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Effective leaders convey a strong mission, inspire others to follow

Effective leadership is a powerful, yet elusive, concept. Many claim it makes or breaks an organization. Over the years, I have interviewed a number of people about leadership and there are a number of recurring themes — humility, intellectual horsepower, emotional intelligence, collaboration, selflessness, trustworthiness, resilience and credibility are among the essential qualities.

I recently read Simon Sinek's book "Start with Why — How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action." I found it a compelling read, particularly from the sales and leadership perspectives.

Sinek claims that successful leadership hinges on individuals and organizations knowing and effectively conveying from the outset why they do what they do. This is generally the complete opposite of what everyone does, with the focus instead on telling others what they do and how they do it, rather than why. Yet it is the why that people remember and to which they relate and what ultimately inspires taking positive action. The why is also the basis upon which transformative leaders lead.

Effective leaders inspire others to follow and this is often an arduous task. When a leader genuinely believes in the organization and its mission and values — the why — and is able to authentically convey that belief, it drives accountability between the organization and its employees and clients.

The why also generates the what and how of the organization and fosters trust which, in turn, provides a foundation for internal and external relationships to flourish based on common views and goals. Loyalty is likewise engendered among employees and clients and it is within this framework that profound organizational

success and transformation can occur.

As Sinek so astutely observes, great organizations do not hire skilled people and motivate them; they hire people who are already motivated and inspire them. Leaders are responsible for harnessing the talent, creativity and motivation of those whom they lead and ensuring that there is alignment between the values and direction of the organization and its employees and clients.

While an important part of this process includes our ability to fairly evaluate our leadership and to provide them with meaningful, real-time feedback regarding their performance, it is just as incumbent on each of us to start with the why and do the same for ourselves.

Great leadership starts within each of us and we cannot reasonably expect our leaders to have qualities that we ourselves do not

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PARADIGM SHIFT



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possess and to lead us if we are incapable of being led. If we want our leaders to inspire us, we must first be open to inspiration. We must each take responsibility for the role we play in our organization's leadership and whether it ultimately succeeds or fails. Even if we do not officially wear a leadership hat, we should not absolve ourselves of our shared responsibility to be a leader in both our professional and personal lives.

So, what is our why? Why are we lawyers? Why do we work where we do? Why are we inspired to get out of bed every morning? Why would we be inspired to do something different, or maybe do the same things differently? Who makes a meaningful difference in our lives? For whom do we make a meaningful difference?

These are fundamental questions that go to the essence of our why — and to our ultimate success and fulfillment. We must be self-aware enough to answer these questions on our own and not look

to others to do this for us. If we are clear on our why, we can ensure that there is alignment with how our what and how manifest in our lives. We cannot expect others to tell us our why or to align our why with our what and how. It is our responsibility to do this for ourselves.

The why is not only an important facet of leadership. As lawyers, we must also recognize the importance of our why in business development endeavors. It enables us to differentiate ourselves from our competition and to direct our marketing efforts to those potential clients with whom there is a true alignment of goals and objectives.

It is at the heart of our ability to relate to clients and potential business partners and it is the relationship aspect of these interactions which is the essence of their success. We tend to overestimate the importance of telling a client what we do and how we do it. This will often trigger a rather clinical discussion, falls flat and does not meaningfully help the client's decision-making process.

The sense of connectedness and loyalty that a client feels toward their lawyer is in large part an emotional, not logical, sentiment and steeply lies in the why, not the what or the how. The why is the glue that holds these relationships together and which will enable them to thrive in the long run. As we step into our business development discussions, we need to be clear that it is the why which will often drive the ultimate success or failure of the pitch.

Whether a leader or a follower, outside counsel or client, starting with why enables each of us to focus on what motivates and inspires us and ensures that our professional and personal lives are in alignment with the essence of who we are and in what we believe.