

Book Review Editor: Theodore J. Weidner, Ph.D., P.E., CEFP, AIA

While many authors have more than one book, it's rare that this column is dedicated to a single author. Simon Sinek appeared on my radar after a YouTube video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IU3R0ot18bg>) on Internet addiction, which explains some of my frustration as a professor and highlights some big concerns for facility officers. I can't say I like the solution in the video, but I appreciate the insights. There's more in the books below.

START WITH WHY: HOW GREAT LEADERS INSPIRE EVERYONE TO TAKE ACTION

Simon Sinek, Portfolio/Penguin, 2009, 228 pp., softcover, \$16, ebook, and audio book

Simon Sinek consults with companies to help them inspire employees, contractors, and others. As a result, he has observed the successful, the near-successful, the formerly successful, and the failures. Like any good consultant, he has developed a theory on what makes a company successful, and what's missing from a company that is not (or is no longer) successful. His theory deals with the "why," not the "what" or the "how." Obviously, it's a gross simplification, but it gets the point across.

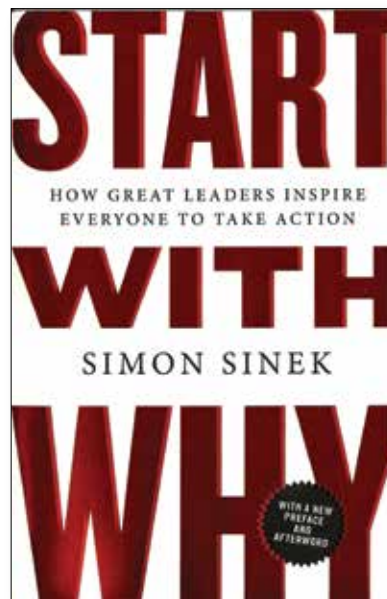
In *Start with Why*, Sinek ties these factors together by considering human behavior and the structure of the brain. He ties both "why" and "how" to the limbic brain, from where we get our feelings and our sense of trust, and the "what" to the neo-cortex, the decision-making and language part of the brain. Sinek postulates that we make our better, gut decisions based on "why," even though we may not be able to explain the reasons for our decision. It's an interesting concept that ties well with the theory of dysfunctional teams I reviewed late last year in the work of Patrick Lencioni.

Sinek's idea is that successful companies will attract consumers or clients because they have articulated their "why" successfully, even though the consumers go to them for sometimes irrational reasons. Think of Apple or Southwest Airlines. Both have loyal followings and find the competition

unsuitable. Southwest has open seating, no reservations, and seems to do fairly well despite the recent abuse claims levied at the airline. In other words, if you're unable to make a decision based on trust, you're likely to spend a lot of time trying to analyze what's not working and still be unsuccessful.

The "why" is often developed by the leader or company founder—think Steve Jobs, Herb Kelleher, or Sam Walton. These highly successful people formulated the "why" message for their company and became successful. "Why" forms the "true north" for the organization, aligning everyone so they know the company's vision and mission. It's similar to the NASA janitor claiming, "My job is to get a man on the moon."

Facility officers work in a difficult and challenging area. They manage constructed assets that often exceed all the financial holdings of the institution, and yet they are often viewed as "only the janitor" or a boiler operator. Successful facility officers understand the "why" of their larger organization (the educational mission) and communicate it clearly throughout the organization so that individual employees do the right thing, at the right time, day after day, and enjoy doing it despite some horrible odds.



LEADERS EAT LAST: WHY SOME TEAMS PULL TOGETHER AND OTHERS DON'T

Simon Sinek, softcover, 2014, \$17, ebook, and audio book

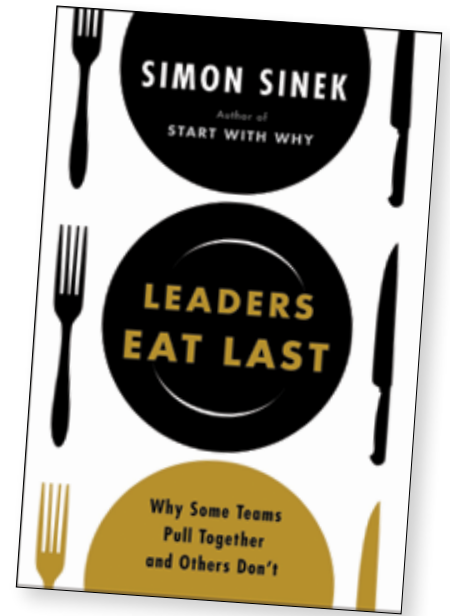
“Leaders Eat Last”—it’s an interesting premise, but where does it come from? Sinek describes a ritual in Marine boot camp where the lowest member of the platoon goes through the mess line first and begins eating. When the first person in the platoon finishes eating, everyone stops, even though they may still have food on the plate. This promotes unity within the team. But what happens if the leader, the highest ranking member of the platoon, doesn’t get to eat much because he has to stop too? Problems.

So what does this ritual mean for the lower platoon members? They are a high priority for the platoon leader; they need sustenance because the platoon can’t succeed if these individuals are not well fed and can’t do their jobs. When the “boss” lets them eat first, they are elevated from being a “grunt,” and they understand better how they fit in. They also understand what it means to see how their actions affect others.

Sinek provides several examples of places where the team improves its effectiveness or productivity when they understand the impact of their work—not by hearing about the outcome from their leader, but by hearing from the recipient. One kind of impact

is demonstrated in the form of a cash donation, the other in the form of time and effort. For instance, many people involved in facilities and/or construction may learn more from participating in a Habitat for Humanity build than from writing a check. The same thing happens from the recipient’s perspective. That could be why Habitat is successful.

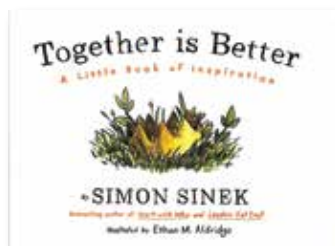
Sinek connects all of these examples to the biology of the brain. The limbic brain processes behavior responses differently from the neocortex, in the form of biochemical stimulation. This kind of stimulation is what results in the continuing distractions mentioned in the YouTube video, and one of the challenges faced by leaders or teachers. Biology is a powerful thing. Understanding the deep biological responses described by Sinek provides helpful insights for us to use in our jobs as leaders or as followers.



TOGETHER IS BETTER: A LITTLE BOOK OF INSPIRATION

Simon Sinek, Portfolio/Penguin, 2016, 140 pp., hardcover, \$22

If you watched the YouTube video mentioned earlier in this column, then you know the details of this book. This is supposed to be a helpful story to inspire people to do better. It’s a nice idea that works within the attention limits of millennials (short), but it is also something one can return to



frequently. It’s similar to a trip to a spa, but cheaper.

I’m not a big fan of the book, but I understand that it may have its place in getting this message out to people wired a little differently than me. ☺



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