

theFrumiGroup

Getting Naked

A business Fable about shedding the three fears that sabotage client loyalty

Notes by Frumi Rachel Barr, MBA, PhD

Author: Patrick Lencioni.

Publisher: Jossey - Bass

Copyright year: 2010

ISBN: 978-0-7879-7639-2

Author's Bio: Patrick Lencioni is a New York Times best selling author of eight books including Five Dysfunctions of a Team. Lencioni, who lives in Alamo, CA, in the San Francisco area, is the president of The Table Group, a management consulting firm specializing in executive team development and organizational health. As a consultant and keynote speaker, he has worked with thousands of senior executives and executive teams in organizations ranging from Fortune 500s and high tech start-ups to universities and non-profits.

Author's big thought: For those who provide service to clients, vulnerability is particularly powerful. Those who get comfortable being vulnerable—or as Lencioni calls it, naked—are rewarded with levels of client loyalty and intimacy that other service providers can only dream of.

Chapter Notes

Introduction:

- Vulnerability is one of the most undervalued and misunderstood of all human qualities. Without the willingness to be vulnerable, we will not build deep and lasting relationships in life. That's because there is no better way to earn a person's trust than by putting ourselves in a position of unprotected weakness and demonstrating that we believe they will support us.
- Yet society encourages us to avoid vulnerability, to always project strength, confidence, and poise. Although this is certainly advisable in some situations in life, when it comes to important, ongoing relationships, it stifles our ability to build trust.
- We think it will hurt our chances for success. We fail to realize that, even though clients require us to be competent enough to meet their needs, it is ultimately our honesty, humility and selflessness that will endear us to them and allow them to trust and depend on us.

- Even if we come to understand this on an intellectual level, most of us will still struggle with vulnerability because we are human beings who don't like to be weak, which means we are subject to the completely natural but irrational fears that make us uncomfortable being naked. This book is about overcoming those fears, which is not easy. It requires levels of self-sacrifice and discomfort—and, at times, real suffering—that few people are willing to endure.
- So naked service is rare, which means it provides an opportunity for a powerful and tangible competitive advantage for those who embrace it. They will build stronger, stickier relationships with their clients; they'll have an easier time getting those clients to actively and enthusiastically recommend and endorse them, even without being asked; they'll have more comfortable and collaborative discussions about pricing and fees; and they'll enjoy their work much more.
- But more than any of that, what makes naked service worthwhile is that it puts us in a position to more effectively help our clients, which, of course, is what providing service is all about.

The Fable

- Getting Naked tells the remarkable story of a management consultant who is trying desperately to merge two firms with very different approaches to serving clients. One relies on vulnerability and complete transparency; the other focuses on proving its competence and protecting its reputation for intellectual prowess. In the process of managing the merger, the consultant is forced to learn life-changing lessons that prove to be as relevant as they are painful.

The Model

The Origins of Getting Naked

- In the late 1990s, Lencioni helped start a management consulting firm called The Table Group that provides a variety of services to a wide range of clients in just about every respectable industry imaginable. From the beginning they adopted a simple and informal approach to serving clients that provoked surprising levels of loyalty and trust. This book is about that approach, which Lencioni calls naked consulting.
- Naked service has allowed The Table Group to build extraordinary trust among their clients over the years, beyond anything they could have imagined. Clients have welcomed them into their most critical and sensitive discussions without hesitation. They have consistently sought their advice and counsel, often about matters that were outside of the scope of the core services provided. They have kept them around even when budgets were tight. And they have vouched for them enthusiastically and authentically with other clients who were considering working with them.

- And aside from making their work more enjoyable, profitable, and rewarding than they would have thought possible, this naked approach to consulting has allowed them to more effectively serve and help those clients in meaningful ways.
- The story in this book is about a management consulting firm, because that is what the Table Group is. However, the naked approach is certainly not limited to one field. It applies to anyone who provides ongoing, relationship-based advice, counsel, or expertise to a customer, inside or outside of a company.

NAKED SERVICE DEFINED

- At its core, naked service boils down to the ability of a service provider to be vulnerable—to embrace uncommon levels of humility, selflessness, and transparency for the good of a client.
- It is more difficult than it seems, because humility and selflessness and transparency often entail suffering.
- Most of us live our lives trying to avoid awkward and painful situations, which is why it is no surprise that we're susceptible to the three fears that prevent us from building trust and loyalty with our clients.

#1: FEAR OF LOSING THE BUSINESS

- No service provider wants to lose clients, business opportunities, or revenue. Ironically, though, this fear of losing the business actually hurts our ability to keep and increase business, because it causes us to avoid doing the difficult things that engender greater loyalty and trust with the people we're trying to serve.
- What clients want more than anything is to know that we're more interested in helping them than we are in maintaining our revenue source. And when we do something, or fail to do something, in order to protect our business, they eventually lose respect for us and understandably question whether they should trust us.
- Naked service providers refuse to be overly concerned about the possibility of losing a client or, for that matter, being undercompensated or having their ideas misappropriated by a client. In fact, they willingly put themselves in positions of exposure in each of these areas, knowing that by doing so they will earn the trust of their clients.
- It's worth reminding ourselves that clients can smell fear and are repelled by it. They are attracted to a service provider who will be honest and direct with them, even if it might jeopardize the relationship.

#2: FEAR OF BEING EMBARRASSED

- No one likes making mistakes in public and having to endure the scrutiny of spectators, especially when those spectators are paying us for our advice or counsel. This fear, then, is rooted in pride, and it is ultimately about avoiding the appearance of ignorance, wanting to be seen instead as smart or competent.

- Naked service providers are so concerned about helping a client that they are willing to ask questions and make suggestions even if those questions and suggestions could turn out to be laughably wrong. They readily admit what they don't know and are quick to point out—even to celebrate—their mistakes because protecting their intellectual ego is not important to them.
- Clients come to trust naked service providers because they know that they will not hold back their ideas, hide their mistakes, or edit themselves in order to save face. As painful as this can be for a consultant who wants to be seen as smart, it is a turnoff to clients who want to hear all of our suggestions, and who are yearning for transparency and modesty—qualities that are immensely more attractive than intelligence.

#3 FEAR OF FEELING INFERIOR

- Fear of feeling inferior is not about our intellectual pride, but rather about preserving our sense of importance and social standing relative to a client.
- Naked service providers not only overcome their need to be self important in the eyes of their clients, but also purposefully put themselves in a lower position. They do whatever the client needs them to do to help them improve, even if that calls for the service provider to be overlooked or temporarily looked down on.
- Ironically, clients come to trust and respect service providers who do this and ultimately come to think more highly of them. That's because there is nothing more attractive and admirable than people who willingly and cheerfully set their egos aside and make the needs of others more important than their own.

SHEDDING THE THREE FEARS

- Vulnerable service providers demonstrate nakedness by engaging in a variety of simple but powerful practices, all of which correspond to one or more of the three primary fears, and as important as it is to understand the fears that underlie these principles, the specific actions that demonstrate naked service are what is required to achieve client loyalty. The principles of naked services are as follows:

ALWAYS CONSULT INSTEAD OF SELL (Fear of Losing the Business)

- Naked service providers transform every sales situation into an opportunity to demonstrate the value of what they do. They avoid, as much as possible, telling clients what they would do if they were to be hired; instead, they just start serving them as though they were already a client. And they don't worry about whether the potential client will take advantage of their generosity; they know that for every client that does, nine others will appreciate their generosity and start to see themselves as a client even before they formally decide to become one.
- Sales situations then become service giveaways, which are more enjoyable experiences because they give the service provider higher levels of confidence than they would have had if they were simply trying to convince a potential client to make a decision.

GIVE AWAY THE BUSINESS (Fear of Losing the Business)

- This principle has two applications. On the one hand, it is related to the “always consult instead of sell” principle because it is about giving a prospective client advice and service even before they agree to become a paying client. By demonstrating generosity and trust, you drastically increase the likelihood of making them a client, not to mention proving to them that you can help them.
- The other part of giving away the business is more financial. It entails always erring on the side of the client when it comes to fees. Because you’re interested in a long-term relationship with a client, it is in your best interest to show them that you are more focused on helping them than you are in maximizing your short-term revenue.

TELL THE KIND TRUTH (Fear of Losing the Business)

- Naked service providers will confront a client with a difficult message, even when the client might not like hearing it. As a result, they put the relationship with the client at risk knowing that it is more important to serve the client’s needs than it is to protect the service provider’s own business.
- But they do this in a way that recognizes the dignity and humanity of the client. Instead of bluntly hitting them over the head with a difficult message, they present their counsel with kindness, empathy, and respect. Still, they don’t sugarcoat their advice or present it in an obsequious way. Naked consultants understand that they have a responsibility for being a truth teller, even if this means they will be sacrificed.

ENTER THE DANGER (Fear of Losing the Business)

- Naked service providers don’t shy away from uncomfortable situations; they step right into the middle of them.
- Great improv actors seek out and engage in the most wacky situations (entering the danger), knowing that this is where an opportunity for genius lies.
- When it comes to consulting and service, entering the danger has to do with having the courage to fearlessly deal with an issue that everyone else is afraid to address. Perhaps more than any other service a consultant provides, this one provokes the most appreciation from clients, many of whom have grown weary of avoiding the “elephant in the room”—one that, over time, has become smellier and messier and therefore more untouchable.
- When a naked service provider stops and says, “Hey, does anyone else smell that?” the consultant usually becomes a hero. Clients come to see them as having courage and integrity—qualities that are disarming, attractive, and often rare. And so “dangerous” situations become opportunities for adding value and building trust.
- This tactic can look similar to telling the kind truth, but it is different because it is done in a group setting in the midst of a potentially difficult moment.

ASK DUMB QUESTIONS (Fear of Being Embarrassed)

- Naked service providers are the ones who ask the questions that others in the room are afraid to ask out of fear that they would embarrass themselves. They realize that if they ask five questions and three of them could be considered ‘dumb,’ the potential benefit that comes from the other two makes it worthwhile.
- Most of us wouldn’t think a 40-percent hit rate would justify the potential humiliation of being perceived as unprepared or intellectually deficient. But clients love it. They’re almost always going to remember the great question we asked and forget about the others, especially when we can quickly and humbly acknowledge the questions that turn out to be poor.
- Think about the times you’ve been in a room and had a question that you thought might be too obvious to ask. And then someone else asks it, and you look at them with a sense of gratitude and respect. That’s how clients see us, if we have the courage to ask.

MAKE DUMB SUGGESTIONS (Fear of Being Embarrassed)

- Naked service providers go beyond merely asking questions that others shy away from; they make suggestions that they aren’t sure of, knowing that they are putting themselves in a position to be even more embarrassed.
- But as is true for the dumb questions, a client is going to remember that one great idea a consultant proposes far more than the not-so-great ones. And if that client thought we were holding back our ideas out of fear of being humiliated, they would—and should—feel cheated. After all, they’re bringing us in and paying us for the objectivity of our thinking, so they expect that some of our suggestions will be less informed than theirs. If we’re not putting ourselves on the line and offering everything we have, they would be unwise to trust us or feel loyal to us.
- Keep in mind, for every seemingly dumb suggestion that turns out to be insightful, there are plenty that are in fact dumb. But without taking the risk of putting an idea out there, the good ideas will never see the light of day.

CELEBRATE YOUR MISTAKES (Fear of Being Embarrassed)

- Naked service providers don’t enjoy being wrong; they just realize that it is an inevitability. And rather than attempting to hide or downplay their errors, they readily call them out and take responsibility for them. Though this may seem counterintuitive, it actually increases the client’s level of trust and loyalty. Clients don’t expect perfection from the service providers they hire, but they do expect honesty and transparency. There is no better way to demonstrate this than by acknowledging when a mistake has been made and humbly apologizing for it.

TAKE A BULLET FOR THE CLIENT (Fear of Feeling Inferior)

- This is perhaps the most difficult principle to explain, as it is easily misunderstood and largely counter to what our culture instills in us.
- Taking a bullet does not mean enabling a client to do the wrong thing by blindly and obsequiously absorbing blame for them. It is about finding those moments when we can

humble ourselves and sacrificially take some of the burden off of a client in a difficult situation, and then—and this is critical—confront them with the kind truth. Without that confrontation, taking a bullet would indeed be enablement. But there are those moments when a service provider is in a rare position to accept responsibility for something that may or may not have been their fault. And of course, when there is any doubt. Taking a bullet means that the consultant always errs on the side of accepting responsibility.

- Taking a bullet is countercultural because we are encouraged in life to deflect responsibility for problems, especially if we are not sure that we have done anything to warrant blame.
- Naked service providers “throw themselves on grenades” for their clients. Knowing that the grenades encountered in a business setting are usually not lethal, and that the act of doing so builds extraordinary trust and loyalty. Of course, occasionally grenades are “lethal” in that they destroy the account, but then that is something a naked consultant will accept.

MAKE EVERYTHING ABOUT THE CLIENT (Fear of Feeling Inferior)

- This is another tactic that seems simple and obvious, but it is harder than it seems—and also more powerful. Naked service providers throw their full attention into the world of the client. They do not try to shift attention to themselves and their level of experience or knowledge; rather, they make it clear that their focus is on understanding, honoring, and supporting the business of the client. As a result, naked service providers often downplay their own accomplishments, allowing clients to discover them for themselves.

HONOR THE CLIENT’S WORK (Fear of Feeling Inferior)

- This one sounds a little like the previous one but it’s bigger than that. Naked service providers honor the client by taking an active interest in their business and by appreciating the importance of that business to the client and the client’s customers. And this can’t be faked. Even when a client’s business isn’t something that a service provider is naturally passionate about, they will find a way to develop and demonstrate an interest out of respect for the client’s livelihood.
- This begs the question, “What if a potential client is involved in a business that we don’t respect?” Not being able to honor that business is a good indication that we shouldn’t be doing that work.

DO THE DIRTY WORK (Fear of Feeling Inferior)

- Naked service providers are willing to take on whatever a client needs them to do within the context of their services. Sometimes what a client needs isn’t as attractive or exciting as we would like. It might cause us to be perceived as lower than the client, or perhaps just lower than we would like to be perceived. But because we are humble and more concerned about our clients than we are about ourselves, we’ll do what they need. In doing so, we’ll earn their loyalty and gratitude.

ADMIT YOUR WEAKNESSES AND LIMITATIONS

- This principle is perhaps the most general and all encompassing. It also sounds a lot like celebrating your mistakes, but it differs in a few important ways. First, it is one thing to be honest about a single mistake, and quite another to admit a general weakness. But the fact is, we all have weaknesses, and if we try to cover them up we'll probably put ourselves in a situation of having to do more and more of what we aren't good at. We'll also wear ourselves out by trying to be something we're not, which not only is exhausting but also prevents us from doing our best in the areas in which we can thrive.

Recommendation: The principles in this book apply to businesses like management consulting, financial advising, public relations, technical services, and internal corporate support services. However, they can be applied to a variety of other service businesses involving ongoing relationships with clients.



Contact Frumi at 949-729-1577
ceoconfidante@frumi.com
www.frumi.com

About the reviewer: Frumi Rachel Barr, MBA, PhD

Many CEO's find themselves asking "What now?" to sensitive situations that only an experienced former CEO can understand. Frumi is the advisor to call to work with you and your executive team as a confidante and - some would say - corporate shrink. She has an uncanny knack of getting to the heart of your corporate climate and maximizing your team's performance, profitability and sustainability.