

Leaders Eat Last by Simon Sinek | Book Summary by Paul Minors

INTRODUCTION

Who is this book for?

Leaders Eat Last is ideal for anyone who leads, whether it be a small team, an entire organisation, a community or a family. As a leader it's important to create a culture that leaves everyone happy and fulfilled, and this is exactly what Simon describes. Simon emphasises that when an environment is built on trust, teams will work together, have each others backs, survive and thrive.

About the author

Following on from Simon Sinek's successful *Start With Why*, Simon continues on with his goal of inspiring leaders and organisations, to inspire others. Simon believes in a world where everyone is fulfilled by their work, that they know their 'why' and are constantly doing things that inspire them. Simon is a trained ethnographer and his books draw upon real-life experiences and examples to identify a naturally occurring pattern, a way of thinking, acting and communicating that gives some leaders the ability to inspire those around them.

In this summary

To begin, this summary will cover our basic need for protection and security in working environments then we'll dive into a few scientific facts to back this up. Then we will discuss why we are in our current state, how we got to this point before moving on to discussing Simon's 'Abstraction Challenge'. Next we will summarise Simon's Leadership Lessons before a brief look at our current society and finally, examining what Simon thinks it takes, to be a leader.

BOOK SUMMARY

BASIC NEEDS

We need protection

Simon describes an environment where bonds are strong, where employees share the glory with others, success is celebrated and everyone goes home at the end of the day feeling fulfilled by their work. And this has nothing to do with money earned or prizes won. This environment that Simon describes is the result of leaders that put the well-being of their employees first. And in response to this, their employees work hard, give everything they've got to the organisation and support each other. If the employees feel that their leaders protect them, this will be reflected in their work.

Simon considers an exceptional organisation one where the leaders provide the protection, and everyone else looks out for each other. They feel safe to push each other and take risks with big payoffs. The key to making this work is empathy, and the leaders have to lead the way. Simon makes it clear that putting your employees first does not mean that business will not thrive. These are the organisations that will continue to innovate and out-perform the others.

We are family

"Being a leader is like being a parent, and the company is like a new family to join. One that will care for us like we are their own . . . in sickness and in health. And if we are successful, our people will take on our company's name as a sign of the family to which they are loyal."

We need to belong

Simon talks about a 'Circle of Safety'. This works to reduce fears and threats to everyone inside the circle. It means that employees feel safe and secure, they can therefore focus their time on seizing opportunities and helping the business to thrive.

"It is easy to know when we are in the Circle of Safety because we can feel it. We feel valued by our colleagues and we feel cared for by our superiors. We become absolutely confident that the leaders of the organization and all

those with whom we work are there for us and will do what they can to help us succeed."

Regrettably, Simon notes that unfortunately, this is not the norm. The norm is for companies to see profits and margins as the utmost importance, they fail to prioritise employees needs and happiness. This is where leaders, and organisations are failing. Simon really pushes the message that our ability to perform depends entirely on how we feel, how safe and secure we feel in an organisation and if we feel well looked after. The key is to empower your employees and enable them to work to their full potential.

IT'S SCIENCE

Biology

Simon explains that it's in our nature to understand and take advantage of incentives. Our bodies work hard to provide feel-good chemicals that are used as a reward for working hard, looking after others, surviving and ultimately thriving. Just as a boss may provide a bonus for reaching a milestone, your body responds to successes with these feel-good chemicals.

Biologically, serotonin is an oxytocin that acts as an incentive, to encourage us to build trust and loyalty, and work well with others. Serotonin encourages social connections and cooperation resulting in better work and survival.

It's all in the chemicals

It goes way back, the basic human instinct to hunt, gather and ultimately achieve. The reason we have this instinct is the combination of both endorphins and dopamine.

"They make us feel good when we find something we're looking for, build something we need or accomplish our goals. These are the chemicals of progress."

Simon explains that endorphins job is to mask physical pain. More often than not activated when we are stressed or fearful, endorphins job is to mask the pains with feelings of pleasure.

When combines with dopamine, that feeling of satisfaction you feel upon completing a task or reaching a milestone, it becomes clear why these two chemicals work together well to encourage us to hunt, gather and achieve.

Confidence, as Simon discusses, is something that we all need a boost of from time to time. We need to feel that we are respected and liked. The feeling of pride, comes from Serotonin.

Finally, Simon comes to perhaps the best chemical of all. Oxytocin, or better known as friendship, love, trust. This chemical is released when in the presence of our

closest friends, or when we give and receive nice things. Oxytocin is what humans crave the most.

BRINGING IT BACK TO THE WORKPLACE

"If we work in an environment in which leadership tells the truth, in which layoffs are not the default in hard times and in which incentive structures do not pit us against one another, the result, thanks to the increased levels of oxytocin and serotonin, is trust and cooperation."

Simon emphasises the role of leaders as the most pivotal. They are the ones who need to make sacrifices, to ensure that those working with and below them are looked after, respected and fulfilled. A leader builds trust by providing their time, energy, money etc. If it comes to it, a leader maybe even need to provide the food off their own plate.

"When it matters, leaders choose to eat last."

Have courage

Simon identifies courage as one of the most important characteristics in a leader. As a leader, you need to represent yourself as someone who is courageous and can provide protection to those working below you. In return, workers will feel trusted, they will feel like they have the space, freedom and ability to work harder, and innovate on new ideas, take risks and know that they will be backed up by their leaders. Simon emphasises that the result is always better work.

Simon explains, that if the leader is not courageous and the employees do not feel protected, they will be more likely to not innovate in fear of doing something wrong, or breaking a rule. They will simply come to work, do what's necessary of them and nothing more. And this creates unhappy employees.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Blame the boomers

Simon explains, that due to the sheer numbers, the baby boomer generation have essentially remodelled society, they are in charge and have been leading the way for quite some time. This came into full-effect in the 1980s and 1990s. And due to this outnumbering, society is feeling the effects of an imbalance.

"Imbalance, as history has proven over and over, will self-correct suddenly and aggressively unless we are smart enough to correct it ourselves slowly and methodically."

It's the desire for instant gratification and the state of our organisations that lack strength, trust and loyalty that means that our leaders may not be up to the job. They are not confident or patient enough to pave the path needed.

Simon points out that people are no longer just people, but perceived as anything from customers, employees or shareholders to e-mail addresses or expenses to be tracked. Simon emphasises the relating that we live in a virtual world, and this, as an abstraction, means that not only our economy will suffer, but our state of being, our happiness.

VIRTUAL WORLD & ABSTRACTIONS

Simon defines abstraction as something that extends beyond physical space to include the nature of numbers.

“ The bigger our companies get, the more physical distance is created between us and the people who work for us or buy our products. At such scale, we can no longer just walk into the aisles and count the cans of soup on the shelf either. Now we rely on documents that report the numbers of what we’ve sold and how much we’ve made. ”

Simons concerns are confronting, he points out that this abstraction of reality and the separation from other humans means that we, as a result become less human. Our behaviours can be considered more and more inhuman and we end up doing more harm to others than good. The picture he paints is not pleasant.

Manage the abstraction

Simon has come up with 5 rules to help manage the emerging abstraction, to try keep people real and accountable;

Rule 1. Keep It Real—Bring People Together. It’s so important to have human-interaction, in real life, not behind a screen. This is where trust is built, empathy and how we learn to innovate.

Rule 2. Keep It Manageable—Obey Dunbar’s Number. Professor Dunbar established the concept that humans cannot maintain more than 150 close relationships. Anything beyond this will be effected and not receive the attention they relationships need to thrive.

Rule 3. Meet the People You Help. Again, get beyond the computer screen and take the time to see the actual, tangible results of our time and effort. In turn, this will motivate us to push harder, do more, be better.

Rule 4. Give Them Time, Not Just Money. It’s a common misconception that money is the only driver, but the reality is that a leader who offers their time and energy to those below them, will cultivate a workplace with people who are more willing to give their time and energy in return. And the result is always going to be better work and better innovation.

Rule 5. Be Patient–The Rule of Seven Days and Seven Years. Simon uses this rule to describe the trust process, he acknowledges that it will take longer than 7 days to earn trust, but fewer than 7 years. There is no strict formula and everyone is different. But he emphasises, that it will take time and patience to build trust.

When it becomes destructive

Simons concept of “Destructive Abundance” is the result of this imbalance. It happens when leaders prioritise the results; the margin, profit, product over the people who are responsible for creating the results; the employees, managers, staff.

“Destructive Abundance happens when the players focus almost exclusively on the score and forget why they set out to play the game in the first place.”

LEADERSHIP LESSONS

Simon outlines his 5 key leadership lessons;

1. **So Goes the Culture, so Goes the Company** - essentially, Simon explains that if the culture is lacking, the company successes will also be lacking. When the culture is one of trust, the company will reap the benefit of innovation and hard workers.
2. **So Goes the Leader, so Goes the Culture** - in this rule, Simon emphasises the importance of the leader taking responsibility for their employees, whether it be success or failures.

"To give them responsibility and hold them accountable to advance the mission. If the captain provides direction and protection, the crew will do what needs to be done to advance the mission."

3. **Integrity Matters** - this one's pretty obvious, leaders need to have integrity, telling the truth, no matter what, is the foundation for building essential trust.
4. **Friends Matter too** - Simone emphasises the importance of bonding with your colleagues outside of the working environment. Leaving the workplace behind gives you the opportunity to really get to know each other, see your colleagues as people and friends rather than co-workers or even worse, competitors.
5. **Lead the People, Not the Numbers** - perhaps the one that Simon talks about the most throughout this book. Businesses need to look beyond profit, although it is the goal of every company, it cannot be the primary priority.

"It is the leaders of companies that see profit as fuel for their cultures that will outlast their dopamine-addicted, cortisol-soaked competitors."

ARE WE THE PROBLEM?

Simon defines the difference between leaders and managers as follows;

- Leaders take responsibility for lives not numbers.
- Managers look after numbers and results.

Simon believes that all managers have the opportunity to be leaders, but they need to take a step back and look at themselves as the problem and start focusing on protecting their people, not the numbers.

Simon insightfully compares incentive programs to drug and alcohol addictions. Drug and alcohol addictions are essentially dopamine addictions. We are addicted to the rush they give us. In the corporate world, incentive programs are another way to get a hit of dopamine, we become addicted to performance. And just like drug and alcohol addictions, this becomes unhealthy.

Simon explains that it's the strive for success and performance at any cost that becomes the issue, not the success itself. It becomes unhealthy and imbalanced when the motive is all about the results and overrides looking after the employees and those responsible for the results.

"In healthy organisations, as in a healthy society, the drive to win should not precede the desire to take care of the very people we claim to serve."

IT'S ALL ABOUT SERVICE

Continuing his comparison to alcohol and drug addictions, Simon compares leadership to reaching step 12 in the AA program. He explains that when following the AA program, regardless of whether you complete the first 11 steps, it's only those that complete step 12 that ever truly overcome their addiction. Step 12 is about committing to another person, someone who is also addicted to alcohol, and helping them overcome their addiction.

"Step Twelve is the commitment to help another alcoholic beat the disease. Step Twelve is all about service. And it is service that is the key to breaking our dopamine addictions in our organisations too."

This example makes it very clear, that a crucial element of leadership is the service to others, service to those in the organisation that need support, trust and respect in order to work hard and contribute to the organisation thriving.

It's going to be hard

"Leadership is not a license to do less; it is a responsibility to do more. And that's the trouble. Leadership takes work. It takes time and energy. The effects are not always easily measured and they are not always immediate. Leadership is always a commitment to human beings."

CONCLUSION

Key Takeaways

1. It's a basic human need to feel protected and respected. It's important that leaders make their employees feel this.
2. A happy and safe work culture will cultivate harder workers and more innovation. The key is to empower your employees and enable them to work to their full potential.
3. A true leader needs to always tell the truth and needs to be courageous.
4. We live in a time where our reality is increasingly virtual. This creates an abstraction and leads to de-humanisation. We need to nurture our relationships, and prioritise meeting people in real-life.
5. Time can be more valuable than money. Pay rises are not always the answer.
6. Businesses need to look beyond profit, although it is the goal of every company, it cannot be the primary priority.
7. It's not easy being a leader, it takes time, patience and commitment

Further Reading

If you enjoyed this summary, check out [Start with Why](#), also by Simon Sinek. Start With Why is about a naturally occurring pattern, a way of thinking, acting and communicating that gives some leaders the ability to inspire those around them. The more organisations and people who learn to also start with WHY, the more people there will be who wake up feeling fulfilled by the work they do.

[The Art of People](#) by Dave Kerpern is a great guide on how to manage some of the most important people and relationships in your life. Kerpern emphasises that people can make all the difference between an average life and a great life.

[Built to Last](#), by Jim Collins examines a selection of 'Visionary Companies' and identifies what it takes to run a successful organisation that will prosper over a long

period of time. If you're looking to step up to a managerial or leadership position for the first time, check out [The First Time Manager](#).

Finally, [How to Win Friends & Influence People](#) by Dale Carnegie is a book that aims to help you convince people to share your way of thinking, to avoid arguments and to become more liked.

[Guidelines](#) is my eBook that summarises the main lessons from 33 of the best-selling self-help books in one place. It is the ultimate book summary; Available as a 80-page ebook and 115-minute audio book. Guidelines lists 31 rules (or guidelines) that you should follow to improve your productivity, become a better leader, do better in business, improve your health, succeed in life and become a happier person.

Action Steps

1. Are you a leader? **Take a step back and asses whether you are prioritising profits or people?** Take another look at Simon's definitions of a manager vs. a leader. Which category do you fall into?
2. If you're a leader of a team or organisation, try organising an outside of work event - give everyone a chance to connect with you and each other on a more personal level.
3. **Identify 3 things that can you do everyday to be a better leader.**
4. If you liked this summary, you can purchase the book on [Amazon](#).