

The 3 Big Questions for a Frantic Family

A LEADERSHIP FABLE . . .
ABOUT RESTORING SANITY
TO THE MOST IMPORTANT
ORGANIZATION IN YOUR LIFE

Patrick Lencioni



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The 3 Big
Questions
for a
Frantic Family

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*For you, Laura, for who you are and what you do
for all of us. And for mom and dad, for always
putting family first.*

INTRODUCTION

I need to start this book with two quick confessions.

First, I am not a family counselor or therapist, and I don't have a Ph.D. in psychology—or anything else for that matter. I'm a management consultant and business author, and more important, a husband and a father of four.

Second, I struggle with many books on family life. It's not that I don't enjoy the subject or find them interesting. It's just that they so often leave me feeling inadequate and overwhelmed by prescribing elaborate systems that can transform my family, as long as my wife and I have four days to invest up front and three hours per week to do follow-up exercises. Which, unfortunately, we don't.

So what prompted me to write this book?

Well, in my work as a consultant, I have frequently found myself in conversations with my clients about their families. I am happy to report that almost all the executives I've met claim that family is more important to them than work. And most of them seem to really mean it.

However, every one of those executives—including the one writing this book—would have to admit that they spend inordinately more time thinking about, strategizing about, and meeting about how to run their companies than they do their families. And yet they complain that life at home is far too reactive, frantic, and unfocused.

Of course, this makes no sense. Why would intelligent, family-oriented people overinvest in their work and fail to manage the most important organizations in their lives? And why wouldn't they apply any of the tools they use at work to improve the way their families function? I can think of a few reasons.

For one, it might not occur to us that management tools from the workplace can apply at home. We don't think about our families as organizations, and ourselves as the executives of those organizations. Additionally, I think many of us feel a little awkward, even embarrassed, at the thought of having a "strategic meeting" to talk about family values or strategic priorities. *Who does that, anyway?*

But more important than all of this, I think we undermanage our families because we take them for granted. Consider this:

Even the least organized among us spends time and energy planning and strategizing about our career, personal finances, and health. Why? Because we all think we might be forced to forfeit those things if we aren't purposeful and thoughtful about them. If we aren't proactive about managing our work and our career, we might wind up with-

out a job. If we aren't strategic about our finances, we could watch our money disappear. And if we aren't purposeful about our exercise and diet, our health could fail us.

But when it comes to being purposeful, strategic, and proactive in our family life, we don't really see much risk of loss. Sure, we might have to deal with more stress and exhaustion than we'd like, but it's not going to threaten the existence of our families. And besides, every other family seems just as frantic as ours. Family chaos is just part of life, and so we accept levels of confusion and disorganization and craziness at home that we would not tolerate at work.

Sadly, it's not until people actually have to face the possibility of losing their families (through divorce or substance abuse or other serious behavioral problems) that they finally come to realize that a little planning and strategy would have been worthwhile. But by then they're spending hours and hours in painful discussions or counseling sessions just trying to recover what they're on the verge of losing. Which reinforces the importance of the old saying, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

Now don't get me wrong. I'm not suggesting that families can ever prevent or eliminate chaos and confusion completely from their lives. As long as there are sleepovers and in-laws and book reports and Little League games and proms and college applications and weddings to deal with, we will have unpredictability and craziness in our homes. And that's a good thing, because complete control—even

if it were possible—would not be desirable. Life should be an adventure.

However, if we could achieve a little more sanity in the midst of that adventure, and transform our stressful, reactive, frantic families into more peaceful, proactive, and intentional ones, wouldn't that be worth doing? I certainly think so.

And that is the purpose of this little book—to help you run your family with more clarity and context and purposefulness by provoking you to answer three simple questions that can change your life. I hope you find my ideas helpful and that your family benefits from them in many ways for years to come.

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The Fable

PART ONE



The Problem

PROVOCATION

Theresa Cousins had never been so mad at her husband, Jude.

Ironically, the comment that sparked her anger wasn't really directed at her specifically and certainly wasn't meant as criticism. In fact, he said it without malice or emotion.

If my clients ran their companies the way we run this family, they'd be out of business.

That was it.

But as a full-time stay-at-home mom, Theresa couldn't help but feel like the target of the comment. Worse yet, she suspected that Jude might be right.

THERESA

The only sister among three brothers, Theresa Toscana considered herself a little tougher than most of her childhood friends. Receiving a partial scholarship to play volleyball at the University of Notre Dame, she chose mathematics as her major and made extra money by tutoring other athletes who were struggling with their freshman year calculus requirement.

One of those athletes was a tennis player who had a roommate named Jude Cousins, a fellow Californian who wasn't having much trouble with math but did need occasional advice about women. Even after she finished her tutoring assignment with his roommate, Theresa and Jude found excuses to be around each other. The two became friends, though they never dated.

After graduation, Theresa returned to her family's home in the San Francisco Bay Area, where she spent two and a half years in what she referred to as "accounting prison," bored to tears doing tax audits for companies that held

no interest for her. So she went back to school to become a junior high school math teacher, something she would come to love.

It was during her first year in graduate school that she also reconnected with Jude.

REUNION

Having quickly abandoned his aspirations to be a journalist in Chicago, Jude joined the herds of recent college grads moving west to work in high tech. After finding a job with a growing software company, he quickly began climbing the corporate ladder, or more accurately, being pushed up it by an industry on fire.

Living with some college friends in San Francisco, Jude spent many Saturday mornings at a local Irish pub watching Notre Dame football games with fellow alumni. It was there that he saw Theresa, and after watching a disappointing loss, he agreed to have dinner with her at her parents' house that night.

Within a week, the old friends began dating, and five years later, to the relief of Theresa's mother, they were finally married.

For the next few years, Jude and Theresa worked hard at their jobs and enjoyed life in the City, eating out with

friends and going to movies whenever they wanted. As much fun as that sounded, quietly they were struggling to start a family. Finally, after two and a half years of trying, Theresa became pregnant—with twins.

CONTINUOUS CHANGE

Almost to the day that they received the doubly overwhelming news from their doctor, Jude decided to leave his high-tech job and start his own consulting firm, working out of the spare bedroom in the couple's new little suburban home fifteen miles east of the City.

By the time the twins, Emily and Hailey, had their first birthday, Theresa had abandoned any plans for an imminent return to teaching, deciding that two infants would be more than enough work for a while.

And when she had Sophia a few years later, Theresa accepted that her teaching career would have to wait even longer, and that her role as a mother would be more than a full-time job. Besides, Jude's practice had grown much faster than they could have imagined, which meant he would be home to help less than she might have liked and that they would easily be able to afford their modest lifestyle on only one income.