

[*The ideal team player: How to recognise and cultivate the three essential virtues*](#), by Patrick Lencioni.

The ideal team player is a leadership fable; it is both interesting and easy reading. As a well-crafted story, it offers a very believable scenario which slowly unravels Lencioni's model, all the while the reader is identifying with the characters and their reactions and reflecting on their own experiences.

As I was reading *The ideal team player* I couldn't help but think of that famous Aristotle quote: 'He who cannot be a good follower cannot be a good leader.'

What we all know as school leaders is that the best precursor to success in senior leadership is a proven track record as an ideal team player.

We have all worked in teams when the dynamic is less than satisfactory, and Lencioni comes up with a most straightforward view on what makes an ideal team player. I would recommend anyone interested in developing a culture of team work in their organisation to take the time to read this book.

The ideal team player model centres around three virtues, indicating that every effective member of a team in an organisation should have all three. Lencioni writes:

For organizations seriously committed to making team-work a cultural reality, I'm convinced that the 'right people' are the ones who have those 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* captures them all. (2016, p. 155)

As we read the fable we are taken on the journey with Jeff, Bobby and Clare, who have taken over the running of the family business, Valley Builders. Jeff is new in the role of CEO and quickly realises that his team needs to expand and he starts to question why some managers and team members are more productive than others. With reference to Jim Collins' work *From good to great*, he knows he needs 'the right people on the bus'. As the story unfolds Jeff discovers that the ideal team player and, therefore, the right person must be Hungry, Smart (as in people smart) and Humble.

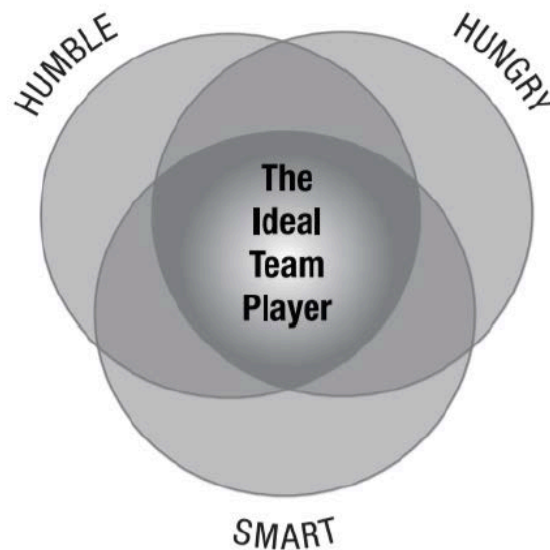


Hungry people are those who are motivated and hard working. They are always looking for more work, to learn more and to take on more responsibility in order to learn more. Hungry is about demonstrating a commitment to the job and going above and beyond what is required.

In the Lencioni model, Smart refers to having good relationships with people, being attuned to the group dynamics, judging social and work situations correctly, listening to others and responding appropriately. Lencioni likens it to having emotional intelligence but believes it is 'probably a little simpler than that' and that it 'refers to a person's common sense about people'. (2016, p. 160)

Humble is not about being self-deprecating and dismissing one's talents and contributions to the team. It is about directing ambition to building something great; about being generous in thought and behaviour, being inclusive, working with other people's strengths, and giving credit to those in the team. It is defined by a lack of ego and interest in status and hierarchy.

All three virtues need to be present in the ideal team player; the power is in the combination, not the individual attributes themselves (2016, p. 161). However, in proposing this Lencioni asserts 'that humility is the single greatest and most indispensable attribute of being a team player' (2016, p. 157).



(Lencioni 2016)

This model (Figure 1) shows that the Ideal Team Player sits in the intersection of all three virtues and, according to Lencioni,

When team members are adequately strong in each of these areas – when they possess significant humility, hunger and people smarts – they enable team work by ...[being] more likely to be vulnerable and build trust, engage in productive but uncomfortable conflict with team members, commit to group decisions even if they initially disagree, hold their peers accountable when they see performance gaps that can be addressed, and put the results of the team ahead of their own needs. (2016, p. 165).

With this description he is referencing his earlier work on teams, also another leadership fable, *The five dysfunctions of a team*.

Anyone who leads a team, or who is interested in being a better member of a team or in helping students to become better team members, should read *The ideal team player* as it will help in the recognition and cultivation of the three essential virtues of productive team work.

REFERENCES

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