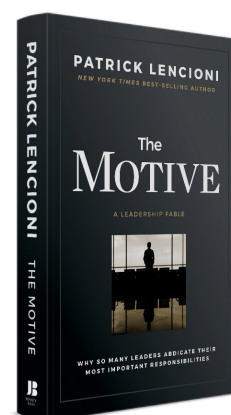


The Motive

A Leadership Fable: Why So Many Leaders Abdicate Their Most Important Responsibilities

by **Patrick Lencioni**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

New York Times best-selling author Patrick Lencioni has written a dozen books on how leaders can build teams and lead organizations. In *The Motive*, he helps leaders understand the importance of why they're leading in the first place.

In this fable, Shay Davis is the CEO of Golden Gate Security, who, after just a year in his role, is beginning to worry about his job and is desperate to turn things around. With nowhere else to turn, Shay receives some hard-to-swallow advice from the most unlikely and unwanted source—Liam Alcott, CEO of a more successful security company and his most hated opponent.

The Motive also summarizes the theory underlying the fable and offers practical advice to help executives examine their true motivation for leading. Lencioni provokes readers to honestly assess themselves and presents steps for changing their approach in five key areas. In this way, *The Motive* helps leaders avoid the pitfalls that stifle their organizations and even hurt the people they are meant to serve.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The two primary motives driving leaders' behavior.
- Why leading and managing are the most important jobs for leaders.
- To overcome denial and resistance in order to adopt the right motive for leading.
- The five omissions of reward-centered leaders.

The Fable

Shay Davis knew that it was too soon for him to get fired. Six months was not enough time for even the most aggressive private equity firm to axe a recently promoted CEO. But it wasn't too soon for them to start thinking about it.

Golden Gate Security wasn't exactly failing under Shay's brief period of leadership. Profit margins were solid, but they looked anemic compared to those of All-American Alarm, the massive and most aggressive national company in the home and small business security market.

Shay figured that the private equity guys would give him another nine months to jump-start Golden Gate, but he wasn't going to wait that long. After climbing the ladder for more than two decades and finally making it to the top, he wasn't about to let all those years of hard work go to waste. So he decided to throw his pride out the window and make a painful phone call.

Research

Lighthouse Partners was a small consulting firm located in Half Moon Bay, California, that had a reputation for working with interesting and successful clients. One of those clients was Del Mar Alarm, a San Diego-based company that was the shining star of the regional security arena in California and a small thorn in Shay Davis' side.

Normally, Shay would never have considered hiring a competitor's consulting firm, but he was beginning to feel desperate enough to try something new. When he contacted the consultant at Lighthouse who worked with Del Mar, she explained that she'd have to check with her client to see if it would be okay for her to work with another company in the same industry. Shay decided he probably wouldn't hear back from her. He was right. But he could never have predicted what would happen next.

Nemesis

It's hard to hate someone you don't know, but Shay figured he was getting pretty good at it in regard to Liam Alcott. Though he had never really met Alcott, aside from a handshake or a perfunctory greeting at an industry event, Shay had heard him speak a few times and read more print interviews than he cared to remember. He had grown to resent the phony affability of the man who seemed to have such an easy time doing what Shay hadn't yet figured out.

So when Shay's assistant, Rita, came into his office to announce that someone named Liam was calling for him

on line one, Shay figured it was one of his own executives pulling a prank on him. But it wasn't a prank.

"Hello, Shay. This is Liam Alcott. I'm calling because Amy over at Lighthouse told me that you contacted her about working with them." Shay felt a rush of shame wash over him, expecting Liam to chastise him for trying to poach his consultants, not to mention his intellectual property.

"You should let me tell you what we've learned from Lighthouse and see if that might be enough for you." Shay didn't know how to respond. *Did I hear that correctly?* Before he could think of something to say, Liam continued. "In fact, I'm coming up there next Thursday for a meeting, and then I'm staying the weekend at my sister-in-law's in Walnut Creek. Why don't we get together on Friday?"

"Don't take this wrong, Liam," Shay paused, "but don't you have some reservations about sharing your secrets with a competitor?"

Liam laughed. "Competitor? I don't think we're competitors. I mean, I certainly wouldn't have wanted Lighthouse to work with you if we were. And it's not like we're trying to steal one another's customers, unless you have plans to get into the security business in San Diego. So I don't see us having any conflict here."

Shay tried desperately to think of an excuse. Though he didn't like the idea of admitting any weakness, he also didn't want to lose out on any advice that Liam might have for him. Deciding that he could think of no good reason to refuse Liam's offer, he relented. "All right then. What time should we meet on Friday?"

Invasion

When Shay walked into his office, Liam was already sitting in the lobby of the building waiting for him. Arriving at the CEO's well-appointed office with a view of Alcatraz, they sat down at a couch, and Shay began. "So, where should we start?"

Liam was ready with an answer. "Well, why don't you tell me why you called Lighthouse? What were you hoping to get from them?"

"Well, I'm feeling like we're just not firing on all cylinders here."

Liam jotted a word or two in the notebook that he brought with him, and then responded. "Is it mostly about All-American?"

Shay did his best to hide his surprise at the discrepancy between the companies' results, which he hoped Liam hadn't noticed. Unfortunately, he did.

Without thinking, Shay admitted, "Well, that's certainly part of it. But I think there's something else. I just don't know what."

Surrender

"What do your numbers look like?" Liam asked. For the next half hour or so, Liam presented the high-level fundamentals of his financial operations, while Shay countered with mostly general answers and a few real numbers sprinkled in here and there for effect. In some aspects of their businesses, the two companies were quite similar. But in many others, Del Mar was light-years ahead.

Shay did his best to hide his surprise at the discrepancy between the companies' results, which he hoped Liam hadn't noticed. Unfortunately, he did. With a genuinely concerned look on his face, Liam offered, "What's going on up here, my friend?"

Liam went on carefully. "I mean, unless I'm hearing things wrong, you seem to have more employees generating less revenue. Your turnover, among both customers and employees, is considerably higher than ours. And you're actually spending more money on marketing than we are." He paused. "Am I missing something?"

"I'm not going to lie to you," Shay confessed. "This isn't easy for me to hear."

Reveal

Liam continued. "Why don't I start by telling you what I learned from Amy and the other consultants at Lighthouse?" Liam went to the whiteboard in Shay's office, picked up a black pen, and announced, "Everything that Amy and the other consultants at Lighthouse focused on started with me. So let's start with you. What is the most important part of what you do?"

Shay thought about it for a moment and came up with the following list:

- Reviewing ops and financials;
- Driving marketing and sales programs;

- Handling the board;
- Managing and leading;
- Interacting with key customers.

Shay asked, "Is this what your list looks like?"

Liam answered plainly. "No."

Shay decided to be as direct as possible. "Okay, what does your list look like?" Liam went to the board. He drew a line through all of the entries other than "managing and leading."

"So, you don't spend time managing your board?"

Liam shook his head. "Not really. I mean, I meet with them once a quarter, and I take their calls if they need to talk to me, which is pretty rare. And that's about it."

Shay said, "I have a hard time believing that."

"I'm sure you do. But it's true. I told my board when I took over that their input, outside of a major catastrophe, would be limited to our quarterly meetings. It was one of my conditions for taking the job. They didn't like it much at first, but now I think they're relieved."

Shay attempted to summarize his general sense of disbelief: "Okay. So, you're telling me that you spend almost all of your time leading and managing your team? Maybe we just have different ways of doing things."

"Maybe," Liam answered, unconvinced. "But you're going to have to convince me that your way is working for your company. Are you willing to let me challenge you about that?"

"Of course," Shay said without much enthusiasm.

Brass Tacks

"Okay," said Shay, "what did you learn from Lighthouse?"

Liam took a drink of water. "I learned that I am supposed to have the most painful job in the company."

Shay was thoroughly confused. Liam continued. "I'm a technology guy at heart. That's what I grew up doing, and that's what I'm comfortable with. That's what I spent my

time doing before I got fired in England. And don't get me wrong; if I could, I'd still spend my time doing that. But I can't, and I don't.

"Why not?"

"Because I have a CIO and a CTO who focus on those things. I have to be the CEO."

Shay shook his head. "It's not that cut and dried. I mean, yeah, you have to be the CEO. But you can still keep your hand in technology stuff. I'm guessing you might be better than the people you hired in those areas anyway."

Liam shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe not. But that's not the point. The point is, I can delegate finance and marketing and sales and technology and operations and all those things. I can't delegate *my job*."

"Who said anything about delegating it? How much of your time does it take to do the CEO stuff?"

"All of it. And then some."

"You mean to tell me that managing your team and the company doesn't give you any time to get involved in other parts of the business?"

Liam nodded his head. "That's right."

Dirty Jobs

"You know that TV show with the guy who spends a day with people who have horrible jobs?" Liam asked.

"Yeah, it's called *Dirty Jobs*. My kids love it. I think because about half the episodes have something to do with poop."

Liam laughed. "Perhaps. I like it because it shows people who seem to like their jobs even though they're doing something that others wouldn't want to do.

Shay tried his hardest not to be sarcastic. "Yeah, but I don't think my job entails anything close to shoveling alligator crap or cleaning out a sewer."

"And yet you don't want to do it. You're not going to want to hear this, but I have to tell you anyway." He paused before finishing. "You might be working hard, but you're not doing it for the company."

"What the hell does that mean?" Shay wanted to know.

Knowing that his adversary might now punch him for what he was about to say, Liam responded. "You're doing it for yourself."

To Liam's great surprise, and relief, Shay didn't seem as angry as he did sad. In fact, all he said was, "Tell me more about that." And that was when Liam decided there was hope for a breakthrough.

Jugular

"Here it is in a nutshell. You are doing the things you like to do. You aren't doing the things your company needs you to do. And that is why your company's performance is so far behind ours." Liam paused. "You need to believe me here. I'm telling you the truth."

Liam asked, "What exactly do you think management is?"

"Well, it's about goal setting and progress reviews and that kind of stuff. That's what I did for 20 years. Now that I'm CEO, it's different."

"How?" Liam asked with the patience of a prosecuting attorney."

"I don't know. Listen, if a CEO has to look over his executives' shoulders, he's hiring the wrong people. I'm not going to micromanage a 52-year-old operations executive. And I think my people prefer my approach."

"Not if they fail."

"If they start to fail, I'll jump in and help them."

"You mean you'll do their job, especially if it's in marketing or sales or M&A."

"Call it what you want. I help them." Then Shay thought of something. "Hey, I thought you were telling me earlier that you don't have time to get involved in your executives' departments, and that all your time is taken up being the CEO. Now you're telling me I need to micromanage people."

Liam shook his head. "First, I didn't say I'm doing my people's jobs. I'm just coaching them, making sure they have a good plan and that I know about any big issue before it's too late to do something about it. That's not micromanagement."

"Potato, Potahto."

Liam shook his head. "No. It's management. The only people who call it micromanagement are employees who don't want to be held accountable. Just because someone is in his forties or fifties or sixties and has lots of experience doesn't mean he doesn't need to be managed. It's not a form of punishment or the sign of a lack of trust. It's the benefit of direction and guidance. I mean, the best football player in the world needs coaching."

“I’m sorry if I still seem skeptical. I guess I really thought that your management consultant gave you something a little more...” he paused searching for the right words, “concrete. This is all pretty soft.”

Liam took a deep breath. “Can we take a 10-minute break? I need to make a call.”

Finally, Amy pulled her last and most dangerous arrow from her quiver.

Skype

When Shay returned, he saw Liam doing a video call on his laptop with a woman. Liam waved him in.

“Shay, this is Amy Stirling, who you spoke with briefly last week. She is one of the principals over at Lighthouse, and the lead consultant who worked with us over the past three years.

Shay sat down in front of the computer and greeted the consultant confidently. “Hi, Amy. It’s nice to meet you. I certainly appreciate Liam sharing what you did for him.”

“Do you?” Amy asked, without any sense of sarcasm or judgment.

“Well, yeah. I mean, it’s always good to learn new things.” Shay responded politely.

“I’ve only got 10 minutes here before I have to go back in with my client. So I’ll be direct, if that’s okay.”

“Please.”

“Well, Liam seems to think that you’re not all that interested in learning new things. Perhaps he hasn’t done a good job portraying what we did with him at Del Mar. Does that sound right?”

Shay didn’t answer the question directly. “Amy, I’ll be direct, too. I just don’t see how all this stuff about meetings and managing people and having uncomfortable conversations

can possibly make the difference between success and failure. It’s not that I don’t see any value in it. But not every CEO goes about his or her job that way. I’m a deal-maker. I’m good at putting together deals, explaining why the Golden Gate solution is right for our customers, and coming in when things get hairy and convincing them to go with us. That is a huge part of our success.”

Finally, Amy pulled her last and most dangerous arrow from her quiver. “I have a question for you, Shay. And it’s the most important one of all. I don’t want you to answer right away but to really give it thought. And please be completely honest. Shay, why did you want to become a CEO?” She paused. “Or perhaps a better way to ask it is this: Why do you *still* want to be the CEO of Golden Gate Security?”

After about 45 seconds, Shay broke the silence. “I have an answer. I don’t know,” Shay said matter-of-factly.

“You don’t know?” Liam asked incredulously.

Amy was smiling on the screen.

Breakthrough

Shay turned back to Liam. “Why did you want to be a CEO?”

“For the same reason you did. But that’s not why I want to be the CEO of Del Mar Alarm now. I see my job as a responsibility and a sacrifice. You’re the CEO of Golden Gate because you see your job as a reward. All those responsibilities and activities we’ve been talking about today are just a function of our motives for being a leader. We can talk all day about what we’re supposed to do, but if we don’t understand why we’re leading in the first place, none of it will make sense.”

Liam saw the look on Shay’s face change just slightly, as though a lightbulb, albeit a dim one, went off in his head.

“Shay, when I have to dive into the middle of a petty political issue between the sales and engineering teams, or when I have to give someone their final warning about having to change their behavior, or when I have to call a meeting after hours to deal with an emergency issue, or when I have to give the same bloody orientation speech to another group of new employees, or when I have to go out to the installers and remind them that they’re the front line of the company and everyone is relying on them, or when I have to,” he paused, “do anything that no one else can do because they’re not the CEO, I smile and thank God that I am making a difference. I have the worst and best, loneliest and most social, most appre-

ciated and most thankless job in the company. And I do that job with pride and without complaint. Because that was what I signed up for, even if I didn't realize it until Amy told me."

Finally, Shay nodded his head and spoke. "You're a good guy, Liam." Liam was confused. "Your coming up here was as generous as it was bizarre. And I mean that in the best way."

The Lesson

Just about every leader would like his or her organization to become healthier. Some leaders fail to achieve organizational health because they possess an almost unconscious unwillingness to do the difficult tasks and confront the challenging situations that are required to bring it about. This unwillingness flows from a flawed—and dangerous—motivation for becoming a leader.

There are only two motives that drive people to become a leader. First, they want to serve others, to do whatever is necessary to bring about something good for the people they lead. They understand that sacrifice and suffering are inevitable in this pursuit and that serving others is the only valid motivation for leadership.

The second basic reason why people choose to be a leader—the all-too-common but invalid one—is that they want to be rewarded. They see leadership as the prize for years of hard work and are drawn by its trappings: attention, status, power, money.

When leaders are motivated by personal reward, they will avoid the unpleasant situations and activities that leadership requires. They will calculate the personal economics of uncomfortable and tedious responsibilities—responsibilities that only a leader can do—and try to avoid them.

This inevitably leaves the people in their charge without direction, guidance, and protection, which eventually hurts those people and the organization as a whole. Employees will express their disbelief as to how their leader could have been so negligent and irresponsible, yet it makes perfect sense in light of his or her motive for becoming a leader.

It's time to expose reward-centered leadership for what it is and help leaders overcome it, for their own good and the good of the people and organizations they are supposed to be serving.

Exploring the Two Leadership Motives

How does a leader's motive play out in the organization?

How does it impact the day-to-day activities of his or her work? The answers have everything to do with behavior.

Imagine two candidates for president of a country. One focuses on getting elected and sees that day as the crowning achievement of his or her life. The other sees the election as the beginning of his or her attempt to accomplish something great.

What behaviors is the reward-centered president going to avoid? Here are a few: taking the time to understand important legislative issues, meeting with constituents who offer little opportunity for publicity, adhering to traditions that are personally uninteresting to him or her. The other candidate is going to embrace those responsibilities. The same applies to leaders of organizations.

The Five Omissions of Reward-Centered Leaders

What follows are the five situations or responsibilities that reward-centered leaders delegate, abdicate, or avoid altogether, which cause the greatest problems for the people they lead. The omission of one or all of these areas may be an indication of an improper motive for leading. This is not a list of the primary responsibilities of a leader. These are simply the most common omissions that reward-centered leaders find to be tedious, uncomfortable, or just plain hard.

1. Developing the leadership team. This activity is often delegated, and sometimes even abdicated completely, by many organizational leaders. This does not work. If people on a leadership team don't believe that the leader sees team development as one of his or her most critical roles, they're not going to take it seriously, and it's not going to be effective. The leader simply must take personal responsibility for, and participate actively in, building his or her team.

Leaders often realize that effective team-building always involves emotional and uncomfortable conversations. Few leaders, even the good ones, look forward to those awkward moments and prefer to let others deal with them.

Do you feel that spending time developing your team members' interpersonal dynamics is superfluous or a waste of time? Do you organize "team-building" activities for your team that are fun but that largely ignore uncomfortable conversations about their collective behaviors?

If you answered yes to these questions, you may have the wrong motive for leading, and you have a serious decision to make. You can either rethink your attitude about team-building and embrace it as the practical, indispensable discipline

Do you believe that providing individual guidance and coaching to your people is somehow beneath you or not worth your time?

that it is, or you can accept that the organization you lead will never come close to reaching its full potential and that your team members will suffer unnecessarily.

2. Managing subordinates (and making them manage theirs). Many leaders have been trained to see management as a set of bureaucratic, overly structured activities related to writing detailed objectives, conducting performance reviews, and determining compensation. This is not really management, either at the executive level or the front line.

Managing individuals is about helping them set the general direction of their work, ensuring that it is aligned with and understood by their peers, and staying informed enough to identify potential obstacles and problems as early as possible. It is also about coaching leaders to improve themselves behaviorally to make it more likely that they will succeed. Managing is also ensuring that subordinates one level below are managing their people, too.

Do you believe that providing individual guidance and coaching to your people is somehow beneath you or not worth your time? Do you feel that you should be able to trust them to manage themselves? Do you justify not knowing what your direct reports are doing by claiming not to want to be a micromanager?

If you answered yes to these questions, then your motive for leading may be off. You can either rethink your role and get more involved in coaching them around their work, or accept that they will often fail to meet your expectations and become misaligned with the goals of the team.

3. Having difficult and uncomfortable conversations. One of the main responsibilities of a leader is to confront difficult, awkward issues quickly and with clarity, charity, and resolve. What kind of issues? Everything from a team member's annoying mannerisms to poisonous interpersonal dynamics and politics. There isn't a leader out there who hasn't balked at a moment when they should have "entered the danger" and had a difficult conversation about these things.

Yet, when leaders dodge these situations, they jeopardize the success of the team and the organization as a whole.

Failing to confront people quickly about small issues is a guarantee that they will become big issues.

Here's the underlying reason that most people avoid difficult conversations: It is embarrassing and awkward. There is nothing comfortable about turning to a man or woman whom you know, someone who is of similar age to you, and who is talented in their own right, and telling them something that makes them feel momentarily bad.

Would you rather learn to live with a person's difficult behaviors than endure an awkward, potentially emotional discussion with them? Do you find yourself venting about your direct reports' behavioral issues rather than talking with them directly?

If you answered yes to these questions, this may be an indication that your leadership motive needs to be adjusted. You will need to reset your expectations about how "comfortable" your job is supposed to be and find the courage to start entering into dangerous conversations until it becomes natural. Or you should prepare for increasing levels of politics, morale problems, and unwanted turnover on your team and in your organization.

4. Running great team meetings. Meetings remain one of the most unpopular and underestimated activities in business. It is where leaders make decisions about whether to purchase a competitor or sell itself to one, to hire more employees or lay them off, to implement a new strategy or kill an old one. Can there be a more critical, central, or indispensable activity within an organization than a meeting?

In so many organizations the people responsible for making meetings better often complain about them the most! A leader seeing his or her meetings as drudgery would be like a doctor viewing surgery that way.

When leaders accept the less-than-amazing status of meetings, the results are two-fold. First, it leads to bad decision-making. If meetings are not engaging, it's completely logical to conclude that the quality of those decisions will be subpar. The second problem of accepting bad meetings at the executive level is that it sets the precedent for the rest of the organization.

Do you complain about your own meetings being boring or ineffective, and do you long for the end of them? Do you allow your people, and yourself, to check out during those meetings, or perhaps skip them from time to time for “more important” work?

If you answered yes to these questions, you may have a problem with your leadership motive. You can pour yourself into designing and facilitating more intense, focused meetings. Or you can resign yourself to suboptimal decision-making, reduced innovation, and a good deal of regret.

5. Communicating constantly and repetitively to employees. Most CEOs don’t hate the idea of communicating to employees. But the majority of them greatly underestimate the amount of communication that is necessary. As a result, they think they’ve done an adequate job announcing a new strategy or initiative long before most people are close to understanding and embracing it.

Studies say that employees have to hear a message seven times before they believe executives are serious about it. Unfortunately, many CEOs refuse to repeat themselves again and again and again and again.

A CEO communicates to employees, at all levels, to ensure that people are aligned with and have bought into what is going on and where they fit into the success of the enterprise. It is an emotional and behavioral process more than a transactional and informational one. And it requires real, repetitive, sometimes tedious work from a leader.

Do you resent having to repeat yourself, complaining that your employees don’t listen? Do you look for new messages and ideas to communicate because you get bored saying the same things again and again?

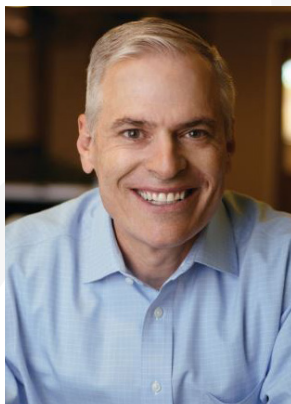
If you answered yes to these questions, your motive for leadership may not be quite right. You need to change your general attitude about communication and see it as a tool for helping others understand and internalize important ideas rather than an activity for your own entertainment.

Otherwise, you’ll need to come to terms with the fact that your employees, even your executives, will often be confused and misaligned. And you’ll need to get used to being surprised and frustrated by their inability to understand you and get on board with your plans.

It’s long past time that we, as individuals and as a society, reestablished the standard that leadership can never be about the leader more than the led. If we can restore the collective attitude that leadership is meant to be a joyfully difficult and selfless responsibility, we will see companies become more successful, employees more engaged and fulfilled, and society more optimistic and hopeful. Perhaps people will stop using the term “servant leadership” altogether, because everyone will understand that it is the only valid kind.

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Patrick Lencioni is founder and president of The Table Group, a firm dedicated to helping leaders improve their organizations’ health since 1997. His principles have been embraced by leaders around the world and adopted by organizations of virtually every kind, including multinational corporations, entrepreneurial ventures, professional sports teams, the military, nonprofits, schools, and churches. Lencioni is the author of 11 business books with nearly 7 million copies sold worldwide.

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