

“Why entrepreneurship and why now?” with Simon Sinek

It’s a reasonable question and one that arises at the inevitable summer weddings, holidays and gatherings of friends and acquaintances.

My response has become to cite Simon Sinek’s 2009 TedTalk, and his book, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. If you’re among those who haven’t seen the video of his talk, you can view it here:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/simon\\_sinek\\_how\\_great\\_leaders\\_inspire\\_action](https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action)

Sinek says that some leaders or organizations inspire more than others, according to a “golden circle” in entrepreneurial thinking and action. He draws three concentric circles, noting that the innermost circle pertains to the “why” we do what we do; the next circle refers to “how” we do what we do (essentially our universal sales proposition/USP); and the outermost circle pertains to the “what” we do, which is readily known. “Inspired organizations,” Sinek says, think, act and communicate from the inside out. And in his common refrain, he says, “People buy *why you do it*, not *what you do*.” And “you want to sell to people who believe what you believe.”



why? (limbic brain)

how? (more limbic brain)

what? (neo-cortex)

If we focus on the result, say, of making money in our businesses, it will not be the “why” of what we do. The “why” is about doing business “with people who believe what you believe.” And “If you hire people who need a job, they’ll work for money. If you hire someone because they believe what you do, they’ll work for you with blood, sweat and tears.” Because “what you do simply serves as proof of what you believe.” An enlightened person is driven by a cause, purpose and belief—and not to be rich and famous, Sinek contends.

He relates the concentric “golden circle” above to the different biological parts and functions of the human brain: the ancient limbic brain (two innermost circles) is responsible for trust, loyalty, decision making and has no capacity for language. This part of the brain controls behaviour and is the place from which all *gut decisions* come.

By contrast to these two inner regions, the outermost and newest part of the brain is the neo-cortex, which is analytical, rational and driven by language, facts and figures. The daily risk of creatives is that the neo-cortex will take over, such as we often see in the “work” of naysayers on committees.

Sinek proceeds to discuss the (marketing) “Law of diffusion of innovation,” whereby “innovators” comprise 2.5% of market success or acceptance of an idea; followed by “early

adopters” who comprise 13.5% (waiting in line for new Apple products simply to be the first to get them); followed by 34% who are the “early majority,” then the “late majority” of 34% and finally the “laggards” at 16%. He says that we only achieve the tipping point between 15% and 18% of market penetration, when the system tips and our innovation (product or service) becomes widespread.

Again, the goal, Sinek reminds us, is “not to do business with everybody who needs what you have. The goal is to do business with people who believe what you believe.” So when we market our services by features and benefits and complicated data, we are marketing from the “outside in” and that does not drive consumer behaviour.

By contrast, if we know “why we do what we do,” we can innovate, ourselves. Those who start with “why” (from the “inside out”) have the ability to inspire those around them or find others who inspire them.

So some of my work is about helping and teaching others to write better, to communicate as powerfully as they think, based on the firm belief that better communication and understanding can change the world. Better writing should reflect better gut reactions (the “why” of the limbic brain) and not only better analysis or thinking.

And since I’m thinking and writing about resilience these days (for a forthcoming eBook), one becomes resilient as an entrepreneur when one knows the “why,” and thereby can deal with impossible challenges, such as technological change and the advent of artificial intelligence (AI).

Non-fiction writing on the Prairies defies the “cookie-cutter” approaches of wealthier regions of central Canadian and of the US (e.g. The American Writers and Artists, Inc. [AWAI], and its gurus). But it can also be difficult to find a steady flow of clients when writing as a freelancer, in SK. If we can allow ourselves (and some already do) to follow the “why” of good reading and writing, we find that there is astonishing creative space and opportunity for freelance non-fiction writers. Yes, even on the Prairies. Engaging with one’s “why” can dispel the myth that writing is the domain of bohemian, bluestocking poverty.

People used to say that owning real estate and owning and operating a car would always be cheap on the Prairies. That has since been proven false. The days of undervaluing non-fiction writing here will also come to an end—even if not imminently. In part, I’ve revisited Sinek closely to throw down the gauntlet to fellow writers and editors. I’m pointing to where we need to go (and it’s emphatically not being paid \$0.10 per word by local media outlets).

*What do you think about Sinek’s identification between the “golden circle” and the human brain? And what do you make of his “law of diffusion of innovation?” If you are a freelancer or want to become one, do you know “why” you work, and if so, how does it make the “impossible” possible, for your entrepreneurship?*

*Please leave your comments on my “contact” page. I’d be delighted to hear from you.*