

# Teamwork: Are You "In" or "Out?"

Bonnie Mattick, Credit Union Magazine  
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A recent article in the CUNA Human Resource/Training and Development Council newsletter praised the benefits of using the team-building concepts from the book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, by Patrick Lencioni. The article was titled "Building Teams: Why You Need Trust, Conflict, Commitment, Accountability, and Attention to Detail" by Mary Herrmann. She followed the Patrick Lencioni model, but didn't expand on how or why "great teams make clear and timely decisions and move forward with complete buy-in from every member of the team."

How or why does a group commit or completely buy in to the team's goals? In my experience, all other factors fail without full and complete commitment by all team members and their senior-level management. Here's an example below.

## **A Dysfunction Case Study**

While working with a small, growing credit union, I developed an established business relationship with the CEO. As we discussed workplace issues, he told me about wanting to expand his management team's capabilities. He explained the issues they were facing, and that he felt they needed "team building." He failed to say they had tried this before.

During our meeting, we talked about the "five dysfunctions" of teams and how his group might overcome them to get better results. I agreed to present a program based on Lencioni's concepts. He was most intrigued with "focusing on results" and said they recently had increased trust within the team.

At the start of the team-building exercise, we talked about key concepts of trust. Participants agreed it's about being "vulnerable," which takes time to develop. After working with the group a short while, I could see they were reticent about being open and honest, and that being vulnerable would take some work.

Fear, concern, and intimidation are very real feelings that sometimes develop in work groups. It's not unique or unnatural. In any group, striving and scratching (metaphorically speaking) align the pecking order with needs and desires.

## **Puppeteers and Pawns**

My role as group facilitator for the credit union was to navigate through a trust-challenged environment, involving diverse personality styles. At least some people were interested in becoming more open and perhaps vulnerable.

However, many seemed influenced by a "puppeteer" on the team who was pulling everyone's strings. She often overshadowed her boss. She wanted to make sure nothing changed. She had control and wanted to maintain it. Even activities during our workshop were threatening to her.

In retrospect, some difficulties during the session could have been avoided:

- I should have collected more information from the CEO prior to embarking on team building.
- I could have been more effective if he had told me about the previous failed team building.
- We could have agreed to try a different approach and deal directly with the person who needed so much control.

Prior to my presentation, the credit union had tried many team-building techniques—some more than once. I found this out much later.

Ultimately, it came down to one basic problem: no commitment to change. The "puppeteer" influenced the team and she had trained everyone to respond to her demands and "string-pulling" efforts. This permeated the organization. Although the CEO bought into the team-building process, not everyone was on board with it.

You can have the best design and the most creative presentation, but the process can be slowed and disrupted if you don't have buy-in from the group and complete participation of people at the top.

## **Actions that Build Teams**

Based on this experience, I discovered actions that bring useful change to groups:

- Ask good questions at the start—before a team-building project. For example: What other team-building programs were instituted, and what were the results?
- Work with the group to establish rapport with individuals prior to administering profile tools.
- Review the group's previous behavior profile tools. What tools did they use, and what were the results? Posting previous results shows behavior patterns and a picture for the group.
- Gain individual commitment from each participant prior to the start of the team-building sessions. What goals do they want to achieve, or what desired work behaviors do they want to change?
- Get full commitment for follow-through from the CEO. Lencioni's model may help build more effective teams, but unless your group commits to implementation and follow-through, it won't be successful.

## **Total Trust and Full Commitment**

To successfully implement the Lencioni model or any other, you must build trust and define how it applies to your group. Individuals may feel vulnerable, but that's normal to the process.

After building trust, the group's next steps are to master conflict and leverage the trust they've established. To reinforce this, use team-building activities that demonstrate how finding the "ideal" conflict point ensures more effective meetings and benefits the group. Gain buy-in from team members to ensure success of team goals and principles.

Achieving commitment at this point means more than just getting people to communicate better. It means being "on the same page" with how the team fits into the business goals.

The last phases of team building are easier than the initial stages. Once all team members have committed to the process, they see how the team may leave a more favorable, rather than unfavorable,

impression on others in the organization. The focus is on benefiting the bottom line—getting results for the team means getting results for the credit union.

Team commitment to decisions and processes brings clarity. Commitment means taking ownership and responsibility for timelines. Goals become more important. According to the famous basketball coach, Pat Riley, "There are only two options regarding commitment. You're either in or you're out. There's no such thing as life in-between."

What's your group's commitment to collaboration and achieving goals?

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