

Patrick Lencioni on What Really Matters

From CEO Rising Summit on June 16, 2020; Written by Samantha Schilke Dowse

Patrick Lencioni is one of the founders and President of the Table Group and has authored 11 books including *The Ideal Team Player*, *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, and more. In his words, “Leadership and the way we run organizations and lead and manage our people has changed, and we will never go back.”

From his book, *The Motive*, Lencioni explains there are two main reasons that people become leaders. The first is a reward for their hard work, with leadership driven by money and respect. This is reward leadership. The second is the understanding that being a CEO is a massive responsibility requiring courage to do the hardest job, focused on what’s best for the health of the organization. This is responsibility leadership. Leaders all have a mixture of these two motivators

In the last four months, CEOs have become far more human in the way they manage their people. Good CEOs have never cared more or known more about the people in their organization. It has become a competitive advantage as a CEO to create a culture where you pour more into your people and in return you get more commitment, innovation, loyalty and productivity.

In his presentation, Lencioni focused on five responsibilities that leaders who are reward centered find most distasteful.

1. They don’t like to have really hard, uncomfortable or difficult conversations.

“I know CEOs who will fly to Japan for a customer but refuse to talk to their CFO who has behavioral challenges.” CEOs who dislike these conversations find every reason to delegate them to others, talk themselves into it getting better or are not direct enough in the conversation. Lencioni doesn’t know a single CEO who loves this about their job, but if they are not willing to have these conversations than no one else will. The CEO will set the tone of avoidance.

The CEO, more than anyone else, has to be willing to have those tough conversations. The key to healthy conflict is trust. Difficult conversations without trust is fruitless and dangerous.

2. They don’t manage their Direct Reports.

Lencioni admits to struggling with this one. Many CEOs have managed people quite well over their career and then when they get to the CEO role they say, ‘I hired good adults who can do their jobs and I can trust them. I don’t think they need to be managed and I especially don’t want to micro-manage them.’ But every human being in the world needs management.

Be sure to ask yourself as a CEO, ‘Am I really aware of what’s going on?’ Holding people accountable to goals is NOT micromanaging. Know what your people are working on, know what their progress is and be ready to step in if they need it. If that’s micromanaging, let’s all be micromanagers! Most companies suffer far more from under-management.

3. They don’t take responsibility for building their leadership team.

Patrick Lencioni reminds us that he’s not a touchy-feely guy. When you build teams at an executive level you get more done, avoid bad decisions, innovate, move quickly, serve your customers, accomplish your mission and make more money. There is nothing soft about it.

Too often CEOs bring in a consultant or an HR person or plan a trip and that's not it. The CEO has to be completely invested as the chief driver of making sure the men and women on their team are working well together, trust each other, have good conflict, commit to decisions, hold each other accountable and are focused on the results of the team. This doesn't mean the CEO can't bring in help, but it won't stick without the CEO imbedded in the process. For a cohesive functioning team, the CEO needs to have an active, personal ownership in building the executive team.

4. They don't like running meetings.

When Lencioni hears this from a CEO he's working with, he likes to ask, 'Well, what else do you do?' The biggest thing a CEO does is run meetings. And those meetings should be exhausting, intense and a little anxious because if there's anything at stake – the livelihood of employees and vendors, the success of the customer – it's something worth talking about in meetings.

With that being said – Don't have boring meetings! Meetings should be the best thing you do whether it's a daily huddle, weekly staff meeting or strategic meeting where you slug out new ideas. Meetings need good conflict, clarity and focus. Focus on getting more done in your meetings, challenge each other, stay focused on what really matters and save each from doing dumb/repetitive things. Promote advocacy and inquiry in meetings.

"It's time to make meetings great. And no one can do that but the CEO."

5. They don't like to repeat themselves.

The CEO is actually the CRO – Chief Reminding Officer. It is their role to constantly go around and remind people of what's important. Reiterate what makes the company great, and never apologize for it. It ensures that the people we're leading are focused on what matters and if that doesn't change over time, stick to the message.

Some CEOs may feel like it's insulting to an audience, or just redundant and wasteful, but the truth is until you've said it seven times to each employee, they don't believe it's true and will have doubt.

"If you're a good CEO, your people should be able to do a good impression of you. They should know what you're doing to say."

Review this list and see where you struggle. Improvement begins with humility and vulnerability. Start with your spouse and then your Direct Reports – they already know the area in which you might be struggling. By admitting it and saying you don't like or do a good job at one of these five, you're showing them that they can trust you. Share that you want to do better and let your people be your biggest coaches. People don't trust perfect leaders, be vulnerable. You gain accountability when you acknowledge that you're not good at something, or that you made a mistake.

These last four months have been difficult and sad. They have also led to a renewed commitment to personal relationship and management which has led to better innovation, customer service and loyalty. And as we move forward, leave behind professionalism and perfectionism. You can get things done a lot faster if they're not perfect.

It's time to re-enlist as CEO, a job that is going to get harder and even more important, and much more gratifying at the end of our careers.