

MANAGEMENT CONSULTING NEWS

all things consulting . . .

Meet the MasterMinds is an exclusive interview series brought to you by [Management Consulting News](#). Feel free to distribute this interview to others, but please respect our [terms of use](#).

If you'd like to subscribe to our free, monthly email newsletter, sign up at www.ManagementConsultingNews.com.

Comments are welcome, so please send them along to the [editor](#).

Enjoy the interview!

.....

Meet the MasterMinds: Patrick Lencioni Shows How to Conquer the Dysfunctions of a Team

Patrick Lencioni is a consultant, bestselling author, and president of The Table Group, a consulting firm that specializes in executive team development and organizational health.

Lencioni's books include [Death by Meeting](#), [The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive](#), [The Five Temptations of a CEO](#), and [The Five Dysfunctions of a Team](#), which continues to be highlighted on the *New York Times*, *BusinessWeek*, *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* bestseller lists. His next book, [Silos, Politics, and Turf Wars](#), is due out in February 2006.

We asked Lencioni's advice about an issue all consultants face: forming and managing productive teams.

MCNews: Given the reliance on teams to solve business problems, you'd think teams would be good at it by now. Why are so many teams dysfunctional instead?

Lencioni: In spite of the proliferation of teams, real teamwork remains elusive in most organizations. Teams fall victim to dysfunction because they are made up of human beings, and we are inherently messy, fallible creatures.

Unless a leader gives people a reason to do otherwise, we tend to look out for our own best interests, and not necessarily those of the team. Teams will never be easy because of this.

Add the fact that managers and leaders often leave team issues untreated, hoping they will work themselves out without any heavy lifting, and you've got a recipe for dysfunction.

MCNews: How can leaders spot the symptoms of a dysfunctional team?

Lencioni: What I call the five dysfunctions of a team are absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability, and inattention to results. And all five have symptoms that team leaders can learn to identify.

“One good indicator of team dysfunction, for example, is a boring team meeting.”

One good indicator of team dysfunction, for example, is a boring team meeting. When people don't challenge one another in discussions about the business, and when people go to meetings unmotivated, you can be pretty confident that they're not collectively engaged.

Another good indicator of team problems is back-channel conflict. Do people reserve their complaints for hallway conversations instead of voicing them during meetings? If so, that's a sign of both a lack of trust and healthy conflict.

MCNews: Consulting project teams are often made up of both consultants and client employees. Any advice for how consultant/client teams can become productive quickly?

Lencioni: First, everyone on the team has to be upfront about their various constituencies and competing interests. Then, they need to take a few steps to accelerate the process of building trust, using exercises that take hours, not days, and which can produce benefits in weeks, not months or years.

MCNews: How can leaders help team members develop the capacity for coping successfully with the frustrations of project obstacles?

Lencioni: Teams have to learn to enjoy the process of work so that obstacles become challenges that are fun to take on, rather than annoyances that stand between them and completion. That's not to say that completion isn't the ultimate goal. But losing sight of the fun of overcoming unexpected changes is a minor tragedy. Work is fun because it requires flexibility and change.

MCNews: What advice would you give a project team about developing performance standards?

Lencioni: Performance standards have to reward team performance more than individual performance. That's not to say that some individual measures or rewards can't be used. But if a leader really wants team behavior, he or she needs to establish a collective sense of success or failure, and then work to ensure that everyone feels compelled to meet high standards of performance.

MCNews: How can a leader most effectively reward the individual contribution of a team member while maintaining the spirit of teamwork?

Lencioni: Focus on team recognition rather than financial or formal rewards. On a good team, there is nothing more gratifying than receiving genuine accolades from a peer or a manager. Unfortunately, this type of incentive is often under utilized.

“On a good team, there is nothing more gratifying than receiving genuine accolades from a peer or a manager.”

Of course, recognition can't make up the difference if team members are grossly underpaid.

MCNews: Any suggestions for managing a poorly performing team member?

Lencioni: That depends on whether the person has a true performance problem or a behavioral/values one. Most of what I'm about to say pertains to behavior, though it could also be used, with a little modification, for those who are just not producing.

First piece of advice to a manager: tell the team member he is underperforming. So many times people are not aware of their situation because managers shy away from giving them direct feedback, especially if it's negative.

If, after direct communication, the situation doesn't improve, make sure the underperformer knows that you're willing to make a change to the team—that is, let him go—if things don't improve. Do it kindly, helpfully, but clearly.

When people know that a leader is willing to make radical changes—like booting someone—they're more likely to focus on improving. When they think they are indispensable or that the manager would never pull the trigger, they have little incentive to change.

One of three things should happen next. Either the employee will improve, he will leave the organization on his own because he sees that he can't be successful, or he'll need to be helped out the door. In most cases, one of the first two situations will happen, and only rarely will a manager have to fire someone.

Finally, throughout this process, communicate with the underperformer with the assumption that he really wants to improve. In most cases, that's the reality. Doubting someone's intentions only increases the likelihood that he won't see the possibility of success.

“When people know that a leader is willing to make radical changes—like booting someone—they're more likely to focus on improving.”

MCNews: If you were to give a new team leader one piece of advice, what would it be?

Lencioni: Take the risk of being vulnerable with the people you lead. That means, be open about who you are, what your concerns are, what your strengths and weaknesses are. Be human, and they will trust you.

MCNews: What's on your reading list these days?

Lencioni: I just finished [1776](#), by David McCullough, which is a very interesting account of a key year in the founding of the US. And I'm reading the Gospel According to John in the Bible.

MCNews: Thanks for your time.

Find out more about Patrick Lencioni, his books and services at www.tablegroup.com.