



the table group
a patrick lencioni company

Successful People Can Be So Annoying

A friend of mine (I'll call him AI because that's his name) recently embarked on a new career as a consultant, and he has been wildly successful, even during these difficult economic times. Anyone who knows him will tell you why he has done so well: he is one of the most diligent, enthusiastic and painstakingly thorough people you'll ever meet. In fact, if you were a competitor of his, you'd say he is over the top. Even annoying.

Anyone who is being honest with himself will admit that the only reason to be annoyed by AI is because he is setting the bar high for himself and his competitors, and because he is able to leap over that bar every time. His success makes perfect sense.

A client organization I've worked with a lot over the past few years, Chick-fil-A, shares many of AI's characteristics. The Atlanta-based restaurant company is known for extraordinary service and customer loyalty, as well as strong financial performance. Anyone who has worked with them behind the scenes knows why — they are extremely picky about everything they do. They approach every project they engage in, from new product launches to leadership training, with extraordinary attention to detail. And they never, ever do something halfway. They take time to do research, think through their options, and carefully discern what would be best for their customers and employees. And then they do it again.

I will be honest here and tell you that even as a partner and vendor to Chick-fil-A, there was a time early in our relationship when I thought my friends there were a little over the top. In the process of doing a project, I'd be tempted to say, "Come on now. That's good enough. Let's not overdo this." And then I would see the end product of their diligence, whether it was a management training program or the opening of a new store or a new menu item, and I would think *oh, now I get it*. Again, their success makes perfect sense.

Any competitor of Chick-fil-A who finds them annoying, and many of them certainly do, would have to admit that it's just plain hard to compete with an organization that sets the bar so high and clears it again and again. Of course, customers don't find Chick-fil-A annoying; they love the consistency of their service and products. And employees don't seem to mind it either; the line of people who want to work there is a long one.

All of this says something interesting about success. If you're not willing to do things that others would say are over the top, and if you're not comfortable being criticized for being annoying and for having standards that seem perhaps just a little too high, then you'll drift toward mediocrity. And though no one would ever aspire to being mediocre, it is more tempting than we might realize. After all, the majority of people out there will encourage us to take the easy route, because that isn't threatening to them. They'll support us as we justify cutting a corner here and lowering our standards there, because it isn't reasonable to do anything more.

And I suppose that's the whole point. Success isn't about being reasonable. It's demanding. It's over the top. It can even be annoying. But it's worth it.

Yours.