

Start with Why:
How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action
Simon Sinek

SYNOPSIS

Effective leadership requires many skills, but none are more important than the ability to inspire people to action. In *Start with Why*, author Simon Sinek asserts that the most important question that truly exceptional leaders ask—and are able to answer—is, “Why do we do what we do?” Understanding the “why” behind individual and organizational actions can mean the difference between resistance and buy-in, or between achieving only short-term profits and realizing long-term term success.

The book begins by taking it’s own advice, methodically using research and anecdotes to explain why asking “Why?” is important. Sinek uses a variety of real-world examples to show that those who effectively answer this question are better able to attract others to their cause and create inspiration and commitment. When organizations can credibly articulate why they exist, they are more likely to engage employees and attract customers.

Start with Why also explores the alternative to inspiration: manipulation. Sinek writes that these are essentially the two options available to influence human behavior. He writes about manipulation in its various forms, including dropping prices, running promotions, using fear, applying pressure, and emphasizing novelty. Not all of these methods are bad. They are often a valid strategy for driving *transactions*. However, they will never result in trust and loyalty in the way that inspiration can.

Sinek offers a path to inspiring others in the form of a very simple leadership model he calls “The Golden Circle.” This model is a series of three concentric circles, beginning with “Why” in the center, followed by “How,” and “What.” Sinek explains that the most inspired companies and leaders think, act and communicate from the center of the Golden Circle and move outward. Often, according to the book, organizations operate in the reverse order, focusing primarily *what* they do, or *how* their offering is different or better than the competition. This, says the book, is a mistake, because no matter who you are or what you’re selling (either literally or figuratively), people don’t buy what you do, but rather why you do it.

Start with Why explores biology and brain science to appeal to the universal applicability of the Golden Circle. The book then presents examples of well-known companies, applying the Golden Circle to their purpose and actions to make the concept tangible. While much of the book is conceptual, in the final chapters, Sinek provides some practical advice on how leaders can articulate their “Why” and connect it to the “How” and “What” to effectively inspire others to take action that leads to success.

Review by Keith Cucuzza, Bridge Consulting

SAMPLE LEARNINGS

Once you have clearly defined your “why,” you can use it as a filter for decisions related to all aspects of to your organization or cause. To illustrate this point, *Start with Why* describes “The Celery Test,” which can be summarized as follows:

Imagine you’re at a dinner party with many extremely successful people, some from your industry. As you mingle, your fellow guests start offering you advice on what you need to do to take your company to the next level. All of them are emphatic but offer different advice:

- “Your organization needs M&Ms!”
- “Data shows you need rice milk!”
- “We’ve made millions implementing Oreo cookies!”
- “You’ve got to get into celery!”

After the party, you rush to the grocery store to buy M&Ms, rice milk, Oreos and celery. You spend a lot of time and money on them, and you don’t even know if they’re going to work. However, one thing is for sure: when anyone sees the dissimilar items in your basket, they can’t tell much about you or what you believe.

Now imagine you knew your why. Suppose it is “being healthy.” With this filter, you’d buy only the rice milk and celery, saving time and money. What’s more, likeminded people (read: customers and employees) would see what’s in your basket, know your “why” and trust that you truly live by it.