

An Inspiring Discussion With Simon Sinek About Learning Your 'Why'

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Asking ourselves "why" is generally a reactionary response after we have done something. Why did I do that? Or, why do I continue to do something?

In the business world, "why" cannot be an afterthought. It must be your forethoughts forethought. Properly and successfully defining your "why" is an important element when defining your business.

Through our work, we have realized that defining our "why" is an absolute must, and for that reason, we reached out to the champion of this concept, Simon Sinek, to ask about the importance of teams, building customer loyalty, attracting new customers and why he believes the concept is so important to share with the world.

Described as “a visionary thinker with a rare intellect,” unshakable optimist Simon Sinek teaches leaders and organizations how to inspire people. With a bold goal to help build a world in which the vast majority of people go home every day feeling fulfilled by their work, Sinek is leading a movement to inspire people to do the things that inspire them.

He is the author of three best-selling books -- the global best seller, *Start With Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*; New York Times and Wall Street Journal bestseller, *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't*; and his latest book, just launched September 2016, is the New York Times best-seller, *Together is Better: A Little Book of Inspiration*.

Sinek is also known for popularizing the concept of “why” in his first Ted Talk in 2009. It has since risen to the third most watched talk of all time on TED.com, gathering 27+million views and is subtitled in 43 languages. Get to know Sinekbetter by reading his full bio.

Below Sinek responds to interview questions that you can learn from, get inspired by, and implement to build your company to new heights.

Question: For those solo-entrepreneurs growing their business and now surrounding themselves with a team, what three pieces of leadership advice would you give them?

Sinek: 1. You can't do it alone. So don't pretend you can. Life changes for the better when we realize that we don't have to know everything, and we don't have to pretend we do. This is the reason for teams. It's not simply about capacity; it's about our diversity -- diversity of ideas and diversity of strengths. As individuals, we are just ok. But, together we are remarkable. When we work together, we can accomplish anything.

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We spend so much time and energy lying, faking and hiding -- pretending we know more than we do and pretending we know what we're doing. When we admit our shortcomings, it's amazing how many people will offer to help. Admitting our shortcomings, our mistakes, when we are stressed or need help -- it's called vulnerability, and it paves the way for people to show up for us in ways we can't even imagine.

2. Give people a reason to come to work, not just a place to go to work. In America and all over the world today, the vast majority of us cannot say, "I love my job." If we go out for dinner with friends and one person shares they love their job, most often our response is, "you're so lucky." Why should it be like winning the lottery to find fulfillment, meaning and deep satisfaction in our work? Why is it only the lucky few who get to feel that way? It's not right!

When we provide people with a reason to come to work that they care about, they will give us their blood, sweat and tears. They will give us their discretionary effort and their passion and their best work, not because they have to, but because they want to. When we give people a reason to come to work, people will come together and put their egos aside to find ways to bring our shared vision to life. When we give people a reason to come to work, they will love their job.

3. We must all try to empathize before we criticize. Ask someone what's wrong before telling them they are wrong. My dear friend and mentor, Lt. Gen. George Flynn, USMC (Ret.) has a simple test to judge the quality of a leader. If they ask someone how they are doing, they genuinely care about the answer. The leaders, who help their people work at their natural best, are the leaders who care most about their people. Let us care and empathize before we criticize. The positive impact is profound -- both in how someone feels about their job and the performance.

Question: In running my company, Evolvor.com, I must have watched your “Start with Why - How Great Leaders Inspire Action” Ted Talk over a dozen times (and to the readers who haven't seen it, [click here](#) and watch it). Why is inspiring and connecting emotionally with your customers / prospects so important?

Sinek: Thank you for sharing my message to inspire others! If we want to drive transactions, we make a pitch. If we intend to build loyalty, we make a friend.

Connecting on an emotional level with our customers and prospects is what breeds loyalty. There is a distinct difference between repeat business and loyalty. Repeat business means that someone will continue to come back to you and buy from you for some reason that motivates or conveniences them. It could be price, location, selection. But as soon as someone else does the same thing you do a little better, customers jump ship.

Loyalty is far different. Loyalty is not a program; loyalty is a feeling. Loyalty means that we are willing to suffer inconvenience to continue to choose to do business with you. We will pay more, travel further and give you the benefit of the doubt. Loyalty is not rational. Loyalty is emotional. It's more than a motivation -- it's inspiration. We are loyal to the brands, organizations, and people with whom we connect with on an emotional level.

I was once in line waiting to board a Southwest Airlines flight and the person in front of me turned around and said to me, unsolicited I might add, "I love Southwest." After 9/11 happened, the airline business took a real hit. And get this, there were people who sent \$1,000 checks to Southwest with letters that read, "You've been there for me and cared for me during the tough times. I want to be there for you in the tough times." Who does that? The only thing I can call that is love. How does something like that happen? Southwest treats their own people with great care. When employees feel cared for they are all the more likely to extend that care to others -- teammates and customers included. Indeed, no customer will ever love a company until the employees love it first.

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Question: Continuing from the previous question, what tips do you have for entrepreneurs wanting to implement a “Start with Why” mindset/approach to help attract new customers?

Sinek: Focus first on bringing your "why" to life from the inside-out of your company. Too many organizations exclaim *customer first!* That sends an inadvertent or a direct message to your people that they are, at best, your second priority. How does that make them feel? They are the ones coming to work every day, spending more time there than with their families. It is their blood, sweat and tears we ask for.

Yes, we need customers to keep the lights on and the engine moving, but who are the ones that actually service those customers? Your employees. Treat them as your top priority, and they will treat your current and potential customers as their priority -- second only to your team's commitment, first and foremost, to each other. It seems counter-intuitive, but it makes perfect sense. Take care of the people who take care of the customers. The best customer service companies in the world -- Zappos, Southwest Airlines, and Container Store -- all put their people first.

Question: Through their development, many companies often pivot strategies. It can be because they have discovered a different need from consumers that they can help fill, or they've learned more about themselves as their business grows. Is there a certain time a company should revisit their "why," and if so, how often should it be reviewed?

Sinek: A "why" is not something we change when it suits us. It is not something we adapt from time to time. We can pivot product offerings. We can pivot marketing approach. We can pivot a business strategy. It is the "why" that provides solidity and continuity. It is like the foundation of a house. Renovate the house as you see fit -- but the foundation remains fixed.

The "why" of a company is like the character of a person. It is who you are. It is how you show up. We don't change who we are simply to get new friends now and then -- and if anyone says that we do that, I would argue that in one of those scenarios, we aren't truly being ourselves. In other words, by pretending to be what we are not to attract different friends is stressful, it doesn't last, and by being something we are not -- we never truly develop the depth of friendship we can as when we are truly who we are. A company's "why" is exactly the same thing.

If the "why" is articulated in terms that include the product, service, industry or customer -- it's not a true "why." Saying "to be the best," or "to offer the highest quality product at the best possible price" or "excellence in all we do" -- none of these are "whys." They are goals or results at best. At worst, they are meaningless, corporate pabulum. Our company's "why" is to inspire people to do what inspires them so together we can change our world for the better. We have infinite possibilities for the products and services we can offer to advance that cause, and we are able to pivot our strategy and marketing to stay current with the times. But who we are at our core has never and will never change. Ever.

Question: What inspires Simon Sinek? What drives you to spread the "Start with Why" cause?

I am inspired by people who show up to serve others. People willing to sacrifice for another or a cause. This is why I'm drawn to people who volunteer to wear a uniform and say they are "in the service." It is why I'm drawn to great teachers or great parents -- the givers.

As for my cause, I want to be a part of changing our world. I use business as a vehicle not because I care deeply about business. I don't. What I do care about deeply is impacting people. Even during the depression or recessionary times, most people still have a job. We spend more time at work than we do at home. We spend more time with our teams than we do our own families. If I am going to make an impact, if I am going to make a difference, I'm more likely to do so by working with leaders in organizations. Why visit someone in their home if I can reach so many more people at work? The best part is, when we impact people at work, they bring it home. We can change people's lives by giving them a place they feel inspired to go to work at every day, feel safe when they're there, and return home fulfilled at the end of the day.

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I want to reverse the effects of the theories popularized in the 1980s and 1990s that touted shareholder supremacy, mass layoffs to balance the books and increase short-term profitability. I want to reverse the negative effects we are now seeing where employees are pawns in the game. Every CEO today says that their people are their most important asset, but how many actually put their people first?

I am inspired by a world where shareholders, corporate boards, analysts, employees and customers demand that organizations exist to advance something bigger than themselves. Who values the long-

term growth of their people over the short-term growth of their profits? Money is important, but money is fuel, not a purpose. We don't own cars so we can have fuel. We own cars to get places. Fuel powers the car. Money powers a business, helps it advance its message to bigger and broader audiences. Business can change people's lives and change the world -- only when they know why they are in business in the first place.