

## Book Report from April 7, 2018 Fort Worth North Book Club

### The Advantage by Patrick Lencioni

Patrick Lencioni's *The Advantage* is a book that is a blueprint for nurturing healthy organizations. His background and experience as a management consultant are exercised throughout the book with supporting anecdotes to his hypotheses.

Lencioni outlines the path to a healthy organization as four disciplines:

1. Development of a cohesive team
2. Creation of clarity
3. Overcommunication of clarity
4. Reinforcement of clarity

First, the organization must build a cohesive team *at the top*. This team is composed of three to twelve individuals from the leadership. The CEO *must* be on this team. The team must be developed so that the members exhibit five traits.

1. Trust in one another
2. Ability to be in conflict
3. Commitment
4. Accountability for the *team's* directions
5. Results oriented

These traits are fundamental to a healthy team. Teams like this get things done.

Second, the organization must create clarity (of purpose). It has been fashionable to build a mission statement. Lencioni does not believe that these statements have much value. He would rather that the team answer six fundamental questions.

1. Why do we exist?
2. How do we behave?
3. What do we do?
4. How will we succeed?
5. Who must do what?

As simple as these questions are, they uncover profound insights into an organization's purpose and into the individual employee's purpose in any corporation – from behavior, to delegation, to measurement.

Third, the team must overcommunicate what it has learned about clarity. Everyone in the organization must be on the same page and this only comes through repetition. The message must be clear (and simple) and it must be repeatable by everyone.

Fourth, the team must review its clarity (statement) regularly and renew or update that statement based upon market conditions. Here, the intent is to be *mindful* of our objectives in the context of the world in which we do business.

Lencioni closes the book with a chapter on meetings. They are so important because this is where the team keeps the *air clear* of anything but the reason for the organization, team, and department existence. It is here that he discusses a sort of hierarchy of meetings from daily-standups to leadership retreats to set strategy. He makes the very important point that meetings must be very clearly thought out. What is in the agenda of a meeting, and what is out, are discussed.

What does all of this have to do with project managers?

One could consider a project to be a *startup* that faces the same challenges as a corporation. The project manager is, in many ways, at the center of the core team of the project. As we know much time is spent in getting that core team to be as cohesive as possible. Clearly, the project's charter must be the same as Lencioni's purpose statement. We also know that project managers spend 90% of their time in communications – keeping everybody on the same page – just as a healthy organization must do.

The takeaways from *The Advantage* are numerous. If the PM builds a cohesive team, communicates, overcommunicates, and reinforces the purpose for the project then it is very likely to be a successful project.

The lessons learned from *The Advantage* serve as valuable, cautionary tales for project managers.