

The Infinite Game

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Simon Sinek is an optimist and a best selling author. He is working to build a world where a majority of us will feel inspired , and return home fulfilled at the end of the day.

We cannot choose the game, we cannot choose the rules, we can only choose how we play.

The rise of great societies, advancements in science and medicine and the exploration of space all happened because large groups of people united in a common cause , chose to collaborate with no clear end in sight.

Acting with an infinite long term view is not easy. It takes real effort. As human beings we are naturally inclined to see out immediate solutions to uncomfortable problems and prioritize quick wins to advance our ambitions.

If there are two players a game exists. And there are two kinds of games – the finite and the infinite.

Finite games are played by known players. They have fixed rules. Infinite games on the other hand are played by known and unknown players. They are not exactly agreed upon rules.

Infinite games have infinite time horizons. And because, there is no finish line, no practical end to the game, there is no such thing as 'winning' an infinite game. In an infinite game, the primary objective is to keep playing, to perpetuate the game.

When we lead with a finite mindset in an infinite game, it leads to all kinds of problems which include the decline of trust, cooperation and innovation.

British airways used to claim that they were the world's favorite airline. Virgin took them to the British advertising standards authority and challenged the claim. British airways defined 'favorite' as the most expansive and not necessarily preferred.

In a finite game, the game ends when its time runs out and the players live to play another day. In an infinite game, it's the opposite. It's a game that lives on and it's the players' time that runs out.

In a business sense, we need to build organizations that are strong enough and healthy enough to stay in the game for many generations.

The true value of an organization is measured by the desire others have to contribute to that organizations ability to keep succeeding, not just during the time they were there, but well beyond their own tenure.

Players with an infinite mindset want to leave the organization in better shape than they found them.

Finite minded players tend to follow standards that help them achieve their personal goals. ' what's best for me ' is finite thinking, 'what's best for us' is infinite thinking.

In 1912, kodak was the first company to pay employees a dividend based on company performance and years later issued what we now know as stock options.

The infinite minded player expects surprises, even revels in them, and is prepared to be transformed by them. The embrace the freedom of play and are open to be transformed by them.

A company built for resilience is a company that is structured to last forever. A company built for stability is about remaining the same.

Victorinox, the swiss army knife manufacturer found its sales collapsing after the 9/11 attack when swiss army knives were not allowed on flights. Victorinox didn't balk, they built a range of products that were not subject to this challenge, e.g. travel gear, fragrances etc. they didn't blame the environment and decline, they grew.

Finite minded leaders hoard information, hide mistakes and operate in a more cautious way. To protect themselves, they don't trust anyone. Their tactics are overtly aggressive.

Unfortunately finite minded leadership is embraced by wall street.

A leader who wants to adopt an infinite mindset must follow 5 things:
advance a just cause, build trusting teams,
study your worthy rivals, prepare for external
flexibility and demonstrate the courage to
lead.

Organizations that simply promise to 'change the world' or 'make an impact' are too generic.

A successful product does not mean you have a strong company.

The problem isn't how skilled an executive is when he takes over as CEO. The problem is whether they have the right mindset for the job they are given.

Words matter. They give direction and meaning to things.

Martin Luther King said 'I have a dream', he didn't say 'I have a plan'

An uncomfortable truth for CFOs, COOs CXOs is that they have reached the peak of their skill set.

The average life of a company was 60 in 1950, today it is 18 according to a Credit Suisse report.

Shortsightedness is an inherent condition of leaders who play with a finite mindset.

In 1978, the average CEO made 30 times the average worker's salary. By 2016, it was 271 times the average workers pay. CEO pay grew at a rate of 70 % faster than the stock market.

Money is a result of business and not its sole purpose.

In any game there are two currencies required to play – WILL and RESOURCES. When we talk resources, we usually talk money.

Will is intangible and harder to measure, it is about the feelings people have when they come to work, WILL comes from the quality of leadership and the strength.

Money can buy a number of things but it cannot buy true will, the ability to want to make a difference irrespective of the odds.

Will is generated by company culture and the behavior of leaders.

There is a difference between a bunch of people who work in a team and a bunch of people who trust each other.

Trust is a feeling and for us to feel safe, we have to feel safe to express ourselves.

We have to be honest about our shortfalls in performance and seek help.

Our ability to trust is not based on our industry. Feeling safe to express our feelings is not to be confused with a lack of emotional professionalism. Good leaders allow people to speak their minds but challenge them.

If we want high performing teams, trust comes before performance.

Trust is about character. Do they have grit/resilience, can they remain cool under pressure, do they have personal accountability?

If someone's performance is struggling and they are behaving in a way that is negatively affecting the team, then the leader has to ask if they are coachable.

Only when a team member proves uncoachable, is resistant to feedback and takes no responsibility for performance that we should seriously think about that person being on the team.

if a leader decides to keep such people, then he is now responsible for the consequences.

Real or perceived , when there is danger, we
act from a place of fear rather than
confidence. The truth shouldn't hurt.

Fear is such an emotion that in many cases it can force is to act against the organizations best interests.

When Alan Mullaly took over as CEO of FIRD, every slide he was shown was green on all projects but the company was floundering. He encouraged people to tell the truth and slowly one person after weeks told him that he was missing his deadlines. That started the culture of showing the truth and then taking action vs believing that all projects were running well.

Culture = Values + Behavior

The ability to succeed is not what makes someone a leader. Exhibiting the qualities of leadership is what helps one an effective leader.

A bias for will before resources, trust before performance, increases the probability a team will perform at a higher level.

The best way to improve performance is to provide an environment in the organization where information flows freely, mistakes can be highlighted and help can be offered and received. This is what a leader drives.

Ethical fading is a behavior that allows people to act in an unethical way to further their own interests, often at the expense of others.

As human beings we are blessed and cured
with our ability for rational thought.

Ethical decisions are not based on what's best for the short term, they are based on the 'right thing to do'

Worthy rivals are people we acknowledge that they have strengths and abilities from whom we could learn a thing or two. (In Tennis, Federer, Nadal, Djokovic are all worthy rivals)

Traditional competition forces us to take on an attitude of winning. A worthy rival inspires us to an attitude of improvement.

Many start ups are fueled by the entrepreneurs vision rather than by the resources to advance it.

A strong balance sheet does not equal a strong company.

Organizations will also find themselves at crossroads when their leaders start to believe their own myths- that the organization's success is because of them.

Our lives are finite but life is infinite. We are the finite players in an infinite game of life. We come and go but life continues with us or without us.