

## CHAPTER 1

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# Start with Why

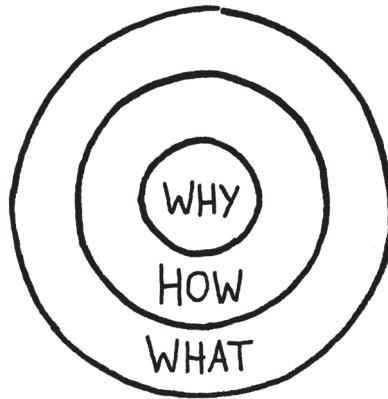
**A Primer**

Sometimes a project that looks like an easy win for us turns into a disappointment or even a disaster. More importantly, sometimes we, or a competitor, succeed brilliantly when all the usual business assumptions say we should have flopped. These outcomes can seem mysterious, but they're not if looked at in a framework that starts with WHY.

In his book, *Start with Why*, Simon Sinek uses a model that he calls the Golden Circle to explain how legendary leaders such as Steve Jobs, Martin Luther King Jr. and the Wright brothers were able to achieve what others who were just as smart and hardworking, and sometimes better funded, were not.

If you've read Simon's book or seen him talk about WHY on TED.com (<http://bit.ly/GoldenCircleTalk>), you're already familiar with the Golden Circle; this chapter will serve to remind you of the most important points. If the Golden Circle is new for you, what follows is the heart of the matter—and is essential preparation for your own search for WHY.

Every organization—and every person's career—operates on three levels, as shown in the illustration on the next page: *What* we do, *how* we do it, and *why* we do it. We all know *what* we do: the products we sell, the services we offer or the jobs we do. Some of us know *how* we do it: the things that we think make us different or stand out from



the crowd. But very few of us can clearly articulate *why* we do what we do.

“Hold on,” you might say. “Let’s be honest here—aren’t most people working to earn money? That’s the obvious ‘why.’” First, money is a result. Though it is a part of the picture, it’s not what inspires any one of us to get out of bed in the morning. And for the cynics out there who think they or others really do get out of bed for the money, the question we ask is, what is the reason they want the money. Is it for freedom? To travel? To provide a lifestyle for their kids that they didn’t have? Is it to keep score and show they have done more than others? The point is, money isn’t the thing that drives people. WHY goes much deeper to understanding what motivates and inspires us. It is the purpose, cause or belief that drives every organization and every person’s individual career. *Why* does your company exist? *Why* did you get out of bed this morning? And *why* should anyone care?

When we meet new customers or clients, the first thing most of us tell them is *what* we do. Then we explain *how* we do it or *how* we are different. This, we think, will be enough to win their business, sway their point of view or convince them to take a particular action. The following pitch follows that template:

*We sell paper. We offer the highest quality product at the best possible price. Lower than any of our competitors. Wanna buy some?*

This is a very rational pitch. It states clearly what the company does and attempts to persuade potential buyers to choose its product over others' on the basis of features and benefits. Though this approach may work now and then, at best it will result in a few recurring transactions. As soon as the buyer finds a better deal, they will be gone, because the pitch doesn't differentiate this specific vendor from other companies in any way that truly matters. Loyalty is not built on features and benefits. Features and benefits do not inspire. Loyalty and long-lasting relationships are based on something deeper.

Let's try the pitch again. Let's start with WHY:

*What good is an idea if it can't be shared? Our company was founded to help spread ideas. The more ideas that are shared, the greater the likelihood those ideas will have an*

*impact in the world. There are many ways to share ideas; one is the written word. That's where we come in. We make paper for those words. We make paper for big ideas. Wanna buy some?*

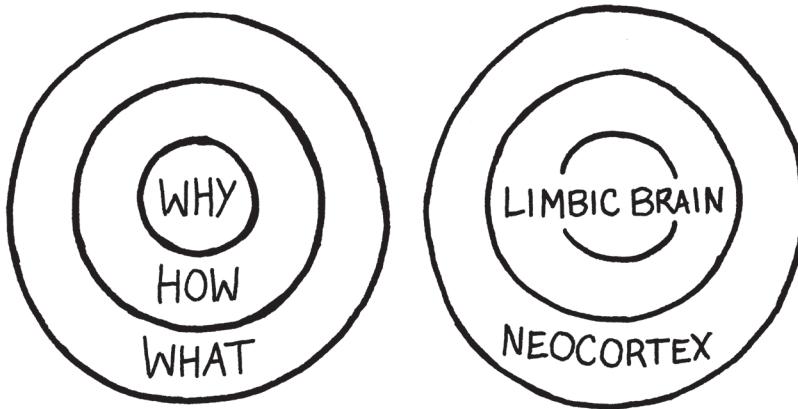
Totally different, right? Starting with WHY just made paper sound really good. And if it can do that for a commodity, imagine what it can do for a product that really can stand out. This pitch is not based on facts and figures, features and benefits. Those things have value but not first. Leading with WHY has a deeper, more emotional and ultimately more influential value. When we use the second pitch, we're no longer talking about paper. We're talking about who our company is and what we stand for. Of course, you'll always get those people who just want a ream of paper. And yet, if your customers' personal beliefs and values align with those expressed in your pitch—i.e., if they believe in the spread of ideas—then they are much more likely to want to do business with you, *not just one time, but over and over and over again*. In fact, they are more likely to stay loyal even if another vendor offers a better price. It says something about them when they do business with a company that reflects their beliefs.

Companies that inspire, companies that command trust and loyalty over the long term, are the ones that make us feel we're accomplishing something bigger than just saving a buck. That feeling of alliance with something bigger

is the reason we keep wearing the jersey of our hometown sports team even though they've missed the playoffs for ten years and counting. It's why some of us will always buy Apple products over other brands, even if Apple isn't always the most affordable choice. Whether we like to admit it or not, we are not entirely rational beings. If we were, no one would ever fall in love and no one would ever start a business. Faced with an overwhelming chance of failure, no rational person would ever take either of those risks. But we do. Every day. Because how we feel about something or someone is more powerful than what we think about it or them.

There's just one problem with feelings. They can be tremendously difficult to express in words. That's the reason we so often resort to metaphors and analogies, like "Our relationship feels like a train heading at high speed toward a rickety bridge." "When I get to the office, I feel like a little kid on the playground again." Even though communicating our feelings is hard, the payoff is big. When we align emotionally with our customers and clients, our connection is much stronger and more meaningful than any affiliation based on features and benefits. That's what starting with WHY is all about.

And here's the best part: This is not our opinion. This whole concept of WHY is grounded in the tenets of biology of human decision making. How the Golden Circle works maps perfectly with how our brain works.



The outer section of the Golden Circle—the WHAT—corresponds to the outer section of the brain—the neocortex. This is the part of the brain responsible for rational and analytical thought. It helps us understand facts and figures, features and benefits. The neocortex is also responsible for language.

The middle two sections of the Golden Circle—the WHY and HOW—correspond to the middle section of the brain, the limbic system. This is the part of the brain responsible for all our behavior and decision making. It's also responsible for all our feelings, like trust and loyalty. But unlike the neocortex, the limbic system has no capacity for language. This is where “gut feelings” come from. It's not our stomach. It's a feeling we get about a decision we have to make that we struggle to explain.

That separation of powers is the biological reason we sometimes find it difficult to put our feelings into words

(“I love you more than words can say”), explain our actions (“The devil made me do it!”) or justify our decisions (“I don’t know . . . it just felt right”).

We can learn, however, to put words to those feelings. And those who do are the ones who are better able to inspire action in themselves, among their colleagues and with their customers. We wrote this book to help you find those words.

Once you understand your WHY, you’ll be able to clearly articulate what makes you feel fulfilled and to better understand what drives your behavior when you’re at your natural best. When you can do that, you’ll have a point of reference for everything you do going forward. You’ll be able to make more intentional choices for your business, your career and your life. You’ll be able to inspire others to buy from you, work with you and join your cause. Never again should you have to play the lottery and act on gut decisions that are made for reasons you don’t really understand. From now on, you will work with purpose, on purpose. From now on, you’ll start with WHY.

**The opportunity is not  
to discover the perfect  
company for ourselves.  
The opportunity is to  
build the perfect company  
for each other.**

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## What WHY Looks Like in Action

The HR director, dressed in a crisp, gray business suit, looked up at Emily and barked his standard opening question: “So, what can you bring to our company?”

A few months before she graduated from college, Emily applied for a position at a large global corporation. A straight-A student who had gone to university on a full scholarship, she easily made it through the first cut and now found herself in a panel interview, where she sat across the table from the HR director and three other executives. They could see from her application that she was bright, but they worried about her lack of real-world experience. More important, they wanted to find out if she would fit their culture and how she would cope under pressure.

The man in gray elaborated: “We have a lot of highly qualified applicants for this position. Tell us what you have that they don’t.”

A conscientious student, Emily had prepared for the interview by learning everything she could about the company. But every other candidate had access to the same information. So Emily went a step further. Emily unleashed her WHY.

“Before I talk about what I might be able to bring to your company,” she calmly told the HR director, “let me first give the reason I get out of bed every day.

“I strive to help people be the best version of themselves. That’s what inspires me. Based on your website, I sense that this is precisely what you believe in too. So, why wouldn’t I apply to be part of your organization?”

That caught their attention.

The interviewers stopped shuffling their papers and looked her in the face. Emily then segued to a more traditional pitch about her skills and strengths, but the battle was already won. That first exchange, which lasted less than thirty seconds, had already persuaded the interviewers to hire her. By starting with her WHY, Emily had spoken directly to the limbic, decision-making centers of their brains. By showing who she was, not just what she could do, she formed an instant and genuine connection. That’s all it took. They knew in their gut that they wanted her on their team.

It was relatively straightforward for Emily too. Instead of using prep time to come up with clever answers to a host of hypothetical questions, she’d focused on being comfortable with communicating her WHY. Once she faced the panel, all she had to do was speak “from her heart” (i.e., her limbic brain) about what inspired her to want to work there. The rest of the interview felt much more like a conversation than an inquisition and all her answers validated the panelists’ intuition. Afterward, her cell phone rang before she even got home. It was the HR director offering her the job.

Tools can be used for many purposes. With a hammer, for example, we can simply hang a picture or we can build a whole house. Our WHY is an equally versatile tool, with applications both narrow and broad. We can use it to ace an interview or inspire our team. An entrepreneur can use it to guide a single new venture or to direct their entire organization. A company can use it to inspire a marketing campaign or to transform its corporate culture. One tool, many uses.

Another way to think of the WHY is as a piece of a jigsaw puzzle. When you know what your piece looks like, it's much easier to see where it fits or doesn't fit. Decisions can be made more quickly and with greater certainty. And when others can see your piece, they can see whether it fits with theirs. If it does, that's when the image starts to take shape. In the real world, that looks like a team coming together to advance a common vision (or, like the people who hired Emily, knowing who to invite to join their team).

There are two ways to build a career or a business. We can go through life hunting and pecking, looking for opportunities or customers, hoping that something connects. Or we can go through life with intention, knowing what our piece looks like, knowing our WHY, and going straight to the places we fit.

## Finding the Right Fit

It was break time for a group of senior TV execs going through the Why Discovery process for their company. As everyone else made a beeline for the coffee, Susan, the HR director, walked over to her colleague Jim. “I don’t think we should hire him,” she said.

For several weeks, Susan and Jim had been debating whether or not to hire a candidate for a critical position. They had conducted a wide search and narrowed down their short list to just one person. On paper, he looked great. He had all the boxes checked. But something just didn’t feel right.

“I didn’t know what the problem was before,” Susan said. “But now it’s so clear.”

Jim finished her thought. “He doesn’t believe what we believe.”

Thanks to the Why Discovery process, Susan and Jim had experienced the same epiphany. The candidate in question had all the right qualifications, but he was missing something incredibly important. He couldn’t champion their WHY. He was up for a key role and leaving the position empty for another few months would absolutely hurt the company. But they resolved then and there, right next to the snack table, that regardless of any short-term pain they

might suffer, they would keep looking until they found someone who could do the job *and* would be the right fit for their company.

It's easier to hire someone based on their résumé. It's harder to hire someone for their cultural fit. The reason is pretty obvious. We usually hire because we have a job that needs to be done. We look at the résumé to see if the candidate has the skills and experience to do that job. Facts are involved. For better or for worse, hiring for cultural fit is usually less about facts and more about how it feels. Irresponsible executives will ignore that feeling (a.k.a. their gut) whereas good executives will listen to it. The problem is, it's still a feeling.

The WHY exists on a macro level and a micro level. A company has a WHY, each division or team has a WHY, and every individual has a WHY. The opportunity is to make sure the right people are working in the right places in the right company. We'll cover more about this idea, called Nested WHYS, in chapter 4.

In the case of the TV executives, their gut feeling that the candidate was wrong for their company, even though his skills were right, was strong enough to cause them concern. But their inability to articulate the reason they felt he was wrong kept them from using their gut feeling as the basis for making the decision. This happens to the best of us—when all signs say “go,” yet our gut is telling us to hold back. It's because we are about to make a decision that's out of alignment with our values and beliefs. As soon as a company's WHY is put into words, the culture becomes a little more tangible and the right decision becomes clear immediately.

It would be nice if business was purely science, but it isn't. While some parts of a business are predictable, tangible and easy to measure (think profit, revenues and expenses), the fact is, there are huge parts of a business that are unpredictable, intangible and hard to measure (think vision, inspiration, trust . . . and hiring someone to fit the culture). It's not that we don't understand the value of the intangibles; it's that we have trouble explaining what that value is. Sometimes the intangible values are abandoned because the internal or external pressure to "make the numbers" overwhelms concerns about the company's long-term well-being. Or sometimes intangibles get ignored because we lack the ability to fully grasp or explain them, to have the patience to nurture them or to know which yardstick would accurately measure them. If we had the right tools to manage the intangibles, we'd probably give them more attention.

Tools help us keep track of inventory inside a company, but what tool can help us gauge the cultural fit of a potential employee? We can easily calculate profit by deducting our expenses from our income, but how do we accurately measure the discretionary effort of our workforce? We can know a customer's purchase history, but how do we know if they trust the company? Having no answers to these questions is the reason too many companies hire for skills before fit, talk about culture but don't know how to build it and fail to create deep, human connections with their employees and customers.

The WHY is a tool that can bring clarity to that which is fuzzy and make tangible that which is abstract. Used properly, it can be used to hire, to develop strategies and to communicate more clearly (internally and externally). The WHY can help set a vision to inspire people. The WHY can guide us to act with purpose, on purpose.

In the next few chapters, we will explain how to find your WHY and put it into words.

**Find Your Why at <http://amzn.to/2wkw228>.**