

The Model

Trust is the heart of a cohesive team. Teamwork is impossible without it.

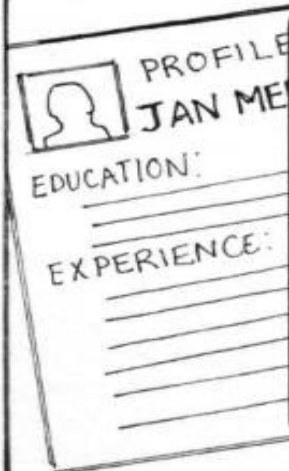


DYSFUNCTION 1: ABSENCE OF TRUST

TRUST

Unfortunately, the word *trust* is used and misused so often that it has lost impact and focus.

The ability to predict a person's behavior based on past experience is one aspect of trust.

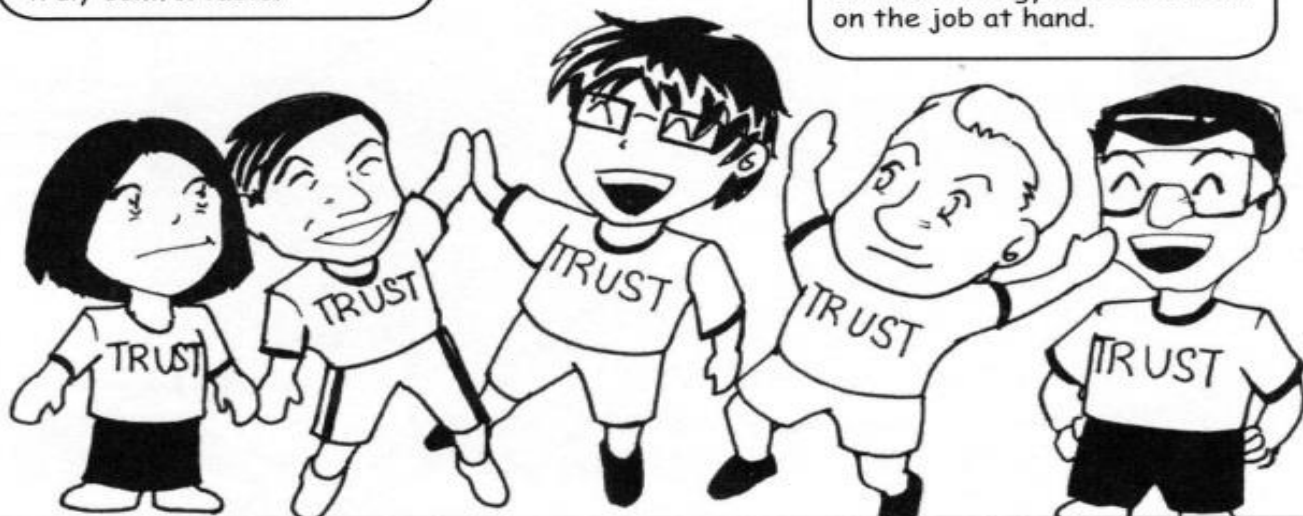


In the context of team-building, trust means the team members know their team mates won't use their vulnerabilities against them. Those vulnerabilities include:

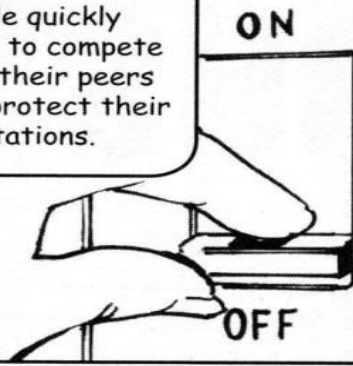
- Skill deficiencies
- Interpersonal weaknesses
- Mistakes
- Requests for help

This concept may sound "soft," but in fact team members only stop guarding themselves when they are truly comfortable.

That frees them to focus all their energy and attention on the job at hand.



Achieving vulnerability-based trust is hard, because people quickly learn to compete with their peers and protect their reputations.



Turning off those instincts, however, is essential.

Teams that lack trust waste time and energy managing their behaviors and interactions.



They dread team meetings, and seldom ask for help or offer to help others.



Morale on distrusting teams is usually low, and unwanted turnover is high.



Members of **teams that don't trust each other** also conceal their weaknesses and mistakes, and seldom offer advice outside their areas of responsibility. They suspect the worst of each other, hold grudges, fail to recognize and tap into each other's skills and experiences, and find reasons to avoid spending time together.

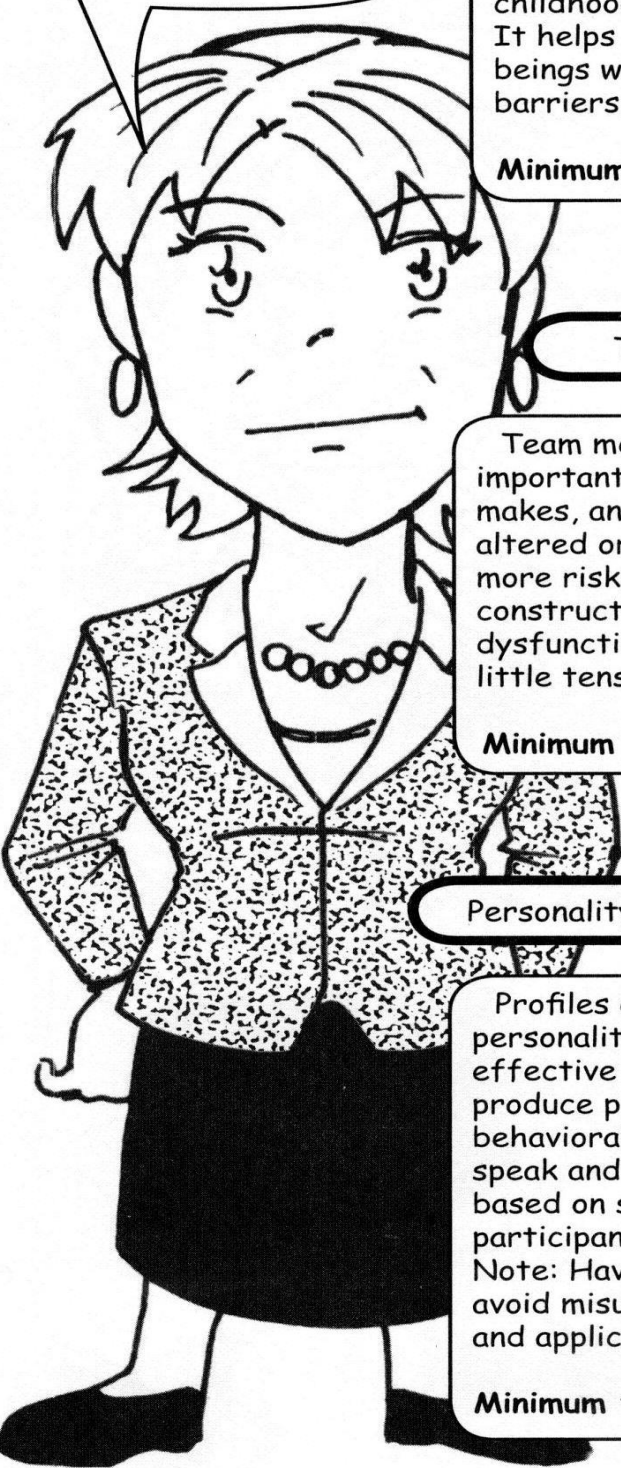
Members of **trusting teams** admit their weaknesses and mistakes, and take risks in offering feedback and assistance. They tap into everyone's experience and skills, devote time and energy to important issues rather than politics, and apologize without hesitation. They also look forward to meetings and other chances to work as a group.



SUGGESTIONS FOR OVERCOMING DYSFUNCTION 1

Vulnerability-based trust isn't created overnight. It takes shared experiences over time, proven follow-through and credibility, and a deep understanding of your team members.





A focused approach, however, can accelerate the process. These tools will help:

Personal histories exercise

This low-risk exercise requires team members to answer questions about their siblings, hometown, unique challenges in childhood, hobbies, first job, and worst job. It helps them relate to each other as human beings with interesting lives, breaks down barriers, and encourages greater empathy.

Minimum time required: 30 minutes

Team effectiveness exercise

Team members speak about the most important contribution each of their peers makes, and one behavior that should be altered or eliminated. This exercise involves more risk, but can extract a great deal of constructive information. Even a relatively dysfunctional team can do it with surprisingly little tension.

Minimum time required: 60 minutes

Personality and Behavioral Preference Profiles

Profiles of behavioral preferences and personality styles are among the most effective tools for building trust, and produce practical and scientifically valid behavioral descriptions of how people think, speak and act. They are non judgmental, based on substantial research, and participants identify their own types. Note: Have a licensed consultant on hand to avoid misusing their powerful implications and applications.

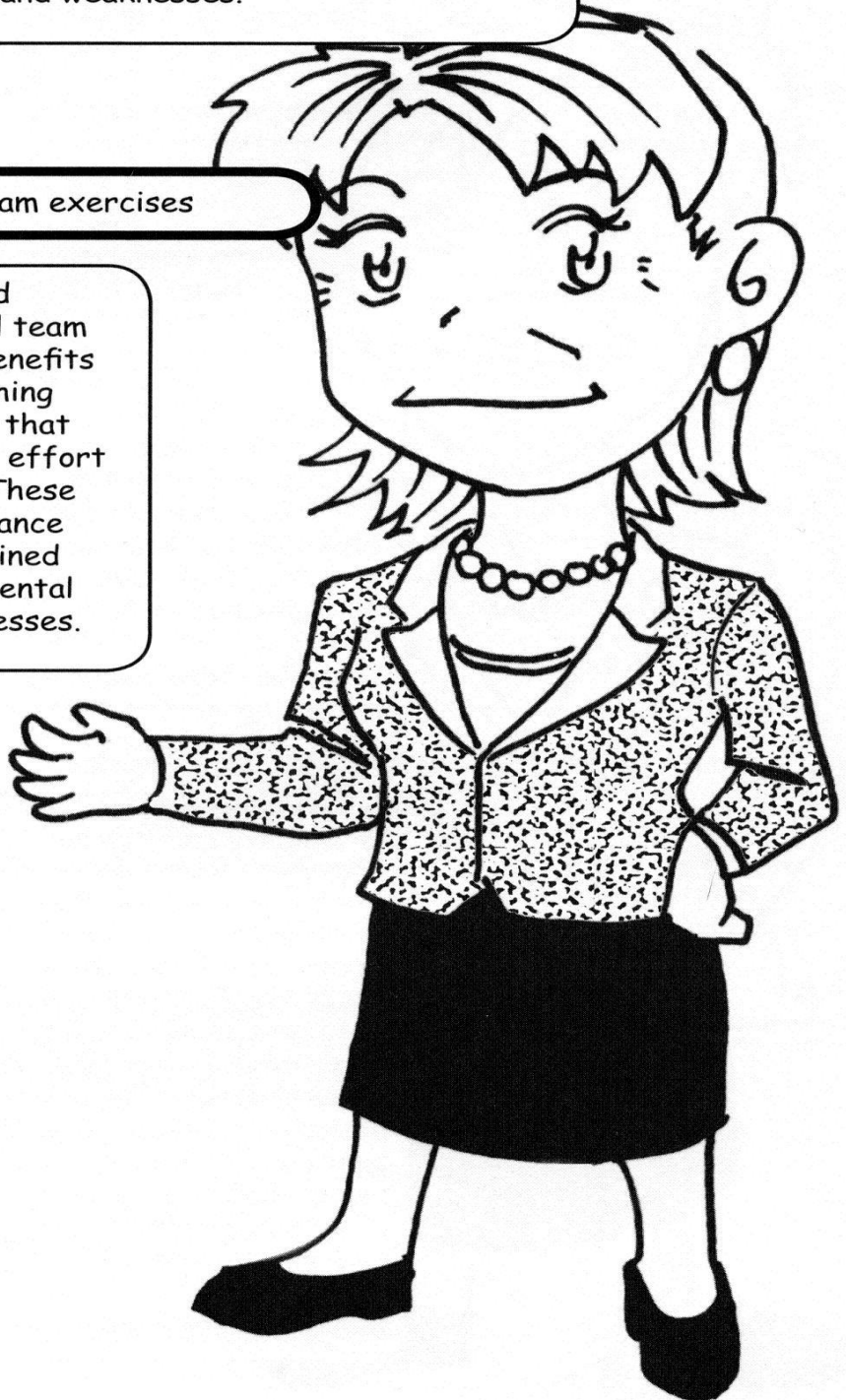
Minimum time required: 4 hours

360-degree feedback


These tools can produce powerful results but are riskier because they call for peers to judge each other openly. I suggest divorcing your 360-degree program from compensation and performance evaluations so it doesn't take on political overtones. Instead, use it to identify strengths and weaknesses.

Experiential team exercises


Rope courses and other experiential team activities offer benefits from doing something rigorous outdoors that involves collective effort and cooperation. These exercises can enhance teamwork if combined with more fundamental and relevant processes.




THE ROLE OF THE LEADER



To encourage trust, a leader must demonstrate vulnerability.




Risking a loss of face in front of the team encourages subordinates to do the same.




But be careful: a leader who fakes vulnerability to manipulate the actions and emotions of others will quickly lose the team's trust.

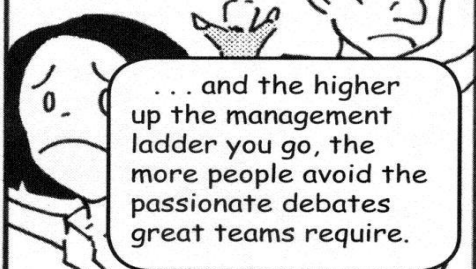
DYSFUNCTION 2: FEAR OF CONFLICT




All great relationships—including marriages, parenthood, friendships and business—need productive conflict to thrive.




Unfortunately, conflicts at work are often viewed as taboo . . .



. . . and the higher up the management ladder you go, the more people avoid the passionate debates great teams require.

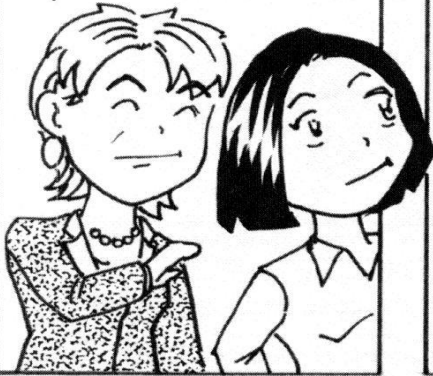


Knowing the difference between productive conflict and destructive infighting is vital.

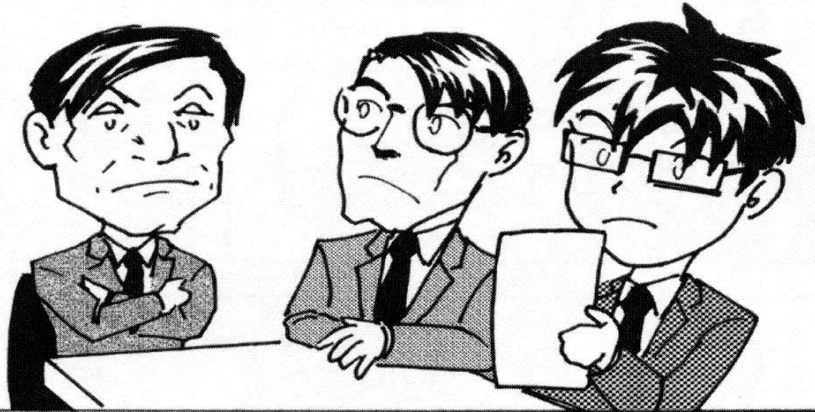


Productive ideological conflict limits exchanges to plans and ideas. Personal attacks are out, but team members will still argue and get frustrated and emotional.

Outsiders might see this as pure discord, but good teams know that the purpose is to find the best solution in the shortest time.



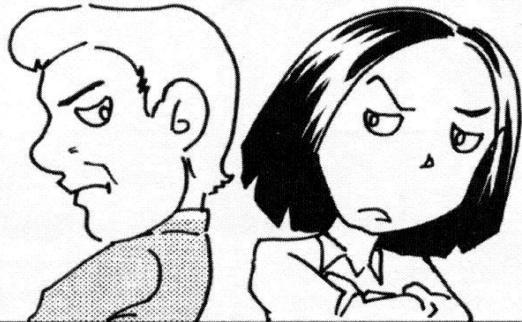
They discuss and resolve issues quickly and completely and emerge from heated debates with no ill feelings or collateral damage, ready to tackle the next critical issue.



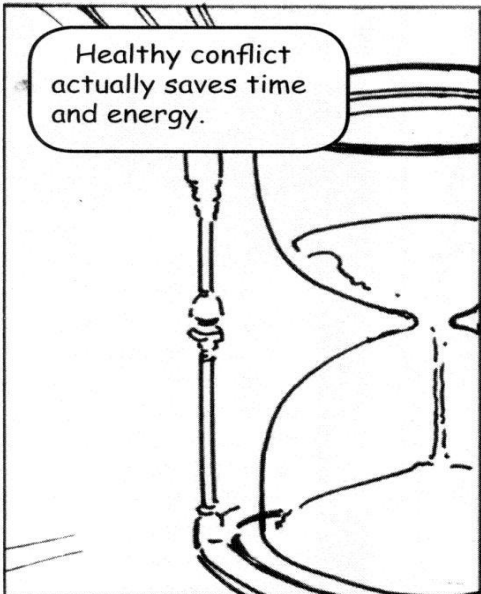
Teams may avoid open ideological conflict so no one's feelings get hurt.



Ironically, they often use back-channel attacks, which are far nastier and harmful than direct confrontation.



Healthy conflict actually saves time and energy.



Avoiding conflict in the name of efficiency actually dooms a team to revisiting painful issues with no resolution. Telling someone to take an issue "off-line" is often code for this wasteful syndrome.



As long as team members believe this interplay is bad and unnecessary, healthy conflict is unlikely.



How can a team develop the willingness and ability to engage in healthy conflict?



Below are some simple methods that make conflict more accepted, common and productive.



Teams that fear conflict waste lots of time and energy posturing and managing interpersonal risk. Their meetings are boring because they ignore controversial topics critical to their success, but outside the boardroom back-channel politics and personal attacks thrive. They also fail to tap into the perspectives of all team members.

Teams that engage in conflict have lively, interesting meetings, put critical topics on the table for discussion, and solve real problems quickly. They also minimize internal politics and extract and exploit the ideas of everyone on the team.



SUGGESTIONS FOR OVERCOMING DYSFUNCTION 2

Conflict Mining

Assign the role of "conflict miner" to someone prior to a meeting or discussion. Conflict miners bring buried disagreements to light, so they'll need objectivity, the courage to get the team to work through sensitive issues, and the persistence to keep things moving until the conflict is resolved.

Real-time permission

Team members need to coach each other to pursue healthy debate. Whenever people are uncomfortable with the level of discord, it helps to remind each other why conflict is necessary. This drains tension and gives the participants the confidence to continue.

Other tools

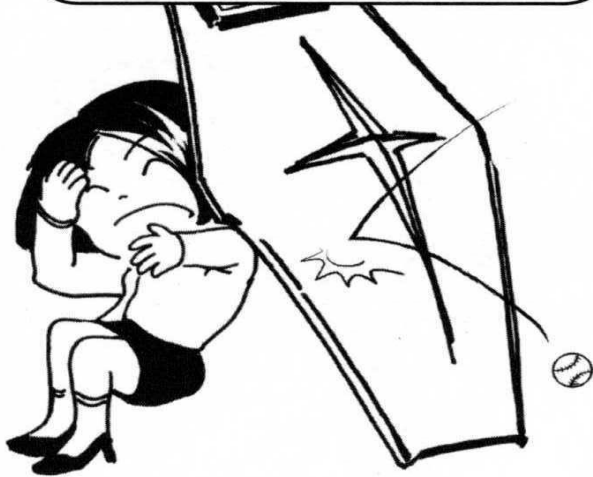
The personality style and behavioral preference tools mentioned earlier include descriptions of how different people deal with conflict, and can help you anticipate reactions. A tool specifically for evaluating conflict, the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, allows people to approach conflict strategically.



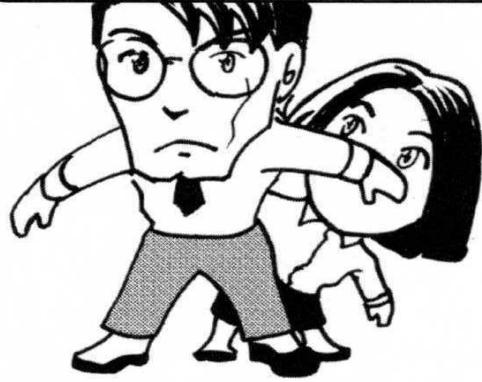


THE ROLE OF THE LEADER

One of a leader's most problematic impulses is the urge to protect team members from harm.



Like overprotective parents who stop their children from arguing, leaders often cut disagreements prematurely short.

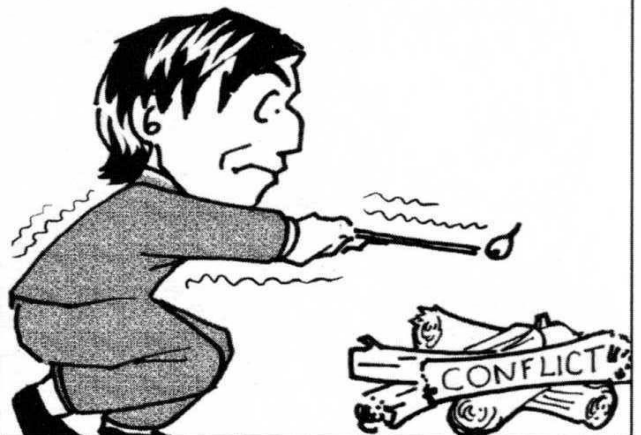


Unfortunately, that prevents team members from developing good conflict management skills, strains relationships, and leaves everyone hungry for resolution.

Leaders need to allow the team to sort situations out themselves, even when things get loud and messy.



A leader also has to walk the walk. If you avoid conflict when it is necessary and productive—something all too many executives do—you're allowing this dysfunction to survive and even thrive.





CONNECTION TO DYSFUNCTION 3

What does conflict have to do with lack of commitment?

Answer: Productive conflict gives you a 360-degree view of the issue. Team members can then confidently commit to a decision knowing they've benefited from everyone's ideas.



DYSFUNCTION 3: LACK OF COMMITMENT

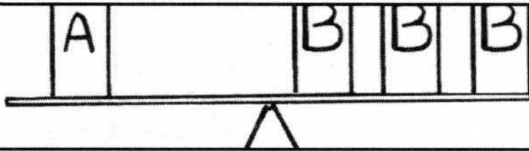
In the context of a team, commitment is a function of two things: clarity and buy-in.

The two greatest reasons for avoiding commitment are the twin desires for consensus and certainty.

- CLARITY
- BUY-IN

Great teams make clear, timely and confident decisions, and move forward with complete buy-in from every member—even those who initially opposed the plan. "Disagree and commit," remember?

Great teams realize the danger of obsessively seeking consensus, and find ways to achieve buy-in. They know that reasonable people only want their opinions considered and don't need to get their way to support a decision.



People will then rally behind whatever decision the group makes. In an impasse, the team leader makes the call.

CONSENSUS

Great teams also pride themselves on committing to a clear course of action.



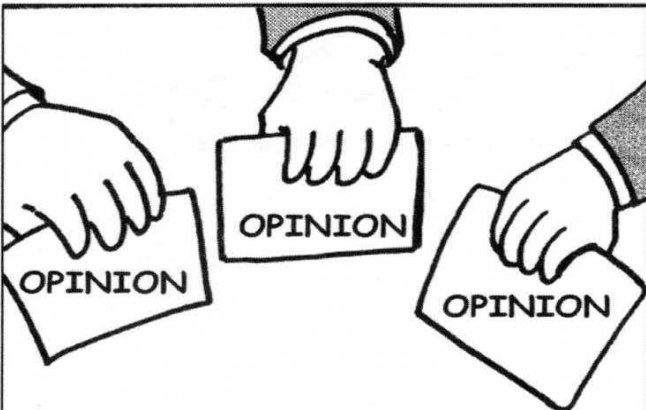
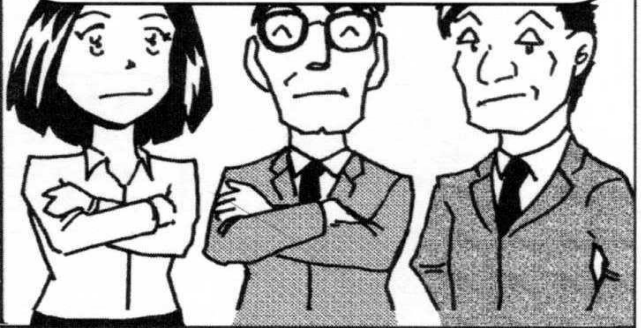
They know that making a bold decision and changing direction with equal boldness if they're mistaken is far better than waffling.

CERTAINTY



Dysfunctional teams hedge their bets, delaying until they believe they have enough data to guarantee they're making the right move. While that seems prudent, it actually produces a dangerous paralysis.

Remember, conflict creates a willingness to commit without perfect information. Teams often possess all the data they need, but have to extract it through unfiltered debate.

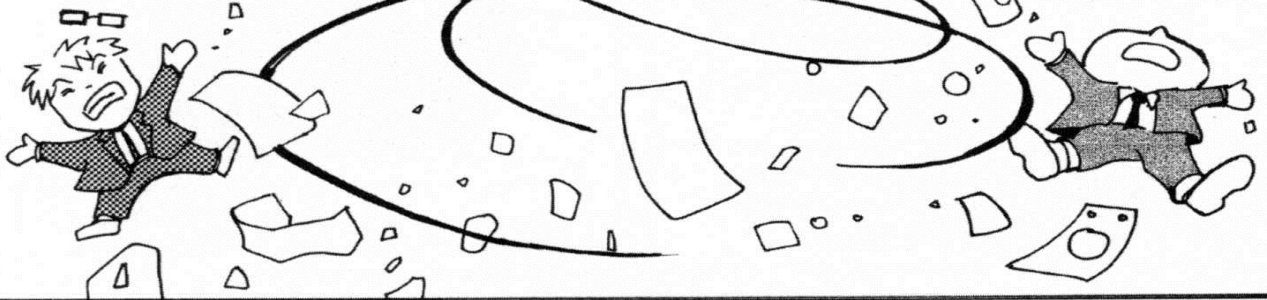


Only when everyone has put their opinions and perspectives on the table can the team confidently commit to a course of action.



This dysfunction creates dangerous ripple effects when an executive team fails to achieve total buy-in.

Small gaps between top executives become major discrepancies by the time they reach employees below, who try to interpret marching orders that are out of sync with what colleagues in other departments are receiving.



A team that fails to commit loses direction and lacks priorities. Members over-analyze and delay decisions, frequently letting windows of opportunity close. That destroys confidence, inspires a fear of failure, and sets up a culture of second-guessing the moves they make and who makes them.

A team that commits aligns around common objectives and makes its direction and priorities clear. It moves forward without hesitation, takes advantage of opportunities before competitors do, learns from its mistakes, and changes direction without hesitation or guilt.



SUGGESTIONS FOR OVERCOMING DYSFUNCTION 3

A team can ensure commitment by maximizing clarity and ensuring buy-in, and resisting the lures of consensus and certainty.



Cascading messaging

These simple, effective tools and principles will help:



Cascading messaging involves having the team review the key decisions made at a meeting and agreeing on what employees and other stakeholders need to be told. This often reveals that everyone isn't on the same page. Team members also realize what should stay confidential and what must be communicated quickly and comprehensively. Their clear alignment sends a powerful and welcome message to employees used to hearing contradictory statements from managers.

Minimum time required: 10 minutes

Deadlines

Ambiguity is the worst enemy of a team that finds it tough to commit. Setting and honoring hard deadlines is essential to ensuring commitment. Interim decisions and milestones are just as vital as final deadlines, since they help identify and address any conflicts before the costs become too great.

Contingency and worst-case scenario analysis

A team with commitment issues should discuss contingency plans up front or, better yet, clarify the worst-case scenario a decision will produce. This usually calms their fears, since they realize a bad decision is survivable and probably less damaging than anticipated.

Commitment-phobic teams can exercise decisiveness on low-risk issues. Teams that make decisions after lengthy discussions but little research or analysis find they make better-than-expected decisions. Research and analysis are important, of course, but teams with this dysfunction tend to overrate their value.



CONNECTION TO DYSFUNCTION 4



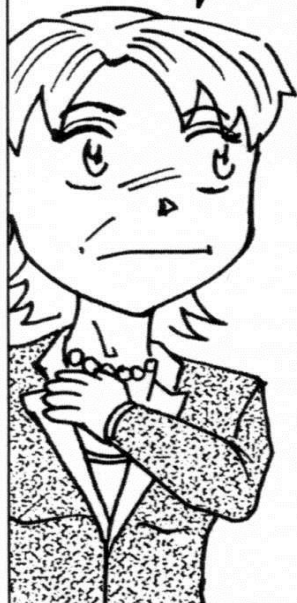
How does this fit in with dysfunction #4, avoidance of accountability? Basically, team members must know what the standards are before they can call each other on inappropriate behaviors and actions.



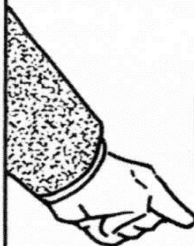
DYSFUNCTION 4: AVOIDANCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

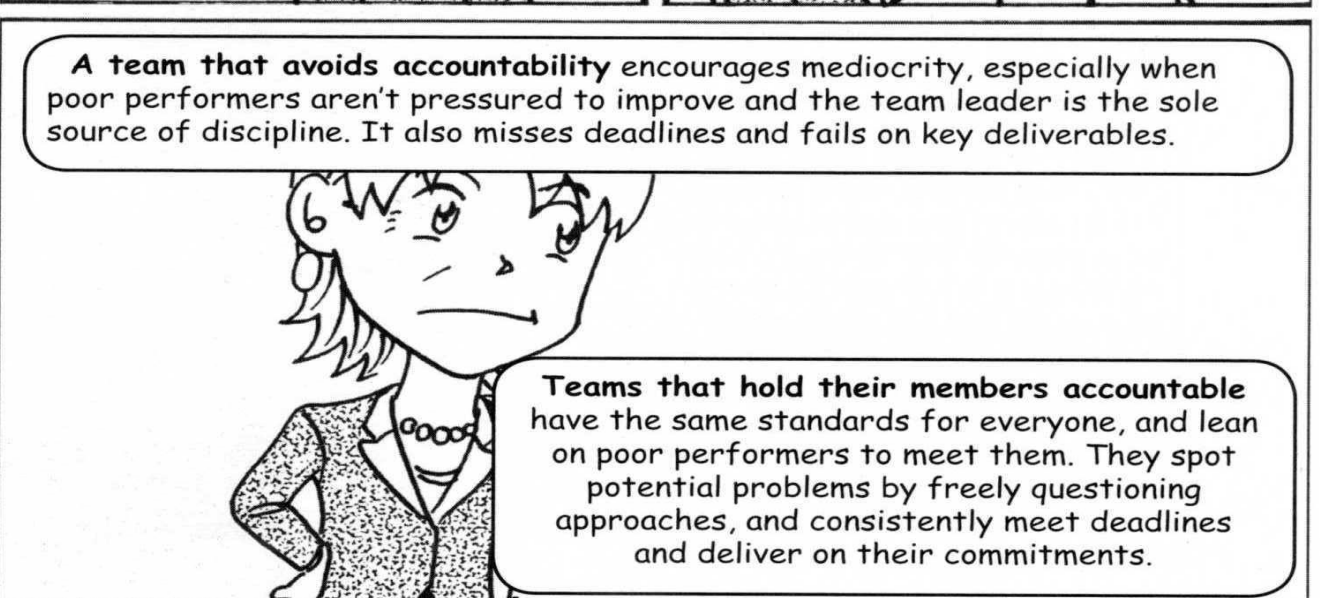
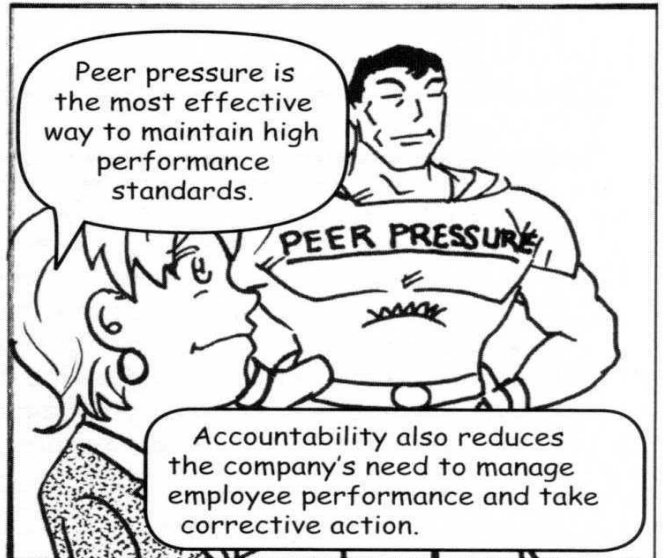
In the context of teamwork, accountability refers to the willingness of team members to call their peers on actions that might hurt the team.

This dysfunction arises because team members can't handle the difficult conversations and strong emotions typical of confrontations.



Great teams recognize and overcome these natural reactions and willingly enter the danger zone.







SUGGESTIONS FOR OVERCOMING DYSFUNCTION 4

Publication of goals and standards

Ambiguity is the enemy of accountability. Being clear about what the team needs to achieve, who needs to deliver what, and how everyone should behave makes it easier for team members to hold each other accountable. It is also important to keep those agreements visible so no one forgets.

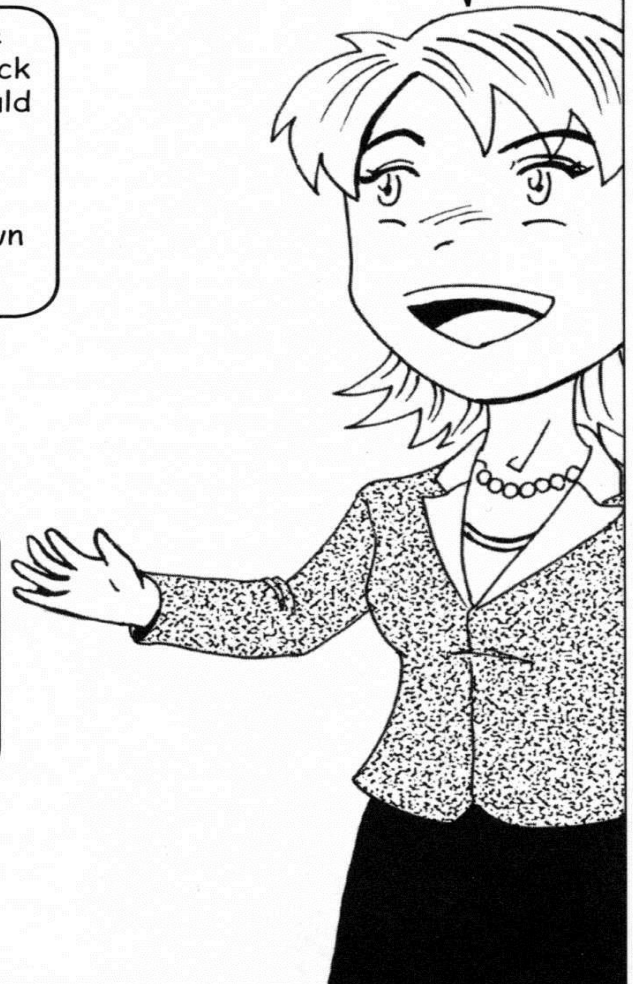
Simple and regular progress reviews

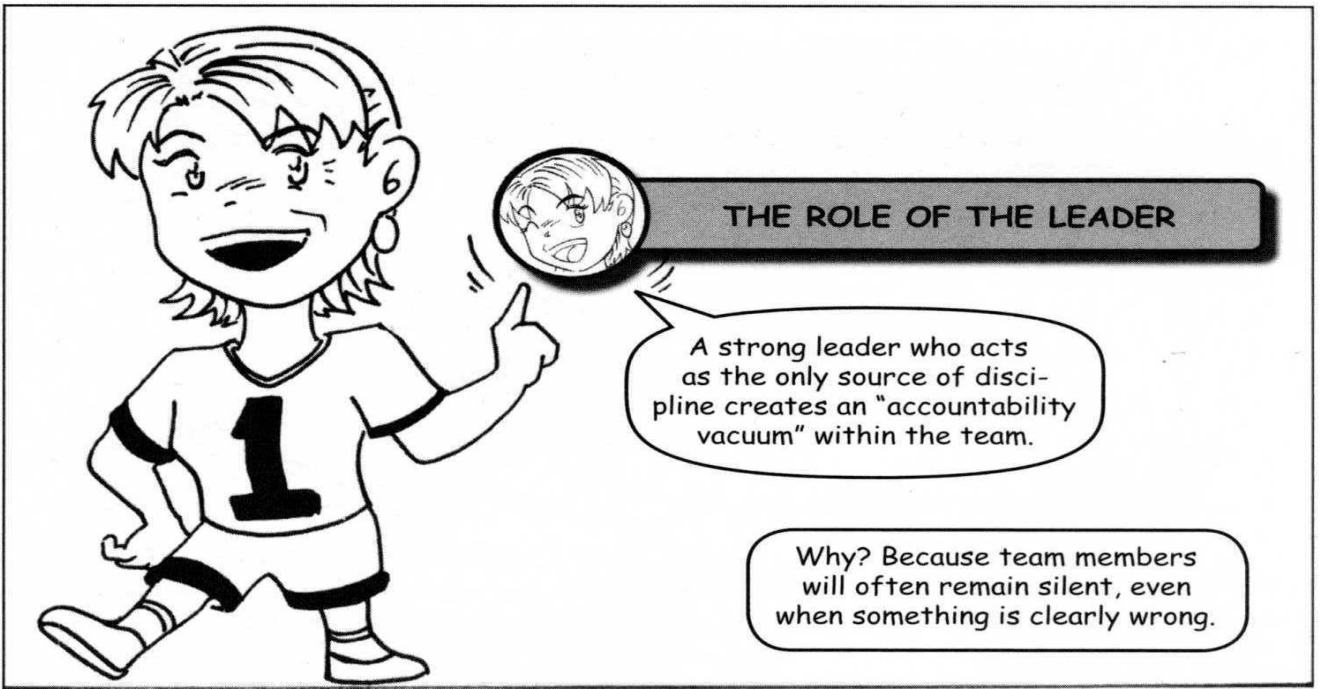
A little structure helps people take action, especially when giving feedback on performance. Team members should communicate constantly about their relative performance against stated objectives and standards. Relying on team members to do that on their own allows them to avoid accountability.

Team rewards

Shifting rewards away from individual performance to team achievement creates a culture of accountability, because team members are unlikely to stand by quietly and fail when a peer is not pulling his or her own weight.

How can a team ensure accountability? With these management tools, which are as effective as they are simple.

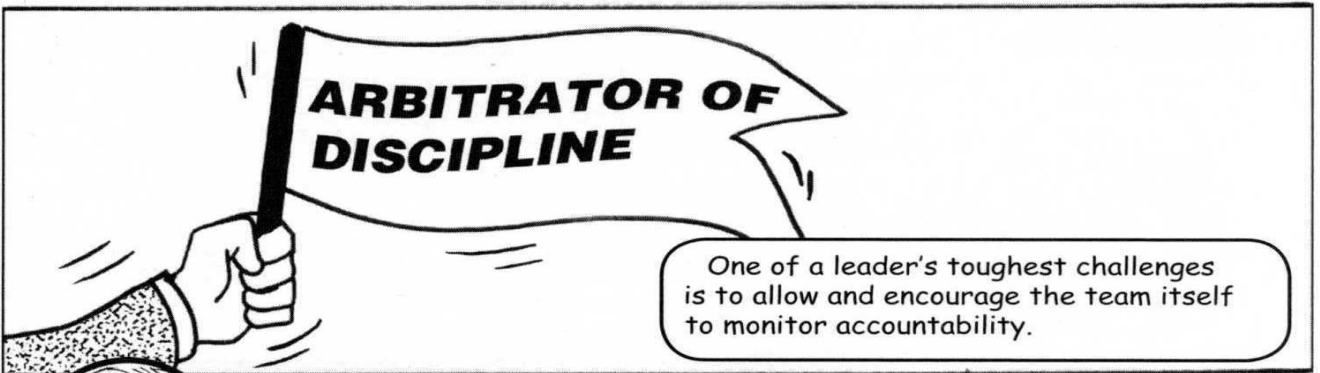




THE ROLE OF THE LEADER

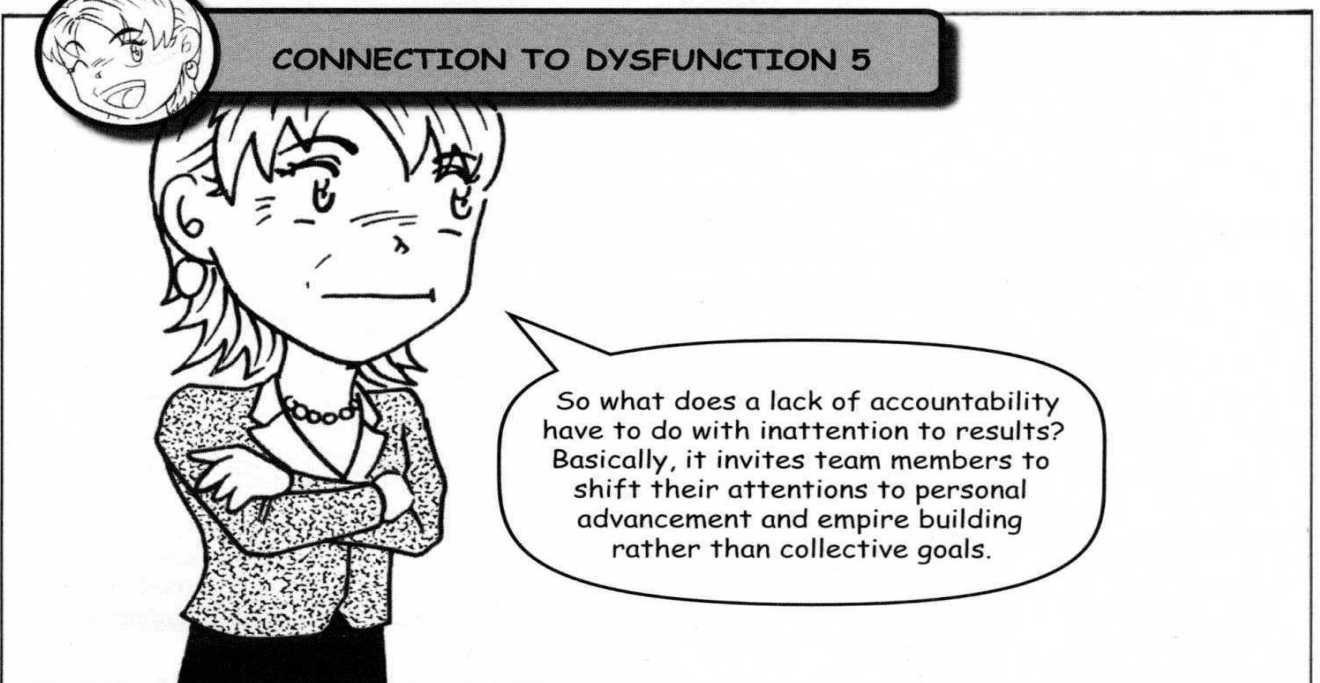
A strong leader who acts as the only source of discipline creates an "accountability vacuum" within the team.

Why? Because team members will often remain silent, even when something is clearly wrong.



ARBITRATOR OF DISCIPLINE

One of a leader's toughest challenges is to allow and encourage the team itself to monitor accountability.



CONNECTION TO DYSFUNCTION 5

So what does a lack of accountability have to do with inattention to results? Basically, it invites team members to shift their attentions to personal advancement and empire building rather than collective goals.



DYSFUNCTION 5: INATTENTION TO RESULTS



The ultimate dysfunction is when team members care about personal gain more than the group's collective goals.



Any team that judges itself on performance needs an unrelenting focus on specific objectives and clearly defined outcomes.



The results aren't limited to financial measures like profit, revenue, or shareholder returns, either.

Although many organizations use those metrics to measure success, this dysfunction has to do with outcome-based performance.

PROFIT

REVENUE

SHARE HOLDER RETURNS

OUTCOME-BASED PERFORMANCE



Every good organization specifies goals for a given period that represent the majority of near-term, controllable results.



Profit may be a company's ultimate scorecard, but the objectives its executives set for themselves are representative of the results they strive for as a team. Ultimately, these goals drive profit.

What else would a team focus on? Team status and individual status are the prime candidates.



Plenty of teams—including political groups, famous firms, and even non-profit orgs—succumb to the lure of status.

Their members find success in merely being associated with the organization. Achieving specific results might be desirable but not worthy of self-sacrifice or inconvenience.



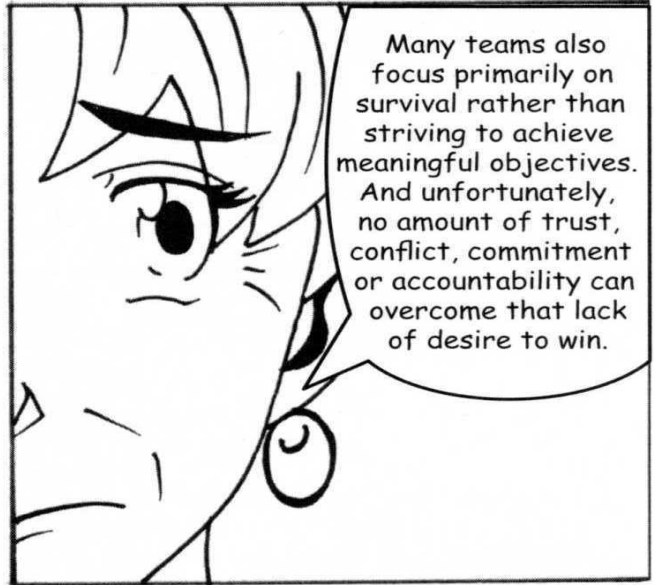
TEAM STATUS

People tend to focus on their own interests at the expense of team goals. Successful teams make collective results more important than individual goals.



INDIVIDUAL STATUS

Many teams also focus primarily on survival rather than striving to achieve meaningful objectives. And unfortunately, no amount of trust, conflict, commitment or accountability can overcome that lack of desire to win.



A team that doesn't focus on collective results stagnates, and achievement-oriented employees leave as the company loses its competitive edge. Team members also become easily distracted as they focus on personal goals.

Teams that focus on collective results minimize selfish behavior. They avoid distractions, compete more successfully, and hold on to achievement-oriented staff.





SUGGESTIONS FOR OVERCOMING DYSFUNCTION 5

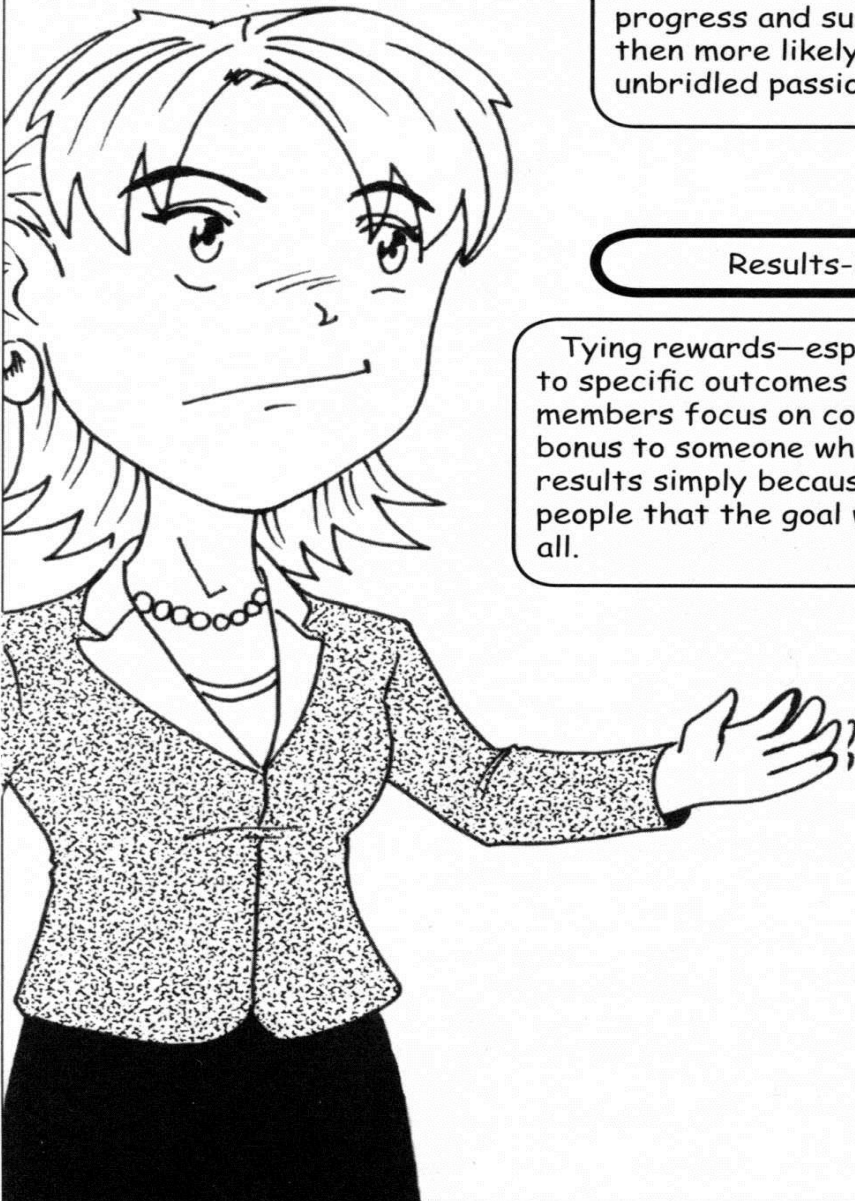
A team can ensure a focus on collective results by making those goals clear and only rewarding the behaviors and actions that contribute to them.

Publication of goals and standards

Athletes who publicly state that their team will tear a rival apart cause coaches to gnash their teeth and provoke opponents. Business teams, however, should openly predict progress and success, because they are then more likely to pursue them with unbridled passion.

Results-based rewards

Tying rewards—especially compensation—to specific outcomes helps ensure that team members focus on collective results. Giving a bonus to someone who has achieved no notable results simply because they tried hard tells people that the goal wasn't so important after all.





THE ROLE OF THE LEADER



The leader must focus on collective results. If the team senses that the leader values personal goals more, they'll feel free to do the same.

team leader

- **focused**
- **selfless**
- **objective**
- **recognizing contributions and achievement of group goals**

Team leaders must also be selfless and objective, and reserve rewards and recognition for those who truly serve group goals.

Successful teamwork ultimately comes down to following a set of principles over a long period, and embracing common sense with uncommon levels of discipline, persistence and openness.



By acknowledging their human imperfections, great teams overcome the natural tendencies that make trust, conflict, commitment, accountability, and a focus on results so elusive.

Ironically, great teams succeed because they are exceedingly human.

