



Getting Naked

A Business Fable About Shedding the Three Fears That Sabotage Client Loyalty

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

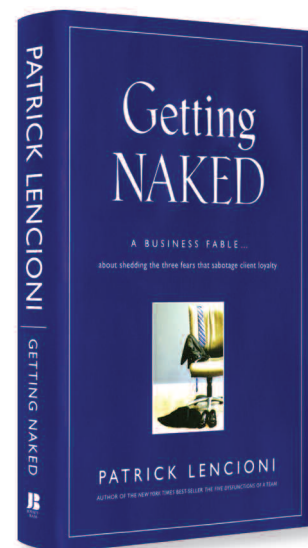
Most of us still struggle with vulnerability because we are human beings who don't like to be weak, which means we are subject to the completely natural but irrational fears that make us uncomfortable being naked.

In *Getting Naked*, acclaimed management expert, consultant, speaker and *New York Times* best-selling author Patrick Lencioni 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.

Getting Naked provides readers with concepts that are accessible and compelling. In it, Lencioni explains the three fears that provoke service providers — whether they are internal consultants, salespeople, financial advisers or anyone else serving long-term clients — to unknowingly sabotage their ability to build trust and loyalty. He also provides a practical approach for overcoming those fears.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to build deeper and longer-lasting relationships with your customers and clients.
- How to make your relationships in business and in life more authentic and fruitful.
- How to develop higher levels of client loyalty and intimacy than your competitors ever imagined.
- How to benefit from becoming more vulnerable.



by Patrick Lencioni

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: GETTING NAKED

by Patrick Lencioni

The author: Patrick Lencioni is a *New York Times* best-selling author of eight books including *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* and *The Three Signs of a Miserable Job*. He is also the president and founder of the consulting firm The Table Group.

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Introduction

Vulnerability. It 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.

For those who provide service to clients, vulnerability is particularly powerful. Those who get comfortable being vulnerable — or as some people call it, naked — are rewarded with levels of client loyalty and intimacy that other service providers can only dream of.

Can you be too vulnerable? No. Of course, if you come to your clients every day admitting that you've made yet another mistake or that you don't know how to do yet another required element of your job, that would be a serious problem. However, it would not be an issue of vulnerability, but rather of competence: The problem would not lie in the *admitting* of so many weaknesses, but in the *having* of them!

Naked Service

Why do we resist being naked with our clients?

For one, 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 ultimate-

ly our honesty, humility and selflessness that will endear us to them and allow them to trust and depend on us.

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

Part One: Theory

I'm not going to lie; Michael Casey was one of my least favorite people in the world. Even the mention of his name could put me in a moderately bad mood.

And so, if you had told me a year earlier that I would spend four solid months of my professional life learning about him and his annoying little consulting firm, I would have told you it was time for me to change careers.

But that's exactly what happened, and I've lived to tell about it.

Me

I'm Jack Bauer, and yes, I share a name with that guy on TV who saved the world every year. Unlike him,



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though, I'm not a superhero. I'm just a consultant.

For five years I'd been working within the strategy practice at Kendrick and Black, a prestigious, international full-service management consulting firm headquartered in San Francisco.

In addition to being one of the senior consultants in our division, I headed up sales for the strategy practice of our firm. This meant I sometimes competed for clients with Michael Casey and his firm, Lighthouse Partners.

Now, Lighthouse was a much smaller firm than ours, and they focused most of their work in the Bay Area, so we didn't run up against them in more than 5 to 10 percent of the projects that we pursued. But when we did, we lost every single time.

That's not exactly true. We won once. But a year later the client threw us out and hired Lighthouse, which was more painful than losing to them in the first place. This only exacerbated our bitterness toward Michael Casey.

Keep in mind that when you compete against a consulting firm you almost never actually see your competitors. But you hear about them. And after listening to story after story about Michael Casey and his team, I would have liked nothing more than to hear they were going out of business. Or so I thought.

Horrible Promotion

When I was first told by a colleague that Michael Casey was leaving Lighthouse and that his firm was for sale, I was ecstatic. We had finally worn him down, I decided.

Lighthouse was up for sale and we wouldn't have to compete with and be humiliated by them ever again.

My glee at hearing about the demise of my enemy came to an abrupt end five days later when the founder of our firm, Jim Kendrick, pulled the rug out from under me.

"Here's the deal, Jack. You probably know about a little consulting firm over in Half Moon Bay called Lighthouse Partners. Well, they were desperate to be sold in a hurry, and Marty said they were probably worth the risk. So we bought them before anyone else could. We are going to have you manage it for a while. We want you to spend five or six months overseeing the firm. As soon as you get your hands around what's going on over there, we can integrate whatever parts of it we decide to keep into our strategy division, and figure out what to do with the rest. And if all goes well, you should be heading the strategy division by then, given that Marty will be

Doing Whatever It Takes

Naked service providers not only overcome their need to feel important in the eyes of their clients, but also purposefully put themselves in a lower position. They do whatever a 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.

retiring next summer." And he left.

Just like that, my world had been turned upside down, and for the rest of the day I couldn't decide how to digest it all. As I explained to my wife that night, I should have been happy. But there was something about the situation that made me uncomfortable.

Part of it was certainly the realization that if this went poorly, my career would be considerably damaged — and that I'd have Lighthouse Partners to thank for it. Michael Casey just might continue to haunt me even after his departure.

Acceleration

Casey's departure from Lighthouse turned out to be more abrupt than anyone expected. As soon as the ink was dry on the deal, he was gone.

When I asked my boss, Marty, about the circumstances, he shrugged. "I really have no idea. But you'll probably find out on Wednesday. You're meeting with the partners over at Lighthouse Wednesday morning."

So, 48 hours after the contract had been signed, I found myself driving west along the crooked highway connecting the San Francisco Bay Area to the coastal town of Half Moon Bay. That's where the 25 employees of Lighthouse Partners were waiting to hear what I had to say about their future.

Walking the corridor, I found a door with a Lighthouse sign on it and went inside. ●

Part Two: Practice

I was greeted by a petite, 40ish blonde woman in blue jeans who was sitting at the front desk. "Can I help you?"

Before I could answer, she continued, "Are you Jack?"

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“I’m here for a meeting with Amy Stirling and Dick Janice.” I’m pretty sure that I didn’t smile, because I felt a sudden surge of self-consciousness and inferiority. I wondered if she noticed.

Without a trace of anxiety, she responded, “I’m Amy Stirling.”

Seeming to sense my discomfort, Amy continued, “Why don’t you go on into the conference room, and I’ll see if I can’t find Dick and Matt.”

A minute later I was sitting alone at the oak table in the fishbowl room.

I couldn’t decide whether I was more afraid of confronting the little monster I had been loathing for these past few years, or of discovering that it wasn’t as ugly as I had imagined. Whatever the case, it was too late to consider, because at that moment Amy and two of her colleagues walked into the room.

Dick Janice, the oldest of the partners and someone whose name I had heard a few times in the course of my sales adventures, greeted me first. Dick seemed as friendly and calm as Amy, which I found disturbing. Do these people even know who I am and why I’m here?

Fortunately, the last and youngest of the partners, Matt O’Connor, gave me a nervous vibe that reconnected me with reality. A freckle-faced redhead, Matt didn’t manage to smile when he shook my hand, and he looked away as soon as he could.

Re-Entry

“So, why did Michael Casey sell the company? Why didn’t he just let you guys run it, or sell it to you?” I asked.

“Selling it to Kendrick was the right thing to do,” Dick explained.

“Why?”

“Well,” Matt said, “for one, Michael’s never coming back. Six weeks ago his daughter and her husband were sideswiped by a semi truck. Her husband died, and she sustained very serious injuries. Michael was adamant that taking care of her two young girls was his new full-time job.”

I had to respect Michael Casey.

Matt went on. “Selling it to us would have put a huge, risky burden on us. If Michael’s departure hurt the business, the value of the firm could have disappeared. Michael wanted us to share in some financial upside, and this was the right time to do it.”

“Besides,” Amy explained, “if things don’t work out with K&B, we can always take a year off and go start another firm.”

Perspective

I couldn’t argue with the logic I was hearing. “So why do you think K&B did the deal?” I wanted to get their perspective.

“Well, we think that you — not you personally, but someone over there — didn’t like us and wanted to get rid of us.

“And then there’s the deep pockets.” Matt explained. “Kendrick and Black can afford to take a flyer on us, but that’s a lot of money to our little firm. We received a nice little payout, and we get to keep our jobs.”

I didn’t want to tell them that there was a good chance some of them wouldn’t. As it turns out, I didn’t have to.

“And if some people don’t get to keep their jobs,” Dick explained, “then they’d get a severance package to add to their payout, which would be more than enough to bridge them through to their next job.”

It was at that moment that I was about to embrace these people and become part of the team. But then it dawned on me. They were actually in a better position than I was! If things didn’t go well with the merger, they’d be fine. Probably better off. But my career would be in serious trouble.

The more I learned about Lighthouse Partners, the worse I felt about myself and about the state of my career. And that put me in a horrible situation. I had to make this merger work with a bunch of people who constantly reminded me that I was sometimes a complete ass. ●

Part Three: Research

The next day was the beginning of my personal crash course in Lighthouse Partners and Michael Casey, the man.

During my first three days in Half Moon Bay I met with at least a dozen consultants and most of the other staff members.

It wasn’t until my fourth day that I saw my first glimpse of the secret behind the success of this strange little firm.

Give Away

Dick Janice and I went into the prospective client’s building, and the receptionist gave us security badges and had us wait for someone to get us. Within minutes we were escorted to the elevators and to a conference room.

When the CEO and head of ops arrived, we did our typical meet and greet and sat down to talk. The CEO went first.

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“So, I was telling my friend, John Sullivan — he’s the COO over at Frigidata — that we needed some help figuring out how to do better planning, and he said I should call you. And that’s why we’re here.”

Dick nodded. “OK. Tell me why you think you need to do better planning.”

The CEO looked to his operating guy. “Well, it’s getting harder and harder to make revenue forecasts. Our costs are rising faster than they should be, and we’re not sure why. And we’re starting to lose market share, which hasn’t happened in 10 years.”

Pulling out his pad of paper, Dick began asking a series of questions. Revenue. Number of employees. Competitive landscape. Cost structure.

Primary Research

After he had exhausted his initial questions, Dick went to the whiteboard. “OK, let me explain what a strategically healthy company looks like, and figure out whether any of this is helpful to you.”

And for the next 45 minutes we just talked. Or better yet, Dick asked questions and the CEO and his sidekick talked.

Finally, the CEO looked up at the clock and said, “OK, we’re running out of time here. I’d like to continue this conversation with the rest of my team, because we’re going to need input from marketing and finance to figure this out.”

Dick nodded. “OK. Should we shoot for next week?” He scrolled through his PDA. “I’m good for Tuesday afternoon.”

The CEO said, “Done. We’ll be in the boardroom on the fourth floor. I’ll have Nancy set you up.”

And we were gone. It was all too easy.

Consistency

“So, I’m curious,” I said afterward, still trying to play it cool. “Why didn’t you try to wrap up the deal today? I think they’d have agreed to just about anything.”

Dick explained, “You know, I’m pretty sure they’re going to want to be a client. So I don’t really want them thinking about what we’re trying to get out of the arrangement. At this point, all I want to focus on is figuring out their issues.” He paused.

“And we need to make sure that they’d be the right kind of client. We’ll have a better sense of that next week. For all I know the real problem is the CEO. If that’s the case, and he’s not willing to deal with that, then we don’t want to be in there wasting our time and energy, and their money, rearranging deck chairs on the

Titanic. We’ve learned over the years that having a bad client is worse than having none.”

“How could that be if they’re paying you?”

Dick said, “Well, for one, it prevents you from finding other good clients. And you’re unlikely to get a good reference.” He paused. “And, as Michael used to say, it just makes you feel bad about coming to work. It destroys the culture.”

Endurance

As I approached the 12th week of my integration project, my boss Marty decided it was time to evaluate our progress and begin the process of more formal integration.

With less than a week to prepare, I began assembling my notes and asking more pointed questions than ever about Michael Casey and his various rules of thumb that, more than anything, defined his approach to client service and business. I was also starting to see a few patterns connecting many of those points. ●

Part Four: Testimony

As I nervously rode the same elevator to the 20th floor where I had been going to work uneventfully for the past five years, I decided that I had probably overdramatized the magnitude of this meeting and the situation in general.

Jim Kendrick’s opening comments at the meeting made it clear that I had not. “We paid real money for this firm. What I want to understand today is what kind of return we’re going to get.”

“Well, I think this could be an extraordinary opportunity for Kendrick and Black, much bigger than I would have imagined a few months ago when the deal was announced. But I’m not going to lie to you. We’re going to have to work hard to learn how to do what they do.”

It took more than a few seconds for my words to sink in.

“Did you say that we’re going to have to learn how to do what they do?”

I nodded my head. “That’s right. From a financial standpoint, Lighthouse has slightly better profit margins than we do, and slightly higher revenue per client. Most of their business comes from referrals and warm leads. When they meet with a client they spend their time asking questions and doing primary research right there. It’s like they skip the entire sales process. And they’re remarkably successful.”

Making the Case

“More than anything else, the power of what Lighthouse

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does can be explained by one word: *vulnerability*.”

Larry Dewitt asked, “Did you say vulnerability?” He smiled and didn’t wait for me to respond. “Is this some kind of new-age hippy thing where we’re going to get naked and hold hands?”

The room chuckled collectively and I forced myself to laugh along with them.

“It’s interesting that you used the word *naked*,” directing my comment at Larry, “because that’s not a bad way to describe the way Lighthouse presents themselves to clients.”

I had their attention again. After writing “vulnerable” and “naked” on the board, I continued.

“What I’m talking about here is a certain kind of fearlessness they have. Whether they’re selling or consulting, they don’t seem afraid of anything.”

“What would they be afraid of?”

“Three things. The first one is the fear of losing the business, either during the sales cycle or in the process of doing consulting.” I wrote it on the board.

“The second fear that Lighthouse doesn’t have — and one that most consultants, including myself, struggle with — is the fear of being embarrassed or looking stupid in front of their clients.

“The third and final fear that the Lighthouse consultants seem to have overcome is the fear of feeling inferior to their clients.”

Deception

After my presentation, Jim Kendrick stood and went to the middle of the conference table near the speakerphone.

“Gentlemen, I guess you’ve heard enough. Is there anything else you need from us right now?”

Finally, after a few seconds’ delay, a voice came over the phone.

“No, I’m good. We’ll finalize the details on Monday. Thanks, everyone.”

Jim then addressed someone else on the line. “What about you, Michael? What did you think?”

“I thought he nailed it, probably better than I could have. Great job, Jack.”

I said “Thank you” half-heartedly, not knowing who I was talking to and why there were people on the line.

Jim ended the phone conversation. He went back to his chair. “The two gentlemen on the phone were Tom Paulson from Strategic Insights, and Michael Casey, the founder of Lighthouse. I thought they should hear today’s meeting. See, we’re selling Lighthouse to

Strategic Insights, and I wanted Michael to confirm that your description of his company was accurate, and I wanted Tom Paulson to hear it directly from someone with no vested interest in selling the firm. Evidently, Paulson liked what he heard, and Michael affirmed that it was true, and so we have a deal.”

Onward

I arrived at Lighthouse the next day. When I entered the conference room, I saw only two men. They introduced themselves.

“Hi Jack, I’m Tom Paulson.” He was a nicely dressed, professional-looking man, the kind you would think would run a high-end consulting firm.

The other man, the one who looked just slightly familiar to me, was older but wore jeans and a polo shirt.

“I’m Michael Casey. I’ve heard a lot about you, Jack. I want to thank you for doing such a nice job explaining my firm the other day.”

Then he changed the subject. “Jack, I’m here to ask you to stay on and run this office.”

I turned to Tom Paulson, who smiled and made his pitch. “We want to maintain this culture and see if we can’t infect the rest of our firm with it.”

Michael went on. “Listen, I don’t want to see this place disintegrate, and I don’t want to see people over here lose their jobs. When I left, I knew that it might not be perfect and that there was a possibility things would unravel, but when I heard you on the phone this week, I decided that there was a chance to keep it going. And that’s why I got on a plane for the first time in months.”

“Of course I’ll take the job.”

Tom shook my hand enthusiastically, which was nice. Michael just smiled at me like a parent who had known all along what I was going to do. ●

THE MODEL

The Origins of Getting Naked

A management consulting firm called The Table Group was started in the late 1990s that provided 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. They call that approach *naked consulting*.

One of the keys to the naked service model is humility.

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Naked service has allowed The Table Group to build extraordinary trust among its clients over the years, beyond anything they could have imagined.

In essence, their clients have treated them more like real partners and team members than as vendors or outsiders. Or as they like to say, they treat The Table Group like members of their family. The naked approach to consulting has allowed The Table Group to more effectively serve and help those clients in meaningful ways.

The naked approach is certainly not limited to the management consulting field. It applies to anyone who provides ongoing, relationship-based advice, counsel or expertise to a customer, inside or outside of a company. Or better yet, it applies to anyone whose success is tied to building loyalty and sticky relationships with the people they serve. ●

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.

As obvious as that may sound, it is more difficult than it seems, because humility and selflessness and transparency often entail suffering. And suffering is not something most human beings, especially in our modern culture, understand or welcome. Most of us live our lives trying to avoid awkward and painful situations, which is why it is no surprise that we are susceptible to the three fears that prevent us from building trust and loyalty with our clients:

The Three Fears

#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.

#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 is rooted in pride, and it is ultimately about avoiding the appearance of ignorance, wanting to be seen instead as smart and 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 celebrate — their errors because protecting their intellectual ego is not important to them.

#3: Fear of Feeling Inferior. This fear is about preserving our sense of importance and social standing relative to a client.

It is completely natural for service providers to yearn for respect and admiration, and to have a disdain for being overlooked, condescended to or treated as though we are inferior. Sometimes we forget that the word “service” shares the same root meaning as “servant” and even “subservience.” ●

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 service are as follows:

Shedding the Fear of Losing the Business

- **Always consult instead of sell.** 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.
- **Give away 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.
- **Tell the kind truth.** 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

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needs than it is to protect the service provider's own business.

- **Enter the danger.** Naked service providers don't shy away from uncomfortable situations; they step right into the middle of them. Entering the danger has to do with having the courage to fearlessly deal with an issue that everyone else is afraid to address.

Shedding the Fear of Being Embarrassed

- **Ask dumb questions.** 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.
- **Make dumb suggestions.** 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. A client is going to remember that one great idea a consultant proposes far more than the not-so-great ones.
- **Celebrate your mistakes.** 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.

Shedding the Fear of Feeling Inferior

- **Take a bullet for the client.** This 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 confront them with the kind truth.
- **Make everything about the client.** Naked service providers throw their full attention into the world of the client. They make it clear that their focus is on understanding, honoring and supporting the business of the client.
- **Honor the client's work.** Naked service providers honor the client by taking an active interest in his or her business and by appreciating the importance of that business to the client and the client's customers.
- **Do the dirty work.** Naked service providers are willing to take on whatever a client needs them to do within the context of their services. 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.** We all have weaknesses, and if we try to cover them up we'll probably put ourselves in a situation of having

Another Reason to Give Away the Business

Another 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.

to do more and more of what we aren't good at. Trying to be something we're not is not only exhausting, it also prevents us from doing our best in the areas in which we can thrive. ●

Broader Applications of Nakedness

The principles of naked service apply most directly and comprehensively 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.

This could certainly include family practice doctors, retained lawyers, sales account managers, life coaches, building contractors, insurance agents and even personal trainers. And although every principle of naked service may not apply to each of these fields, most of them do, and they can help any service provider inspire loyalty and trust with clients.

Even beyond the world of clients, being naked has its benefits and advantages. When we can demonstrate vulnerability to the people we live and work with, we build stronger relationships, affirm our trust in them and inspire them to become more vulnerable themselves. And that is certainly worth getting naked for. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Getting Naked*, you'll also like:

1. ***The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* by Patrick Lencioni.** The master of the business fable uses this medium to get to the heart of why so many teams break apart and how to overcome the common problems faced by teams.
2. ***Satisfaction* by Chris Denove and James D. Power IV.** Using the closely guarded research data of J.D. Power and Associates, this book pushes executives to devote significant effort to customer satisfaction.
3. ***The Speed of Trust* by Stephen M.R. Covey.** The one thing that is common to every individual, team and organization is the need for trust. In an era of skepticism, Covey shows you how to grow and nurture trust with clients.