



A JO<sup>♥</sup>SR GUIDE TO

# **LEADERS EAT LAST**

BY SIMON SINEK

Why Some Teams Pull Together  
and Others Don't

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Others Don't

JO♡SR

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## What's it about?

In the hectic—and sometimes hostile—world of business today, there is one major factor determining which companies pull together and which ones fall apart, and that is the type of person leading them. When a business has an unqualified or uncaring leader, over time it will inevitably become a dog-eat-dog enterprise, riddled with failures, layoffs, and wild variations in stock value. But when the right leader is at the helm to steer a company through tough times and protect the interests of its employees, this corporation will undoubtedly be admired for its integrity, stability, teamwork, and sustained success.

Perhaps you wish to be in charge yourself—especially if you're thinking about the potential advantages: larger paychecks, added benefits, more control over your working life, and the chance to truly make an impact in your industry. However, what may not be as readily apparent are the obligations that come with such perks. Those in command must lead by example. It is their responsibility to look after each individual that works for them, and when it comes down to it, they are held solely accountable for employee happiness and, in turn, company success (or failure). The promotion of certain beneficial behaviors and positive feelings among staff is therefore vital, in order to create an atmosphere that makes people excited to come to work each day.

Put simply, managing others is a huge responsibility. Unfortunately, many leaders today are either unwilling to take on this responsibility and far more focused on forwarding their own selfish interests, or they don't know how to effectively carry out their duties at all. *Leaders Eat Last* will teach you what today's leaders must do to help an organization survive and prosper. You will also understand how to create a positive working environment, one in which people can trust and rely upon each other, working collaboratively to achieve the

greatest success. Crucially, you will realize that when leaders eat last, trust and cooperation flourish.

## **To see success in the workplace, you must balance selfish chemicals with selfless chemicals**

For a company to achieve the greatest success, it is essential that its employees are willing to work hard, push boundaries, take action, and, crucially, work together harmoniously. The problem is that many organizations don't encourage this kind of work ethic and behavior.

All too often today, business involves the pursuit of self-interest, which undermines trust. Staff members believe that they are in constant competition with the people around them and frequently feel threatened, unable to confidently contribute and make a meaningful difference in the workplace. This is because modern society has created an imbalance of the chemicals that drive human behavior. In order to positively shape company culture, leaders must become aware of these chemicals and understand what triggers their release. Then they must work to restore the balance, positively shaping company culture and ensuring their staff are happy and secure.

There are five chemicals that matter when it comes to human action and reaction. Endorphins and dopamine are "selfish" chemicals, which enable us to get things done, but in excess can be damaging to the success of a business. Endorphins mask physical pain, allowing us to push through demanding situations, for example helping a marathon runner to continue on to the end of a grueling race. Meanwhile, dopamine provides us with a feeling of satisfaction when we achieve what we set out to do—when we complete a certain task or reach a deadline. Too much of both can result in us focusing solely on our own personal needs, instead of working with others to achieve a common goal.

Serotonin and oxytocin are “selfless” chemicals that incentivize us to work with our colleagues as a team. Serotonin gives us pride and self-confidence; it is released when others admire us. This validation of our abilities and worth makes us feel stable and confident, so we find it far easier to work positively and collaboratively in a group. Oxytocin is linked to friendship, trust, and love. It enables easy cooperation between people because it drives us to be kind and generous to others.

Finally, there is the “stressful” chemical, cortisol, which generates feelings of fear or panic in those who feel like they are in danger. Most employees today suffer the consequences of too much cortisol, which negatively damages health and makes working effectively near on impossible.

Unfortunately, the competitive nature of business environments today has caused selfish chemicals and stress to take over; selfless chemicals are almost nonexistent. Leaders need to address this imbalance, stimulating selfless chemicals within their workers and making the environment profitable for all. This can be achieved by employing the techniques explained in Simon Sinek’s book.

## **Focus on people rather than profits to achieve long-term stability**

In the past, successful companies focused on making every human interaction as positive as possible for both customers and employees, which resulted in an abundance of selfless chemicals. Today it's all about pleasing the shareholders and increasing profit, often at the cost of employee satisfaction and the quality of service provided to customers, contrary to what would be best for the business in the long term. However, people are far more important than numbers, and by making people your priority, you can achieve a stability that will allow your company to stand the test of time.

Focusing on numbers and statistics is bad for business, and encourages egocentric behavior. As an example, former CEO of General Electric Jack Welch fired the bottom 10 percent of his managers every year to boost profits, raise share prices, and cushion his own paycheck. His decisions were based on short-term gains, and encouraged ruthless behavior among staff members. People became afraid to do anything that might jeopardize their job and would happily throw a fellow employee under the bus to improve their own situation. Naturally, selfish chemicals and stress levels were high, and the morale and character of the company sank.

In complete contrast to this, Costco CEO James Sinegal made employees the priority, realizing that they were the source of sustainable profits, responsible for ensuring a satisfactory customer experience. He treated Costco employees like family members; wages were fair and staff morale was always high. In fact, when the economy took a downward turn in 2009, Sinegal chose to raise his staff's salaries to help them survive this crisis. These workers were very happy in their jobs, and selfless chemicals ruled.

Back then, GE was the poster child for corporate success and Costco didn't seem very notable at all. Yet from 1986 to 2013, although GE stock did grow by 600 percent, Costco's grew by a massive 1200 percent! Additionally, Costco's rise was smooth and steady, whereas GE suffered extreme spikes in both directions as the market became volatile. In treating his employees well, Sinegal was rewarded with a greater level of dedication and performance, leading to stable, long-term financial gain.

An effective leader focuses on people rather than profits. While turnover is important, remember that it's your employees who generate this income. Happy workers are far more valuable than those who are motivated by fear. Make decisions for the long term, look after the staff you have, and profit will follow.

## **Empower others to take action and they will help you to succeed**

In order for a business to succeed, it is essential that those in charge give away some of their decision-making power to others. Without the power to exercise judgment and take action where they think appropriate, staff simply cannot work effectively.

It has been proven that people perform best when they feel like what they do has an impact: giving employees authority over their responsibilities is vital. This was something David Marquet recognized early on in his captaincy of the USS *Santa Fe*. Morale onboard was low, and the submarine was not functioning effectively—people simply didn't want to be there. One day, while conducting a drill, Marquet unwittingly gave an impossible order to the Officer of the Deck. Yet, despite knowing the order couldn't be carried out, the Officer still repeated it to the submarine's driver. Later, when Marquet questioned him about why he had done this, the Officer simply replied: "Because you told me to."

The problem was that crew members did nothing more than follow the orders of those above them, because no one felt like they had control or authority. This was drastically affecting the success of the ship's operations. Marquet knew a change had to happen, so he took action. He turned the crew into leaders, into responsible decision-makers rather than followers, giving up much of the control to which he was accustomed. Rather than simply issue orders, he made each individual accountable for the ship's success and ensured that every person was equipped with appropriate training and knowledge. This change worked wonders for the submarine and its crew—serotonin levels went through the roof. People felt responsible for keeping the vessel running smoothly and also knew they had the power to make it happen. Working on the *Santa Fe* became a coveted assignment,

and the submarine gained a reputation for its efficiency and effectiveness.

You can empower your employees in the same way. Give them the right training and then let them take responsibility for their work. The idea is to delegate tasks and divide the power so that it doesn't all rest with you. This could mean letting someone else run meetings while you simply participate, allowing others to take charge of an important account and only providing guidance when necessary, or even just handing over the keys to the supply closet so staff don't have to ask permission each time they need something.

Employees who feel empowered to make decisions will work harder and feel happier in their jobs. Let others lead—it will only add to your company's overall success.

## **Inspire employees by showing them the impact their work has in the world**

We've already seen that employees are more motivated to work harder when they feel their actions have an impact. Motivation increases even more if they believe they're also having a positive effect on something outside of the workplace—if they're helping others or making a difference in the world somehow. A leader should therefore try to ignite passion in their team and drive success by showing them the results their work achieves.

Wells Fargo wanted to show their employees just how important their jobs really were to the customers they served. As part of this effort they brought in a customer to tell the story of how a Wells Fargo loan had changed their life for the better. The bank employees were inspired by this positive, personal feedback, understanding that their work meant more than just selling loans: it actually helped people improve their lives. This simple change of perspective made all the difference for team members at Wells Fargo, and all because the leaders took steps to help them discover meaning and purpose behind their work.

Effective leaders give people a sense of purpose by making the positive impact their work has on others as tangible as possible. Most jobs involve doing something to help others; all you need to do is find out whom your organization's work helps, or what cause it furthers, and then find a way to bring it into focus for your team. Perhaps, like Wells Fargo, you could bring in some of the customers your team helps and have them share their story. Or give your employees the chance to follow up with clients to see how your service helped or is helping, and if there is anything further they need. When positive feedback or reviews come in, share them around so everyone can get a boost of positivity and purpose from them. You could also offer opportunities to volunteer throughout the

year and choose charities to support that really mean something to people.

Connecting with the people they are helping can make all the difference for your employees, and it is in your power to provide this connection. Show your team that they are helping others, changing lives, and changing the world, and they will work harder every day to do more.

## **Fight abstraction by encouraging social interaction in the workplace**

One of the biggest issues leaders face today is abstraction: they see the numbers, but don't connect them with the people they represent. Technology has progressed to the point that we often don't have to physically interact with colleagues or managers, and many leaders are sequestered in their office away from their team. If you're in charge, you can fight this kind of abstraction using the following methods:

- 1. Keep groups of people at a manageable number.** Anthropological research has shown that as human beings we function best in smaller groups. Our ancestors used to live in tribes of around 100 to 150 people—larger units weren't as connected and didn't cooperate as well. Try to keep departments or project teams within this range to maintain strong bonds and promote camaraderie among workers.
- 2. Bring people together face to face.** Technology today makes it possible to go through a whole workday without directly interacting with anybody, and useful tools like email and instant messaging have the disadvantage of removing any sense of community, which can leave people feeling isolated. You can avoid this by bringing employees together in person. Hold weekly meetings, organize staff activities, think about developing an open office, and ensure that there are communal break rooms, to encourage social interaction and improve bonds between staff members.
- 3. Get to know your staff.** To lead effectively, you should get to know your employees on a personal level. Spend time with different departments, and chat with team members

about their family, friends, or hobbies. When you recognize employees as individuals, they will be motivated to work harder for you because they will feel valued, and you will work harder for them because they become real to you.

4. **Offer employees your time, as well as money.** All the bonuses and raises in the world will never encourage staff more than a leader who invests personally in their employees. If you want to motivate team members in a meaningful way, you need to give them your time and attention. Meet with them directly and listen to what they have to say. Don't respond solely via email, or have a secretary answer all your calls. Give the staff your full consideration and the benefit of your direction. When you show them that you really listen and want to offer them your help, they will care about producing results for you.

The bigger the company, the more important it is to prevent abstraction in the workplace. Make sure that your employees feel valued, and treat them as individuals to improve workplace happiness, increasing levels of those all-important selfless chemicals.

## **Build trust by acting with integrity and always telling the truth**

Customers buy from companies that they feel they can trust; workers are loyal to their employers for the same reason. Therefore, a leader *must* be trusted by those they lead in order to be successful. This requires acting with integrity at all times and always communicating honestly with your team members.

Ralph Lauren is a prime example of a company that builds trust by being open and honest with their staff. In 2013, it was discovered that for several years their Argentinian subsidiary had been bribing the government to procure faster shipments and escape import regulations. When leaders at Ralph Lauren were made aware of this illegal behavior, rather than try to cover it up or lay blame elsewhere, they chose to be honest and contact the authorities themselves. Not only that, they didn't fight the resulting punishment, but instead paid over one million dollars in fines. They chose to set the right example for their staff—as well as for all other businesses—and as a result are one of the most trusted employers in the world. They are hugely successful because of this, and it's their happy employees that power this success.

To ensure your employees have absolute faith in you as their manager, you must always be completely honest with them, no matter what. So if something goes wrong, tell them. Acknowledge your shortcomings and hold yourself accountable for these—they will respect your sincerity. If layoffs are about to happen, hold a team meeting explaining what is going on and why, and how it will be carried out. Offer to answer any questions. In fact, always encourage open communication, and have regular meetings with your team to ensure that they are happy. If individuals have suggestions, take these on board. When your staff trust you to keep

their best interests in mind, you can trust them to do the same for you.

Trust is paramount to effective leadership. When employees trust their employers, they will feel safe in their work environment, and levels of oxytocin will rise. Make sure your staff trust you by always being honest with them and acting with integrity. At times this may be difficult, but just remember it is key to your company's success.

## **Final summary**

As a leader, it is your responsibility to provide an environment in which employees feel secure and in turn happy. Employees who feel secure in their place of work will be more willing to put the effort in to move the company forward. They will take decisive action to innovate, cooperate, and drive the success of the company as a whole.

This can only happen when a leader promotes selfless chemicals in their staff, keeping the selfish ones in check, and also reducing stress. A great way to promote a positive working environment is to focus on people rather than numbers and profits. When individuals feel valued, they work harder to achieve success, and increased productivity naturally furthers company profit—on a long-term basis. You should also empower people by enabling them to make decisions for the company. Employees who feel they make an impact somehow, both inside and outside of the workplace, not only enjoy their jobs more but work harder too.

Fight abstraction by bringing people together and devoting your time and energy to them. Make sure they feel appreciated and they will work harder to help you reach your goals. Finally, always act with integrity and be as honest as possible with your team. This sets a great example for your employees and shows them that they can trust you to do the right thing by them. Trust in the workplace is essential for happy, productive staff members.

When you invest time and effort into your employees, you will be rewarded with complete dedication and unparalleled levels of performance. Lead effectively and inspirationally, encourage community values, promote happiness, and establish trust: these are the fundamental principles that will allow your company to thrive.

## Now read the book

Simon Sinek is well positioned to give advice on what it takes to be an effective leader. A globally recognized motivational speaker with an extensive background in the advertising industry, Sinek has provided guidance to countless organizations, entrepreneurs, and governmental agencies, and also assists in military innovation and planning. His extremely popular TED Talk “How great leaders inspire action” reaches more and more viewers every day, and he also authored *Start with Why*, to which this book is a follow up.

*Leaders Eat Last* gives enlightening insight into the way different business cultures can affect the behavior of employees. Sinek covers multiple disciplines related to business management, taking complicated theories from economics, anthropology, and biology, and applying them in an understandable and relatable manner to how modern organizations interact.

Leadership isn't an abstract concept: it is constantly evolving. From their earliest days living in tribal communities humans have learnt to lead and to follow according to a natural hierarchy in order to cooperate more effectively for survival. Though the stakes aren't necessarily life or death in the modern world, these principles are still being used today and are still being refined so that human interaction becomes even more successful. Using this knowledge, Sinek explores his key concept of a “Circle of Safety,” which leaders can use to strengthen their company and promote success and well-being.

*Leaders Eat Last* isn't a shortcut to being a successful leader because, as Sinek makes clear, no such shortcut exists. However, it is a great place to start on the journey to leading with integrity and concern for the well-being of the individuals you are in charge of. Lead effectively by creating an environment that means your

employees look forward to coming to work each day, and watch as your team works with you to achieve greatness.

## **Key takeaways**

- Focus less on the numbers and more on the people the numbers represent. You must show your staff that you care about them if you want them to work hard and help you succeed.
- A great leader empowers each individual to take action and responsibility so that they care more about their jobs and about doing well.
- Trust is the key to maintaining a strong team of people who work hard, both with and for each other in good times and bad. Build trust by being honest and displaying integrity.

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