

SMA Dailey's Book Club: Start with Why

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Last year, Sgt. Maj. of the Army Daniel A. Dailey started a book club to promote discussions among Soldiers about Army related topics focused on leadership and the Army Profession.¹ "We already ask Soldiers to read and understand regulations and policies -- this is an opportunity to start a new initiative that's fun, while also helping our squad leaders guide discussions on topics that relate to our profession," Dailey said. "It shouldn't feel like another task. I don't want to force Soldiers to do this. I want them to want to read with me."²

Start with Why by Simon Sinek, the most recent book on Dailey's Book Club list, is open for discussion from July to December 2017. Though not military based and repetitive in some sections, the book does cover many leadership aspects beneficial to noncommissioned officers.

What is the "Why"?

The “why” is the purpose, reason, cause or belief behind a dream, action, or product.³ For example, you may have the will, work ethic, and valor to be a good noncommissioned officer, but Soldiers don’t just look at what you do or how you do it. It is your “why”, the reason you do things as an NCO, that gains your Soldiers’ trust and support. People don’t buy what you do; they buy why you do it.⁴

The “why” is crucial for Soldiers and goes back to the Army’s very beginning. Maj. Gen. Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, the man credited with shaping the U.S. Army NCO, implemented a training program and drill manuals for the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War.⁵ He discovered the manipulative tactics he applied when training British, Hessian, and Prussian soldiers did not work for Soldiers of the Continental Army. Unlike the European soldiers, the continental soldiers were not professionals but “instead a people’s army fighting for a cause.”⁶

Eventually, Von Steuben discovered that American Soldiers struggled to believe in the army’s “why”, which led to purposelessness, low morale, and desertion.⁷ George Washington’s “why” became “fuzzy” and he struggled to maintain what Sinek calls the “growth, loyalty and inspiration that help[s leaders] drive [their] original success.”⁸ Von Steuben’s success in training and organizing the Soldiers was a result of inspiring them to believe the “why” in a much stronger light.

Inspiration vs. Manipulation

Von Steuben is also a perfect example of the manipulation vs. inspiration leadership that Sinek discusses. In order to have people follow you wholeheartedly, you cannot use fear or manipulation to lead them. Instead, you must inspire them with your “why.”

Von Steuben concluded that “unless you give motivated people something bigger to believe in, something bigger than their job to work toward, they will motivate themselves to find a new job and you’ll be stuck with whoever’s left.”⁹

The Golden Circle Concept

The Golden Circle Concept, according to Sinek, is an alternative perspective that guides leaders to inspire and improve their leadership.¹⁰ The graphic to the left models this concept and below is a breakdown:

WHAT: what you do. It is the easiest to identify and explain.

HOW: the process or steps you take to do WHAT you do.

WHY: Your cause, reason, or purpose. The most difficult to identify.¹¹

Most people think outside to inside by starting with WHAT they do and ending with WHY they do it. For example: As an NCO, I ensure my Soldiers’ well-being (WHAT) by providing guidance, resources, and correction (HOW). I care about my Soldiers and want to see them continue to grow and develop (WHY).

But if you remember, people don’t buy what you do; they buy why you do it. Therefore, the correct way a leader should think is inside out: As an NCO, I care about my Soldiers and want to see them continue to grow and develop (WHY). By providing guidance, resources, and correction (HOW), I ensure the development and well-being of my Soldiers (WHAT).

Successful leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., the Wright Brothers, and John F. Kennedy “were able to inspire those around them and truly lead their team” even when met with hostility.¹²

“Their goals were not different from anyone else’s and their system and processes were easily replicated,” Sinek said. “They stand apart from the norm and their impact is not easily copied.”¹³

So what made these leaders so successful? They began with their why and inspired people.¹⁴

Sinek also mentions that you do not have to be the senior leader to influence and lead. For example, though Apple is not the top manufacturer of computers, they do lead the computer industry.¹⁵ Likewise, though NCOs are not the senior leaders who call the shots, they are the backbone of the U.S. Army. Officers depend on NCOs to carry out orders and their ability to inspire Soldiers to see the “why” is a crucial leadership skill.

Knowing Your “Why”

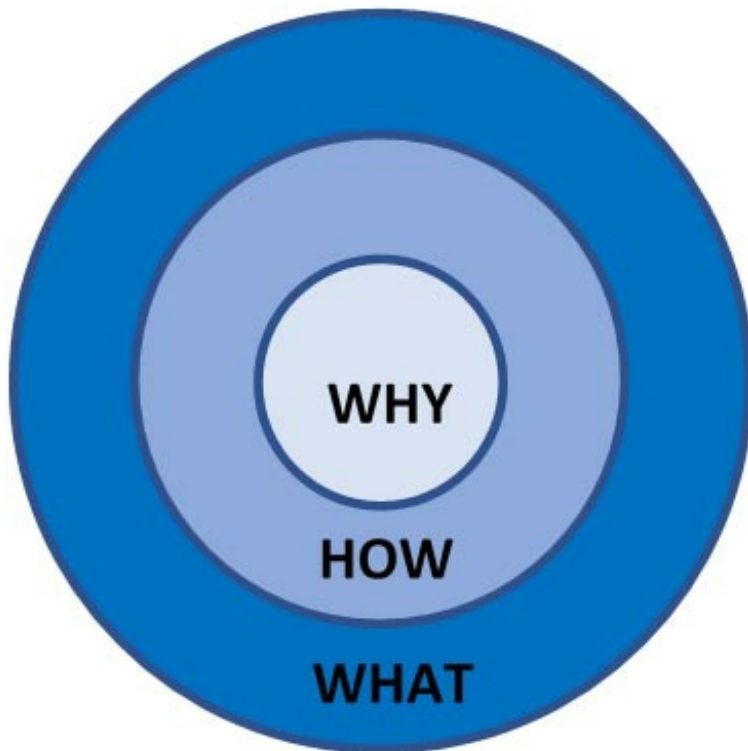
Sinek points out that most companies do not know what draws customers and employees to them and therefore do not know “what to do, how to attract more employees and how to encourage loyalty with the ones they already have.”¹⁶ This would be the equivalent of NCOs not knowing their role in taking care of Soldiers.

This cannot be the case for NCOs. They must have a clear understanding of why their Soldiers look to them to lead.

NCOs are leaders who guide Soldiers and officers alike, and understanding your “why” is extremely important to carry out your duties. Once Soldiers believe in your “why”, you gain their trust and loyalty.

Why You Should Read Start with Why

Reading this book will allow you to participate in SMA Dailey’s book discussions as he makes troop visits.¹⁷ Dailey hopes “the book club concept will help establish critical reading as a crucial skill for NCOs, considering the reading, research and writing curriculum now prominent in Army professional military education, including the Basic Leader Course, the Advanced Leader Course, the Senior Leader Course and the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy.”¹⁸



The book club is voluntary, but NCOs can use it as a professional development tool and should attend any book discussions, read the discussion guide or even watch Simon Sinek’s TED talk, which inspired his book.

Future book club selections will come from Soldier recommendations. Check the SMA’s Book Club page often to see when suggested books are accepted.

TED Talk Video [Link](#):

Sinek’s Golden Circle Concept. Successful leaders think from the inside out. (Source: Sinek, 37)

https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action/up-next

Notes

1. C. Todd Lopez, "SMA's new book club kicks off," U.S. Army website, 02 June 2016, accessed 12 September 2017, https://www.army.mil/article/169075/SMA_s_new_book_club_kicks_off/.
2. Lopez, "SMA's new book club kicks off".
3. Simon Sinek, *Start with Why* (New York: Portfolio, 2009) 39.
4. Sinek, 41; 58.
5. Pablo Villa, "Friedrich von Steuben: A Closer Look at the 'Father' of the NCO Corps," *NCO Journal*, 18 September 2015, accessed 4 October 2017, <http://ncojournal.dodlive.mil/2015/09/18/friedrich-von-steuben-a-closer-look-at-the-father-of-the-nco-corps/>; and *American Military History*, ed. Richard W. Stewart, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C: Center of Military History, 2009), 87.
6. Stewart, 105.
7. Stewart, 87.
8. Sinek, 50.
9. Sinek, 94; and Stewart, 69.
10. Sinek, 39.
11. Sinek, 39.
12. Sinek, 2-3.
13. Sinek, 5.
14. Sinek, 5.
15. Sinek, 5.
16. Sinek, 16.
17. Lopez, "SMA's new book club kicks off".
18. Lopez, "SMA's new book club kicks off".