

Leaders Eat Last

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Book Review on *'Leaders Eat Last'* by *Simon Sinek*

One can describe leadership qualities from various perspectives. In this book, *Leaders Eat Last*, well-known author and motivational speaker Simon Sinek weaves his argument of leadership qualities about few iconic leaders quoting many empirical anecdotes. Simon starts the book with a riveting story of a pilot - Jonny Bravo in the jungles of Afghanistan War. The author quotes the fearless valour of this pilot saving 22 fellow American marines from enemy attack risking his life. Simon starts this intriguing incident asking his readers as why such heroes like Jonny Bravo put their life before fellow mates. The subsequent chapters justify the presence of four chemicals in our body – Endorphins, Dopamine, Serotonin and Oxytocin – responsible for emotional behaviour in our body.

The book *Leaders Eat Last* quotes numerous research articles and reports of popular universities to augment Simon's logic as why a leader should keep his or her employees first in corporate setting before profits.

Simon with his inimitable convincing story deftly makes us believe that the leader who cares about fellow colleagues would steer his or her organisation to the pinnacle of success. In one of the stories about a well-known American packaging company – HayssenSandiacre, Simon emphatically convinces his readers as how its new boss Bob Chapman dumped old dehumanizing company cultures; and embraced a new employee empowerment culture. Bob with his caring attitude ensured every employee in his company was protected collectively from any potential lay off threat. Not only Bob gave a sense of protection, he gave a sense of pride to all his employees irrespective of their rank and files. Simon Sinek aptly calls this approach as building 'Circle of Safety'.

While elaborating ‘Circle of Safety’, Simon quotes, Spartans of ancient Greece in his book. He illustrates that Spartans strongly believed that their Circle of Safety doesn’t come from Spartans’ Spears; but from the strength of their shields drawing a corporate parallel reminding everyone that the top management should not believe in abstract profits; instead they should breed more confidence among their employees and earn profit.

His inferences from various studies of Harvard Business Review, University of Canberra, University of College of London, Gallop Poll 2013 are quite illuminating. Simon Sinek fortunately doesn’t believe in mincing words. He severely criticizes Jack Welch’s approach of terminating 10 percent employees of his group companies on account of poor performance. Incidentally, Jack was also known as ‘Neutron Jack’ during his reign among his peers.

Simon logically argues his case with statistics as why lay off is a bad approach for any company’s success. According to him lay off is the anti-thesis of success. He brings the success story of Costco, a well-known department store and its co-founder James Sinegal’s successful journey. James took Costco to the next orbit without sacrificing his employees in bad times. His data presented on dashboard about General Electrical and Costco makes us believe if you trust and empower your employees in turbulent times, the reward will follow.

Simon being an anthropologist, in his subsequent chapters quotes the fact about how human beings survived as single tribe for the last 50,000 years. Simon presents the fact that we all belong to Homo Sapiens race and survived all the odds because of our innate nature and our ability to manage with insufficient resources.

The Book Leader Eat Last reminds many murky practices that are prevalent among many companies wherein top leaders selfishly promote their interest sacrificing fellow employees’ welfare. Simon refers The National Institute of Mental Health’s report that cautions the rising rates of depression and anxiety among employees.

In one of the chapters, Simon describes one harmful chemical ‘Cortisol’ of our body and how a few leaders are responsible for increasing this chemical. Cortisol is a chemical that rises in our body whenever we are stressed. Simon argues that a leader can build trust among his people even in worst situations by ensuring ‘Circle of Safety’. For which, the leader should generate another happy chemical ‘Oxytocin’ by imbuing compassion and empathy.

Simon narrates the journey of Goldman Sachs a glorious company once upon a time that made millions for its investors. Unfortunately, the same company had to fail because of its change of culture. The management pushed employees’ welfare of the company behind profits and rewarded its top executives with fancy salary. The author sharply criticizes many companies that profited from sacrificing their employees’ jobs. At the same time, Simon praises many famous companies for their benevolent culture.

In the book, there was a mention about a scientist Spencer Silver of 3M company and his failure to come up with a strong adhesive as desired by his project team. However, his leaders encouraged him to further research on his so called ‘failed product’ a weak adhesive. Voila! There born ‘Post it Note’. The rest was history! Simon accords his due credit to 3M for the right culture encouraging employees to fail in their innovative endeavors.

Simon Sinek’s admiration for leaders of Marine Corps is quite evident in this book. His copious mention of stories about Marines Corps leaders and their sacrifices do give his readers some interesting perspectives. The name of this book has been borrowed from Marine Corps standard practices. In the Marine Corps, seniors always ate last letting juniors to pick up their meals.

The last few chapters focus on millennials. Simon calls them Abstract Generation. He justifies in his book as to why millennials always look for a quick fix and their quest for achievements; and their impatience to work under indifferent bosses. Simon reminds the readers about millennials’

childhood journey and protective parentage that made them to seek immediate solutions from their superiors at the drop of a hat.

A memorable anecdote narrated by Eve Branson, mother of billionaire Richard Branson founder of Virgin Atlantic group is presented in the book as a stark reminder to all parents. Eve Branson, once driving her young shy Richard to their home asked Richard to get down, 3 kms away from home and told him to walk on his own asking different people for directions to reach the destination. Richard Branson, on many occasions reminisced this incident as how he became independent in his growing up years because of his mother's parentage.

Simon Sinek in his last chapter very thoughtfully presents his views and suggestions to both millennials and their employers as what they can do to each other for everyone's development.

Simon Sinek's marquee book *Leader Eat Last* is ideal for anyone and everyone. It is a practical and intriguing book that defies common myth that abstract numbers will yield longevity for companies. One must invest a few hours to read this book.