

Simon Sinek: How Great Leaders Inspire Action

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Simon Sinek has deciphered how influential leaders and some organizations think, act and communicate to the masses. In his TED talk, he answers why some of history's innovators, leaders, and organizations differ from others. Those who were more qualified, similar in skill, having "the same access to the same talent, the same agencies, the same consultants, the same media" (TED, n.d., 00:29). After a few years pondering this question, he realized there was a naturally occurring pattern that he calls "the golden circle." This idea is "grounded in the biology of human decision making, that explains why we are inspired by some people, leaders, messages and organizations over others" (cornerstone, n.d., Para. 3). Sinek associates the golden circle idea (what, how, why) with the human brain - the neocortex and limbic brains, which control our feelings and behavior (TED, n.d.). He also introduces the term the law of diffusion of innovation, which is the gap in a bell curve that causes the tipping point and attracts the masses (TED, n.d.). Therefore, if we want to become influential and attract the masses like those before us, we must know why? we do what we do.

There are TED talks one watches once and forgets what they were about, but there are others that entice you to investigate more because it is intriguing. One such TED talk is "How Great Leaders Inspire Action" by Simon Sinek, a "British-American author of five books including *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (2009), and motivational speaker" (Bookrader, n.d., Para. 1). He graduated from Brandeis University with a BA in cultural anthropology and later pursued advertising (Bookrader, n.d.). Furthermore, he has dedicated his professional life to inspiring people and helping them live joyful and fulfilling lives (Bookrader, n.d.).

Generally speaking, “How Great Leaders Inspire Action” has two main points about people; their way of thinking and what causes some to be influential leaders and others not to succeed, explained by the golden circle idea and the law of diffusion of innovation (TED, n.d.). He eloquently introduces us to his simple idea called the golden circle, better explained by three rings with Why? in the inner circle, How? in the second circle, and What? on the outer circle. This diagram is similar to the design of our brains. The "neocortex" corresponds with the 'what' level (TED, n.d., 06:02), which is responsible for "our rational and analytical thought and language" (TED, n.d., 06:06). Additionally, “the middle two sections make up our limbic brains, and our limbic brains are responsible for all of our feelings, like trust and loyalty" (TED, n.d., 06:12). Furthermore “it is also responsible for all human behavior, all decision-making, and it has no capacity for language" (TED, n.d., 06:21).

Furthermore, as he unfolds this idea, we learn that some leaders can influence others while others can not because the difference is that some think from the outside in (What? How? Why?) and others from the inside out (Why?, How? What?). Therefore, those few individuals such as Apple, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and the Wright brothers that "think, act and communicate from the inside out" become inspiring (TED, n.d., 3:02). Their why? was to know their real purpose, cause, and belief (TED, n.d.). Sinek states that one way to know the why?, is by answering the following questions: “Why does your organization exist? Why do you get out of bed in the morning? Why should anyone care?” (TED, n.d., 2:39). Therefore, inspiring leaders begin with the why? before advancing to the how? and then the what? (cornerstone, n.d.). They are the ones that will eventually inspire employees and others. Sinek also observed that we eventually follow those "who lead not for themselves, but for others" (TED, n.d., 17:27).

Sinek's second point was "the law of diffusion of innovation" (TED, n.d., 10:56). He made a bell curve graph showing that 2.5% are innovators, the next 13.5 % are adopters, and the next 34% are the majority (TED, n.d.). He believes that we are part of these groups at various times in our lives. One way to get the majority to accept any idea is to "achieve this tipping point which is between 15 and 18 percent market penetration" (TED, n.d., 11:36). This tipping point is crucial for any success to occur.

Sinek's approach to delivering his idea was simple, intellectually stimulating, and coherent. According to Bookrader.com, it is "one of the most popular TED videos of all time" (Para. 4). The speaker's goal for the audience was for us to believe in his beliefs. An example of this approach is similar to how Dr. Martin Luther King Jr influenced 250,000 individuals to attend Washington to hear his "I have a dream" speech (TED, n.d.). Unlike today's politicians, "he did not go around telling people what needed to change in America" (TED, n.d.15:41). Instead, "he went around and told people what he believed" (TED, n.d. 15:45).

Similarly, on Sinek's company website, Sinek states that his organization is there "to inspire people to do the things that inspire them so that, together, each of us can change our world for the better" (Sinek, n.d.). His statement reminds me of the Person in Environment (PIE) perspective, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory with rings nestling individuals with the outer rings [environmental influences] similar to the golden circle with its three rings all nested around the "Why?".

Furthermore, I can use Sinek's idea and Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory to deeply understand my Christian purpose concerning my life, ministry, and career path. Both ideas center on the individual [me], which is the inner circle – why? in Sinek's golden circle model. Understanding the why? of why I pursue mental health counseling will make me a great

influential counselor. Additionally, Sinek states, "when we work hard for something we do not believe in, it is called stress" (Sinek, n.d). Nevertheless, "when we work hard for something we love, it has called passion" (Sinek, n.d.). Therefore, knowing my why? will make me more passionate about my professional career or, in Christian terminology, knowing my "calling." Likewise, some scholars describe "calling as a transcendent summons, originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness" (Steger, 2017, p. 64). In contrast, others have more of a secular meaning, such as "a consuming, meaningful passion people experience toward a domain or purpose in life or meaning" (Steger, 2017, p. 64).

Similarly, the Bible states in Ephesians 2:10, "for we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Bible Study Tools, n.d.). In 1 Peter 4:10, the Bible also says that each of us "has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (Bible Study Tools, n.d.). If I believe in what the word of God promises me, then I know that I was created for work that is waiting for me. Therefore, I was given gifts manifested as skills, talents, and values to use to help one another.

Therefore, as a Christian, I must understand the illogical Christian perspective of living in seasons. There is always a purpose, whether the season is short or long. At that moment, I might not understand the purpose, but if I believe that God is above all things, knows all things, and has our lives in his hands, I can trust that I am on the right path. When I was a kid, someone would ask, "what do you want to be when you grow up?" I would say a doctor, a lawyer, or a teacher. Unfortunately, society has ingrained in all of us that that is the way to live, to focus on the what? Rather than the why?

After taking some courses in the Alliance University mental health program, I began to understand myself more, which is the why? in Sinek's model. I became aware that God had given me gifts that would enable me to help individuals that would one day be in my office. Some gifts include self-awareness, compassion, problem-solving, genuineness, encouragement, prayer warrior, and prophecy. Being part of their healing process through the understanding of clinical practical tools such as active listening, sharing knowledge, and explorations through various techniques, assessments, and resources such as ACCESS VR. With God's transformative power, clients can walk away feeling liberated, healthier, and with a brighter, more optimistic perspective to continue to live out their journey. Additionally, I also realized that nothing I have experienced would be unused. All the experiences throughout my life, the good, bad, and ugly, will be used one way or another; therefore, I will be able to connect with many individuals through my understanding of their struggles, pain, and dysfunctional cognitions and maladaptive behavioral actions.

Additionally, I learned that sometimes, things happen not because I have sinned but because God is to be glorified, just as in the story of the blind man, "born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him" (Bible Gateway, n.d.). Similar to the Happenstance theory, which states that random events throughout one's life can have positive and negative consequences (Zunker, 2016). It is the theory of chance; one day, you may hear about an exciting job from an acquaintance or may lose a job due to societal economic hardships to only find another one the following week (Zunker, 2016). It is these random events that, from a Christian perspective, are no accidental circumstances but rather God our father working in our lives to move us along his purpose for our lives. I have experienced these random events, which have positively impacted my life.

For example, I have not had to look for jobs since I have become a Christian, all my jobs have been word of mouth, or me happening to be at the right place at the right time. I remember that for my last job, I randomly received a call from my old pastor asking me if I was looking for a job, and that evening I was interviewing for the job. Two weeks later, I was part of a small non-profit organization essential for the “work” during the pandemic. We provided several grants totaling seven million dollars to organizations nationwide and globally to provide food, COVID tests, and funds for them to stay afloat while everything shut down. However, deep inside me, I knew it was only for a season. God had me there to be part of that small team, fulfill his purpose, and then move along my journey. Unlike the earlier half of my life when I was not a Christian, my focus was solely on the what? And how? instead of the why?

According to Wiles (2022), 2022 was a time of great reflection, where many individuals started to look deeper into their why? They started questioning the purpose of the day-to-day job (Wiles, 2022). Additionally, Steger and Dik's model of meaningful work depicts that meaningful work is being done when individuals can develop a complete understanding of how they are an essential part of their work environment (Steger, 2017). This way of thinking will assist them in identifying their purpose in their lives, which motivates their efforts in any work scenario (Steger, 2017).

The pandemic became the catalyst to "elevate purpose and values" (Wiles, 2022, Para. 10). About 3,500 employees worldwide were surveyed in October 2021, and “65% said the pandemic had made them rethink the place that work has in their life” (Wiles, 2022, Para. 10). Additionally, 56% stated they want to devote their time and skills to society (Wiles, 2022). The pandemic was a time of loss and, ultimately, grief signaling to many, including myself, that nothing lives forever and that life is short and reflecting on what truly matters. As counselors, we

could help our clients see unforeseeable events such as the pandemic “into opportunities for learning” (Vo et al., 2021, Para. 1). Furthermore, helping our clients “embrace open-mindedness” (Vo et al., 2021, Para. 2) enables them to tolerate ambiguity due to universal changes that are out of control. Ultimately, I can help clients be flexible and find their purpose or passion for a specific job opportunity.

In conclusion, knowing the why? in your life is the fire to inspire those around you. Sinek’s idea strengthens my perspective on how to live my life. I know God has granted me gifts I can use to build up, help, encourage and care for one another, in my case my clients. Additionally, Sinek’s idea is the difference between just having a job and a passion for why? in what you do. Personally, it would be a great privilege to be chosen to go into the hearts of those individuals [clients] who are broken or hurting time and time again.

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