

START WITH WHY



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HOW GREAT LEADERS
INSPIRE EVERYONE
TO TAKE ACTION

SIMON SINEK

PORTFOLIO

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For Victoria,
who finds good ideas
and makes them great

There are leaders and there are those who lead.
Leaders hold a position of power or influence.
Those who lead inspire us.

Whether individuals or organizations, we follow those
who lead not because we have to, but because we want to.
We follow those who lead not for them, but for ourselves.

This is a book for those who want to inspire others and
for those who want to find someone to inspire them.

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INTRODUCTION

WHY START WITH WHY?

This book is about a naturally occurring pattern, a way of thinking, acting and communicating that gives some leaders the ability to inspire those around them. Although these “natural-born leaders” may have come into the world with a predisposition to inspire, the ability is not reserved for them exclusively. We can all learn this pattern. With a little discipline, any leader or organization can inspire others, both inside and outside their organization, to help advance their ideas and their vision. We can all learn to lead.

The goal of this book is not simply to fix the things that aren't working. Rather, I wrote this book as a guide to focus on and amplify the things that do work. I do not aim to upset the solutions offered by others. Most of the answers we get, when based on sound evidence, are perfectly valid. However, if we're starting with the wrong questions, if we don't understand the cause, then even the right answers will always steer us wrong . . . eventually. The truth, you see, is always revealed . . . eventually.

The stories that follow are of those individuals and organizations that naturally embody this pattern. They are the ones that start with *Why*.

1.

The goal was ambitious. Public interest was high. Experts were eager to contribute. Money was readily available.

Armed with every ingredient for success, Samuel Pierpont Langley set out in the early 1900s to be the first man to pilot an airplane. Highly regarded, he was a senior officer at the Smithsonian Institution, a mathematics professor who had also worked at Harvard. His friends included some of the most powerful men in government and business, including Andrew Carnegie and Alexander Graham Bell. Langley was given a \$50,000 grant from the War Department to fund his project, a tremendous amount of money for the time. He pulled together the best minds of the day, a veritable dream team of talent and know-how. Langley and his team used the finest materials, and the press followed him everywhere. People all over the country were riveted to the story, waiting to read that he had achieved his goal. With the team he had gathered and ample resources, his success was guaranteed.

Or was it?

A few hundred miles away, Wilbur and Orville Wright were working on their own flying machine. Their passion to fly was so intense that it inspired the enthusiasm and commitment of a dedicated group in their hometown of Dayton, Ohio. There was no funding for their venture. No government grants. No high-level connections. Not a single person on the team had an advanced degree or even a college education, not even Wilbur or Orville. But the team banded together in a humble bicycle shop and made their vision real. On December 17, 1903, a small group witnessed a man take flight for the first time in history.

How did the Wright brothers succeed where a better-equipped, better-funded and better-educated team could not?

It wasn't luck. Both the Wright brothers and Langley were highly motivated. Both had a strong work ethic. Both had keen scientific minds. They were pursuing exactly the same goal, but only the Wright brothers were able to inspire those around them and truly

lead their team to develop a technology that would change the world. Only the Wright brothers started with Why.

2.

In 1965, students on the campus of the University of California, Berkeley, were the first to publicly burn their draft cards to protest America's involvement in the Vietnam War. Northern California was a hotbed of antigovernment and antiestablishment sentiment; footage of clashes and riots in Berkeley and Oakland was beamed around the globe, fueling sympathetic movements across the United States and Europe. But it wasn't until 1976, nearly three years after the end of America's military involvement in the Vietnam conflict, that a different revolution ignited.

They aimed to make an impact, a very big impact, even challenge the way people perceived how the world worked. But these young revolutionaries did not throw stones or take up arms against an authoritarian regime. Instead, they decided to beat the system at its own game. For Steve Wozniak and Steve Jobs, the cofounders of Apple Computer, the battlefield was business and the weapon of choice was the personal computer.

The personal computer revolution was beginning to brew when Wozniak built the Apple I. Just starting to gain attention, the technology was primarily seen as a tool for business. Computers were too complicated and out of the price range of the average individual. But Wozniak, a man not motivated by money, envisioned a nobler purpose for the technology. He saw the personal computer as a way for the little man to take on a corporation. If he could figure out a way to get it in the hands of the individual, he thought, the computer would give nearly anyone the ability to perform many of the same functions as a vastly better resourced company. The personal computer could level the playing field and change the way the world operated. Woz designed the Apple I, and improved the technology with the Apple II, to be affordable and simple to use.

No matter how visionary or how brilliant, a great idea or a great

product isn't worth much if no one buys it. Wozniak's best friend at the time, the twenty-one-year-old Steve Jobs, knew exactly what to do. Though he had experience selling surplus electronics parts, Jobs would prove to be much more than a good salesman. He wanted to do something significant in the world, and building a company was how he was going to do it. Apple was the tool he used to ignite his revolution.

In their first year in business, with only one product, Apple made a million dollars in revenues. By year two, they did \$10 million in sales. In their fourth year they sold \$100 million worth of computers. And in just six years, Apple Computer was a billion-dollar company with over 3,000 employees.

Jobs and Woz were not the only people taking part in the personal computer revolution. They weren't the only smart guys in the business; in fact, they didn't know much about business at all. What made Apple special was not their ability to build such a fast-growth company. It wasn't their ability to think differently about personal computers. What has made Apple special is that they've been able to repeat the pattern over and over and over. Unlike any of their competitors, Apple has successfully challenged conventional thinking within the computer industry, the small electronics industry, the music industry, the mobile phone industry and the broader entertainment industry. And the reason is simple. Apple inspires. Apple starts with Why.

3.

He was not perfect. He had his complexities. He was not the only one who suffered in a pre-civil rights America, and there were plenty of other charismatic speakers. But Martin Luther King Jr. had a gift. He knew how to inspire people.

Dr. King knew that if the civil rights movement was to succeed, if there was to be a real, lasting change, it would take more than him and his closest allies. It would take more than rousing words and eloquent speeches. It would take people, tens of thousands of

average citizens, united by a single vision, to change the country. At 11:00 a.m. on August 28, 1963, they would send a message to Washington that it was time for America to steer a new course.

The organizers of the civil rights movement did not send out thousands of invitations, nor was there a Web site to check the date. But the people came. And they kept coming and coming. All told, a quarter of a million people descended on the nation's capital in time to hear the words immortalized by history, delivered by the man who would lead a movement that would change America forever: "I have a dream."

The ability to attract so many people from across the country, of all colors and races, to join together on the right day, at the right time, took something special. Though others knew what had to change in America to bring about civil rights for all, it was Martin Luther King who was able to inspire a country to change not just for the good of a minority, but for the good of everyone. Martin Luther King started with Why.

. . .

There are leaders and there are those who lead. With only 6 percent market share in the United States and about 3 percent worldwide, Apple is not a leading manufacturer of home computers. Yet the company leads the computer industry and is now a leader in other industries as well. Martin Luther King's experiences were not unique, yet he inspired a nation to change. The Wright brothers were not the strongest contenders in the race to take the first manned, powered flight, but they led us into a new era of aviation and, in doing so, completely changed the world we live in.

Their goals were not different than anyone else's, and their systems and processes were easily replicated. Yet the Wright brothers, Apple and Martin Luther King stand out among their peers. They stand apart from the norm and their impact is not easily copied. They are members of a very select group of leaders who do something very, very special. They inspire us.

Just about every person or organization needs to motivate

others to act for some reason or another. Some want to motivate a purchase decision. Others are looking for support or a vote. Still others are keen to motivate the people around them to work harder or smarter or just follow the rules. The ability to motivate people is not, in itself, difficult. It is usually tied to some external factor. Tempting incentives or the threat of punishment will often elicit the behavior we desire. General Motors, for example, so successfully motivated people to buy their products that they sold more cars than any other automaker in the world for over seventy-seven years. Though they were leaders in their industry, they did not lead.

Great leaders, in contrast, are able to inspire people to act. Those who are able to inspire give people a sense of purpose or belonging that has little to do with any external incentive or benefit to be gained. Those who truly lead are able to create a following of people who act not because they were swayed, but because they were inspired. For those who are inspired, the motivation to act is deeply personal. They are less likely to be swayed by incentives. Those who are inspired are willing to pay a premium or endure inconvenience, even personal suffering. Those who are able to inspire will create a following of people—supporters, voters, customers, workers—who act for the good of the whole not because they have to, but because they want to.

Though relatively few in number, the organizations and leaders with the natural ability to inspire us come in all shapes and sizes. They can be found in both the public and private sectors. They are in all sorts of industries—selling to consumers or to other businesses. Regardless of where they exist, they all have a disproportionate amount of influence in their industries. They have the most loyal customers and the most loyal employees. They tend to be more profitable than others in their industry. They are more innovative, and most importantly, they are able to sustain all these things over the long term. Many of them change industries. Some of them even change the world.

The Wright brothers, Apple and Dr. King are just three exam-

ples. Harley-Davidson, Disney and Southwest Airlines are three more. John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan were also able to inspire. No matter from where they hail, they all have something in common. All the inspiring leaders and companies, regardless of size or industry, think, act and communicate exactly alike.

And it's the complete opposite of everyone else.

What if we could all learn to think, act and communicate like those who inspire? I imagine a world in which the ability to inspire is practiced not just by a chosen few, but by the majority. Studies show that over 80 percent of Americans do not have their dream job. If more knew how to build organizations that inspire, we could live in a world in which that statistic was the reverse—a world in which over 80 percent of people loved their jobs. People who love going to work are more productive and more creative. They go home happier and have happier families. They treat their colleagues and clients and customers better. Inspired employees make for stronger companies and stronger economies. That is why I wrote this book. I hope to inspire others to do the things that inspire them so that together we may build the companies, the economy and a world in which trust and loyalty are the norm and not the exception. This book is not designed to tell you what to do or how to do it. Its goal is not to give you a course of action. Its goal is to offer you the cause of action.

For those who have an open mind for new ideas, who seek to create long-lasting success and who believe that your success requires the aid of others, I offer you a challenge. From now on, start with Why.