

Leaders Eat Last Summary

By Simon Sinek

What does good leadership look like?

Leaders Eat Last examines the impact of effective leadership, and its effect on organizational culture. Work culture is reflective of leadership, and creating a "Circle of Safety" prioritizes empathy and support, so that individuals and the company thrives.

Sometimes we need to be reminded about things, and when it comes to leading, who better to remind us than bestselling author and TedTalk sensation Simon Sinek. Sinek has dedicated his life to researching leadership patterns, and how we should think and act within teams. The dominance of hierarchical leadership structures has made us lose sight of the true essence of leadership. While many of the book's key themes may be familiar, the stories, anecdotes, and truths are things that we seem to have lost sight of.

You can have the best product or service in the world, but if the people in your team aren't happy, things start to unravel. Often the importance of teamwork shows itself most prominently in times of crisis. If a company has a good culture and exemplary leadership, it works through the hardships with relative ease. On the other hand, if a company has a leader who isn't people-focused, then employees are unlikely to work towards overcoming the crisis.

One of our basic human needs is safety, and this isn't just about our physical safety, but our mental and emotional safety. Having a strong

sense of employee safety means that you'll inspire loyalty and commitment. And loyalty and commitment mean that everyone works towards a common goal.

We'll briefly explore what constitutes good leadership. So much of contemporary leadership has become about "the bottom line," profit, cash flow, and impressing investors. However, as Sinek explains, we've forgotten that leadership is actually about people. We'll see how crucial it is to properly manage, motivate, and nurture people, so that they not only grow, but thrive. Good leaders take care of people, show empathy and guidance, and in so doing, the team works to maximum potential. When a team is working together for a common purpose, all financial goals tend to work out.

Environment

Many work environments are tailored towards contracts and tit-for-tat relationships. This means that instead of working together, team members are often competing and are afraid of their job security. Have you ever worked in a toxic work culture where colleagues are obstructive, or hope for someone to fail, so that they can rise through the ranks?

Previous generations believed that you became a "company man," and that company loyalty was everything. Nowadays, we're told that staying at a company for "too long" is a sign of weakness and complacency.

If we go back to our history and look at human evolution, we have survived because of our natural instincts to form complex social groups. Everyone in a tribe had a role to play, and this social organization allowed

people to be safe and protected. While the world around us has changed and advanced in profound ways, human nature remains the same. We're biologically determined to seek and value connection.

However, we also value autonomy and independence. As we learned from *So Good They Can't Ignore You*, job satisfaction has declined in recent decades. In 2010 only 45% of Americans surveyed were happy with their jobs. This indicates that work environments are not satisfactory and that many people remain in positions because they lack the autonomy and financial freedom to leave.

Sinek examines the fact that work environments are crucial. Leaders need to foster a culture where employees feel valued and supported. So often we think and expect people around us to change, but we need to shift focus on adjusting the environment. A good leader can change a work culture, whereas a manager tends to hone in on individual gains. Having a toxic work culture is the death of productivity, because instead of focussing on external factors, people focus on internal factors such as group politics and factionalization. And, a toxic work culture also impacts individuals more deeply. Stress increases the risk of heart attacks and cancer, and also seeps into home life.

When we speak about a work-life balance, this doesn't just mean for individuals, but also for their social groups and families. Studies show that children are more affected by a parent's bad mood or stress than by the number of hours that they spend working. So while we may think we need to spend more time with our families, it's more fruitful to focus on our mood when we're around them. In short, quality time is sometimes better than "quantity time."

Furthermore, we need to look at how humans are made up, and this

comes down to four major chemicals. Two of these are "Selfish," and two are "Selfless." Endorphins help us to deal with pain, and dopamine makes us task-oriented. These are "Selfish" chemicals, because they revolve around the self and allow us to get things done. Serotonin and oxytocin are the "Selfless" chemicals, because they center on social connection.

Selfish Chemicals Can Aid Progress

Endorphins and dopamine are the chemicals that make us feel good when we achieve our goals. It's this feeling that makes us want to push ourselves and pursue even more significant progress for ourselves.

Endorphins are most typically experienced when we exercise. After exercising, we often experience a high, and it's this high that motivates us to continue and strive to improve. Many people refer to this as a "runners' high." This high that we get after exercising is actually our body trying to mask the pain of exercising and exerting ourselves. The great thing about endorphins is that they allow us to physically exert ourselves and reward our exertion.

Dopamine is commonly associated with dangerous pursuits such as drug-taking. Substances such as alcohol and cocaine provide us with dopamine hits, and this feeling of instant gratification is highly addictive. Pleasure arises because of dopamine, which can be highly problematic when we engage in bad habits or addictive behaviors.

However, if we channel the power of dopamine for good, we can become more effective individuals. For example, as we saw with *The Checklist Manifesto*, checking things off a list, achieving goals, improving ourselves mentally and physically, allows us to enjoy the positive side effects of

these chemicals. The satisfaction we get from crossing things off a list provides us with dopamine hits, which is great news for productivity.

So how does this apply to leadership?

Well, we need to use our dopamine for good. Many leaders use fear to rule, and are governed by the ego. When we try to control individuals and experience a "power high," this arises from a surge of dopamine. So the bottom line is that we feel good at the expense of others. Instead, we should focus on using the power of dopamine to be goal and task-oriented. If we work together to complete tasks, not only do we get things done more efficiently, but everyone experiences the positive effects of dopamine. However, we do need to find balance. Because dopamine is so addictive, we need to be mindful of how pursuing it too vigorously can result in being isolated or burning out.

Selfless Chemicals Foster Safety and Connection

Serotonin and Oxytocin are responsible for feelings of trust, loyalty, connection, and cooperation.

Serotonin comes from the feeling of being connected to a group. All of us need to experience a sense of belonging, whether it's at work, home, or through other social connections. We feed off group connections, and we want recognition from other people. This is why, when we're presented with awards or degrees, this practice is done in public. How would you feel if you worked hard to reach a goal and your certificate or award was simply mailed to your doorstep? It would feel like an anticlimax, right? Our achievements also affect the people around us. The people who celebrate our successes also have a rush of serotonin when they feel

proud and part of the process.

Oxytocin is the love hormone. We feel it most acutely when we fall in love or have romantic feelings towards others. However, we also get it when we perform or observe good deeds. When we help other people and show love, this strengthens our sense of connection, and this is important for our overall happiness and wellbeing. Furthermore, oxytocin comes from physical contact such as a handshake, a pat on the back, or a hug. Sinek explains that we should never underestimate the importance of social connection, and doing things face-to-face wherever possible.

The selfless chemicals develop a spirit of generosity, trust, and friendship. These things are crucial because they make us feel safe and secure.

The Circle of Safety

It's a wonderful feeling when you know that people have your back. This synergy can be achieved by focusing on the chemicals that motivate us, and encourage us to connect with others. The more cooperation and collaboration we can develop, the more trusting and happy team members are. Balancing these chemicals means we're more likely to get through hardships and face obstacles as a team.

What if you were told that you had to nail a presentation or you'd lose your job?

For most of us, this would probably lead to a meltdown because working under this type of pressure is exceedingly challenging. Most of us do our best when we're relaxed and able to channel our creativity. If we look at a

company like Next Jump, they believe in mentoring, coaching, and finding solutions, instead of firing people. Why focus so heavily on improving others and giving so much time to employees? Well, if people are scared of losing their jobs, they can't work at an optimum level. And potential is everything.

Furthermore, when we love our jobs and the place we work, and we respect the people around us, this creates almost unwavering loyalty. Sinek uses the example of Barry-Wehmiller, run by Bob Chapman to exemplify the type of leadership that everyone should look to. Barry-Wehmiller was in financial turmoil. They were advised to "cut the fat" and proceed with a series of layoffs. Chapman refused because he didn't want to sacrifice any of the people in the company. This attitude is in complete opposition to the dominant view that people are expendable. He asked for solutions and refused to budge.

The solution was "furlough." Every single employee, including top-level managers and even the CEO, had to take four weeks of unpaid leave. The four weeks of financial hardship for each employee was not easy; however, it was certainly preferable to unemployment. And, when every single person is in the same boat, this instills a sense of fairness and unity.

We'd be naive to think that money and profits aren't necessary. However, as the Costco example shows, having happy and safe employees does wonders for the "bottom line." Costco set the minimum wage to \$20, which was well above the average national minimum wage. What happened was a 1200% increase in profits – even during the 2008 recession. Their employee program works from within the circle of safety because they hire internally and promote from within. The result of happy and motivated employees is excellent service, satisfied return customers,

and happy investors.

As we've learned from authors such as Brené Brown and Dan Coyle, empathy in leadership is an essential quality.

Every organization should operate where everyone feels as if they can rely on the people around them. Take for example, US Air Force pilot "Johnny Bravo," Lieutenant Colonel Mike Drowley. Johnny Bravo epitomizes brave and empathetic leadership. In 2002 he risked his life to check on his ground team, who were entering very hostile territory. He was flying above with his squadron, and he told them to stay above the clouds while he flew beneath them to check on his troops. As it turns out, they were under fire, so Johnny Bravo risked his life to provide them with the necessary cover. By the time he called for assistance, he'd nearly run out of ammunition, but instead of ascending to safety, he continued flying alongside his wingman. Johnny Bravo doesn't think of himself as a hero; he asserts, 'They would have done it for me.' That particular mission resulted in zero casualties.

Being part of a team such as this means that you feel safe, and can rely on everyone to do their respective jobs. If mistakes are made, there's someone to have your back and to handle the repercussions together. On the other hand, how often have you heard of leaders passing the buck or expecting someone else to take the fall for them? When leaders rely on their rank and seniority, this shows an unwillingness to engage with their team members as other human beings. Sinek explains that leadership isn't about having a higher position within some hierarchical structure; it's a mindset that comes with a set of morals and values. In short, leaders sit last. They wait for everyone else to have their needs met before they meet their own needs. This behavior results in the type of loyalty that means everyone feels safe, secure, and valued.

In Conclusion

How do you create a team that exudes passion and commitment? Contrary to popular belief, it's not about focusing on spreadsheets and targets. Passion and commitment come from showing empathy and making people feel safe and secure.

This type of leadership takes a lot more work, time, and energy. Being committed to others, and putting the needs of others above our own is no easy feat. It takes a considerable amount of sacrifice to be able to give up so much time and energy to this process. However, the rewards pay off, because creating a team where everyone has each other's backs is priceless.

One of the core messages is that any leader needs to lead for the long term. Leadership isn't about applying temporary bandaids to issues as and when they arise. Short-term solutions seldom work because they're

often guided by ego, and hence speak to instant gratification.

The success of *Leaders Eat Last* is that Sinek gives real life case studies and examples of where empathic leadership works, and where ego-centric, short-term leadership does not. While the key ideas about leadership might be things you've read elsewhere, the manner in which Sinek weaves together theories with contemporary examples is very poignant and illustrative. For instance, we all need to be reminded that leadership isn't just a job, it's a mindset. You can't take the day off from it. Furthermore, leadership shouldn't just fall upon the "top brass." Everyone can be a leader within their own job. It's about inspiring and motivating others, showing care and empathy, and having everyone's back.

So why aren't all companies embracing the philosophy of *Leaders Eat Last*? Well, perhaps because it takes an enormous amount of hard work and dedication. However, as Sinek shows, this isn't just a fad or trend; it's a proven philosophy with tangible and measurable results.

As Oprah Winfrey says, 'Leadership is about empathy. It is about having the ability to relate to and connect with people for the purpose of inspiring and empowering their lives.' So, if you want to be the type of person people look up to, serve others before you serve yourself.