What Keeps Organizations Healthy?
*By Sherill Hostetter, Organization Development Consultant and Leadership Coach*

We as human beings often get so involved in our work and interests that we ignore the signs of our physical body trying to get our attention. If our physical body parts could talk, the message often may be, “We are trying our best to perform for you, but we’re having difficulties within the system! Things are out of alignment; we’re sending you signals of pain and you’re ignoring them!”

A congregation can also get so busy going about its mission that the signs of unhealth within the system and team go ignored. The urgent often cries for attention while the significant unhealthy symptoms are tolerated.

And yet, Patrick Lencioni in *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else*, says that the single greatest advantage any organization can achieve is organizational health. It means dealing with issues that are critical, but don’t seem particularly urgent. You have to slow down in order to go fast. What Lencioni states about organizations in general relates to congregations as well.

Lencioni describes four necessary disciplines for health in any organization:

1.) **Building a cohesive leadership team**

A real team plays in an interactive, mutually dependent, and interchangeable manner. **Teamwork is a strategic choice.**

Building a cohesive team takes some investment of time in learning to know each other’s strengths and weaknesses so that the team can work out of their strengths together. How does this happen?

- **Create greater levels of trust.** Team is built on vulnerability based trust. Recent studies are revealing how important trust really is to success. Google’s Project Aristotle report in 2016 on the best predictor of high performance was whether the team had a culture of trust. In Paul Zak’s 2017 book *Trust Factor*, his years of research revealed that the more trust one is shown, the more the brain produces oxytocin, the body’s natural emotional upper hormone. Oxytocin maximizes teamwork as trust begets trust.

- **Mastering Conflict**

When there is trust, conflict becomes the pursuit of truth in finding the best solution. Many teams and/or congregations engage in conflict without trust and it becomes a game of politics. Overcoming the tendency to run from discomfort is one of the most important requirements of congregants/team.

- **Achieving commitment**

A team and/or congregation cannot achieve commitment without conflict. Persons will have more buy-in on decisions when they’ve had opportunity to give input, ask questions, and understand the rationale behind the proposals.
• **Embracing Accountability**
  Conflict is about issues and ideas, while accountability is about performance and behavior. In building a culture of trust, respect, and collaboration, congregants and team members can call for accountability among themselves where core values are not being upheld. This only can happen when there is clarity on vision, culture and core values, though.

• **Focusing on Results**
  Vision goals need to be higher than the goals of the subgroups within the congregation. Therefore, decision-making involves alignment in serving the entire congregation and maximizing performance.

2.) **Creating and Communicating Clarity**
Creating clarity is all about **achieving alignment**.

Critical questions named by Lencioni are:
- Why do we exist? (vision of unique value offered)
- How do we behave? (culture and core values)
- What do we do?
- How will we succeed? (strategic anchors)
- What is most important right now? (goals)
- Who must do what? (differentiating of roles)

Leaders should keep answers to these questions in front of them at all times.

**Just as healthy persons intentionally make appointments for annual physicals, organizations, including congregations need annual well-being check-ups as well.** What may be signs of unhealthiness? How can levels of trust be increased? Could strategic discussions bring more clarity to the six questions above? Physical health without healthy practices and check-ups cannot be taken for granted; neither can organizational and congregational health be taken for granted without intentional regular health practices, including regular assessments.

Interested? Contact David Miron for information on our Consultation Services at 717-560-1949 or via email dmiron@scclanc.org