

THE MOTIVE

BY PATRICK LENCIONI

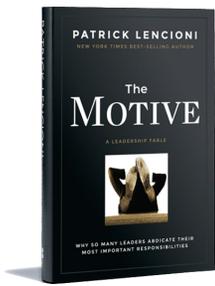
THE SITUATION

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 ax 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. The company, headquartered in Emeryville, a mostly commercial town on the eastern shore of the San Francisco Bay, was still growing, albeit slower than most other regional home security companies in the west. Profit margins were solid, but compared to All-American Alarm, the massive and most aggressive national company in the home and small business security market, they looked anemic.

Shay figured that the PE 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.



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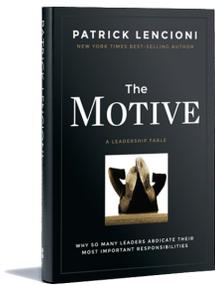
RESEARCH

Lighthouse Consulting was a small firm located in Half Moon Bay, California, and it 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.

Whether it was a panel discussion at a trade show or an article in a business magazine, Del Mar and its British CEO, Liam Alcott, were regularly lauded for their off-the-chart profitability as well as for their ability to fend off national competitors like All-American.

Normally, Shay would have never 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.



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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.

And 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 before he could pick up the phone to play along, he noticed the 619 area-code and decided that the caller might just be his nemesis calling from San Diego.

Taking a deep breath, he dove in. "This is Shay."

"Hello, Shay. This is Liam Alcott."

Shay realized immediately that it wasn't a prank. But he was somehow relieved that he didn't even like the sound of the man's voice, notwithstanding the English accent, which he decided was affected. So he decided to be excessively nice.

"Well, what can I do for you, Liam?"

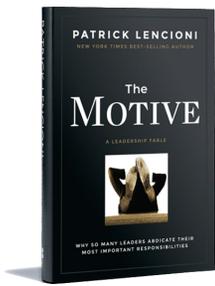
"First, I want to apologize for not reaching out to you last summer to congratulate you on your promotion. I feel like a bum."

Shay wasn't at all convinced that the man was genuine. But he wasn't about to let on. "Don't be silly. Believe me, if anyone knows how busy you are, it's me."

"I suppose that's true. Anyway, 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. Shay tried to play it cool. "Yeah. I just figured that they know our industry, and that if they didn't have a problem with-

Liam interrupted. "Of course. I get it. And I don't have any problem with it at all. Amy's a great consultant, and Lighthouse has been very helpful to us down here. You would love working with her."



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NEMESIS (CONTINUED)

More than a little surprised, Shay backed off to preserve some pride. “Well, we’re going to be talking to other firms too, so we’re not ready to commit to anything quite yet.”

Liam didn’t flinch. “That’s smart. In fact, before you hire any consultants, I think there is one big thing that you should do first.”

Shay was bracing himself for some sort of condescending advice. “What’s that?”

“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?”

“I’ll have to check with-”

“I just asked your assistant, Rita. It’s Rita, right?”

“Yeah.”

“She said you’re wide open Friday. You were supposed to do an ops review or something but it got pushed back a few weeks.”

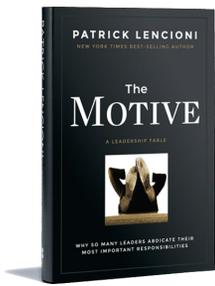
Shay suddenly felt betrayed, by Rita, by the consultants at Lighthouse, by someone. Not ready to accept his enemy’s clearly devious offer, he pushed back.

“Don’t take this wrong, Liam,” he 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.

Liam continued. “I’d say that our common enemy is All-American, and I’d rather not see them get another regional foothold in Northern California.” He paused. “Unless you’ve already figured out how to deal with them.”



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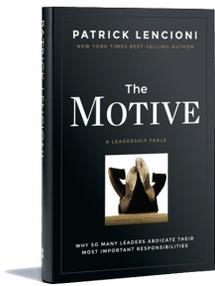
NEMESIS (CONTINUED)

Though Shay 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. "No, we've still got work to do there."

"Okay," Liam announced enthusiastically, "so that's one area where I might be able to help you. And I'm sure you'll have some advice for me."

Shay responded with a partially false sense of humility. "Well, I don't know about that." Deciding that he could think of no good reason to refuse Liam's offer, he relented. "Alright, then. What time should we meet on Friday?"

When the call ended, Shay decided he'd have several days to come up with a good reason to be out of town at the end of next week.



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DEFENSELESS

By the close of the day, Shay realized he was stuck. It wasn't that he lacked the cleverness to come up with a believable excuse. He had plenty of small business customers he could schedule a meeting with on a moment's notice. That wasn't the problem. Shay's predicament was having to choose between two threats to his pride.

On the one hand, canceling the meeting would allow him to avoid the humiliation of a lecture from a man he disliked. On the other hand, missing out on good advice from a more successful company might cause him to forfeit more market share to All-American Alarm, which would embarrass him in front of his board and possibly lead to his eventual demise. Deciding that losing his job would be worse than admitting his inferiority to Liam, Shay decided to go ahead and meet with his adversary and learn what he could about how to deal with their mutual competitor.

But when he woke up on Friday, he laid in bed staring at the ceiling, wondering if he had made the right decision.

Turning to his wife, Dani, who had just woken up, Shay asked her a strange question. "Isn't there some really important chore you need me to do right away so I don't have to go to work?"

Dani laughed. "You must have a lot of meetings today."

"I wish." Shay responded, wondering if he should confess his pettiness to his wife.

"What's the problem then?"

"Oh, I'm just being stupid. I have to spend a lot of time with someone I don't particularly enjoy."

"Brandon?" she asked.

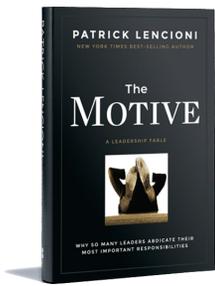
"No."

"Marisa?"

Shay climbed out of bed. "No, it's no one from the company."

Dani seemed puzzled. "Who is it?"

"Oh, I don't know," he answered as he disappeared into the bathroom.



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DEFENSELESS (CONTINUED)

“What do you mean ‘you don’t know’? Who is it?”

“It’s a guy named Liam Alcott.”

“You mean that CEO from San Diego who you hate so much?” Dani shouted so her husband could hear her from the other room.

Shay came back into the bedroom. “Have I complained about him that much?”

“Are you kidding? ‘Liam Alcott is a pompous ass. Liam Alcott thinks he’s God’s gift to business. Liam Alcott’s accent is so fake that-’”

Shay interrupted his wife. “Okay, I get it. I guess I have.”

Dani got up and started making the bed. “So why are you meeting with him?”

“I don’t know. It’s weird. He offered to help me with something.”

“Did he offer to help you make the bed?”

“What?” Shay was confused.

She pointed to his side of the bed.

“Oh. Sorry.” He started to pull the sheets and blanket up.

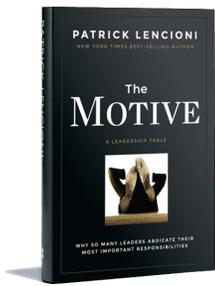
“So what’s this meeting about?” She persisted.

Shay didn’t want to tell her the whole story. “He wants to help figure out how to compete better with All-American.”

“That’s a good thing, right?”

“If it were anyone else...” He didn’t finish the sentence.

“Well, I’d say you need to take a breath, put your big boy pants on, and admit that he might know something you don’t.” She paused while he took her advice. “And if he’s a pompous ass, thank him for his time and be the bigger person.”



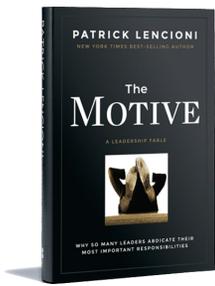
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DEFENSELESS (CONTINUED)

“You know,” Shay stopped making the bed for a moment. “I don’t remember asking for your opinion.” He smiled.

Dani threw a pillow at him and responded with a British accent. “I’m sorry. Was I being a pompous ass?”



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INVASION

When Shay walked into his office, he found Liam sitting behind his desk with his feet propped up on it, smoking a cigar.

“So, big boy. Let me tell you how to run a business.”

No, that’s not true. But Liam was already sitting in the lobby of the building waiting for him.

“Good morning, Shay!” Liam announced as he stood up, with more enthusiasm than Shay would have liked this early in the morning.

Still, he mustered up the energy to respond in kind. “It’s nice to finally meet you, Liam. Thanks so much for doing this.”

“Hey, it’s a chance to avoid having to spend too much time with my in-laws.”

Shay laughed inauthentically, like one of those characters at the end of a bad sit-com.

The two continued their small talk as they made their way toward Shay’s office, stopping by the kitchen to get coffee.

Arriving at the CEO’s well-appointed office with a view of Alcatraz, they sat down at a couch, and Shay began.

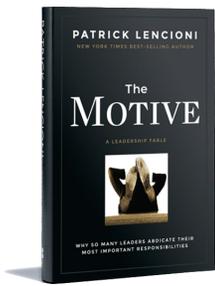
“So, where should we start?”

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?”

Shay felt a sudden rush of shame again, wondering if this wasn’t an accusation. Liam seemed to read his mind.

“Oh, I’m not questioning your intentions, Shay. Not at all.” He held up his hands in a show of apology. “I’m just wondering what you were feeling that made you look for help.”

Relieved by the reassurance, Shay wondered if Liam might be a little less pompous than he had assumed. He decided he could open up a little.



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INVASION (CONTINUED)

“Well, I’m just not feeling like we’re firing on all cylinders here.” Okay, that wasn’t so bad, Shay decided.

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

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

Liam looked up with a big smile on his face and said something that seemed to Shay to be either arrogance or goofiness. “Oooh, this is going to be fun.”

At that moment Shay decided he’d made a big mistake.

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