

THE CEO'S EXPRESS LANE TO COHESIVE LEADER TEAMS

By Jamey Gadoury



“*The Advantage* is a must-read book for leaders. When I opened it several years ago, I found that Lencioni had captured nearly everything I believed about helping organizations improve - and more! He also provided a useful vocabulary to talk about it. You’ll find his influence here.”

Jamey Gadoury



HOW COHESIVE IS YOUR LEADER TEAM?

In *The Advantage*, Patrick Lencioni lays out a model for organizational health. His first step is “Build a Cohesive Leadership Team.” I agree with Pat! The team’s **cohesion**¹ creates a solid foundation for optimizing success in the company.

Leaders often think about cohesion (or its absence) during inflection points in the business - acquisitions, dramatic growth, tough times, or recruitment of a new leader team.

Let’s think through that last one...

1. Think of cohesion as “working well together” or, more formally: “the presence of close-knit relationships that allow a team to move in unity toward a common goal.”

Technically, even one new leader means a new team.

The dynamic has changed.

A NEW TEAM

A new leader team presents this challenge:

1. How do you “gel” the team as quickly as possible?
2. How do you get them to work together with the same cohesiveness that you see in experienced teams?

Weeks - even months - of hard work went into recruiting these leaders. You sifted through resumes and LinkedIn profiles, conducted interviews, and debated with colleagues. You looked for the best candidates that would be the right fit for this next season.

When the team is finally assembled, it’s good to take a breath and be grateful for the accomplishment. But the hard work continues. The task now is to take these talented professionals that you’ve recruited and gel them into an effective leader team. You’ve been around long enough to know: that’s no easy task.



WHAT YOU KNOW

You recruited these leaders for their exceptional talents and proven accomplishments. Within certain margins of error, you're confident that you've loaded the right people onto Jim Collins'¹ bus. But you also know that they each have strengths AND weaknesses. You know that friction points will emerge, and you wonder what personality clashes may be coming.

You're familiar with "storming and norming," and you want to move through those steps as quickly as possible. You know conflict is important for a team, but you want to make sure it's the healthy kind.

YOUR OPTIONS

You could leave it to chance. You could also hope for the diamond effect: with enough time and pressure the team MIGHT learn how to work well together.

Or you could choose more control on a tighter timeline. You can deliberately take the express lane.

1. Author of *Good to Great*



THE EXPRESS LANE

You're already doing the most important part - you've created space in your own schedule to reflect on your people, their needs, and future challenges. Continue to journal and whiteboard ideas as you go through this process.

You'll want to budget about 2 days of each leader's time, spread out over a month on the calendar. Here's the steps:

1. Set Expectations and Create Space
2. Equip Individuals
3. Equip the Team
4. Maintain and Replicate



STEP 1

SET EXPECTATIONS & CREATE SPACE

LET YOUR LEADERS KNOW WHAT'S COMING & TO PLAN FOR IT

Most companies are task-focused, busy doing the work and moving the ball forward. That's a good thing. **But this task-focus should systematically be interrupted to focus on strengthening critical relationships.** Let your people know this is one of those times. Strong relationships in the leader team belong at the top of the list. The costs of dysfunction on THIS team are far too high.

Organizationally, **you are going to create space on the calendar to invest in the leader team.** Communicate to your leaders that there will be a time investment, and that it requires their full attention. This cannot be done half-heartedly.

The focus will be first on themselves as individuals and then on one another as a team.



STEP 2

EQUIP THE INDIVIDUAL

YOUR LEADERS ARE AT DIFFERENT POINTS IN THEIR OWN GROWTH AND SELF-AWARENESS

At this point you will standardize some of that self-awareness. You want to create a common framework for each of them to think about themselves as leaders. There are several ways you can do this.

1. Perhaps you've been reading a book¹ that offers a framework on leadership. Ask your leaders to place themselves in that framework.
2. You can also leverage your own wisdom and experience and provide a few concise questions² that drive reflection.
3. You can leverage personality assessments, as DISC, Insights, Caliper, Hogan, MBTI®, or one organic to your organization. This is usually paired with coaching to enhance and accelerate self-awareness.

The important thing is that you provide a common framework for each leader to reflect and see himself or herself in a new light.

1. e.g. Lencioni's *The Advantage*, Sinek's *Leader's Eat Last* and *Start with Why*, Collins' *Good to Great*

2. e.g. "What is one thing a past team has told you (about you) that was hard to take? What did you do with it?"
"What is one thing about you, that if the rest of us truly understood it, would help us work with you better?"
"How is this leader team doing, right now, in terms of cohesion?"
"Why are you here, on this team?"



STEP 3

EQUIP THE TEAM

THE HEART OF THE PROCESS

In this step, you'll leverage the self-awareness and common framework from Step 2 to build what one author¹ has called "a strong lattice of trusting relationships".

Set aside 1-2 days where the leader team can meet for an off-site. During this off-site, you will drive conversations that help increase the strength of relationships among team members. **A critical piece of this is humanizing one another.** We often go through the daily schedule of work reducing one another to cogs in the machine, or to functional value. "I'm moving toward a goal, and what is most important is how you fit into that." Yet, each leader has hopes, dreams, and things that are important to him that don't always get air time at the office.

Sharing those human aspects requires a certain degree of vulnerability, a topic that researcher Brené Brown² has addressed at length in her books and her popular TED talks. She² notes that vulnerability should be appropriate, and that it involves risk. "Risk" is actually part of her definition. As the team humanizes one another and practices appropriate vulnerability, trust will deepen. (Watching that take place on a team - in real time - is one of the most rewarding parts of my work.)

You will also want to construct exercises that help each leader acknowledge and share important strengths and weaknesses (more vulnerability!) The output will be a team of leaders who understand one another and know how to leverage its collection of strengths and weaknesses for the good of the group.

1. Stan McChrystal in *Teams of Teams*
2. Brown defines vulnerability as "uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure" in *Dare to Lead*
3. Vulnerability is hard for most of us, and even harder when it's a new competency. Start small in those risks. Expect to be uncomfortable. Focus on things that are universally human, or universal for your team. If you are feeling it (anxiety, fear, uncertainty), chances are they are too. And they will appreciate you saying it.



STEP 4

MAINTAIN & REPLICATE

MAINTAIN THE GAINS

After the off-site, you want to **maintain the gains** you've achieved and increase the momentum. You also want to cascade these gains down to the rest of the organization. Here's a few steps toward that end:

- a) Within a week after the off-site, have pairs of leaders meet for 15 minutes or more to discuss their key take aways. This is a focus on the "so what?" **Each should answer "what have I observed since the meeting" and "what will I change?" (or "have I changed?")** This prompts a continued awareness of self and others, while also pushing for specific actions.
- b) Within a month and a half of the off-site, gather the team together for at least an hour to cover the same questions. Add to those questions a discussion on how your leaders are cascading the benefits of the off-site to the rest of the organization. Identify cost-effective ways to increase the self- and team-awareness of other members of the organization.
- c) Schedule another off-site at the 3-6 month mark. Continue to build the cohesion of the team, while also creating space for discussion of specific operational and strategic issues.



WE CAN HELP

This process works. Regardless of industry or size of company, it works. You can be effective following the process yourself.

And if you'd like some help, we'd love to hear from you.

[START YOUR JOURNEY](#)



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REFERENCES & ADDITIONAL READING

Good to Great

Jim Collins

The Advantage

Pat Lencioni

Team of Teams

General McChrystal

Leaders Eat Last

Simon Sinek

Dare to Lead

Brene Brown



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