

EPISODE 631

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:35.2]

FT: Welcome to So Money everyone, this is episode 631. Our guest today popularized the concept of why. A very simple three letter word, why, we use it all the time, he made it famous again. It stemmed from a TED Talk that he gave back in 2009 that has now become the third most watched talk of all time on Ted.com. That's pretty incredible.

Simon Sinek is on So Money today, this is a huge honor for me and I will tell you that years ago, I met Simon before he popularized the very simple word why, re-popularized I should say. We met in the green room of a talk show or show on MSNBC, we were both on there to talk about small business and entrepreneurship, he was super cool, we exchanged numbers, I never followed up and I'm kind of embarrassed about it because I could have gone on to become like actual friends with Simon Sinek and not just a gawker.

But I'm more than just a gawker. I am a true fan, I am someone who deeply admires his work and I'm so excited to see his career come so far. He's touched so many lives and now he's on the podcast, how about that? How about them apples? Simon's out with a new book, it's called *Find Your Why: A Practical Guide For Discovering Purpose For You and Your Team*. This is the follow up to his first book, *Start With Why*, that was a global best seller and in this new book, he's addressing the concerns that come up with why. Such as, can you have more than one why? I'll tell you already, he says no, I was kind of surprised by that.

Also cool during our interview, Simon told me that I asked him a question he's never received and he likes the question. So obviously that made me feel really cool and I'm even now more excited to unveil this interview with Simon Sinek.

Here we go, fasten your seatbelts.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:02:39.2]

FT: Simon Sinek, welcome to So Money. You are very popular person. I was telling folks this week that I was interviewing you and so much fan praise have you gotten over the week. People, “Oh my god, tell him I say hi. He doesn’t know who I am, but I love his work.”

[0:02:55.1]

SS: Oh, that’s so nice. Thank you very much.

[0:02:57.4]

FT: You’ve made quite the name for yourself and your business and I was bragging to my friends that I kind of knew you before things really took off for you and now you’re really a household name. We ran into each other back stage at MSNBC over a decade ago. Since then obviously the TED Talk has had over 30 million views, you’ve written multiple bestselling books.

Your newest book is called *Find Your Why: A Practical Guide For Discovering Purpose For You and Your Team*. You’re obsessed with why, Simon. Why?

[0:03:31.2]

SS: Yeah.

[0:03:30.5]

FT: Why are you obsessed with why?

[0:03:33.0]

SS: A funny story because you know, I wrote this book a bunch of years ago called *Start With Why* and I made the case for the existence of this thing called the why. The biggest complaint that I got was, “I buy it, I get it but you don’t tell us how to find our why in the book.”

So eight years later, we finally answered the question.

[0:03:53.3]

FT: How do you find your why?

[0:03:55.8]

SS: This is the thing that I love about this process. So this is the process that we’ve been doing with our own clients that I went through myself back 10 years ago, which put me on this path, you know, it was my own discovery of my own why that set me on my path.

I think that’s one of the things that people don’t always know, which is I didn’t have a career and then sort of like come up with this thing called the why. It was I went through a period of pain where I had no fulfillment at work, I hated my job, I didn’t want to wake up and do it the next day and it was the process of trying to rediscover my passion that I discovered this thing called the why.

It completely reenergized me and I practiced everything I preached and I started with why and I communicated what I believed and I attracted people who believed what I believed and it literally led to the TED Talk and it led to all of the speaking career and it led to book deals, which none of which I ever imagined and so what I’m so excited about is now even more people can learn their why.

It’s one of our goals that every single person and every single organizations should know their why and coming out with this book means for, you know, whatever it goes for in Amazon, you know, \$12, \$15. I just love that people can do it. It’s just so exciting.

[0:05:13.8]

FT: Why, and then what's the rest of the question? Is it why am I doing what I'm doing? Why is this necessarily going to fulfill me? What is the exploration behind why?

[0:05:25.3]

SS: Why is a noun rather than a question. It is your why, it is the purpose cause or belief that drives every single one of us. We all have our own why, this reason why we do things, it's why we find inspiration and fulfillment in some things and not others.

That is, we are capable of putting words to that thing. Even though it exist in the part of their brain that doesn't control language, the limbic brain, we can actually find words just like we can find words to say I love you. Even though that feeling exists in the same part of the brain.

What I learned is that we are a product of our upbringing. A why fundamentally is an origin story, it's where we come from. We are who we are based on the experiences we have as children. The experience we have with at school and with our parents, form us into who we are. The rest of our lives our why is fully formed probably by the time we're about 18, 19, maybe a little younger, actually younger. The youngest person I help find their why was 16.

Let's call it late teens, your why is fully formed and the rest of your life, the rest of our lives is an opportunity to live in balance with that why or not. The process of uncovering one's why, of discovering one's why is a process of discovery where we go through our life experiences, we go through the high points and the low points and we look for the patterns.

That's exactly what this book does, it takes us through a process that I started years ago and my team built upon them even better and lets people go through that process themselves.

[0:07:05.3]

FT: 16, it's before your prefrontal cortex has really developed and you know, depending whether you're a boy or a girl, that could be a very different path for you. It's not a coincidence then that

we say when you try to discover what it is you want to do with your light that will be fulfilling, think about your childhood.

[0:07:24.1]

SS: Yeah, it doesn't seem connected, right? You would think, it's not about — see the thing that I love about this is it's a completely objective process because if I say, "So, tell me the kinds of things you like to do, you know? Or, what do you think that you would find fulfilling?" It's very subjective, you know, we stress about it, try and give the right answer. The thing I love about this process is, talking about your own childhood or your memories, they are how you remember them. There's no trying to sort of change them to change the process one way or another.

The thing that is important is we all have lots and lots of experiences when we're young, some good, some bad but we don't remember everything. We only remember some things and we usually remember the things that, for some reason, resonate with us more than others that they stick with us. It's those memories within which we can find the patterns because they matter to us. Those memories matter to us more than others.

[0:08:22.1]

FT: Can you have more than one why? Can you why change — is it healthy to change your why over a lifetime?

[0:08:28.4]

SS: We only have one why and it remains fixed our entire lives. You know, some people say that tragedy changes their why, it does not. What tragedy does is it gives us an opportunity to actually realize or live our why. I mean, after September 11th, for example, people said, "My job was stupid and I decided to make a change." Well, the job was always stupid but you know, you sort of — it was put into perspective, your why came front and center because of the tragedy. We started making decisions based on that why where we previously we didn't.

So no, we only have one why and it doesn't change, you know, you can't change who you are, you may tweak personality quirks or bad habits but fundamentally, you are who you are.

[0:09:09.3]

FT: Some people, I will suspect, are better at discovering their why than others because some of us are not very good at self-reflection, self-awareness. It's scary sometimes too to admit to yourself what it is that you actually want to be doing, what makes you happy and fulfilled for whatever reason. Again, maybe going back to childhood, you're insecurities. How do you get over some of these mind traps and the bad kind of inner thoughts that you have that prevent you sometimes from stepping into your why?

[0:09:41.4]

SS: Well, the process doesn't require that level of deconstruction. It's a reporting, we tell stories, we highly recommend that you do it with someone, you do it with partner. Because we found that the process of being able to talk to someone to have someone listen is actually much more revealing than sitting down and just sort of talking to a tape recorder, you know? Someone is objective and listening to what the things you're saying.

Yeah, I mean, look, if somebody's not interested in finding their why, they're not going to do it, you know? Clearly if someone's going to go through this process and buy a book and sit down and go through the hours that it takes to do it. There's probably some desire. It kind of prescreens, I guess. But I found it a fascinating process.

We gave the book out to a few people before it came out to just make sure that it works, and some of the stories I've already heard, you know, where two friends did it together and they were both crying as they reveal to each other and realizing things about each other and this is even before they got to the why portion, it was just sort of the telling stories of our past portion. I just love that, you know?

My message in general is one of service, I'm a great believer in cooperation, I talk about trust a lot, all of my books are about, how we do things better together and how we build teams and how we take care of each other.

I mean, that's what all of my work is about. Even in this process, the thing that I'm most proud of is this is not a solitary experience, it's not buy a book, read a book, go through a process. But rather, it's, use the book as a guide to sit down with someone and go through this process. But ultimately, you're going to be doing it with someone and it's an incredibly powerful experience for the two people who we involve.

[0:11:23.7]

FT: Take us further down the road of talking about some of the – what's on the other side of this. For you, discovering your why has led to an incredible platform to reach people, help people, books. But, for others, what are some of the immediate benefits, the gifts of being able to step into your why and really embrace it?

[0:11:43.1]

SS: So, in *Start With Why*, I wrote about, I gave a metaphor that really captures this, I'll share that metaphor with you, I call it the "celery test". You know, we're constantly being given advice by all sorts of people, you know, on how we should live our lives or build our businesses or whatever it is. You know, many of these people are smart and accomplished and worthy of giving us advice.

So I equated to going to a dinner party and somebody says to you, "You know what you need? You need to buy Oreo cookies. I have done so well with Oreo cookies," and somebody else says to you, "KitKats, it's all about KitKats." Yet another person says to you, "It's not about the KitKats, it's about celery. I have done so well with celery, I found happiness and joy from celery." And finally somebody else says to you, "It's rice milk, you've got to use rice milk."

So we take all of this perfectly good advice, from perfectly smart and accomplished people, we got to the supermarket, we buy Oreos and KitKats and celery and rice milk and we may get

some value out of some of these products, we don't know. We spend a lot of time and a lot of money at the supermarket and the worst part is when we're standing in line, waiting to leave with all of these products in our hands, people are walking past us and no one can see what we believe because we bought everything, right?

Now, imagine you know your why. Imagine, let's say your why is to always be healthy and only do the things that protect the health and integrity of your body. Now, the question is, which products are you going to buy? Which, products are you going to buy?

[0:13:20.3]

FT: Celery.

[0:13:21.2]

SS: Only the celery, right? The celery and the rice milk, it's the only one that makes sense, right? You go to supermarket, you only buy celery and rice milk, you spend less time, less energy at the supermarket, you're guaranteed to get value and when you're standing in line waiting to buy, waiting to pay rather, somebody walking past can see the celery and rice milk in your arms and they can see what you believe and they can walk up to you and say, "Hey, I also believe in being healthy."

Congratulations. You just attracted a client, a job, a friend, an opportunity because people can see what you believe. Here's the best part: before I made the decision, before we did anything, simply me communicating what I believe, you knew before I said anything which ones we had to buy. You knew that we had to buy celery even before I said it. That's called scale. If you translate that to a company now, organizations that are capable of putting their why into words means they attract employees and they attract customers who believe what you believe and those employees are better capable of making the right decisions.

If you are an individual, your ability to communicate your why means that you attract friends or partners who are more likely to connect with you. It means when you make decisions for your career or how to decorate your house or whatever it is, you can run things through this filter. You

know, it's no longer a lottery where sometimes we do something where you "find ourselves in the flow". It's no longer an occasional thing, you can actually do this prescriptively where more often than not, you will find yourself happier and more fulfilled by the work that you do, the people you spend time with, the decisions you make.

[0:15:02.9]

FT: It's like a shortcut, it's a beautiful short cut to actually figuring out what you want to do.

[0:15:07.7]

SS: Funny you say that. I wouldn't call it a shortcut, I would say what we do without it is the long route.

[0:15:13.5]

FT: Right.

[0:15:14.5]

SS: This is the way we should be doing things. This is actually the correct route and the other things we do without why is actually circuitous, we're guessing, pretending it's a lottery, sometimes we get lucky and sometimes we don't and inefficient. I think this is actually the correct way to live a life or build a business or build an organization rather than the circuitous way most of us unfortunately do it.

[0:15:34.5]

FT: And it's wasteful, you know? We talk often on the show about, you know, building your best financial life and I can see how starting with your why that can also make sure that the way that you spend, the way that you save, the way that you run your financial life is in alignment with that and it can get rid of a lot of the unnecessary distractions, financial distractions that we fill up our lives with.

[0:15:56.1]

SS: Correct, and it makes our decisions really confident as well. Other people say, “I don’t understand why you made the decision because all the data that you should have done X and you chose Y,” and we go, we shrug our shoulders and we go, “I don’t know, it just felt right.” Well now we can actually say in words and actually have great confidence as to why this decision is right for me.

[0:16:14.7]

FT: You call yourself an unshakable optimist. Was there a time when you weren’t and what has inspired this mindset? Because it’s conscious. I don’t know, maybe you are just born an optimist but I do think it’s something you have to work at?

[0:16:30.1]

SS: I’ve always been a pretty happy-go-lucky guy and it was this period 10 years ago where I lost my passion that I really started doubting myself so much because I lost the thing that made me who I thought I was. It was the discovery of my why, the ability to put it into words that super charged and energized me like I’d never experienced before.

To answer your question, I think I’ve always been an optimist, I think I’ve become super optimist and the more that I have used the why, you know, people have introduced me to people. So my entire career has been an accident. I never set out to be a public speaker. Somebody said, “Wow, you’re so passionate about this thing called the why, will you come and talk to our organization about it?” And I just said yes.

I never imagined I’d be an author, somebody said, “Can I introduce you to a publisher?” And I said, “Sure,” and I went and had a meeting with the publisher. You know, all of the opportunities, all the doors that have been open have been because I practiced what I preach, I follow to a T everything that I’ve written about, or at least try really hard to.

I think I've become more optimistic because I've seen that positive attitude and focused on one's one cause and belief is, not only yields good things but surrounds us with people who are wonderful people, who take care of us and watch our backs and it makes it easy to be an optimist when you're surrounded by wonderful people.

[0:17:57.8]

FT: You've also said, which I think is something worth discussing is, these days especially with so many personal brands and "experts" out there leading the though leadership community. You don't call yourself an expert, and I watched your interview on CBS with Gale King and Company and they concluded that you are an expert. You were not ready to admit that of yourself but from the outside in, you are very much knowledgeable and have expertise. But you insist on being identified as a teacher.

So tell us why that's important and there's a quote that I actually read of yours on business insider that said, "The best leaders don't consider themselves experts, they consider themselves students." Expand on that for us.

[0:18:44.3]

SS: Yeah, I consider myself a student, not even a teacher. I consider myself a student. Sometimes the student teaches and I embrace that responsibility when it comes up but I am a student. I'm very uncomfortable being called an expert because it assumes I have nothing left to learn.

I may be a more advanced student than some and I think I have a responsibility to share what I'm learning but I avoid saying that I'm right or I have answers, rather I have a perspective that I'm on a journey and I'm happy and proud to share that journey and what I'm learning along the way that it may help others. And I remain open to what others have to teach me that my own journey can grow and I can learn more too.

So I'm a student; I'm a student of leadership, I'm a student of people, I'm a student of myself, I'm a student of relationships, these things fascinate me. I'm not interested in everything, I'm

interested in some things and these are some of the things I'm interested in. Like anybody, when you find something you're interested in, you do work to learn about it. So yeah, it's just a journey and the funny thing is my book's a semi-autobiographical.

You know, *Start With Why* I came out of the loss and rediscovery of my own passion. *Leaders Eat Last* came as my career started to grow, concerned that I didn't know who to trust. Because there were people who were saying all the right things to me and I realize they were just working me for a deal or something. I sort of went on this investigation, had no intention of writing a book, trying to learn trust because I was struggling to know who to trust.

This goes in a work context and sometimes even a personal context and I happen to be having dinner with my publisher and was telling him what I was learning you know, he's like, "Yeah, I'll publish that," and that became *Leaders Eat Last*. *Find Your Why*, same thing. *Together Is Better* was my way of saying thank you to the people who have helped me along the way, knowing that I can't do any of this stuff alone, it takes many people.

Now, *Find Your Why* is part of the journey of wanting as many people as possible to learn their why because I know the magic it can provide and so, you know, we can do these ridiculous things that some organizations do, some people do where you take your IP and you can sell it for \$1,500 for an online course. I'd rather sell it in a book for \$15 or \$20, whatever it cost on Amazon or Barnes and Noble or any of the fine book seller they sell it for.

[0:21:10.6]

FT: It's anywhere you like to buy your books.

[0:21:12.0]

SS: Anywhere you like to buy your books. You know, I would like to say it's available in fine book stores anywhere and some not so fine ones too.

[0:21:20.3]

FT: You are bookstore agnostic.

[0:21:22.5]

SS: I am bookstore agnostic. For me, it's the realization of a promise, you know? Which is we said we wanted to get as many people to learn they why as possible because we know the benefits of it. Like everyone in my team knows it, every single one of us. We did the online course, we do personal workshops for companies and things like that and now this is really for individuals, entrepreneurs and teams within large organizations.

[0:21:47.9]

FT: You said earlier that you can, as early and young as 16 years old, identify your why. Take us back to Simon at that age and what were you doing, what was your passion and connect the dot for us because I think many of us know where you are today and have followed your more recent rise to success. But I always love to hear about my guests' beginnings and some of their more influential experiences as children and how that has formed them into interesting adults. So take us back to 16.

[0:22:19.3]

SS: I'm going to avoid the question for a moment and pay you a complement which is, here I am, talking about childhood experiences and patterns and you're the first person to have ever asked me about my own.

[0:22:29.7]

FT: Really?

[0:22:30.6]

SS: First one, you're the first one. Isn't that funny? Yeah. I mean, how do I — I was a dorky kid. I'm still a nerd, I'm just an older nerd. At the age of 13, I went to space camp, you know? I

thought I wanted to be an astronaut. As a teenager, what was I like? 16, where was I? I was in high school, that's like junior sophomore year of high school.

[0:22:58.4]

FT: SAT's, the whole, yeah, I don't want to go back to 16.

[0:23:01.6]

SS: So if I think back in the time, I was experimenting with being my own person. I remember, you know, I went to high school in America, I went to public school where we all wore jeans and sneakers and T-shirts to school and I remember starting, I wore black shoes, I started wearing shoes to school. I was just experimenting, then I started wearing crazy colored socks. I was experimenting with being myself.

I remember picking fights with my sister and my younger sister, we overlap for two years in high school. She would buy something because everyone else had it and for me, if everyone else had it, that was a reason not to buy it, you know? I think that for me, I was experimenting very delicately, dipping my toe into being myself and it came from a relationship I had with my grandfather.

My grandfather was an odd duck. He was totally unique, totally an eccentric, and I see a lot of myself in him and I learned from him that you can be weird, you know? And it was fine. I think I gained the confidence and the desire to be myself from him because I saw him doing it. He was a happy guy. I mean, he's sort of – he had a love of life and people thought he was nuts and so I think I started experimenting from that. Yeah.

[0:24:19.9]

FT: From crazy colored socks to what was the next weird experiment?

[0:24:25.6]

SS: Which by the way is which survives today. I do not own a pair of socks. I actually do not own a pair.

[0:24:31.7]

FT: Well, weird is the new cool.

[0:24:32.8]

SS: Well so now, yeah, I guess so. It finally caught up with me. I kind of have a grad show marks point of view about myself, you know grad show mark said I would never join a club that would have me as a member, you know?

I kind of feel the same way that if I'm cool, I fear for everyone else.

[0:24:54.1]

FT: Do you have – you have obviously philosophies around leadership and self-discovery. What do you find to be your money mantra, a money philosophy that has guided you?

[0:25:06.7]

SS: I've had to learn about money. I've had a previously very unhealthy relationship with money where I was one of these people who thought that money was dirty and I was embarrassed even ashamed when I started to make more of it.

[0:25:25.1]

FT: Why?

[0:25:25.9]

SS: Who knows, you know? I think a lot of people in the do good space make this mistake because we see money around bad people and you know there's this weird thing that you have to – there is a martyrdom when you have to do good work and it is complete madness and nonsense and I completely disagree with that now. Money is fuel, this is what I've learned and it's all fine and good to say, "I want to drive to California," and you build the most beautiful car to get there. But if you don't have fuel you're not going anywhere.

So you can build the perfect organization, the perfect company. You can have vision and ambition and goals up the wazoo but if going to fuel to advance anywhere then it's all for nought. So money is fuel and so my views on money are very much guided by seeing money as fuel. Money has never been a goal for me. I don't have a financial target that I am going to make this amount of money by this date. But rather I view it as fuel.

So even on our PNL in our company, we have no line item that says "profit" on the bottom of our PNL. It says "freedom". It literally says, "How much freedom did we earn this month?" and it maybe freedom to give it away, freedom to take vacations, freedom to pay our people more, freedom to give bonuses, freedom to give to charity, freedom to say no to clients we don't want to work, yes to clients we do want to work with even though they can't afford things. We can drop our prices to work with charitable organizations, for example, pro bono work and you're damn right, I want more freedom this month than I had last month. So for me, money I don't think about it in terms of money. I think about it in terms of fuel and freedom.

[0:27:15.2]

FT: That is first on this show. So it's a first for both of us in some ways. Thank you so much Simon. This has been really beyond expectations. You know, we obviously started out talking about the importance of finding your why but really appreciate you going back in time with us, talking about your eccentric grandfather and we love that you wear crazy-colored socks. That's why we love you and you will continue to inspire and connect with people because we're all weird but we are just afraid to show it, you're not and we appreciate that.

[0:27:50.4]

SS: You know that's very kind of you, thank you and thanks for asking the question. I mean to your credit, like I said, here I am talking about the importance of looking backwards and you are the first person to ask it.

[0:28:00.5]

FT: Well thanks for the honest answer.

[END]