

Start With Why Summary – Simon Sinek

14 MINUTE READ

[Start With Why](#) (2009)

How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action

by [Simon Sinek](#)

[Paperback](#) | [Ebook](#) | [Audiobook](#)

Looking for a full, FREE Start With Why summary?

You're in the right place!

Here's what you'll find on this page...

One-Sentence Summary

Start With Why is a simple guide to building successful companies and becoming a best-in-class leader by asking and answering three simple questions: Why, How and What - by motivational speaker and business consultant, Simon Sinek. ([256 pages](#))

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Note: This **Start With Why** summary is part of an ongoing project to summarise the [Best Communication Books](#) and [Best Leadership Books](#) of all time.

Start With Why Review

What do Martin Luther King Jr, Sam Walton and the Wright Brothers have in common?

Why did they succeed where others failed?

Simon Sinek has the answers in Start With Why.

An expansion of his 18-minute Ted Talk (see below), this book goes beyond business organization and leadership in search of a deeper understanding of Why, How and What.

Start with why -- how great leaders inspire action | Simon Sinek | TE...

With an actionable three-part solution to any leadership problem, Sinek reveals simple truths anyone can use to upgrade the way they communicate.

His secret formula? Start with Why and let the rest simply falls into place.

Want to learn more about Why, How and What?

Check out my Start With Why book summary below...

Start With Why Summary

A World That Doesn't Start With Why

Chapter 1: Assume You Know

We all make assumptions.

And no matter how much data you gather, things always fall through the cracks.

Result? Your assessment of any situation ends up based on partial or false information.

The truth is our perception of "the truth" is based on our environment and experiences.

It wasn't long ago that most people thought the earth was flat. This shared belief shaped the way people acted. In fact, most people stayed close to home to avoid falling off the edge.

Until more recently (1964), many Doctors endorsed smoking as healthy. Ads targeted young people and pregnant women. Lucky Strike even went as far as to claim that their cigarettes were medically superior to other brands.

You may laugh, but stop and look at the "truths" we "know" today.

Will they still be true in 100 years?

Are you sure?

By taking "truths" for granted, you risk missing the bigger picture.

And that's a risk leaders face too.

Sinek identifies two types of leader:

1. The leader who focuses only on what they "know"; and
2. The leader who sees the bigger picture.

The first leader tries to manipulate reality to fit with their version of the

“truth”.

The second takes a big picture view and crafts new truths that fit their reality.

Chapter 2: Carrots and Sticks

Manipulation is all around us. We just don't always see it.

Advertisers and marketers claim they manufacture motivation. But Sinek says ads and marketing campaigns are manipulations.

Think about what makes you buy something. You may not even realize the underlying motive for your decisions.

The secret to making you spend?

Your hopes and fears.

Businesses know how to manipulate your emotions to convince you to take action.

You won't want to miss this sale. You can't be the only one without this toy. You don't want to fall short in the eyes of others.

It doesn't matter what the manipulation is — fear, peer pressure, or hope for the future.

What matters is it works.

But only as a short-term solution that leaves you open to the next manipulation.

The product sold to you through manipulation has to have a limited appeal. The new sneakers that make you jump higher and run faster will soon be out of style. The next pair will make you jump higher and run

faster.

It's an endless chain of exploitation to keep you buying.

The problem with this type of manipulation is that another company can always sweep in with a new and better offer. There's no loyalty to the sneakers (or the company), just a reaction to the latest special offer.

An Alternative Perspective

Chapter 3: The Golden Circle

Walk down any busy sidewalk, and take note of all the Apple devices you see.

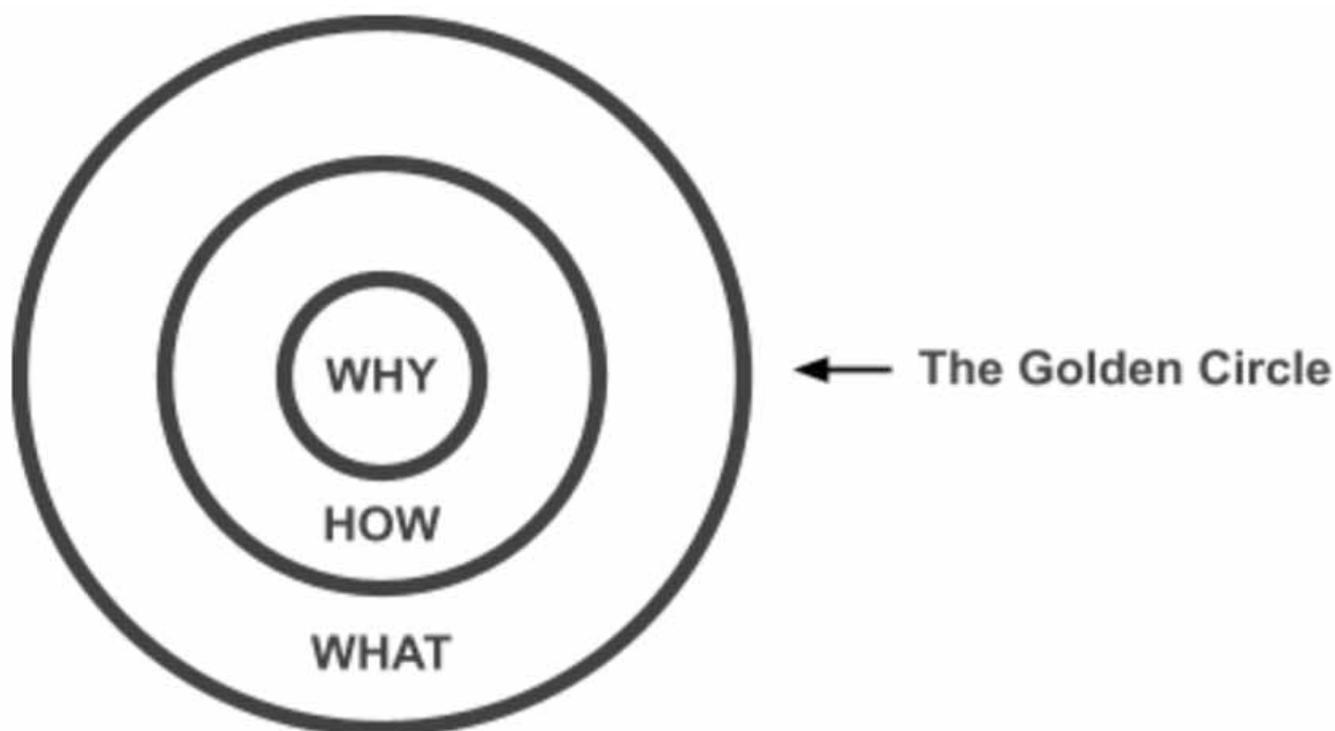
What makes Apple such a powerhouse?

One thing that gives them the edge is the way they inspire their customers. It's more than the product. It's the *Why* behind the product.

Strong leaders inspire. It doesn't matter the size of their organization, where they are, or what they do. All strong leaders choose inspiration over manipulation.

The foundation of inspiration is a naturally occurring pattern Sinek calls "The Golden Circle."

Three concentric rings ask three very important questions: *Why*, *How* and *What*.



You begin in the middle – at the bullseye. This is your Why.

Why wants to know your purpose. What is your cause? Why are you in business? Why should people even care?

The next ring asks How. The answer is your process. Most people know how they do what they are doing. But good leaders look for ways to do things differently.

The outer ring addresses What. This should be easy to answer. It's the products and services provided by the business or individual.

Most leaders communicate from the outside of The Golden Circle and work inwards. They start with What, then discuss How and leave Why till last.

The best leaders start from the inside of The Golden Circle and work outwards. They start with Why, then discuss How and then What.

By starting with Why, you begin with a mission and a purpose. You inspire from the start. And How and What fall naturally into place.

From its iconic 1984 ad to its dancing silhouettes, Steve Jobs put Apple's Why (changing the status quo and doing things differently) at the heart of the company and its messaging.

If you start with Why, you stand for something. You stand out and inspire loyalty.

Chapter 4: This Is Not Opinion, This Is Biology

Dr. Seuss introduced us to the story of the Sneetches in 1961. One group of Sneetches has a green star on their belly while the other group doesn't. As the story progresses, each group goes to great lengths to get or remove the green star because they want to fit in.

The moral? The need to belong isn't rational.

And neither is the rest of our decision making.

Luckily, Sinek's Golden Circle aligns perfectly with how we're biologically hardwired to think.

Our brains have two parts:

1. [The limbic system](#); and
2. [The neocortex](#).

The limbic system sits in the middle of our brain and handles feelings. It deals with things that aren't rational. It is drawn to the Why and the How of The Golden Circle.

The limbic brain also makes decisions. It drives the gut decisions that overpower logic.

The neocortex surrounds the limbic system and focuses on What. This part of the brain loves facts and information. It is rational. It makes wise decisions. It likes research.

When businesses fixate on What, they lose focus on How and Why. They fail to answer or appeal to the limbic brain. They don't elicit an emotional response.

When businesses fixate on Why they cut straight to our emotional decision making. We still need a How and a What, but only to post-rationalize the choices we've already made.

Chapter 5: Clarity, Discipline and Consistency

We crave balance.

And The Golden Circle provides it by appealing to both parts of our brain.

It offers us clarity (Why), discipline (How) and consistency (What).

Remove Why, How or What from the circle, and the result is imbalance and broken messaging.

To find balance when communicating...

First, find clarity by asking Why.

Would you vote for a politician who can't tell you why they're running for office? The same applies to business. If Why isn't well defined, no one cares. To inspire your team members, your employees and your customers with your mission, you must start with Why.

Next, establish discipline with How. How will you achieve Why? This is where values and principles matter. How maps out systems and processes and accountability.

Finally, with clarity and discipline in place, seek consistency. Deliver a What (your product or service) that is fully aligned with your Why and your How.

Leaders Need A Following

Chapter 6: The Emergency of Trust

In the 1980s, Continental Airlines was the worst airline in the industry. Employees were treated badly, employees treated each other badly and customers were treated badly in turn.

When Gordon Bethune took over as CEO he turned Continental Airways around by focusing on employee happiness (his Why).

The How and What followed naturally and within a year Continental went from emerging from its second bankruptcy to its most profitable period in its history.

How do you (re)build trust at any level of an organization?

Trust is an emotion. It's driven by Why. It creates discipline and consistency which builds loyalty and influences decision making.

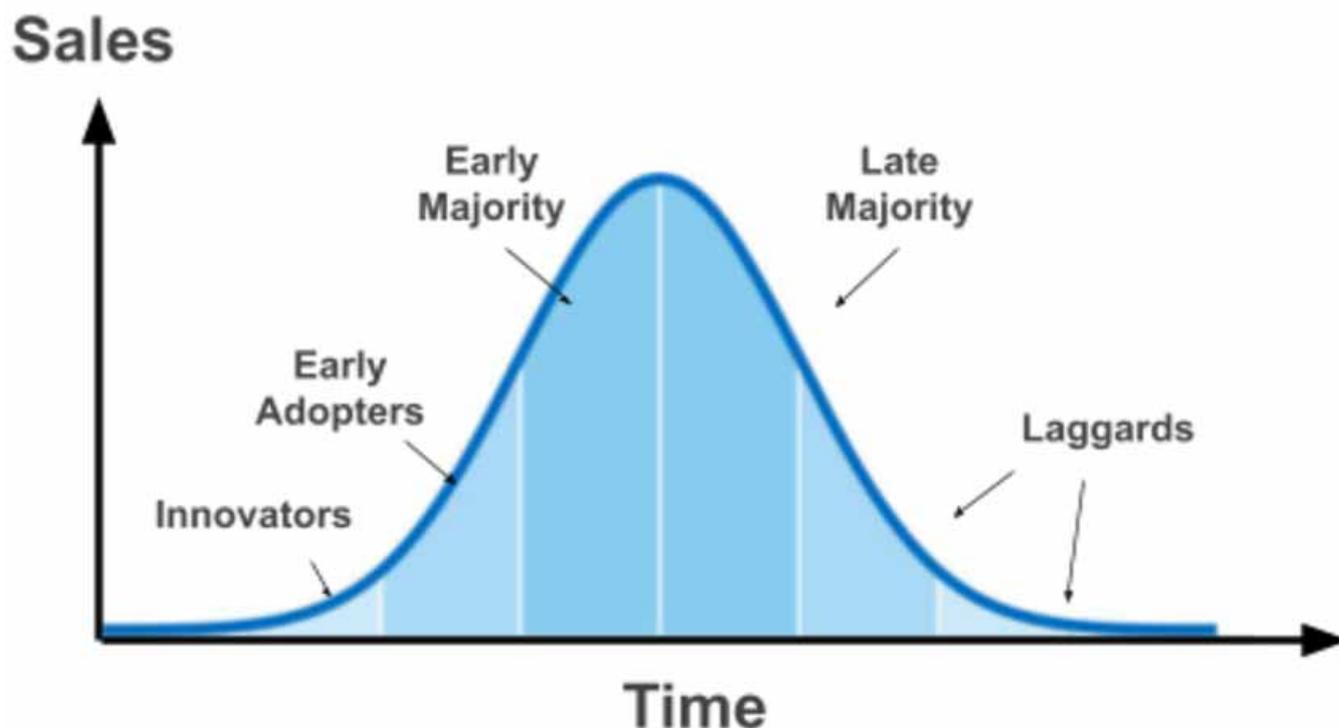
To gain trust, you must answer "Why?".

You can't convince someone to trust you. You have to show them that you can be trusted through a shared mission; through sharing their values and beliefs.

Chapter 7: How A Tipping Point Tips

The Law of Diffusion of Innovations explains how ideas spread.

They start off slowly, gain momentum and then gradually fade away.



Look at the innovation adoption lifecycle diagram above.

On the left side are the innovators, followed by early adopters. At the peak of the bell curve are the early majority and the late majority. Eventually, things slow, and the laggards who sit on the right of the curve finally catch up with the trend.

When a new trend begins, some buyers jump in right away. These people are innovators and early adopters. They are not loyal and will move on to the next thing as soon as it's out.

As the price declines and word spreads, the two majorities (early and late adopters) drive most of the sales. These buyers are your rational purchasers.

The laggards only purchase your product because you have what they need.

Sinek recommends targeting the customers on the left side of the bell curve with your Why, How and What. Appeal to innovators and early adopters who believe what you believe. When you connect with them,

they become part of your mission, remain loyal customers and encourage other buyers to join the trend.

The same scenario applies to leadership. To catalyze change, look for (and/or hire) innovators in a team whose beliefs align with yours. Then communicate your Why, How and What. The people who believe in and share your mission are your best allies in getting the whole team moving in the same direction.

How To Rally Those Who Believe

Chapter 8: Start With Why But Know How

High energy people demand attention. You can't help but notice them.

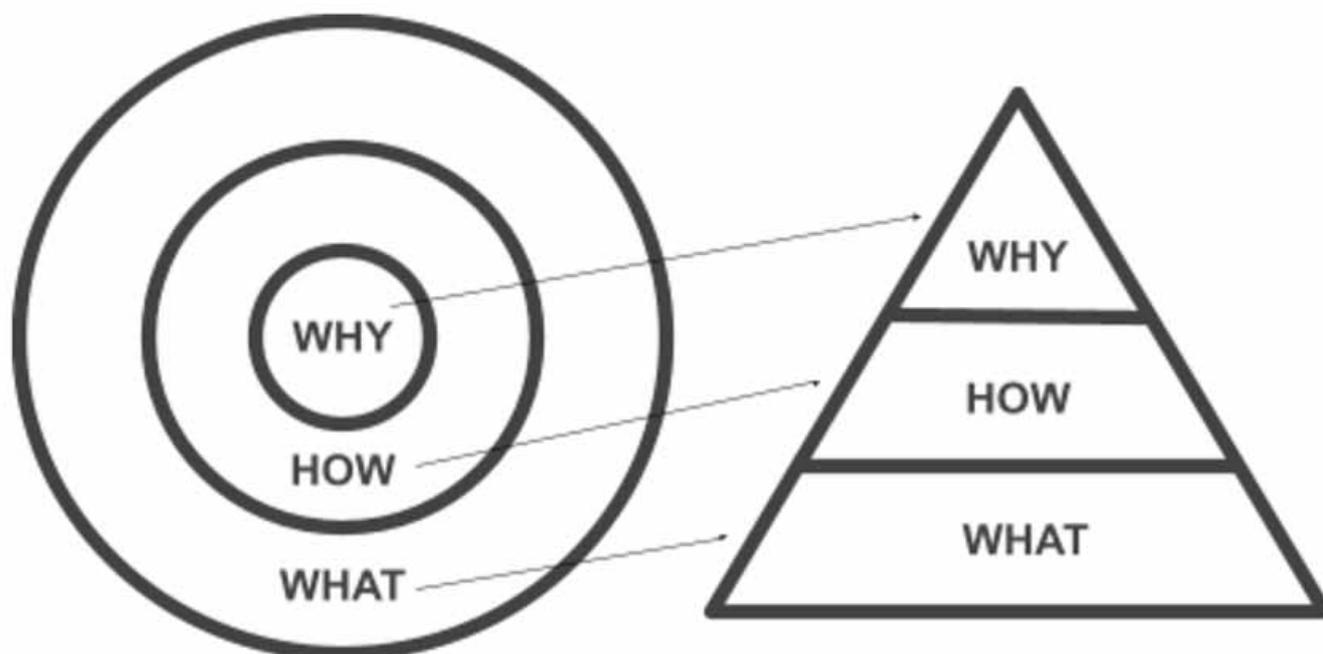
But it isn't always the most energetic person that makes the best leader. Many energetic leaders are How-type leaders. They focus on short-term motivation.

What do the best leaders have in common? They have charisma.

Charisma has nothing to do with energy. Instead of exciting people, charisma inspires people. It builds trust and loyalty. It focuses on Why and creates long-term motivation.

However, even companies with inspiring and trustworthy leaders can fail if they forget The Golden Circle.

Turn the circle on its side and it becomes a pyramid (or cone).



The Why is at the top, How in the middle and What at the base. This cone creates a blueprint for successful companies. Senior managers at the top focus on Why. Middle managers in the middle focus on How. Employees form the bedrock of the What.

By keeping this hierarchy in mind, a company can use a core group of Why-types to motivate the What-types and How-types.

Chapter 9: Know Why. Know How. Then What?

Once the Why, How and What hierarchy is in place, you can expand your reach by turning your cone into a megaphone that communicates with your marketplace.

The marketplace is disorganized and chaotic by nature. It includes your current customers, potential customers, competitors, suppliers and flow of money.

An organization must communicate Why, How and What well to effectively market their products and services (Note: As we'll see later, not all communication must be verbal. Just the kind of products and services an organization delivers – it's What – and the way it delivers them – its How –

can communicate a clear, consistent Why, How and What to customers, employees and partners without having to spell them out.)

Many companies make this process much more difficult than it is. They try to find a different angle on every message to showcase a feature or an advantage.

Sinek recommends starting with Why. Create a tangible message for those inspired by what inspires you. Then use simple and clear communications to deliver your message effectively.

Chapter 10: Communication Is Not About Speaking, It's About Listening

Martin Luther King Jr. understood the power of symbolism. He gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial. By symbolizing the American value of freedom for all, he started with Why before even opening his mouth.

Harley Davidson understands the power of symbolism. Their logo is more than just an emblem. The Harley logo proclaims a lifestyle. It's a symbol of shared values and beliefs. In fact, Harley's Why ("The timeless pursuit of adventure. Freedom for the soul.") is so powerful that thousands of people tattooed Harley's logo on their bodies.

So how do you build that kind of loyalty?

By communicating your Why effectively. Both explicitly, and by delivering a How and What that are completely consistent with that mission.

Even though Why, How and What are all separate rings in The Golden Circle, the real secret to unlocking their power is to make sure they align.

Harley Davidson exemplifies discipline and consistency in the products they offer their customers. You know exactly what to expect when you

walk into a Harley dealership.

Apple does an incredible job controlling not just the quality of its products (What), but the quality of the buying experience (How) with its world-famous Apple stores.

Where Companies Go Wrong

Many companies feel the need to constantly offer something new.

They may start with Why but the endless drive for innovation confuses their How and their What. What they say and what they do lose alignment, leaving their customers confused.

For example, Volkswagen (VW) has become known and loved for its sturdy, affordable cars.

Then, in 2004, VW added a luxury car to its lineup.

Critics loved it. It was so well crafted designed that it far outperformed the competition.

And it hardly sold at all.

It simply didn't align with the Why of Volkswagen or luxury car owners. The product was out of touch with VW's mission. It broke The Golden Circle.

A product that doesn't inspire loyalty from your customer base offers no value to your company. It doesn't communicate your Why in a way that the customer can understand.

In the worst-case scenario, it can even break trust you already enjoy.

The Biggest Challenge Is Success

Chapter 11: When Why Goes Fuzzy

Sam Walton knew the value of working hard and Walmart's Why centered on this value.

Throughout Walton's life, he was extremely successful in keeping the focus on Why, which helped Walmart stand out from its competition.

But, like Volkswagen, Walmart lost focus on Why.

After Walton's death, Walmart shifted from working hard to help local communities to single-mindedly chasing low prices. They switched from motivation to manipulation.

Their Why became fuzzy, and Walmart now has higher employee turnover and lower returns than more mission-focused competitors.

The moral? It doesn't matter what you achieve or how successful you feel, you must keep the focus on Why. If you stay focused on Why, you will naturally stay true to and accountable for the How and What. If you change Why, or lose touch with it, How and What will shift too.

Chapter 12: Split Happens

Most companies begin with an idea fueled by passion.

Being passionate about something is important. Many of us use passion as a key talking point in interviews or on resumes.

And passion is exciting.

But just like energy, it only provides short-term motivation.

Passion alone isn't enough.

When you have Why without How, you have only passion. And you have

no way to effectively achieve your dream.

What happens when a small business builds a Why and How effectively? With luck and a solid foundation, the small business grows into a large one.

But with growth comes the potential to lose sight of the Why. The focus shifts from Why and How to only How and What.

And as the Why fades away? Trust is lost, and customers no longer see the value in the company.

Conclusion? Large companies must get back to small business Whys to continue to thrive and inspire.

Discover Why

Chapter 13: The Origins Of A Why

Sinek found his personal Why.

He was working passionately to figure out why some marketing worked and some didn't. He was frustrated. He was stressed. He was grasping for answers.

He realized he'd lost his Why.

As Sinek began to study the concept of Why, he found that Why was a process.

To find Why, you have to turn around and look back.

You don't invent Why, you discover it.

Every person and organization has a Why. It comes from their journeys and experiences.

Finding the Why isn't difficult.

The hard part is maintaining it.

Sinek uses Henry Ford as an example of never losing focus on Why.

Ford's focus on the why helped him to create a lasting company in the face of a changing world. Sinek calls him a brilliant WHY-guy who changed the way industry works. He chose a path and never deviated from it.

Using the same approach, Sinek doubled down on The Golden Circle. If he felt his own Why, What and How were out of balance, he took the steps to rebalance them. He began practicing every concept in his book personally.

He targeted innovators and early adopters. They helped him spread his message and inspire others through the Law of Diffusion.

Sinek's Why? To inspire others.

How? By sharing.

What? The Golden Circle.

His life was transformed. By focusing on Why.

He found purpose and an audience and success.

Chapter 14: The New Competition

If you follow your personal Why, others will follow you.

Sinek tells us the story of a young runner named Ben. Ben was never the fastest athlete. He was quickly left behind at the start of any race. Yet despite having cerebral palsy, Ben always made it to the finish line.

Ben knew his Why. He wasn't concerned with competition. His only focus was finishing and beating his own time.

Take Ben's example and apply it to your own business and leadership.

DON'T focus on fame or beating the competition

DO focus on beating yourself.

Find the mission that inspires you to get up each morning and change the world.

Start with Why.

Be A Part Of This Movement

What is a leader?

Leadership is not about having power or the authority to order people around.

To be a leader, you only need one thing – a follower.

A true follower doesn't follow you because of manipulation. They aren't forced to follow you because of incentives or fear.

Imagine you're stranded on a desert island with strangers. While some people panic and some try to form a plan, eventually two leaders step forward.

One explains what they believe and the overall plan. The other simply says, "This won't work," and walks away.

Who do you follow?

Chances are that you follow the one that communicates with you clearly –

who has a clear Why, How, and What – instead of just taking a leap of faith.

Both may be visionaries, but only one is a leader.

Leaders don't always have great ideas. What they do have is the ability to support and motivate people.

They never start with what needs to be done.

They start with why.

Start With Why Contents

***Start With Why* has 14 main chapters in 6 parts...**

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Part 6: Discover Why

13. The Origins of a Why

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Start With Why FAQs

What Is the Main Point of Start With Why?

The main point of Start With Why is that the only way to build a lasting motivation as a leader is to keep your focus on the Why (the reason and beliefs behind your goals and actions).

Where Can I Watch Start With Why on YouTube?

You can watch Simon Sinek's TEDx Start With Why course (as hosted on YouTube) [at the top of this post](#).

Best Start With Why Quotes

These Start With Why quotes come from **The Art of Living's** ever-growing central library of thoughts, anecdotes, notes, and [inspirational quotes](#).

"People don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it. And what you do simply proves what you believe."

- [Simon Sinek](#), Start With Why

"Great companies don't hire skilled people and motivate them, they hire already motivated people and inspire them."

- [Simon Sinek](#), Start With Why

"You don't hire for skills, you hire for attitude. You can always teach skills."

- [Simon Sinek](#), Start With Why

"The role of a leader is not to come up with all the great ideas. The role of a leader is to create an environment in which great ideas can happen."

- [Simon Sinek](#), Start With Why

"Leadership requires two things: a vision of the world that does not yet exist and the ability to communicate it."

- [Simon Sinek](#), Start With Why

"When you compete against everyone else, no one wants to help you. But when you compete against yourself, everyone wants to help you."

- [Simon Sinek](#), Start With Why

"Some in management positions operate as if they are in a tree of monkeys. They make sure that everyone at the top of the tree looking down sees only smiles. But all too often, those at the bottom looking up see only asses."

- [Simon Sinek](#), Start With Why

"Working hard for something we do not care about is called stress, working hard for something we love is called passion."

- [Simon Sinek](#), Start With Why

"Charisma has nothing to do with energy; it comes from a clarity of WHY. It comes from absolute conviction in an ideal bigger than oneself. Energy, in contrast, comes from a good night's sleep or lots of caffeine. Energy can excite. But only charisma can inspire. Charisma commands loyalty. Energy does not."

- [Simon Sinek](#), Start With Why

"Great leaders and great organizations are good at seeing what most of us can't see. They are good at giving us things we would never think of asking for."

- [Simon Sinek](#), Start With Why

Wish There Was a Faster/Easier Way?

Whenever you're ready, here are four ways I can help you be more productive, find more balance and live life more on purpose...

1. **Curious? Discover how productive you really are...** Take this free, 2-minute assessment to unlock your PQ and discover the top 25 habits you need to get big things done. [Take the 2-minute quiz →](#)
2. **Overwhelmed? Get a free chapter of my book...** Let me show you how to beat procrastination, permanently, with this free sneak peek inside **TAoL**'s ultimate productivity primer. [Download your free chapter →](#)
3. **Stuck? Grab a 90-Day TRACKTION Planner...** Get the tool thousands trust to help them take control of their time, master their habits and hit goals in every part of their lives. [Order your 90-day planner →](#)
4. **Burned out? Join the TRACKTION Community...** Take the 6-week masterclass, get weekly group coaching, find accountability partners

and connect with like-minded self-starters. [Get started FREE →](#)

[Lillian Teague](#)

I naturally fell into my 20 year writing career through my love of words and knowledge. I've been blessed to share what I've learned with digital and print readers around the world. To find me, just follow the trail of tea and good books. (Or check out my [LinkedIn](#)).