

THE ADVANTAGE by Patrick Lencioni

“CULTURE EATS STRATEGY FOR BREAKFAST”

This quote, commonly attributed to the great Peter Drucker, is an embodiment of this quarter’s book review. Patrick Lencioni’s THE ADVANTAGE explores the critical importance of organizational culture and why it’s essential for success in any organization; not just to maximize performance and revenue, but to weather the storms and challenges all of us face. The key to organizational culture rests with the leadership and management team; as this journal is for Family Physician leaders, my hope is that its content and principles will resonate within you and help you to improve your teams.

For those that have read Lencioni’s previous works (Figure 1), this book differs in that it’s not structured as a fable with a leadership lesson but rather incorporates many of the teachings from those books and his consulting business into 4 disciplines that lead to strong organizational health (see embedded diagram). The book is a combination of step-by-step blueprint processes as well as practical, positive and negative real world examples.

Of these four disciplines, by far the most important is **building a cohesive leadership team**. As we have all seen weak and strong leadership teams, if divisiveness and conflict exists within the leadership team, there’s no doubt that those symptoms will permeate throughout the rest of the organization. In addition to



Figure 1: Organizational Health Model; Patrick Lencioni

getting the right people on the bus (ala Jim Collin’s Good to Great), the paramount concern of senior leadership is to ensure the leadership team (i.e. the command team) are synchronized in focus and purpose. To build a cohesive leadership team, Lencioni walks the reader through 5 behaviors that the team must embrace to be successful: Trust, Conflict, Commitment, Accountability, and Results. Although none of these are surprising to anyone on a leadership team, the book challenges both the CEO, as well as each individual member of the leadership team, to evaluate what these values mean and to then check if he or she is being internally and externally accountable to them. In regards to trust, the key is for leaders “to sacrifice their egos for the collective good of the team.” As written in a prior USAFP book review, the essence of this is the same as in the Question Behind the Question. Every leader must approach the given

issue or friction with a perspective of what can I do to make it better; this humility and focus on the organization builds trust and commitment for the leadership team and the organization.

Another component of a cohesive team is the ability to manage conflict. Lencioni brings a great model for where successful organizations function: the Ideal Conflict Point (ICP). On a spectrum of artificial harmony to Mean-Spirited Personal attacks, the ICP is the point where conflict is uncomfortable and forces tough decisions but still remains constructive. The challenge within our military system is how to maintain candid, professional, and at times uncomfortable discussions given the added complexities of rank, position, and medical expertise.

The second discipline is the need to **create clarity**. In the military, we have a distinct advantage as we are all trained that the mission comes first and that the commander’s intent gives subordinates the direction needed to violently execute the plan. However, within our medical departments, is the clarity of mission as clear as it should be? What’s most important? Quality care, readiness, war time skills training, or GME? We must ensure our organizations know why we exist, how we will succeed, and what’s most important right now. The book progresses through six questions leadership teams must consider to provide this clarity. In my current organization, access to care is our primary focus as primary care is our number one engine. To this point, the commander’s daily report is a summary

of all our primary care access metrics. How do your organization's metrics that are reviewed daily correlate to what you need to focus on today? For other metrics that have their own standard reporting mechanism, there's no reason to include them in your daily report.

The third discipline is **overcommunicate clarity**. Every article I've read on personnel surveys or organizational improvement starts with the need for clear communication. Obviously if this was easy it wouldn't keep dominating these reports. Leaders must be cheerleaders for the organization as well as "Chief Reminding Officers". All too often, people start to hear your message at the same time you get tired of saying it. The final discipline is **reinforcing clarity**. Highly successful organizations are able to do this through hiring processes, feedback mechanisms, and compensation. The key is for the organization to "institutionalize its culture without bureaucratizing it." That phrase stuck with me. Throughout our Armed Forces we have countless examples of great ideas with great purpose that

then become just another set of slides and checklists to feed the reporting system. The lack of innovation and flexibility completely runs contrary to developing and preserving the culture the leaders and the organization have fought to establish.

The final section of the book addresses the importance of well-designed and well-executed meetings in furthering or destroying the culture of the organization. Meetings have different purposes and structure to address the stated need (daily huddle, tactical staff meetings, quarterly off-sites, or ad-hoc topical meetings {i.e. for acute issues needing a deep-dive}). This section gives the reader a useful and applicable summary of the meeting types. For more information, Lencioni's Death by Meeting is an essential read for those wanting to run productive, energetic, and focused meetings.

For those that aren't aware, our health center suffered a horrific event in early September when one of our nurses was violently attacked in our facility by another employee and almost died (thankfully she is doing well and despite the long future

recovery, is in great spirits). Part of the reason I chose this book was the fact that the great culture of Munson Army Health Center allowed us to get through this event and emerge stronger. I am certainly not implying we did everything perfectly, but we (the leadership team) built on the inherent strength of the organization and used many of the principles captured in the book to guide our organization. Clarity, communication, and over communication was essential; the command team huddled late into the night to clearly identify our priorities, roles and responsibilities, and the mechanisms by which we would reinforce and communicate everything that was happening. Ultimately, in my opinion, our clearest definition of success is that we didn't allow that incident to define who we are. Organizational culture is the heart of the organization and leaders must do everything within their power to define and preserve it.

"Organizational health will one day surpass all other disciplines in business as the greatest opportunity for improvement and competitive advantage." -Lencioni