

LEADERS EAT LAST

Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't



Leaders Eat Last is New York Times Bestselling author, Simon Sinek's highly anticipated second book. Through its pages, Sinek explores the aspects of leadership through a biological perspective. He compares modern organizations with our Paleolithic ancestors to determine *what* makes a great leader. He determines that what people crave the most in a leader is someone who can create for us a *Circle of Safety*.

Though a variety of inspirational stories from

the perspective of employees and managers, Sinek outlines how to inspire trust in an organization while standing up against the dangers from outside.

Sinek invites his readers to consider three important ideas:

- 1) Understand how humans are naturally wired.
- 2) Combat abstraction in the corporate environment.
- 3) Become a leader.

This book will help organizations build a culture where the employees are loyal and engaged, willing to adopt supportive mentalities, and become motivated to take more risks through inspirational leadership.

Leaders Eat Last describes *why* it's all so important to do.

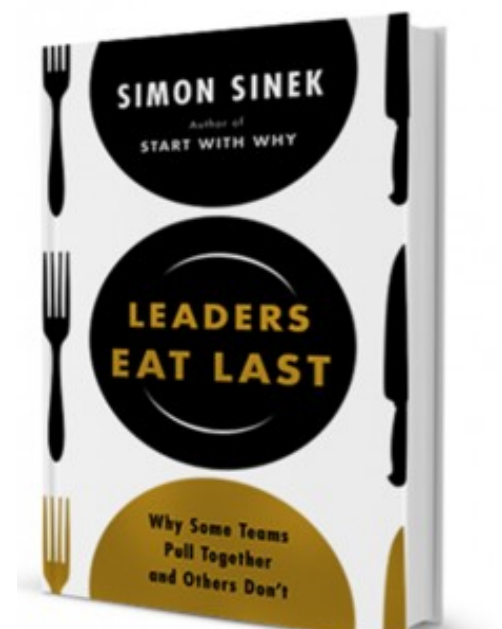
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"Marine leaders eat last because the true price of leadership is the willingness to place the needs of others above your own." (p. x)

Sinek's Vision:

To "create a new generation of men and women who understand that an organization's success or failure is based on leadership excellence and not managerial acumen" (p. ix)...and to help build a world in which the majority of people go home saying, "I love my job!"





Humans are hard-wired to work together. Nearly everything about us is designed to help us survive and prosper in harsh conditions. Our physiology and our need to cooperate exist with our survival in mind. Though evolution, Mother Nature has helped humans develop four primary chemicals that contribute to positive emotions: endorphins and dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin

Endorphins and Dopamine: The *selfish* chemicals

Sinek describes these chemicals as the reason we are alive and the reason we achieve. “They make us feel good when we find something we’re looking for, build something we need or accomplish our goals. They are the chemicals of progress.” (p 39)

Endorphins mask physical pain; sometimes we call them the ‘runner’s high.’ In Paleolithic times, hunters and gatherers could go all day and night in unbearable weather conditions looking for food. Each time the pain of the hunt became too much to endure, endorphins would kick in to mask the pain and make them feel good enough to endure.

Dopamine is the goal-achieving chemical responsible for feelings of satisfaction and a sense of completion; it gives an incentive for progress. A surge of dopamine gives us near-instant gratification, In Paleolithic times, dopamine encouraged hunters and gatherers to stay focused in order to reach their food-finding goals.

.....
“Some believe we should always put others first...others believe we should always put ourselves first...the fact is, both are true.” (p. 38)
.....

The problem? Endorphins and dopamine can be addictive. Consuming nicotine, alcohol, drugs all release high amounts of dopamine into the body’s system. Behaviors such as gambling and high usage of social media have the same affect. Performance-driven organizations can become addicted to numbers when they are constantly striving to ‘hit the goal.’ Without proper leadership, this achievement is often at the expensive of others.

Serotonin and Oxytocin: The *selfless* chemicals

The two selfless chemicals provide incentives to our bodies “to work together and develop feelings of trust and loyalty...so that we are more likely to work together to cooperate, so that we can ultimately survive.” (p 38) In combination with endorphins and dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin create a healthy synergy resulting in more cooperation and collaboration.

Serotonin is the leadership chemical and is tied to self-confidence. When we are recognized for our successes, we feel our value go up. Serotonin is released into the bloodstream when experiencing or witnessing success. It reinforces bonds between leaders and followers and is responsible for feelings of pride, increasing confidence levels while decreasing stress levels, social anxieties and aggression.

Oxytocin is chemical love. It is released during social interactions and helps build love, trust, and friendship. Like serotonin, oxytocin relieves stress while promoting attachment and generosity, solidifying relationships and instigating instincts of protection towards others.

.....
“Love is giving someone the power to destroy us and trusting they won’t use it.” (p. 50)
.....

Executive Book Summary: *Leaders Eat Last* by Simon Sinek

Endorphins and dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin are not the only chemicals Mother Nature gave humans to help us survive. There is one other important to the biological understanding of leadership: cortisol.

Cortisol: The stress chemical

Cortisol is a chemical our body produces to alert us to nearby dangerous and prepares us to take extra measures in order to protect ourselves. It's our *gut feeling* that something isn't right.

The problem? Cortisol is designed to quickly alert us to potential dangers, but leave as soon that threat has gone. The stress cortisol places on our bodies produces some extreme effects including suppression of the immune system, damage to short-term memory, and impaired cognition. When workers do not feel safe in their environment, cortisol is released into the bloodstream like saline from an IV-bag, drip after drip after drip. Cortisol becomes an ever-present hormone that lowers workplace performance and producing some serious health risks to employees.

Surveys show that 83% of Americans feel stressed at work. The most significant factors include pressure, bullying and lack of managerial support.

FAST FACTS...

Stress is attributed to 40% of work-related illnesses.

Work-related stress costs employers \$200B-\$300B a year.

The top three most stressful sectors to work in are: Healthcare, Social Work, and Education.



The world around us is filled with constant trials and dangers around which the five chemicals (endorphins, dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, and cortisol) help us navigate. In the business world, these dangers include fluctuations in the stock market, new technologies and competition.

We also face dangers from inside our organizations, but these dangers are variable and

therefore controllable. A great leader is able to eliminate these triggers of stress that include intimidations, humiliations, isolations, feelings of uselessness and rejections within the company by giving their people a sense of belonging based on a clear set of values.

By creating a *Circle of Safety*, leaders reduce the threats felt within the organization allowing people to focus their energy on protecting their company from the external dangers. The success of a company comes from the cooperation of the group members in maintaining the *Circle of Safety*.

"The primary role of leadership [is] to look out for those inside their Circle." (p. 23)



The *Circle of Safety* (p 21)



For an organization to succeed, leaders must treat leadership as a social contract. Great leaders unite a team around a cause that they all believe in. A physical presence is essential to cultivate working relationships, trust and teamwork. Leaders need to put people at the forefront of company goals and value long-term goals over short-term aims.



So Goes the Culture, so Goes the Company

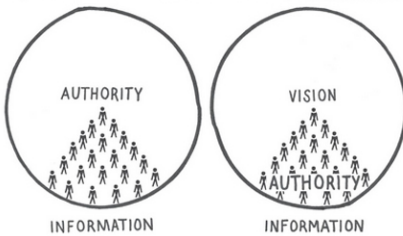
Just as like culture, corporations have their own history, traditions, and beliefs. Once employees identify themselves with this culture, they will form attachments to their company and speak about it with pride. The reverse is also true. "Bad cultures breed bad leaders." (p 133)

"In a weak culture, we veer away from doing "the right thing" in favor of doing "the things that's right for me." (p 129)

So Goes the Leader, so Goes the Culture



GIVE AUTHORITY TO THOSE CLOSEST TO THE INFORMATION



(p 144)

The *Circle of Safety* can easily be destroyed when a leader chooses to believe "I before You. Me Before We." (p137) Far too often, those with authority but none of the information are the decision makers. An organization will only begin to reach it's maximum potential when those in authority are prepared to surrender some of their control. *"The rank of office is not what makes someone a leader. Leadership is the choice to serve others with or without any formal rank."* (p 141)



Integrity Matters

Trust is vital. When we suspect leaders of dishonesty or neglect to take responsibility for their actions, our *Circle of Safety* shrinks. If during war, a soldier hesitates after questioning an officer's decision, people could die.

They need to have complete trust in their officer to follow them into the foxhole. Although corporate decisions are not often a matter of life and death, the same is true for every organization. In the words of Sinek, *"Leadership is about integrity, honesty, and accountability. All components of trust...to be a true leaders, to engender deep trust and loyalty, starts with telling the truth."* (p150)

"We don't just trust people to obey the rules, we also trust that they know when to break them." (p 155)

Friends Matter



In order to truly lead, leaders need to spend time with those that they serve. They need to establish positive connections because “enemies fight [but] friends cooperate.” (p 162) Cooperation – a means of working together, regardless of opinion, allows entities to not only reach a common goal, but to show progression. “Like any relationship, some [people] will get along, and some won’t. But in time, cooperation will happen.” (p 165)



Lead the People, Not the Numbers

Companies who firmly develop a *Circle of Safety* succeed because they treat employees like family. They create loyalty resulting in low turnover rates. When workers feel that their leaders are also defending them from the dangers outside, the company can then invite customers into that same *Circle of Safety*.



“Letting someone into an organization is like adopting a child.” (p23)

(p 178)

“When a leader embraces their responsibility to care for people instead of caring for numbers, then people will follow, solve problems and see to it that that leader’s vision comes to life the right way, a stable way and not the expedient way.” (p 177)



In *Leaders Eat Last*, Sinek reveals the concept of abstraction with Joseph Stalin’s infamous statement that “The death of one man is a tragedy...the death of a million is a statistic.” Intrinsically, all leaders should know that it is imperative to put people first, but so many corporate leaders fail to do so. By focusing on numbers before people, poor

leaders are able to ignore the pain they inflict on others and destroy livelihoods. They can be so driven to increase profits that they focus solely on short-term rather than long-term gains.

In order to combat abstraction, one must manage the abstraction. This can be done by following five simple rules:

1. Bring people together.
2. Keep it manageable.
3. Meet the people you help.
4. Give them time, not just money.
5. Be patient.

Leadership is difficult because you can’t give your time and energy to everyone. This is why you have to trust others to

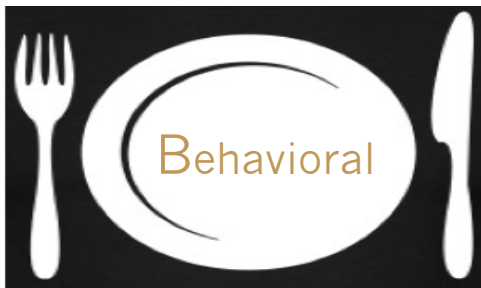
trust others to trust others. Great leaders empower the levels of management and the managers become leaders themselves.



(p 115)

“Great leaders sacrifice the numbers to save the people, because when push comes to shove, numbers won’t save you, people will.” (p.110)

Application to Leadership Theories



Leaders Eat Last adheres closely to the Behavioral Approach to leadership as it takes a critical approach on the actions of great leaders. Sinek reiterates the importance of achieving a Team Management style that “places a strong emphasis on both tasks and interpersonal relationships.” (Northouse, p 77) Additionally, Sinek describes great leaders as those who regard their organizations as families “and reward loyalty and obedience.” (Northouse, p 77) In his fifth leadership lesson, Sinek claims that when employees are brought into the *Circle of Safety*, it’s like adopting a new member of the family.

Sinek also likens great leaders to those who adjust their leadership style according to the situation. Poor leaders will make decisions regardless of their proximity to pertinent information. On the other hand, great leaders know how to hand over control to others who have a better viewpoint. They will direct, coach, support and delegate their followers depending on their level of development.



The importance of combating abstraction is an important theme throughout *Leaders Eat Last*. To do so, great leaders know the people they are working with and concern themselves with “emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals.” (Northouse, p 159) In doing so, followers begin to trust in their leader’s ideology and strive to meet common goals.

Sinek’s third leadership lesson tells us that *integrity matters* and that trust is essential. *Leaders Eat Last* looks at authentic leadership from an interpersonal process, resulting “not from the leader’s efforts alone, but also from the response of followers. Authenticity emerges from the interactions between leaders and followers.” (Northouse, p 196) Should a follower have any doubts about the sincerity of their leader, their subconscious mind will question whether to continue following them or not.



Executive Book Summary: *Leaders Eat Last* by Simon Sinek



Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't by Simon Sinek was a great book to accompany this course in Organizational Leadership. I found it easy to relate various leadership theories presented by Peter G. Northouse in *Leadership: Theory and Practice* through his numerous stories and informal case studies. References made to the American Marine Corps and to organizations such as

General Electric, Costco and 3M helped illustrate his points clearly. I responded well to Sinek's style of writing and organization of the book.

This was the first opportunity I had to consider leadership from a scientific perspective. Sinek defines the traits of a strong leader in relation to human biology, which is an argument I found quite interesting and generally agreed with. Having recently left a position where I continually faced internal conflicts. I now realize how much influence my former director had over the school environment and how it could have been more positively managed. If what Sinek says is

true, my reactions to the pressures of the job resulted in an abnormal amount of cortisol, and contributed to the demise in my health. Happily, I've taken a new position at a school where I feel safe, appreciated, and heard. I feel the *Circle of Safety* around me.

I would highly recommend this book to those interested in a new, biological perspective of leadership, but would warn readers that Sinek hasn't presented any new theories. Instead, he has given us the opportunity to consider our actions and determine if we are doing all we can to create safe, inclusive environments for our colleagues, manage internal conflicts and fight against external ones.

MEET THE AUTHOR

Simon Sinek wrote his first book, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, in 2009. Since then, he has become a well-known motivational speaker making notable appearances on TED.com and 99u.com. Sinek popularized the leadership concept of the 'golden circle' of human motivation. With a degree in Cultural Anthropology, Sinek teaches Strategic Communications at Columbia University, New York.



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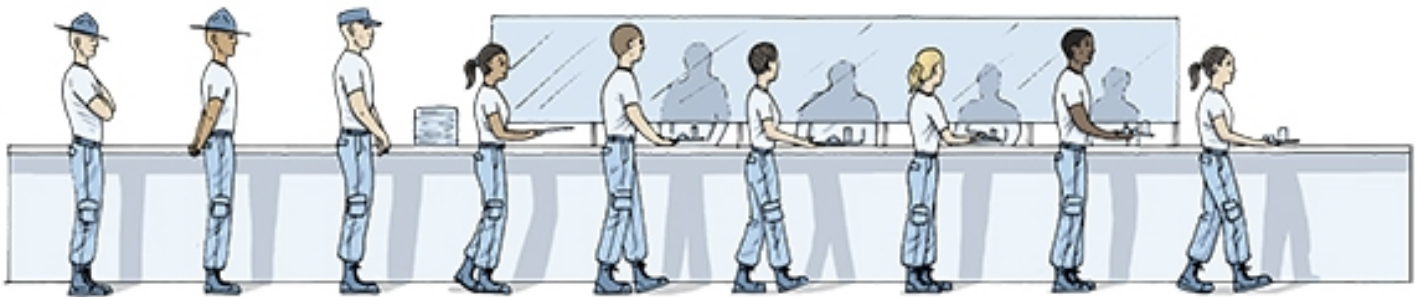
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BECOME A LEADER

"Each of us has a responsibility to keep the Circle of Safety strong. We must all start today to do little things for the good of others...one day at a time. Let us all be the leaders we wish we had." (p 216)



Are you eating last?