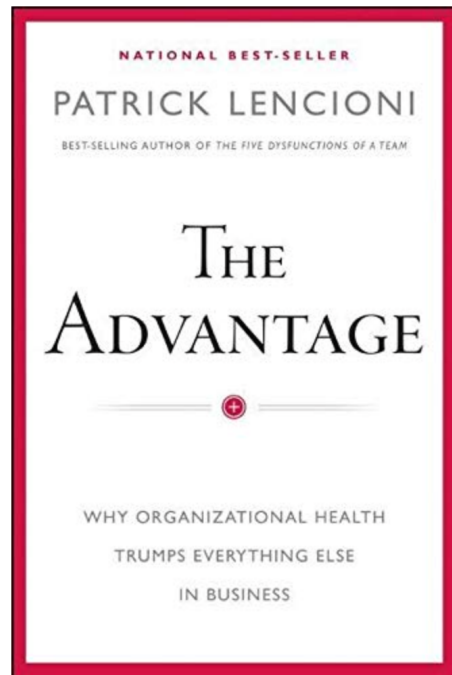

BOOK SUMMARY

"The Advantage: Why Organisational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business" by Patrick Lencioni

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[Hard Cover for around AU\$34.95
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Patrick Lencioni is one of those authors who writes in a down-to-earth and practical way. His workshops and seminars are presented in the same way. So, this book was expected to be portrayed in a similar manner. It didn't disappoint. As Lencioni says about himself, "Because I'm not a quantitative researcher, the conclusions I draw here are not based on reams of statistics of finely crunched data, but rather on my observations as a consultant over the past twenty years" (p.xvii). There's nothing like real life observation to give one a perspective on things.

The opening statement to the book is that *"The single greatest advantage any company can achieve is organisational health. Yet is it ignored by most leaders even though it is simple, free, and available to anyone who wants it"* (p. 1). As I read this book in 2021, I can't help but feel that Lencioni was prophetic since the book was first published in 2012. He was, and is, right. In Australia for example, we had a major Royal Commission into Banking that was instigated in December 2017 and overseen by Commissioner Kenneth Hayne. The findings shocked the general public and highlighted misconduct in

the banking, superannuation and financial services industry which was largely attributed to a poor culture resulting in dishonest, misleading, or deceptive practices and behaviours.

The well-known management consultant Peter Drucker is reported to have said that "Culture eats strategy for breakfast". Leaders and organisations are slowly coming around to the understanding that it's not just about better strategy, up-to-date technology and software, lean financing, or being innovative. Instead, good business is about people. Employees and customers. Lencioni argues that the seminal difference between successful companies and mediocre ones has little to do with what they know and how smart they are and more to do with how healthy they are.

Simply put, he writes that an organisation is healthy when it has integrity as defined by being whole, consistent and complete, when its management, operations, strategy and culture are all unified. Healthy organisations, he states, are recognised by the following:

- minimal politics
- minimal confusion and bureaucracy
- high morale
- high productivity
- low staff turnover

The book is a refreshing call to action with a framework about how to change from an unhealthy to a healthy organisation. It is straight-forward and complete with stories, tips and anecdotes from his experiences in consulting to some of the nation's leading organisations. Lencioni knows full well that organisational health doesn't come in a tidy, linear fashion, but he does offer a model that can be broken down into **four simple disciplines** including (1) Build a cohesive team (2) Create clarity (3) Overcommunicate clarity (4) Reinforce clarity. Chapters in the book expand each of these areas and provide detail on how each can be accomplished.

You'll notice the importance of "**clarity**" in the model above, and in this regard, Lencioni argues strongly that leaders must give their employees clarity for six simple, but critical questions, namely:

1. Why do we exist?
2. How do we behave?
3. What do we do?
4. How will we succeed?
5. What is most important, right now?
6. Who must do what?

Providing direct and clear answers to these fundamental questions "without using jargon and smarmy language, will drastically increase the likelihood of creating a healthy organisation" (p. 77).

Although he expounds at length on the four main disciples and distils it down by examining the **six key questions**, he ends his book on that one arena that is largely the bane of everyone's work life, namely, meetings! As John Cleese once titled one of his training videos, "Meetings, Bloody Meetings". In Lencioni's experience, the leadership team of a healthy organisation engages in four basic types of meetings:

- Daily check-in (administrative in nature); 5-10 minutes each day
- Weekly staff (tactical in nature); 45-90 minutes
- Adhoc topical (strategic in nature); 2-4 hours
- Quarterly off-site (developmental in nature); 1-2 days

As a parting shot, Lencioni reminds us that "there is no escaping the fact that the single biggest factor determining whether an organisation is going to get healthier – or not – is **the genuine commitment and active involvement of the person in charge**. As I've stated elsewhere, "the fish rots from the head" and the converse is also true. Real change, including moving to a healthy organisation, comes from the leader and the team he or she has around them.

The Advantage provides a foundational construct for conducting business in a new way -- one that maximizes human potential and aligns the organisation around a common set of principles. Sometimes, we need things spelt out in simple and basic ways -- this book is it.

[Dr Darryl Cross is a clinical and organisational psychologist as well as a credentialed executive and personal coach. He is also an author, international speaker and university lecturer. Dr Darryl assists people to find their strengths and reach their goals. Further information on Dr Darryl can be seen at www.DrDarryl.com and www.LeadershipCoaching.com.au]