

## The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive: A Leadership Fable

By Patrick Lencioni  
Jossey-Bass  
2000

A review by Cydney Koukol, Communication Strategies

Hooked. As I read this book I was reeled in. *What were those four obsessions on that piece of paper?* And, once uncovered, how simple and practical they seemed. Elusive to one executive; critical to the other – the four obsessions/disciplines were an outcome of one having become “lost in the weeds” in his own company.

Lencioni speaks to this in the introduction, “The key to managing this challenge, of course, is to identify a reasonable number of issues that will have the greatest possible impact on the success of your organization, and then spend most of your time thinking about, talking about, and working on those issues.” A sidelight to this fable speaks to a topic seldom covered in the media – men who find it difficult to balance their work and home lives.

The author weaves a tale of two competing, successful companies and their chief executives and the critical pieces – leadership and culture – that breed success. While the title of the book calls to an extraordinary executive, Lencioni near the end makes the comment that the executive was an “ordinary man obsessed with a basic philosophy.” The word *obsession* may make it seem that the organization and its executive were nearly mad in trying to accomplish and live by them – not the case. The leader “obsessed” was reminiscent of the leaders described by Jim Collins in *Good to Great* – a simple man, simply committed.

During the first 2/3 of the book the “leadership fable” is told and the final 1/3 discusses applying these four disciplines in an organization. In the concluding pages of this 180 page book, Lencioni admits each leadership team will find different challenges in ascribing to the four disciplines, however two things an executive must keep in mind:

- “First, there is nothing more important than making an organization healthy.”
- “Second, there is no substitute for discipline.

Disarmingly simple, this book is thought provoking. Anyone reading it can put faces on the people at the table in each of these organizations – you have worked with them. Perhaps that’s why Corporate Health Group chose this book as their top-pick for their business library for 2002.