



The Ideal Team Player by Patrick Lencioni

Think you might want to read this book?

Patrick Lencioni spends the first two-thirds of *The Ideal Team Player* explaining the three most important virtues of employees: humble, hungry, and smart. The final third is dedicated to understanding and applying those virtues to optimize teamwork in any organization. If you think you may know some “lovable slackers,” “accidental mess makers,” and “skillful politicians,” this book will help explain how to be sure they are and coach them to be better team players.

What would Socrates ask?

- Can you merge the virtues “hungry, humble, and smart” into the hiring process?
- What if you re-interviewed everyone at your school to check for fit?
- How do we instill “humble, hungry, and smart” into our students?
- In what way does our hiring process put the candidate in relaxed, stressful, and group situations?
- What is the best way to motivate someone lacking in humility? Hunger? Smarts?

Concepts

- How candidates treat the admin support staff may be the best indicator of humility.
- People who are only humble but not at all hungry or smart are the “pawns” on a team. They are pleasant, kind-hearted, unassuming people who just don’t feel a great need to get things done and don’t have the ability to build effective relationships with colleagues.
- People who are hungry but not at all humble or smart can be thought of as “bulldozers.” These people will be determined to get things done, but with a focus on their own interests and with not understanding or concern for how their actions impact others.
- People who are smart but sorely lacking in humility and hunger are “charmners.” They can be entertaining and even likeable for a while, but have little interest in the long-term well-being of the team or their colleagues.
- People who are humble and hungry but decidedly not smart are the “accidental mess-makers.” They genuinely want to serve the team and are not interested in getting a disproportionate amount of attention and credit. However, their lack of understanding of how their words and actions are received by others will lead them to inadvertently create interpersonal problems on the team.
- People who are humble and smart but not adequately hungry are the “lovable slackers.” They aren’t looking for underserved attention, and they are adept at working with and caring about colleagues. Unfortunately, they tend to do only as much as they are asked, and rarely seek to take on more work or volunteer for extra assignments.
- People who are hungry and smart but lack humility are the “skillful politicians.” These people are cleverly ambitious and willing to work extremely hard, but only in as much as it will benefit them personally. Unfortunately, because they are so smart, skillful politicians are very adept at portraying themselves as being humble, making it hard for leaders to identify them and address their destructive behaviors.

Quotes from the author

- ... “the right people” are the ones who have the three virtues in common—humility, hunger, and people smarts. I refer to these as virtues because the word *virtue* is a synonym for the nouns *quality* and *asset*, but it also connotes the idea of integrity and

morality. Humility, which is the most important of the three, is certainly a virtue in the deepest sense of the word. Hunger and people smarts fall more into the quality or asset category. So, the word *virtue* best captures them all.

- Most candidates know how to project a sense of hunger during standard interviews. As a result, those leaders find themselves spending inordinate amounts of time trying to motivate, punish, or dismiss non-hungry team members once they're on board.
- Of the three virtues, this one needs the most clarification because it is not what it might seem; it is not about intellectual capacity. In the context of a team, *smart* simply refers to a person's common sense about people. It has everything to do with the ability to be interpersonally appropriate and aware.
- ...Keep in mind that accurately identifying people as bulldozers, charmers, prawns, accidental mess-makers, lovable slackers, or skillful politicians is not always easy, and shouldn't be done flippantly. Wrongly labeling a team member, even in private or jest, can be damaging.
- Managers will need to be "smart" about how to use the terms with their employees. And remember, the real purpose of identifying these types is not to pigeonhole people, but to better understand what constitutes ideal team players so we can recognize or develop them on our teams.
- Too many interviews are so generic that they provide little or no insight into specific attributes. Instead, they leave interviewers with extremely general assessments of candidates. "She seems like a nice person. I like her."
- I often like to talk with candidates in a room with multiple team members. This allows us to debrief more effectively (e.g., "What did you think he meant when he said ...?") This also gives you a sense of how the candidate deals with multiple people at once, which is a critical skill on a team. Some people are much different on-on-one than they are in a group, and you need to know that.
- It is amazing that as we move further into the twenty-first century, most interviews are still the same stilted, rehearsed, and predictable conversations they were forty years ago. The problem is not that they are boring or old fashioned, but rather that they aren't effective for discerning whether a person has the behavioral skills and values that match an organization or a team.
- I do believe that interviews should incorporate interaction with diverse groups of people in everyday situations and that they should be longer than forty-five minutes.
- Asking an interviewee a question once often yields a generically acceptable answer. Asking that question again in a different way might get you a different answer. If you're not sold on the response, ask a third time in a more specific way, and you will often get a more honest answer.
- Instead of asking someone if he is humble, ask, "If I were to ask your colleagues to assess your level of humility, what would they say?" Some interviewers will think this sounds obvious, but then they'll admit that they don't do it enough. Others will wonder if such a seemingly small change in tactics can make a difference. But there is just something about having to answer on behalf of another person that makes a candidate more honest.
- A doctor can't be asked to do surgery before being hired, but a copy editor, and advertising manager, or a management consultant can be given a simulated work project. The point is not to get free work, but rather to see how people perform in real-world situations so you can discern whether they are humble, hungry, and smart.
- If you have a doubt about a person's humility, hunger, or smarts, don't ignore it. Keep probing. More often than not, there is something causing that doubt.
- Knowing whether a person has people smarts is difficult to discern by asking a specific question. What is more important is observing her general behavior during an interview

process and the way she answers questions. That's why it's important to put her in situations that are not like traditional interviews. Some people can mask their social awkwardness during a rehearsed interview, but for a longer period of time in a fluid situation, it is much harder.

- Ask the reference to serve as a consultant, one whose job it is to ensure that there is a fit that will benefit everyone.
- What happens when a manager can't decide if an employee has the will or ability to improve? My preference, and my recommendation, is to err on the side of caution and keep working with the employee. Why? Because I believe it is a tragedy to lose an employee for the wrong reasons. Not only does it create an unnecessarily painful situation for that person, but it also robs the team of a potentially valuable contributor.
- All too often in life, we see people do what we want them to do and we say nothing, assuming that the behavior has become natural for them. An easy standard. We justify our lack of praise by claiming that it would be embarrassing to the employee to call attention to a behavior that she sees as something fundamental. What we're failing to realize is that the point of praise is not only to reinforce the behavior in that employee, but also to reinforce it in everyone else.

Quotes from others

- "Humility isn't thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less." - C.S. Lewis

Gateways to further learning

- [The Table Group](#)

Referenced books with the potential to impact leading and learning in education

Author(s) Last Name	Title
Collins	<i>Good to Great</i>
Lencioni	<i>The Five Dysfunctions of a Team</i>

The applicability of this book to education is



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