

Understanding and Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Chapter

Not **finance**. Not strategy. Not technology. It is **chapter work** that remains the ultimate advantage, both because it is so powerful and so rare.

You can best express the power of chapter work by this statement:

“If you could get all the people in an organization rowing in the **same** direction, you could accomplish the goals, in any ministry, against any opposition, at any time.”

Building a strong chapter is both possible and remarkably **simple**. But it is painfully difficult.

Chapter work comes down to mastering a set of behaviors that are at once theoretically **uncomplicated**, but extremely **difficult** to put into practice day after day. Success comes only for those groups that overcome the all-too human behavioral tendencies that corrupt chapters and breed dysfunctional politics within them.

Chapter Assessment

Use the scale below to indicate how each statement applies to your chapter. It is important to evaluate the statements honestly and without over-thinking your answers.

3 = Usually

2 = Sometimes

1 = Rarely

- _____ 1. Chapter members are passionate and open in their discussion of issues.
- _____ 2. Chapter members call out one another's deficiencies or unproductive behaviors.
- _____ 3. Chapter members know what their peers are working on and how they contribute to the collective good of the chapter.
- _____ 4. Chapter members quickly and genuinely apologize to one another when they say or do something inappropriate or possibly damaging to the chapter.
- _____ 5. Chapter members willingly make sacrifices in their areas of expertise for the good of the chapter.
- _____ 6. Chapter members openly admit their weaknesses and mistakes.
- _____ 7. Chapter meetings are vigorous, and not boring.
- _____ 8. Chapter members leave meetings confident that their chapter is completely committed to the decisions that were agreed on, even if there was initial disagreement.
- _____ 9. Morale is significantly affected by the failure to achieve chapter goals.
- _____ 10. During chapter meetings, the most important – and difficult – issues are put on the table to be resolved.
- _____ 11. Chapter members are deeply concerned about the prospect of letting down their peers.

- _____12. Chapter members know about one another's personal lives and are comfortable discussing them.
- _____13. Chapter members end discussions with clear and specific resolutions and calls to action.
- _____14. Chapter members challenge one another about their plans and approaches.
- _____15. Chapter members are slow to seek credit for their own contributions, but quick to point out those of others.

Chapter Scoring

Combine your scores for the preceding statements as indicated below.

Dysfunction 1: Absence of Trust

Statement 4: _____

Statement 6: _____

Statement 12: _____

Total _____

Dysfunction 2: Fear of Conflict

Statement 1: _____

Statement 7: _____

Statement 10: _____

Total _____

Dysfunction 3: Lack of Commitment

Statement 3: _____

Statement 8: _____

Statement 13: _____

Total _____

Dysfunction 4: Avoidance of Accountability

Statement 2: _____

Statement 11: _____

Statement 14: _____

Total _____

Dysfunction 5: Inattention to Results

Statement 5: _____

Statement 9: _____

Statement 15: _____

Total _____

A score of 8 or 9 is a probable indication that the dysfunction is not a problem for your chapter.

A score of 6 or 7 indicates that the dysfunction could be a problem.

A score of 3 to 5 is probably an indication that the dysfunction needs to be addressed.

Regardless of your scores, it is important to keep in mind that every chapter needs constant work, because without it, even the best ones deviate toward dysfunction.

Dysfunction #1: Absence of Trust

Members of chapters with an absence of trust:

- **Conceal** their weaknesses and mistakes from one another.
- Hesitate to ask for **help** or provide constructive feedback.
- Hesitate to **offer** help **outside** their own areas of responsibility.
- **Jump** to conclusions about the intentions and attitudes of others without attempting to clarify them.
- Fail to recognize and **tap** into one another's skills and experiences.
- Hold **grudges**.
- **Dread** meetings and find reasons to avoid spending time together.

Members of trusting chapters:

- **Admit** weaknesses and mistakes.
- Ask for help.
- **Accept** questions and input about their areas of responsibility.
- Give one another the **benefit** of the doubt before arriving at a negative conclusion.
- Take risk in offering feedback and assistance.
- Appreciate and tap into one another's skills and experiences.
- Focus time and energy on **important** issues, not politics.
- Offer and accept apologies without hesitation.
- Look forward to meetings and other opportunities to work as a group.

Suggestions for Overcoming Dysfunction #1: Absence of Trust

- **Personal Histories Exercise:** Have each chapter member answer a short list of questions about themselves i.e.:
 - Number of children
 - Hometown
 - Unique challenges of childhood
 - Favorite hobbies
 - First job

- Worst job
- Simply by describing these relatively harmless attributes or experiences, chapter members begin to relate to one another on a more personal basis.
- **Chapter Effectiveness Exercise:** Requires each chapter member to identify the single most important contribution that each of their peers makes to the chapter, as well as the one area that they must either improve upon or eliminate for the good of the chapter.

Dysfunction #2: Fear of Conflict

📺 Members of a chapter with a fear of conflict:

- Have **boring** meetings.
- Create environments where behind the back personal **attacks** thrive.
- **Ignore** controversial topics that are critical to chapter success.
- Fail to **tap** into all the opinions and perspectives of chapter members.
- Waste time and energy with an attitude merely for effect.

📺 Chapters that engage in conflict.

- Have lively, **interesting** meetings.
- Extract and exploit the ideas of all chapter members.
- Solve real problems **quickly**.
- Minimize politics.
- Put critical topics on the table for discussion.

📺 *Suggestions for Overcoming Dysfunction #2: Fear of Conflict*

- The first step is acknowledging that conflict is productive, and that many chapters have a tendency to avoid it.
- Members of chapters must occasionally assume the role of a “negotiator”---someone who has the courage and confidence to call out sensitive issues and force chapter members to work through them.
- Real-Time Permission.
- In the process, chapter members need to coach one another not to retreat from healthy debate.
- Remind them that what they are doing is necessary.
- Once discussion or meeting has ended, remind participants that the conflict they just engaged in is good for the chapter.

Dysfunction #3: Lack of Commitment

📺 A chapter that fails to commit:

- Creates **uncertainty** among the chapter about direction and priorities.
- Breeds lack of **confidence** and fear of failure.
- Revisits discussions and decisions again and again.
- Encourages second-guessing among chapter members.

🎬 **A chapter that commits:**

- Creates **clarity** around direction and priorities.
- **Aligns** the entire chapter around common objectives.
- Develops an ability to **learn** from mistakes.
- Moves **forward** without hesitation.
- Changes direction without hesitation or guilt.

🎬 **The two greatest causes of the lack of commitment are the desire for general agreement and the need for certainty.** Great chapters understand the danger of seeking consensus, and find ways to achieve buy-in even when complete agreement is impossible.

🎬 **Consensus:** Great chapters understand that reasonable human beings do not need to get their way in order to support a decision, but only need to know that their opinions have been heard and considered.

🎬 **Certainty:** Great chapters also pride themselves on being able to unite behind decisions and commit to clear courses of action even when there is little assurance about whether the decision is correct. They also realize that it is better to make a decision boldly and be wrong – and then change direction with equal boldness – than to be indecisive.

🎬 ***Suggestions for Overcoming Dysfunction #3: Lack of Commitment***

- **Cascading Messaging** – Ending a meeting, a chapter reviews the key decisions made during the meeting, and agree on what needs to be communicated to the other members.
- One of the best tools for ensuring commitment is the **use of clear deadlines regarding the decisions that were made.**
- **Worst-Case Scenario Analysis** – Briefly discuss or clarify the worst-case scenario for a decision you are struggling to make. This usually allows you to reduce your fears by helping you realize that the cost of an incorrect decision is survivable, and far less damaging than you had imagined.

Dysfunction #4: Avoidance of Accountability

🎬 **A chapter that avoids accountability:**

- Creates **resentment** among chapter members who have different standards of performance.
- Encourages **mediocrity**.
- Misses deadlines.
- Places an undue burden on the chapter leader as the sole source of discipline.

🎬 **A chapter that holds one another accountable:**

- **Ensures** that poor performers feel pressure to improve.
- Identifies potential problems quickly by questioning one another's approaches without hesitation.
- **Establishes** respect among chapter members who are held to the same high standards.

🎬 ***Suggestions for Overcoming Dysfunction #4: Avoidance of Accountability***

- **Publication of Goals and Standards** – Clarify publicly exactly what the chapter needs to achieve, who needs to deliver what, and how everyone must behave in order to succeed.
- **Simple and Regular Progress Reviews:** Chapter members should regularly communicate with one another, either verbally or in written form, about how they feel their chapter mates are doing against stated objectives and standards.

Dysfunction #5: Inattention to Results

The ultimate dysfunction of a chapter is the tendency of members to care about something other than the collective goals of the group.

📺 **A chapter that is not focused on results:**

- **Stagnates** and fails to grow.
- **Rarely** accomplishes their goals.
- Encourages chapter members to focus on their own individual goals.
- Is easily distracted.

📺 **A chapter that focuses on collective results:**

- **Retains** achievement-oriented members.
- Minimizes individualistic behavior.
- Enjoys **success** and suffers failure a short duration.
- Benefits from individuals who suppress their own goals/interests for the good of the chapter.
- Avoids distractions

📺 **Suggestions for Overcoming Dysfunction #5: Inattention to Results**

- **Public Declaration of Results:** Chapters that are willing to commit publicly to specific results are more likely to work with a passionate even desperate desire to achieve those results.
- Chapters that say, “We’ll do our best,” are preparing themselves for failure.

Summary

The reality remains that chapter work ultimately comes down to practicing a small set of principles over a long period of time.

Success is a matter of embracing common sense with uncommon levels of discipline and persistence.