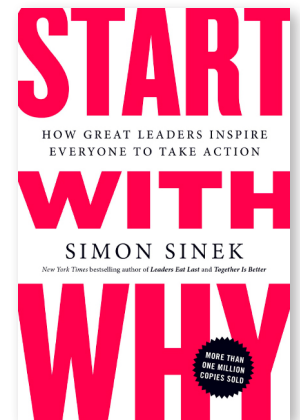


Start with Why

How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action

by **Simon Sinek**



Contents

Assume You Know
Page 2

The Golden Circle
Page 2

Clarity, Discipline and Consistency
Page 4

The Emergence of Trust
Page 5

How a Tipping Point Tips
Page 5

Know WHY. Know HOW. Then WHAT?
Page 6

The Origins of a WHY
Page 8

The New Competition
Page 8

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Any person or organization can explain what they do; some can explain how they are different or better, but very few can clearly articulate why. **WHY** is not about money or profit — those are results. **WHY** is the thing that inspires us and inspires those around us.

Although these “natural-born leaders” may have come into the world with a predisposition to inspire, the ability is not reserved for them exclusively. We can all learn this pattern. With a little discipline, any leader or organization can inspire others both inside and outside their organization to help advance their ideas and their visions. We can all learn to lead.

Start With Why shows that the leaders who inspire all think, act and communicate in the exact same way — and it’s the complete opposite of what everyone else does. Drawing on a wide range of real-life stories, it provides a framework upon which organizations can be built, movements can be led, and people can be inspired — and it all starts with **WHY**.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The naturally occurring pattern of how great leaders inspire people.
- How brain biology plays a role in influencing others when you answer the question, “Why?”
- How to inspire employees and customers to create brand loyalty.
- What causes a tipping point to occur.
- Why visionaries need “how” people to be successful.

PART I: A WORLD THAT DOESN'T START WITH WHY

Assume You Know

We make decisions based on what we *think* we know. It wasn't too long ago that the majority of people believed the world was flat. This perceived truth impacted behavior. During this period, there was very little exploration. People feared that if they traveled too far, they might fall off the edge of the earth. So for the most part, they stayed put. It wasn't until that minor detail was revealed — the world is round — that behaviors changed on a massive scale.

Now consider how organizations are formed and how decisions are made. Do we really know why some organizations succeed and why others don't, or do we just assume?

As we all know, however, not all decisions work out to be the right ones, regardless of the amount of data we collect. Sometimes the impact of those wrong decisions is minor, and sometimes it can be catastrophic. Whatever the result, we make decisions based on a perception of the world that may not, in fact, be completely accurate.

When faced with a result that doesn't go according to plan, a series of perfectly effective short-term tactics are used until the desired outcome is achieved. But how structurally sound are those solutions?

There is a wonderful story of a group of American car executives who went to Japan to see a Japanese assembly line. At the end of the line, the doors were put on hinges, the same as in America. But something was missing. In the United States, a line worker would take a rubber mallet and tap the edges of the door to ensure that it fit perfectly. In Japan, that job didn't seem to exist. Their Japanese guide looked at them and smiled sheepishly. "We make sure it fits when we design it."

Every instruction we give, every course of action we set, every result we desire starts with the same thing: a decision. There are those who decide to manipulate the door to fit to achieve the desired result, and there are those who start from somewhere very different. Though both courses of action may yield similar short-term results, it is what we can't see that makes long-term success more predictable for only one.

Carrots and Sticks

There's barely a product or service on the market today that customers can't buy from someone else for about the same price, about the same quality, about the same level of

service and about the same features.

But if you ask most businesses why their customers are their customers, most will tell you it's because of superior quality, features, price or service. In other words, most companies have no clue why their customers are their customers. This is a fascinating realization. If companies don't know why their customers are their customers, odds are good that they don't know why their employees are their employees either.

The reality is, most businesses today are making decisions based on a set of incomplete or, worse, completely flawed assumptions about what's driving their business.

There are only two ways to influence human behavior: you can manipulate it, or you can inspire it.

From business to politics, manipulations run rampant in all forms of sales and marketing. Typical manipulations include dropping the price; running a promotion; using fear, peer pressure or aspirational messages; and promising innovation to influence behavior to drive purchases, votes or support. When companies or organizations do not have a clear sense of why their customers are their customers, they tend to rely on a disproportionate number of manipulations to get what they need. And for good reason. Manipulations work.

Reality is, in today's world, manipulations are the norm. But there is an alternative.

PART II: AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE

The Golden Circle

There are a few leaders who choose to inspire rather than manipulate in order to motivate people. Whether individuals or organizations, every single one of these inspiring leaders thinks, acts and communicates exactly the same way. And it's the complete opposite of the rest of us. Consciously or not, how they do it is by following a naturally concurring pattern that I call the Golden Circle.

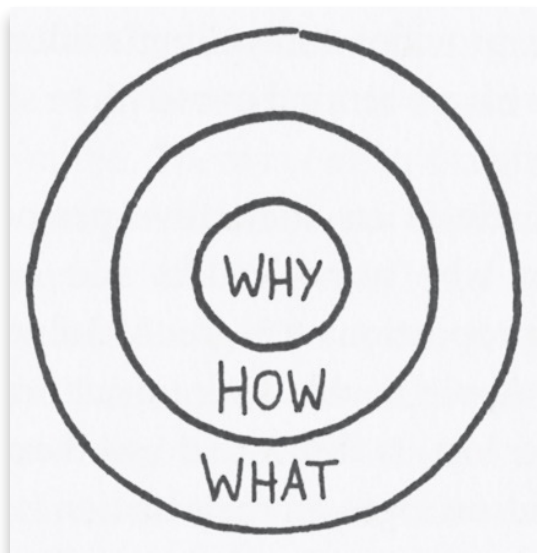
The Golden Circle is an alternative perspective to existing assumptions about why some leaders and organizations have achieved such a disproportionate degree of influence. It offers clear insight as to how Apple is able to innovate in so many diverse industries and never lose its ability to do so. It explains why people tattoo Harley-Davidson logos on their bodies. It provides a clearer understanding not just of how Southwest Airlines created the most profitable airline in history but why the things it did worked.

It all starts with Why.

Before we can explore its applications, let me first define the terms, starting from the outside of the circle and moving inward.

WHAT: Every single company and organization on the planet knows **WHAT** they do. This is true no matter how big or small, no matter what industry. Everyone is easily able to describe the products or services a company sells or the job function they have within that system. **WHATs** are easy to identify.

HOW: Some companies and people know **HOW** they do **WHAT** they do. Whether you call them a “differentiating value proposition,” “proprietary process” or “unique selling proposition,” **HOWs** are often given to explain how something is different or better. Not as obvious as **WHATs**, many think these are the differentiating or motivating factors in a decision. It would be false to assume that’s all that is required. There is one missing detail:



WHY: Very few people or companies can clearly articulate **WHY** they do **WHAT** they do. When I say **WHY**, I don’t mean to make money — that’s a result. By **WHY** I mean what is your purpose, cause or belief? **WHY** does your company exist? **WHY** do you get out of bed every morning? And **WHY** should anyone care?

When most organizations or people think, act or communicate, they do so from the outside in, from **WHAT** to **WHY**.

But not the inspired companies.

I use Apple Inc. frequently as an example simply because they have broad recognition and their products are easy to grasp and compare to others. What’s more, Apple’s success over time is not typical. Their ability to remain one of the most innovative companies year after year combined with their uncanny ability to attract a cultlike following makes them a great example to demonstrate many of the principles of The Golden Circle.

I’ll start with a simple marketing example.

A marketing message from Apple, if they were like everyone else, might sound like this:

We make great computers.

They’re beautifully designed, simple to use and user-friendly.

Wanna buy one?

It’s not a very compelling sales pitch, but that’s how most companies sell to us.

But that is not what the inspiring leaders and organizations do. Every one of them, regardless of size or industry, thinks, acts and communicates from the inside out.

Let’s look at that Apple example again and rewrite the example in the order Apple actually communicates. This time, the example starts with **WHY**:

Everything we do, we believe in challenging the status quo. We believe in thinking differently.

The way we challenge the status quo is by making our products beautifully designed, simple to use and user-friendly.

And we happen to make great computers.

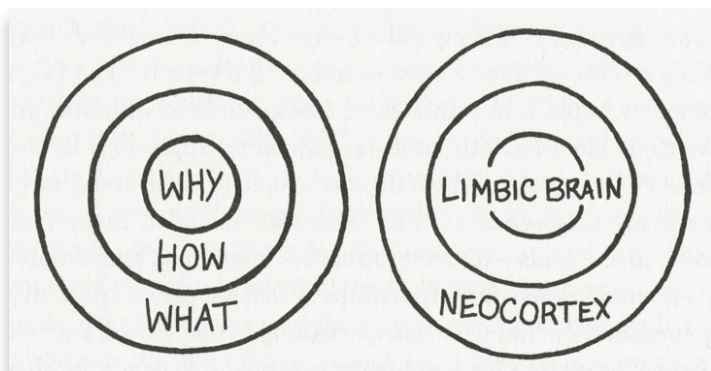
Wanna buy one?

Apple not only reverses the order of the information, their message also starts with **WHY**, the purpose, cause or belief that has nothing to do with **WHAT** they do.

Knowing your **WHY** is not the only way to be successful, but it is the only way to maintain a lasting success and have a greater blend of innovation and flexibility. When a **WHY** goes fuzzy, it becomes much more difficult to maintain the growth, loyalty and inspiration that helped drive the original success. By difficult, I mean that manipulation rather than inspiration fast becomes the strategy of choice to motivate behavior.

This Is Not Opinion, This Is Biology

When a decision feels right, we have a hard time explaining why we did what we did. The part of the brain that controls decision-making doesn't control language, which is why we rationalize "gut" decisions that "feel" right. Decision-making and the ability to explain those decisions exist in different parts of the brain. There is no part of the stomach that controls decision-making; it all happens in the limbic brain.



It's What You Can't See That Matters

In focus groups, the makers of laundry detergent asked consumers WHAT they wanted from detergent, and consumers said whiter whites and brighter brights. So brands attempted to differentiate HOW they got your whites whiter and brights brighter by trying to convince consumers that one additive was more effective than another. No one knew exactly what was driving their behavior. That little nugget wasn't revealed until many years later when a group of anthropologists hired by one of the packaged-goods companies revealed that all those additives weren't in fact driving behavior.

Products with a clear sense of WHY give people a way to tell the outside world who they are and what they believe. Remember, people don't buy WHAT you do; they buy WHY you do it. If a company does not have a clear sense of WHY, then it is impossible for the outside world to perceive anything more than WHAT the company does. And when that happens, manipulations that rely on pushing price, features, service or quality become the primary currency of differentiation.

Clarity, Discipline and Consistency

Starting with WHY is just the beginning. There is still work to be done before a person or an organization earns the right or ability to inspire. For The Golden Circle to work, each of the pieces must be in balance and in the right order.

Clarity of WHY

If the leader of the organization can't clearly articulate WHY the organization exists in terms beyond its products or services, then how does he expect the employees to know WHY to come to work and WHY customers should buy? To inspire starts with the clarity of WHY.

Discipline of HOW

Once you know WHY you do what you do, the question is HOW will you do it? HOWs are your values or principles that guide HOW to bring your cause to life. HOW we do things manifests in the systems and processes within an organization and the culture. Understanding HOW you do things and, more importantly, having the discipline to hold the organization and all its employees accountable to those guiding principles, enhances an organization's ability to work to its natural strengths. Understanding HOW gives greater ability.

Consistency of WHAT

Everything you say and everything you do has to prove what you believe. A WHY is just a belief. That's all it is. HOWs are the actions you take to realize that belief. And WHATs are the results of those actions — everything you say and do: your products, services, marketing, PR, culture and whom you hire. If people don't buy WHAT you do but WHY you do it, then all these things must be consistent.

Three Degrees of Certainty

When we can only provide a rational basis for a decision, when we can only point to tangible elements or rational measurements, the highest level of confidence we can give is, "I *think* this is the right decision." That would be biologically accurate because we're activating the neocortex, the "thinking" part of our brain.

When we make gut decisions, the highest level of confidence we can offer is, "The decision *feels* right," even if it flies in the face of all the facts and figures. Again, this is biologically accurate because gut decisions happen in the part of the brain that controls our emotions, not language. Ask the most successful entrepreneurs and leaders what their secret is, and invariably, they all say the same thing: "I trust my gut." However, the gut decision can only be made by a single person. It's a perfectly good strategy for an individual or a small organization, but what happens when success necessitates that more people be able to make decisions that feel right?

That's when the power of WHY can be fully realized. The

ability to put a WHY into words provides the emotional context for decisions.

The goal of business should not be to do business with anyone who simply wants what you have. It should be to focus on the people who believe what you believe. When we are selective about doing business only with those who believe in our WHY, trust emerges.

PART III: LEADERS NEED A FOLLOWING

The Emergence of Trust

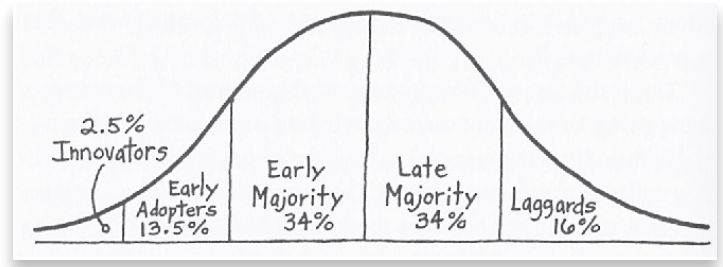
Whom do you trust more, someone you know or someone you don't know? What do you trust more, a claim made in a piece of advertising or a recommendation from a friend? Are these questions too easy? Then how about this one: why should anyone trust you?

Personal recommendations go a long way. We trust the judgment of others. It's part of the fabric of strong cultures. But we don't trust the judgment of just anyone. We are more likely to trust those who share our values and beliefs. When we believe someone has our best interest in mind because it is in their benefit to do so, the whole group benefits. The advancements of societies were based a great deal on the trust between those with a common set of values and beliefs.

So many decisions (and indeed contract negotiations) are based on an advertising industry measurement called a Q-score — a quotient of how well recognized a celebrity is, how famous they are, so to speak. The higher the score, the better the unaided awareness of the celebrity. This information alone is not enough. The clearer the spokesperson's own WHY is understood, the better ambassador they can be for a like-minded brand or company. But there is no measurement of a celebrity's WHY currently available, so the result is obvious. Unless the audience to which you are trying to appeal gets a sense of what that spokesperson believes, unless that spokesperson is "one of us," the enforcement may drive recognition, and it may even drive sales for the short term, but it will fail to build trust.

How A Tipping Point Tips

In his 1962 book *Diffusion of Innovations*, Everett M. Rogers was the first to formally describe how innovations spread through society. But the Law of Diffusion of Innovations explains much more than just the spread of innova-



tion or technology. It explains the spread of ideas.

There is an irony to mass-market success, as it turns out. It's near impossible to achieve if you point your marketing and resources to the middle of the bell curve, if you attempt to woo those who represent the middle of the curve without first appealing to the early adopters.

That's because the early majority won't try something new until someone else has tried it first. This is why we have to drop our price or offer value-added services. We're attempting to reduce the risk tolerance of these practical-minded people until they feel comfortable to buy. That's what a manipulation is. They may buy, but they won't be loyal. Don't forget, loyalty is when people are willing to suffer some inconvenience or pay a premium to do business with you.

The goal of business then should not be to simply sell to anyone who wants what you have — the majority — but rather to find people who believe what you believe, the left side of the bell curve. They perceive greater value in what you do and will happily pay a premium or suffer some sort of inconvenience to be a part of your cause. They are the ones who of their own volition will tell others about you. If you reach them, the system tips, and the idea or product spreads.

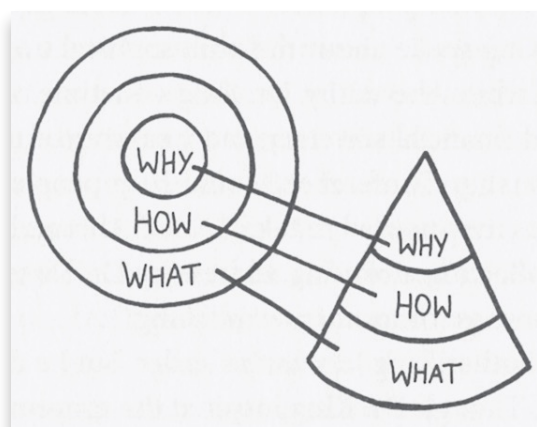
That 15 to 18 percent is not made up of people who are simply willing to buy the product. It is the percentage of people who share your beliefs and want to incorporate your ideas, your products and your services into their own lives as WHATs to their own WHYs. They look to WHAT you do as a tangible element that demonstrates their own purpose, cause or belief to the outside world. Their ability to easily see WHY they need to incorporate your products into their lives makes this group the most loyal customers. Get enough of the people on the left side of the curve on your side, and they encourage the rest to follow.

PART IV: HOW TO RALLY THOSE WHO BELIEVE

Start With WHY, But Know HOW

The Golden Circle is not just a communication tool; it also provides some insight into how great organizations are organized. If it is to provide any real value in how to build a great organization in our very three-dimensional world, the Golden Circle needs to be three-dimensional. The good news is, it is. It is, in fact, a top-down view of a cone.

The cone represents a company or an organization — an inherently hierarchical and organized system. Sitting at the top of the system, representing the WHY is a leader; in the case of a company, that's usually the CEO (or at least we hope it is). The next level down, the HOW level, typically includes the senior executives who are inspired by the leader's vision and know HOW to bring it to life. Don't forget that a WHY is just a belief; HOWs are the actions we take to realize that belief, and WHATs are the results of those actions.



Those Who Know WHY Need Those Who Know HOW

Walt Disney was a WHY-type, a dreamer whose dream came true thanks to the help of his more sensible older brother Roy, a HOW-type.

Walt Disney began his career creating cartoon drawings for advertisements but moved quickly to making animated movies. Like all WHY guys, Walt was busy thinking about what the future looked like and often forgot he was living in the present. “Walt Disney dreamed, drew and imagined, Roy stayed in the shadow, forming an empire,” wrote Bob Thomas, a Disney biographer. “A brilliant financier and businessman, Roy helped turn Walt Disney’s dreams into reality, building the company that bears his brother’s name.”

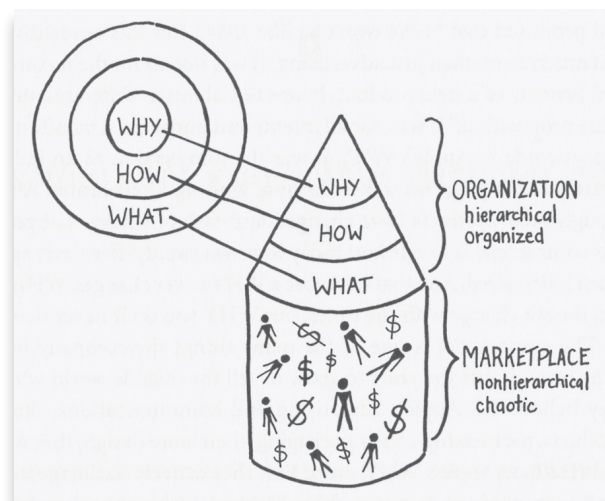
HOW-types don't need WHY-types to do well. But WHY-guys, for all their vision and imagination, often get the short end of the stick. Without someone inspired by their vision and the knowledge to make it a reality, most WHY-types end

up as starving visionaries, people with all the answers but never accomplishing much themselves.

Although so many of them fancy themselves visionaries, in reality most successful entrepreneurs are HOWtypes. Ask an entrepreneur what they love about being an entrepreneur, and most will tell you they love to build things. That they talk about building is a sure clue that they know HOW to get things done. But most companies, no matter how well built, do not become billion-dollar businesses or change the course of industries. That is all you need.

Know WHY. Know HOW. Then WHAT?

The leader sitting at the top of the organization is the inspiration, the symbol of the reason we do what we do. They represent the emotional limbic brain. WHAT the company says and does represents the rational thought and language of the neocortex. Just as it is hard for people to speak their feelings, like someone trying to explain why they love their spouse, it is equally hard for an organization to explain its WHY. The part of the brain that controls feelings and the part that controls language are not the same. Translated into business terms, this means that trying to communicate your differentiating value proposition is really hard.



Put bluntly, the struggle that so many companies have to differentiate or communicate their true value to the outside world is not a business problem; it's a biology problem. And just like a person struggling to put her emotions into words, we rely on metaphors, imagery and analogies in an attempt to communicate how we feel. Absent the proper language to share our deep emotions, our purpose, cause or belief, we tell

stories. We use symbols. We create tangible things for those who believe what we believe to point to and say, “That’s why I’m inspired.” If done properly, that’s what marketing, branding and products and services become: a way for organizations to communicate to the outside world. Communicate clearly, and you shall be understood.

Communication Is Not About Speaking, It’s About Listening

There are people who walk around with Harley Davidson tattoos on their bodies. Some of them don’t even own the product. The reason is simple. After years of Harley being crystal clear about what they believe, after years of being disciplined about a set of values and guiding principles, and after years of being doggedly consistent about everything they say and do, their logo has become a symbol. It no longer simply identifies a company and its products; it identifies a belief.

Most companies have logos, but few have been able to convert those logos into meaningful symbols. Because most companies are bad at communicating what they believe.

For a logo to become a symbol, people must be inspired to use that logo to say something about who they are and what they believe.

The Celery Test

We often look for the best practices of others to help guide us. But it is a flawed assumption that what works for one organization will work for another.

It is not just WHAT or HOW you do things that matters; what matters more is that WHAT and HOW you do things is consistent with your WHY. Only then will your practices indeed be best.

Imagine you go to a dinner party, and somebody comes up to you and says, “You know what you need in your organization? M&M’s. If you’re not using M&M’s in your business, you’re leaving money on the table.”

Somebody else comes up to you and says, “You know what you need? Rice milk. The data shows that all the people are buying rice milk these days. You should be selling rice milk in this economy.”

While you’re standing over the punch bowl, yet another person offers some sage advice: “Oreo cookies,” he says. “We made millions from implementing Oreo cookies in our organization. You’ve got to do it.”

Still somebody else comes up to you and says, “Celery. You’ve got to get into celery.”

You get all this great advice from all these highly accomplished people. Some of them are in the same industry. Some of them are more successful than you. Some of them have offered similar advice to others with great success. Now, what do you do?

You go to the supermarket, and you buy celery, rice milk, Oreos and M&M’s. You spend a lot of time at the supermarket walking the aisles. You spend a lot of money because you buy everything. But you may or may not get any value from some or all of these products; there are no guarantees.

But one thing’s for sure: when you’re standing in line at the supermarket with all of these items in your arms, your celery, rice milk, Oreos and M&Ms, people will walk right past you, and nobody can see what you believe.

But what if you knew your WHY before you went to the supermarket? What if your WHY is to do only things that are healthy? To always do the things that are good for your body? You’ll get all the same good advice from all the same people; the only difference is, the next time you go to the supermarket, you’ll buy only rice milk and celery. Those are the only products that make sense. It’s not that the other advice isn’t good advice; it’s just not good for you.

Filtering your decisions through your WHY, you spend less time at the supermarket, and you spend less money, so there’s an efficiency advantage also. You’re guaranteed to get value out of all the products you bought. And, most importantly, when you’re standing in line with your products in your arms, everybody can see what you believe. Others who are healthy will see you as someone like them.

PART V: THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE IS SUCCESS

When WHY Goes Fuzzy

The single greatest challenge any organization will face is ... success. When the company is small, the founder will rely on their gut to make all the major decisions. But as the organization grows, as it becomes more successful, it becomes physically impossible for one person to make every major decision. Not only must others be trusted and relied upon to make big decisions, but those people will also start making hiring choices. And slowly but surely, as the megaphone grows, the clarity of WHY starts to dilute.

The moment at which the clarity of WHY starts to go fuzzy is the split. At this point, organizations may be loud, but they are no longer clear.



Microsoft has experienced a split but is not so far down the line that it can't be put back on track. There was a time not too long ago that people at Microsoft showed up at work every day to change the world. And they did. What Microsoft achieved, putting a PC on every desk, dramatically changed the way we live. But then their WHY went fuzzy. Few people at the company today are instructed to do everything they can to help people be more productive so that they can achieve their greatest potential. Instead, Microsoft became just a software company.

Good Successions Keep the WHY Alive

Successful succession is more than selecting someone with an appropriate skill set — it's about finding someone who is in lockstep with the original cause around which the company was founded. Great second or third CEOs don't take the helm to implement their own vision of the future; they pick up the original banner and lead the company into the next generation. That's why we call it succession, not replacement. There is a continuity of vision.

PART VI: DISCOVER WHY

The Origins of a WHY

Just as Apple's WHY developed during the rebellious 1960s and '70s, the WHY for every other individual or organization comes from the past. It is born out of the upbringing and life experience of an individual or small group. Every single person has a WHY, and every single organization has one too. An organization, don't forget, is one of the WHATs, one of the tangible things a found or group of

founders has done in their lives to prove their WHY.

Every company, organization or group with the ability to inspire starts with a person or small group of people who were inspired to do something bigger than themselves. Gaining clarity of WHY, ironically, is not the hard part. It is the discipline to trust one's gut, to stay true to one's purpose, cause or beliefs. Remaining completely in balance and authentic is the most difficult part. The few who are able to build a megaphone, not just a company, around their cause are the ones who earn the ability to inspire. In doing so, they harness a power to move people that few can even imagine. Learning the WHY of a company or an organization or understanding the WHY of any social movement always starts with one thing: you.

The New Competition

If you follow your WHY, then others will follow you.

All organizations start with WHY, but only the great ones keep their WHY clear year after year. Those who remember WHY they were founded show up to the race every day to outdo themselves. The pursuit, for those who remember WHY they are running the race, is not for the medal or to beat someone else but to advance their own cause.

What if the next time someone asks, "Well why should I do business with you?" we answer, "Our goal is to find customers who believe what we believe and work together so that we can all succeed. We're looking for people to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with us in pursuit of the same goal. We're not interested in sitting across a table from each other in pursuit of a sweeter deal. And here are the things we're doing to advance our cause," and then the details of HOW and WHAT you do follow. But this time, it started with WHY.

Imagine if every organization started with WHY. Decisions would be simpler. Loyalties would be great. Trust would be a common currency. If our leaders were diligent about starting with WHY, optimism would reign, and innovation would thrive. As this book illustrates, there is precedence for this standard. No matter the size of the organization, no matter the industry, no matter the product or the service, if we all take some responsibility to start with WHY and inspire others to do the same, then, together, we can change the world.

And that's pretty inspiring.



Simon Sinek is leading a movement to inspire people to do what inspires them. Sinek is also an adjunct staff member of the RAND Corporation and teaches graduate-level strategic communications at Columbia University.

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