

the five dysfunctions of a team

By Patrick Lencioni

Reviewed by Ruth Hassall

This may not be an obvious choice of book for youth leaders to read but I think it's one of the best I've read on the subject of team and the principles can easily be applied to the youth ministry context.

The book is split into two parts. The first, which forms the bulk of the book, is what Lencioni describes as a leadership fable – a story written in the context of a realistic but fictional organisation. In this fable, the story centres around Kathryn Petersen, the new CEO of DecisionTech.

Two weeks into her new role, observing the problems in the organisation she begins to wonder if she should ever have taken the job. She hadn't really anticipated just how dysfunctional her team was, and how the team members would challenge her in ways that she had never been challenged before. Here she is facing the ultimate leadership crisis: uniting a team that is in such a bad state that it threatens to destroy the whole company.

Throughout the story, Lencioni bit by bit reveals the five dysfunctions that go to the very heart of why teams – even really good ones – often struggle.

What I love about Lencioni's style is that the fable allows readers to learn more effectively by losing themselves in a story and by being able to relate to the characters involved.

In the second part of the book Lencioni pulls together the five dysfunctions and offers actionable steps that can be taken to address each dysfunction. Although based in a business setting, the principles are applicable for anyone interested in teamwork, whatever their context.

Lencioni identifies the five main dysfunctions of a team as:

- Absence of trust.
- Fear of conflict.
- Lack of commitment.
- Avoidance of accountability.
- Inattention to results.

He goes on to demonstrate how each dysfunction flows from the previous one, and offers some interesting insights into healthy conflict and how we can create trust on a team. He offers a description then of the alternative to dysfunctional teams, a truly cohesive team.

- They trust one another.
- They engage in unfiltered conflict around ideas.

- They commit to decisions and plans of action.
- They hold one another accountable for delivering against those plans.
- They focus on the achievement of collective results.

So, not an obvious choice, and not a new book on the market but one that I would really recommend for anyone thinking through how to make their team work better and more cohesively, with everyone moving in the same direction in working out the vision for the team.

