so that you can achieve your greatest goals.

Dysfunction #1: Absence of Trust

This first dysfunction is all about the absence of trust among your team members.

As Lencioni points out, trust is one of those words that gets used so often that it has lost some of its meaning. He says that he intends it to mean: "The confidence among team members that their peers' intentions are good, and that there is no reason to be protective or careful around the group."

Based on this definition, the root cause of this first dysfunction is most people's unwillingness to be vulnerable with the group. The natural tendency of most people is to hide their mistakes and weaknesses from their peers and bosses.

Teams with an absence of trust (a) hide weaknesses from one another, (b) don't ask for help or provide constructive feedback, (c) don't offer help outside their own areas of responsibility, (d) jump to conclusions about the intentions and skills of others quickly, (e) don't recognize and tap into each others' skills and experiences, (f) waste time and energy trying to look good, (g) hold grudges, and (h) dread meetings and find reasons to avoid spending time together.

Teams that exhibit trust (a) admit weaknesses and mistakes, (b) ask for help, (c) accept questions and input about their roles, (d) give each other the benefit of the doubt, (e) offer feedback and assistance to others, (f) tap into each others' skills and experiences, (g) focus time and energy on important issues, not politics, (h) offer and accept apologies without hesitation, and (i) look forward to meetings and other opportunities to work as a group.

Overcoming a lack of trust

There are a few things you can do to get over a lack of trust on your team.

One of the most powerful exercises you can do is a "personal history" for each person on your team, where each team member shares information about themselves. When people find areas to connect with their team members on (i.e. connections in common or shared interests), they are much more likely to trust one another.

You should also consider having your team take one of the many personality and behavioral preference profile surveys. Understanding exactly how people are different on a team can help create empathy for each other, and help them work more effectively with one another.

Finally, as a leader, your most important action is to demonstrate vulnerability yourself.

How this relates to Dysfunction #2 - The Fear of Conflict

By building trust with one another, constructive conflict becomes possible. Teams know they can argue and debate with one another without fear of being branded destructive or critical.

Dysfunction #2: Fear of Conflict

Most people dislike conflict and avoid it at all costs. Unfortunately, it's also one of the biggest drivers of dysfunction impacting teams.

Before we hop into the idea of promoting conflict, it's important we make the distinction between ideological conflict (the good kind) and destructive fighting and internal politics (the bad kind). What we are looking for here is more of the good kind and less of the bad kind.

Teams that fear conflict (a) have boring meetings, (b) create environments where internal politics and personal attacks occur, (c) ignore controversial topics that are critical to team success, (d) don't tap into all the opinions and perspectives of team members, and (e) waste time and energy with posturing to one another.

Teams that engage in conflict (a) have great meetings, (b) pull out the ideas of all team members, (c) solve real problems quickly, (d) minimize politics, and (e) address critical topics on a regular basis.

Overcoming a fear of conflict

The first and easiest step is to acknowledge publicly that conflict is productive.

The second step is to mine for any unresolved disagreements among team members and get them resolved. Consider assigning somebody this role.

> *As a leader, your most important action is to demonstrate vulnerability yourself.*

Coach your team members so that they each have permission to nurture healthy debate amongst one another. If you find them shying away from a tough conversation, coach them towards understanding that what they are doing is important and necessary to the team's success.

Finally, on the flip side, as a leader you should practice restraint when it comes to resolving conflict. Our natural tendency is to eliminate conflict because it is uncomfortable. Resist the urge to step in when constructive conflict is happening.

How this relates to Dysfunction #3: Lack of Commitment

When team members feel free to engage in productive conflict, they can commit and buy-in to a decision that's made - even if they disagree with it - because they feel like they have been heard.

Dysfunction #3: Lack of Commitment

On a team, commitment is a function of two things: Clarity and Buy-in. If there is clarity around decisions and buy-in on what those decisions require from the team, great things can happen.

A team that fails to commit (a) creates ambiguity around direction and priorities, (b) over analyzes and under-acts, (c) creates lack of confidence and fear of failure, (d) revisits old discussions and decisions again and again, and (e) encourages second-guessing among team members.

A team that commits (a) creates clarity around direction and priorities, (b) aligns the entire team around common objectives, (c) develops an ability to learn from mistakes, (d) takes advantage of opportunities before competitors do, (e) moves forward without hesitation, and (f) changes direction without hesitation.

> *As a leader, you need to be comfortable making decisions that ultimately turn out to be wrong.*

Overcoming a lack of commitment

One of the most valuable things you can do is end each meeting with a thorough review of the key decisions made during the meeting, and agree on what needs to be communicated to other team members about those decisions. This should take you at least 10 minutes to do correctly, and is critical to your success in getting things done.

Another area of discipline that will help with overcoming a lack of commitment, is creating deadlines around decisions. If there are any unresolved decisions that need to be made, set a deadline around when you'll have a decision, and stick to it.

You can also bring contingency plans into your discussions in order to make sure everybody understands the worst-case scenario if you've made the wrong decision. Sometimes teams won't commit because they haven't considered the consequences of things going wrong.

If your team is truly commitment-phobic, start off by having them make decisions concerning low-risk situations.

And, finally, as a leader you need to be comfortable in making decisions that ultimately turn out to be wrong.

How this relates to Dysfunction #4: Avoidance of Accountability

When decisions and commitments are made publicly, team members are much more likely to be able to hold one another accountable.

Dysfunction #4: Avoidance of Accountability

Lencioni suggests that the most effective and efficient means of maintaining high standards on a team is through peer pressure.

That said however, most people avoid accountability like the plague. They don't like others holding them accountable for things they said they would do, and they feel just as uncomfortable in holding others accountable for things that don't get done.

A team that avoids accountability (a) creates resentment among team members who have high standards, (b) encourages mediocrity, (c) misses deadlines and key deliverables, and (d) relies on the leader as the sole source of accountability.

A team that holds each other accountable (a) ensures that poor performers feel pressure to improve, (b) identifies potential problems quickly, (c) establishes respect among team members who are held to the same high standards, and (d) avoids excessive bureaucracy around performance management and corrective action.

Overcoming a lack of accountability

The first and obvious thing you can do is publicly clarify what the team needs to achieve, and exactly what each team member is expected to contribute in order for that to happen. Then, simple and regular progress reviews will ensure that people continue to take action towards the goals you've set as a team.

You may also want to consider shifting rewards away from individual performance to team achievement, so that people feel the need to not only ensure their performance is up to par, but that their team members are also living up to their end of the bargain.

As a leader, your role will be to function as the ultimate arbiter of discipline if and when the team fails. If you've set up the culture correctly, these instances should be fewer and far between.

How this relates to Dysfunction #5: Inattention to Results

When team members are not being held accountable for their contributions, they are more likely to pay attention to their own needs and wants as opposed to the results the team should be achieving together.

Dysfunction #5: Inattention to Results

Lencioni deems Inattention to Results the ultimate dysfunction of a team. Here, the tendency is for team members to care about something other than the collective goals of the team.

There are a number of reasons why team members might be focussed on something other than results. For some, just being a part of the team is enough to keep them satisfied. For others, focussing on their own career and status is more important than the results the team generates. Whatever the reason, having a team that has this 'illness' ensures everything else will fall apart.

A team that is not focussed on results (a) fails to grow, (b) rarely defeats competitors, (c) loses high performing employees, (d) encourages team members to focus on their own careers and individual goals, and (e) is easily distracted.

A team that focusses on results (a) retains achievement-oriented employees, (b) minimizes individualistic behavior, (c) enjoys success and suffers failure acutely, (d) benefits from individuals who subjugate their own goals/interests for the good of the team, and (e) avoids distractions.

Overcoming inattention to results

There are a number of things you can do to overcome this dysfunction, but by far the most important thing to do is to publicly declare results. Teams that are willing to commit publicly to results will often do whatever it takes to get them done. A public scoreboard that is visible to everybody on your team will help drive this home.

Once you've done this, consider tying compensation and rewards to the achievement of those public goals. As a leader, your role is to model attention to results. If the people on your team get the feeling you are focussing on anything other than results, they'll feel like they can do the same.

As a leader, your role is to model attention to results.

Build an A Team

Play to Their Strengths and Lead Them Up the Learning Curve
by Whitney Johnson

Disruptive innovation, at its simplest, explains how low-end industry insurgents take on—and eventually outcompete—high-end incumbents who seemingly should have known better things take traction and the David beats the Goliath.

It is now generally accepted that disruptive innovation underpins the invention of new products and services. Less generally recognized, is that personal disruption in the workplace—the movement of people from one learning curve to the next, one challenge to another—can drive learning, engagement, and even innovation. Johnson claims we can build an A Team this way. Let's explore how.

The S curve of learning

The S curve of learning represents three distinct phases:

1. The low end, involving a challenging and slow push for competence.
2. The up-swinging back of the curve, where competence is achieved, and progress is rapid.
3. The high end of the curve, where competence has evolved into mastery and can quickly devolve into boredom and disengagement.

An A-Team is a collection of learning curves

Johnson challenges us to visualize our team as a collection of people at different points on their own personal S curves. New team members will be at the low end of their curve for approximately six months depending on the difficulty and aptitude. At the six-month mark, they should be hitting the tipping point and moving onto the steep back of their learning curve. During this second phase, they'll reach peak productivity, which is where they should stay for three to four years. At around the four-year mark, they will have made the push into mastery. In the mastery phase, an employee performs every task with ease and confidence. But ease, and even confidence, can quickly deteriorate into boredom without the motivation of a new challenge. It is time for them to jump to a new learning curve.

Personal disruption in the workplace can drive learning, engagement, and even innovation.

Accelerants of Learning and Growth

Johnson gives us pointers to progress on how to get the right Team on the right Learning S-curves.

1.Identify the Right Risks
What needs aren't being met on your team? Does it make sense to redistribute responsibilities? Create a new role? Would more high-quality candidates be available if you looked beyond the spec of the current job? As a manager your job is to mitigate the risk of disruption, not to plug gaps with human resource plugs.

2. Play to Individuals' Distinctive Strengths
What does each person do well that other people on the team do not, and what sorts of problems do those strengths equip them to solve? As a manager, your job is to pinpoint what people do uniquely well and pit these abilities against assignments that make their strengths relevant

3. Stepping Backward Is a Way to Move Forward
Why would an employee be motivated to step back from success in a role while resting on their laurels at the top of the curve, enjoying privilege and entitlement? Because stepping back is your slingshot to moving further forward and contributing more. Pull back and accelerate further.

4. Give Failure Its Due
At the low end of the curve, when you hire within the organization you must expect staff to flounder. This gives them support for learning, allowing them to quickly engage in the actual work. With employees in the sweet spot of the S curve it can be harder. You may want to shield them from failure, but when tasked with undemanding assignments their confidence begins to falter. Give them stretch goals to keep the edge.

5. Encourage Discovery-Driven Growth
With discovery driven growth the initial plan is skeletal and is fleshed out as feedback rolls in. We can use this approach when managing people. As you learn about a person's capabilities you can redeploy them to improve the match between strengths and unmet business needs. Job descriptions should be deliberately vague attracting talented prospects who can contribute now, while offering potential unexplored roles.

Hire people who can grow on the job

Begin by reminding yourself that the goal is to approach human resources as raw materials rather than as finished products, the same way you would handle other resources. Johnson suggests we consider the following.

1. Identify the tasks you want a new hire to perform. Don't accept that it has to stay as it currently is. Genuinely understand what you are looking for, then make the effort to find it.

2. Do a team check: consider how the new role will affect the team. How might a new hire enhance the capacities your team already has? Where are the gaps in good team compatibility?

3. Do a sanity check: identify your motivation for the new hire. Having identified these, may require an adjustment to expectations. If we onboard someone who can do the functional job but can't do the emotional job, we won't be satisfied no matter what they do.

4. Write the right job specification. The target should be to attract talented people who are qualified to onboard at the low end of the job's learning curve. They won't be experts, but they will have what it takes to learn and grow into other roles. If we inflate the necessary qualifications to attract the crème-de-la crème we will get a candidate who will become disinterested within the first few months of employment.

The goal is to approach human resources as raw materials rather than as finished products.

Manage the hungry new hire

New hires need a vision. Understanding why their job is important will aid them through early stage difficult days. Initially they may struggle and try your patience. You may even wonder why you hired them. But you can increase their odds of moving up the learning curve by laying out a vision from the outset. Just as your new employee needs to understand the company's vision, you'll want to understand theirs. Find out what they are trying to accomplish as a person and how this new role fits with their goals, as well as what they anticipate they will need from you to be successful.

As your employees share their goals with you, clarify expectation that progression by learning is important. Be explicit: I am here to help you help me get my job done. Here's how. I will then reward you for your contributions. And here's how I'll do that. Get your new hire's perspective on your operation. Being able to hear the contrary ideas of others allows us to move more quickly up the learning curve. Learn to solicit ideas and opinions from newcomers who aren't yet blind through familiarity. Future performance and innovation may hinge on it.

Be a Chief Encouragement Officer. Feeling the agitation or disapproval of the boss can cause concern. Remember staff took this job and will stay in this job—or not—largely because of the leader. If you can make them feel safe and acknowledge their efforts, even when imperfect, you're sitting on a gold mine.

As a leader, you need to be comfortable making decisions that ultimately turn out to be wrong.

Playing to Sweet Spot Strengths

Sweet-spot employees are confident in their abilities, having moved past the daily struggle at the low end of the curve. Yet it is common for managers to be reluctant to provide these employees with stretch assignments. Maybe you don't want to discourage or derail them. But experiencing a genuine risk of failure - working under pressure - is what motivates most of us to step up to the plate. Allow, and even generate, pressure. In the case of your sweet-spot employees, consider imposing constraints that fall into the following categories:

• Time - A task that is less demanding becomes a major challenge if you impose a tight deadline. Here are some questions to ask your employees, and yourself. *To hit annual targets in nine months instead of twelve, what would you do differently? If you were going to be away for three months, what would you do to make sure things could run without you? What are the most important priorities? Which things aren't as important? What must you absolutely get done so that your manager can advocate for your jump to a new curve?*

• Money – Trim back the expenditure on the team. Ask questions such as: *If your business unit had to be profitable as a stand-alone entity, what would your business model be? If you only had half of the current marketing budget, what would you do differently? If you had to assemble an A-team with only 80% of your current budget, what would you do?*

• Expertise – Exploit their deep understanding. Ask: *If you were CEO for a day and ran the company based on your area of expertise, what would you change? What if everyone on your team were new? No experts, only novices. What would you do differently?*

Managing Masters

Here's the challenge: after months, maybe years of investment, our employee shoots up the learning curve. They have become our go-to person, willing and able to do whatever is asked. We've become accustomed to an outsized return on their effort. Why would we push them to try something new, when we're still reaping the rewards of our investment? As growth peaks and flattens out, if change isn't on the horizon, our high performer may become a low performer. This is seldom intentional, but it happens anyway, either because they feel stymied or because work has become too easy, and routine is boring.

Have your best workers share what they know

High-end-of-the-curve employees are sought after assets internally but even more so externally. So how can you manage (and keep) this human resource you've worked hard to develop in a way that will work for your organization, your team, and you? There are three important roles they can play:

Pacesetters: pushing low-enders to excel. Put your top performers to good use by showing low-enders what success looks like.

Trainers: conveying corporate memory. Have the top enders create their legacy in the creation of the Organizational Encyclopedia – The business Book of Knowledge.

Mentors: the benefits of mentoring offer a fresh angle on the job for someone who may be a bit idle while they await the jump to a new curve, and it disperses the training responsibility through a wider pool of talent.

Keeping Masters Engaged

The goal is always to retain talent, but the more people achieve seniority, the more it becomes a challenge. Not everyone can go up. But it is also true that "up" isn't the only way up: a lot of learning and growth can happen in lateral moves that may give employees the perfect skill set to forge ahead. If lateral moves carry some stigma, then backward moves are often seen as even more so. We tend to assume something's wrong with someone who takes a step back. But sometimes taking a step back is exactly the right move. Like the slingshot, we pull back to get the momentum we need to catapult forward.

Shake things up

Managing people as a series of S curves requires a disruptive mindset on your part. Here are some important questions Johnson says we should consider. *How can I shake up employees or teams who have become set in their ways? What goals might be accomplished by shifting people into different roles? How can I create a company culture that encourages and even insists on curve jumping?*

Where to climb when you're at the top

For some employees, there may not be a next curve to jump to within the organization, especially those who are approaching retirement. Data tells us that more people are choosing to work past traditional retirement milestones. Some may have the work-life bandwidth remaining to tackle entirely new learning curves, others may not. Efforts to accommodate their needs, perhaps part-time or remote work can keep them contributing at great benefit to everyone involved. Many will be willing to discuss adjustments to compensation that will maintain their high value to the firm while allowing them more flexibility to pursue non-career objectives. The key is to think creatively. Years of experience is a human resource not to be wasted.

"Up" isn't the only way up: a lot of learning can happen in lateral moves that may give employees the perfect skillset to forge ahead.