The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer

Transcript for Episode #077: The Five Dysfunctions of a Team and How to Overcome Them

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Amy Climer: Welcome to The Deliberate Creative Podcast Episode 77. Today's episode, I want to talk with you about The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, which is a model designed by Patrick Lencioni. This whole concept of these five dysfunctions of a team I first learned about in reading Patrick Lencioni's book with the same title: The Five Dysfunctions of a Team. By the time I had read the book, I had already been facilitating teams, doing team buildings, team effectiveness exercises for at least a decade. When I read his book, I realized this is the stuff I have been working on with teams but I had not thought of laying it out in this way. He set up this model that just made it so clear to me and I now use this model all the time with my clients. It helps them understand these are the things that we need to do if we want to be more effective as a team. I want to share this with you because if you have a team that you are trying to be creative with, you absolutely have to have these elements as part of your team. If you want to be creative, you have to be effective as a team.

I have put together a one-page cheat sheet of the model that you can download from my website. If you go to www.climerconsulting.com/077 you can download just an image of the model. That is helpful if you want to do that right now and then you can listen along to the podcast or if you want to have a reference sheet later afterwards. Go to www.climerconsulting.com/077.

Let me just give you a visual image of what this model looks like. I want you to imagine a pyramid or a triangle with the widest base at the bottom pointing straight up. There are five layers to this triangle. The bottom is the foundation and the layers really build on each other. Although you will see, as I am talking about it, that they all interconnect. It is sort of hard to

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separate them out as separate things, but we do that to make it easy to talk about and communicate.

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

1. Absence of Trust [02:58]

The most important thing team members need if they are going to be effective working together is they need to have trust. The dysfunction is the Absence of Trust. When Lencioni talks about trust, what he is saying is there are different layers to trust. One of those layers is I trust that if my team member says that they are going to do something, they are actually going to do it. I trust that because they have done that in the past and I have seen a history there. That is a type of trust and that is an important type of trust.

However, it is even more important to take that a layer further. This is the type of trust where I can be vulnerable with my team members. Where I can come to work and be in this team and be fully myself. Where I am not constantly monitoring what I am saying or worried if I am saying the right thing. My team members know my weaknesses, they know my skill deficiencies, they know my interpersonal shortcomings and they still love me and I am still part of the team. I am able to make mistakes and I am able to ask for help. When team members have that level of trust with each other, that can lead to an amazing performing team.

For each of these layers I want to talk about what gets in the way and the role of the leader. What gets in the way of trust is invulnerability. If team members are not willing to be vulnerable with each other, it is very difficult to trust each other. There needs to be some vulnerability. However, what their leader can do to help develop that is go first. It is very difficult for team members to be vulnerable and be real with each other if their leader is not modeling that and they are not seeing that from their leader. If you are a leader and you want your team members to be more open with each other, you have to start by being more open with them. Make it clear what your weaknesses are. The reality is they already know what they are, but if you are constantly trying to hide them as opposed to being open and talking about them, that just creates some issues. Just being open about it.

At the same time, there should also be kind of the striving to overcome those weaknesses or work on them, but not at the expense of not sharing them, if that makes sense. Point is that the foundation of every team is having a deep level of trust amongst each other.

2. Fear of Conflict [05:50]

Move up to the next layer in the pyramid and the dysfunction is the Fear of Conflict. If team members want to be effective together, they have to be willing to engage in some conflict with each other. I have talked about this in other episodes of the podcast. There are certain types of conflicts that are helpful and certain types that are not. The helpful conflict is where we can disagree around ideas or about how we might work together, but we are not disagreeing because of personality or identity.

If we are exploring an issue or a problem, it is okay to engage in some conflict there. Because if we do not engage in some conflict then what might happen is that we move forward with an idea that everyone does not agree with and that some people may actually feel like it is a bad idea. But because they risk conflict, they are too afraid to say anything and speak up against the trajectory, they are quiet and they do not speak up and that is called Group Think. Bad things have happened because people have not spoken up when they should have. It is important for team members to talk through ideas or decisions that you are making. You need to be able to talk through that.

What gets in the way of conflict is artificial harmony. When we pretend that everything is okay, that is not helpful. What the leader could do to help engage that conflict is what Lencioni refers to as Mine for the Conflict. Think of like a miner in a cave or outside of the mountain digging for gold or digging for rubies or whatever image you want to have there, kind of digging for that conflict. Be careful with this metaphor because you are not digging super deep and trying to incite conflict and have this blow-out conversation or this big argument with the team. That is not what we are talking about. What we are talking about is that if you have a sense that somebody does not agree with someone but they are not speaking up, then you might ask them, "Hey Amy, what's going on in your mind right now? You're awfully quiet right now. Would you be willing to share what you are thinking?" It could be something as simple as that. That is an example of mining for conflict.

The other thing that might be helpful is if there is something in the team's history that has not been addressed, it may be important to bring that up again and talk about it and resolve that issue. Unresolved conflicts or unresolved issues can kind of linger and fester and cause some issues.

The dysfunction there is the Fear of Conflict and you want to be able to have some conflict in an appropriate way with bringing in your full emotional intelligence, if you will. You do not want to have conflict all the time, at some point you have to actually agree on what we are doing while moving forward and that is a good segue into the next level.

3. Lack of Commitment [08:59]

The next dysfunction is Lack of Commitment. What gets in the way of the commitment is actually the ambiguity. Often, it is not team members' unwillingness to commit to whatever the team is working towards, but it might not be clear about what they are supposed to be doing and what they are supposed to be committing to. What the leader can do is to push clarity and closure.

Let's say that you have talked about a decision and as the leader or even as a team member, it seems that the conversation has ended and there has been some resolution. It can be very helpful if someone would just restate, "All right, it sounds like we just agreed on blah, blah, blah," or, "It sounds like we just agreed on blah, blah, blah and John is going to move forward with this, Jose is going to go do this, Maria is going to work with this," and it is very clear who is going to be doing what as you move forward. Often, when people know what is expected of them, they are willing to step up and do it. But if you are seeing a lack of commitment from your team, it may just be that there is a lack of awareness and understanding of what they are supposed to do. Be careful because as a leader, it may be very clear to you. Do not assume that just because it is clear to you it is clear to every team member.

4. Avoidance of Accountability [10:37]

The fourth level is accountability. The dysfunction is the Avoidance of Accountability. This is a tough one for a lot of people because accountability means there needs to be some confrontation, which can be challenging, and that is what the leader has to do. The role of the leader is to confront difficult issues. There are a number of ways you can do that well, which I will not go into all those now, but I would say it is very valuable as a leader and even as a team

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member, to learn how to confront difficult issues. There is a great book that I highly recommend called [Difficult](#) [Conversations](#). I will put a link to that in the shownotes. Great book that can help kind of map out some ways to address difficult issues.

By avoiding the accountability what you are saying is that you are accepting the standards as they are. What gets in the way is low standards. If you do not address an issue that is happening, you are saying the way it is right now is okay with me. Having that accountability is very important to help the team be more effective together and help them achieve the results. And you can see that the commitment, that clearness around what is it that we are committing to, is needed before you can get into accountability. Sometimes people are not doing what they said they are going to do because they do not know and so then it is hard to hold them accountable if they do not actually know what they are supposed to do.

So making that clear and then having those conversations. It could be as simple as you are in a team meeting, something is due, you are expecting something from Maria, for instance, and Maria did not do it. Instead of just saying, "Okay, no big deal. You could do it by next week," have a conversation. Just right there in the team meeting just say, "What happened, Maria? Can you tell us a little about what is going on? Do you need any help? Do you need any support?" Just talk about it. It does not have to be this big deal. It does not have to be this huge issue. It could just be as simple as a few follow-up questions in the moment. That is an example of accountability.

What is great is if the team gets to the point where this is not only coming from the team leader, but this is coming from other team members. I would say that is like the advanced team where they are high performing, they are holding each other accountable and really I think that is the goal of most teams, is to get to that point. The Avoidance of Accountability is the dysfunction so the competency would be keeping each other accountable.

5. Inattention to Results [13:23]

Number five, the very top level of the pyramid, the dysfunction is Inattention to Results. Obviously, what you want to do is pay attention to results and strive to meet them. What gets in the way of this is status and ego. Status might be that somebody is on the team and that is what they want. They just want to be on the team because it is cool. It could be that you are on a board as part of a non-profit or that you got put on a certain project team or whatever it is.

Maybe it is the executive team of an organization and that status of being in the C-Suite, that is enough. That actually gets in the way of the results because you do not care about the results of the team, you just care about looking good, and there is the go piece. That gets in the way of results.

The thing is, getting to results it takes a lot of hard work. If you are too worried or if team members are too worried about their status and ego, they are usually not going to do the work. What the leader could do is focus on collective outcomes and focusing on why is it we are doing what we are doing. What is the purpose of our work? What is our work that we are trying to do? How are we moving forward with that? What is it that each person needs to do? Having action plans and really focusing on those collective outcomes, being very clear of what each person is supposed to do. Those are the results that you are striving for.

That is an overview of the five dysfunctions of a team model. I highly recommend reading Patrick Lencioni's book. It is a quick read. I think of it as an airplane book because if you have like a two-hour airplane flight, it is just a great book to read on the flight. It is quick and easy. In the book, what I love is he lays it out as a fable so it is a story of a team. You get to see what it might look like in a team that is dealing with these issues and how they resolve these issues.

How You Might Improve These Dysfunctions

Now that you have the overview, I just want to briefly talk about how you might improve on each of these levels. I am going to start with trust at the bottom.

1. Absence of Trust [15:35]

One way you can develop trust within the team is to set up some situations where team members have the opportunity to be vulnerable with each other. This could be where team members are sharing their stories, what is it that has made them who they are, their life story, their personal histories, if you will. You can also do -- I hesitate to use the word team building because I think sometimes teambuilding we think of like we are going to get together and toss around some balls and play some games. I have facilitated many games with teams but what is super important is that if you do that that you are very clear about why you are doing that and

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that it actually fits with your goals of building trust. That can work if it is done with intentionality and if you have a strong facilitator who is leading the group through that process.

The challenge or the issue with doing team building activities is it can come off as like hokey or ingenuine and that is obviously not what you want and that actually might cause harm if you are trying to build trust within your team. And you know your team. Some teams love that stuff and they just get really excited about it and some do not. I would say do not force it, as far as the games go.

The other piece around trust that could be really valuable is to use a tool to help team members understand each other's strengths and weaknesses. For instance, something like Myers-Briggs or DISC or especially if you are focusing on creativity, you might consider FourSight, which I talked about in Episode 08. I interviewed Blair Miller who talked about FourSight. It is a great tool to help us understand how we solve problems. We all have different approaches to how we solve problems or how we communicate or how we interact and when we can see those tools or the results of an assessment laid out, that can help us understand each other better and understand how we fit together better. Those are a couple of ideas on how you might build trust within the team.

Also know that it is a slow process. I think sharing stories about who you are, your personal histories, as well as doing an assessment can speed that process up, but it does still take time. Those are a couple of ways that you can build trust.

2. Fear of Conflict [18:19]

As far as helping build appropriate conflict within the team, I mentioned before mining for conflict and I shared an example of the type of question that you might ask in the middle of a team meeting if you see that something is not quite right. Asking those questions requires some courage and some confidence and, I think, also some humility. So much of how we communicate and ask questions is about our tone. If you are asking somebody like, "Hey, you have been awfully quiet, I'd love to hear what you're thinking," and doing that in a way that says, "Hey, I'm curious," as opposed to like, "Hey, you haven't said anything. What's up?" Probably not going to be the most helpful, especially if that person is not at all concerned about sharing their perspective.

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The other thing you could do is just making sure if there is a moment where you can sense; like we are having a conversation, there is some conflict happening, it is getting difficult and team members might start retreating because it is not comfortable, reminding team members this is part of the process and even though it is uncomfortable, stay with it and stick with it and let's continue the conversation. Almost like hitting a pause button and saying, "I get it. I know that you might be uncomfortable right now, keep going because what you're doing is really good." A little bit of that encouragement, if you will, can be helpful.

3. Lack of Commitment [19:49]

Dysfunction number three was Lack of Commitment. One of the things that you can do to increase commitment is making sure everybody knows what we are committing to. I am a big fan of having things visually in writing either on a flipchart, on the dry erase board in the room or on a slide that everybody is seeing. Say somebody is taking notes and you project that up on the screen and so you can type in like here is what we are committing to and here is who is going to be doing what. Action plans are a great way to make that commitment more clear.

I am actually sometimes surprised with how many teams do not use some sort of written planning process when they are trying to work on a project together. I guess I just get all dumbfounded that if you are trying to work on a project together, there are multiple people involved, having something written out like here is the task, here is who is doing it, here is when it is due, here is what needs to happen and then you have the next task and the next task and every task has an assignment of what is doing it, by when and what they need, what resources, et cetera. Something like that is important. There are a zillion different models and formats that you can use. It does not have to be fancy. It could be as simple as just like a flipchart on the wall or it could be an Excel spreadsheet or you could use a tool like Asana or Basecamp which are online tools. Anyway, having a way to visually record what everyone is supposed to do.

And then also it is important, especially when you are focusing on commitment, that people actually agree to do what you said they are going to do or do what you talked about. Just because it gets up on the wall that the person whose name is assigned to it, are they willing to do it? Do they agree with that? Be careful with assigning people tasks that are not in the room. That happens sometimes in meetings like, "Oh, Joe is not here. Let's give it to him." Not necessarily cool.

4. Avoidance of Accountability [21:56]

The fourth level is Avoidance of Accountability. You want to look at how do I help the team be more accountable to each other? One of those is to make sure there are written agreed-upon goals and standards. What are we even working on together and what is our standard? How are we trying to do that? What is the quality of work we are looking for? What might that quality look like? And that should be, in my opinion, a shared conversation. Not necessarily something that has come down from above and slapped on the table, but that team members have the opportunity to dig in and explore and talk about that together. Having some written goals and standards can be really helpful.

The action plans that I mentioned in level three, the Lack of Commitment, those will help with the accountability and being able to have conversations around those. Depending on how often you are meeting, you might want to do a periodic review of where you are at in general. Maybe at every meeting you are looking at the specifics, but then sometimes you might want to pull back and review. It might be valuable to review each individual on the team and give them some feedback about how they are doing. That feedback can be really helpful and it can help ensure that you are not letting low standards slide.

The other thing is you might think about how is the team rewarded? A lot of times what happens is that teams are given a joint shared project that they are supposed to be working on together, but at the end of the day they are rewarded individually. That can make it difficult especially when we look at the fifth level, the Inattention to Results, and we look at status of ego. If I am worried about say getting a raise or getting some sort of reward, individually, that may change how I show up as a team member. And so is there a way the team could be rewarded as a team?

I think one of the great examples is sports teams. They either all win or they all lose. If you look especially at the professional level, there are issues about some team members getting paid a lot and some are not, but if you look at just like winning and losing, they are either all winning or they are all losing and that does have an impact on every individual person. What does that joint accountability look like? What are the results? What are the rewards they might get?

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5. Inattention to Results [24:32]

The fifth level is results. The dysfunction was the Inattention to Results. One of the things you could do is make sure it is very clear what is our team striving for. Let's say you are part of the executive team of an organization, the results of your team is not the same as the mission of the organization. There are some more specific results that your team is looking at. The mission or the vision of the organization is very big and broad, as it should be. On a level down, the executive team might be working together to achieve some results, but what are those results? I found that a lot of times, executive teams do not know what their purpose is as a team and they do not know what they are really working towards.

Being very clear with that, again, having that in writing, making sure that every team member can articulate it, not repeat it verbatim. In my opinion, it does not matter if members can recite the mission of the organization, but what matters is can they talk about it in their own words and can they talk about the purpose of the team in their own words and are they excited about it, have they bought into it? Make sure there are clear results that are in writing that everybody can talk about.

The other thing is that you want to make those results public. Depending on the situation, you may want to make those results public. That could be public within the organization, that could be public within the world, everybody. But when the results, the intention, what you are striving for becomes public, we now have this different level of accountability that it is not just the five to ten people in my team that I am accountable to, I am now accountable to the entire organization or the entire public. Everybody is looking at me. That is another layer of accountability that can drive results.

Those are a few ways that you might help lead your team to get to those different levels and to really become a high performing team. If you are a team leader and you want your team to focus on these five levels, definitely put some thought into how you might do that. You might want to bring in an outside facilitator to help with some pieces of this, particularly the trust level or helping people learn how to give and receive feedback, how to engage in productive conflict. Those could be some really helpful tools to develop within your team members.

Sometimes it can be really tough to be both a leader of a team, or even a team member, and also a facilitator, particularly when you really want to focus on the team. That may be a time

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where you bring in an outside facilitator to help you with that process and also to be a bit of a thought leader and help you think through what is the best way to address this with this particular team in this situation. If that is something that I could help you with, please reach out to me. You can get in touch with me on my website at www.climerconsulting.com. As I said at the beginning of this episode, I put together just a one-age cheat sheet about this model from Patrick Lencioni and you can download that at www.climerconsulting.com/077.

I hope this was helpful. I hope this helps you think through different areas of strengths and weaknesses within your team.

Weekly Challenge [28:04]

First, download the cheat sheet with the model so you can see this visually and then just do like a quiet assessment of where do you think your team is at on each of these levels. You might even give yourself a one to five rating of where do you think they are with trust, conflict, commitment and so forth. If you are really interested in this, I highly recommend Patrick Lencioni's book. Go buy the book and I will put a link in the shownotes. In the back of the book, there is an assessment tool that he has created. It is just a quick 15-question tool that you can take to get a better sense of where your team is at with these different levels.

If your team, on a scale of one to five, they are not in a four to five on each of these different levels, then you have some work to do. In my opinion, it is totally worth it because it is all about getting the results that you are trying to get. So what is the purpose of your team, what are they trying to do together? If those results are important, then the work of working on the team and with each other and developing those relationships is also important because that will help you get to those results.

Again, if there is anything I can do to help you or if you have any questions about this, feel free to reach out to me. I would love to hear from you. Have a wonderful creative week. I will see you next time. Bye.

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