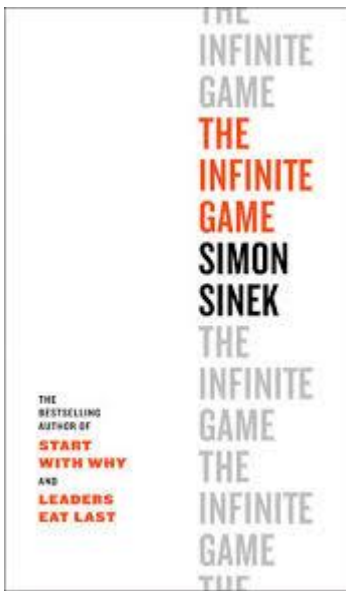


The Infinite Game by Simon Sinek – Here are five lessons and takeaways



I wrote this book to rally those who are ready to challenge that status quo and replace it with a reality that is vastly more conducive to our deep-seated human need to feel safe, to contribute to something bigger than ourselves and to provide for ourselves and our families.

It is our collective responsibility to find, guide and support those who are committed to leading in a way that will more likely bring that vision to life.

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Simply put: The responsibility of business is to use its will and resources to advance a cause greater than itself, protect the people and places in which it operates and generate more resources so that it can continue doing all those things for as long as possible.
*Simon Sinek, **The Infinite Game***

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Simon Sinek helps us remember the basics; very important basics. He did that with his book *Start with Why*. And he does it again with his new book, *The Infinite Game*. I recently presented my synopsis of this book at the November 1 *First Friday Book Synopsis* in Dallas.

In the book, he makes one key point, fleshed out with many stories, examples, and implications. **His point: business is not a game with a final clock; it is an infinite game.** And the biggest implication is that business people need to play a very long game, and pretty much ignore the “*next quarter is all that matters*” game plan that way too many leaders follow.

And, this really has to be understood at the beginning of this conversation: Milton Friedman, and his essay from 1970, *The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits, The New York Times Magazine* — (as opposed to the view of Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*). *Friedman insisted that “there is one and only one social responsibility of business, to use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits so long as it stays within the rules of the game.” — In other words, according to Friedman, the sole purpose of business is to make money and that money belongs to the shareholders.*

He gives credit to *Professor James P. Carse, who penned a little treatise called **Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility** in 1986. According to Carse, a finite-minded leader plays to end the game—to win. And if they want to be the winner, then there has to be a loser. — Carse’s infinite player plays to keep playing. In business, that means building an organization that can survive its leaders.*

Here are the key differences between Finite Games vs. The Infinite Game...

- *Finite games are played by known players. They have fixed rules. And there is an agreed-upon objective that, when reached, ends the game.*
- *Infinite games, in contrast, are played by known and unknown players. There are no exact or agreed-upon rules. Though there may be conventions or laws that govern how the players conduct themselves, within those broad boundaries, the players can operate however they want. And if they choose to break with convention, they can. The manner in which each player chooses to play is entirely up to them. And they can change how they play the game at any time, for any reason.*
- *There is no such thing as winning education; no one is ever crowned the winner of careers; there is no such thing as winning global politics. And there is certainly no such thing as winning business. All these things are journeys, not events.*

In my synopses, I ask: What is the point (of this book)? My answer for this book is: Business is not working very well; for many companies, and for many people. The problem is that we are viewing and approaching business as a Finite Game. The solution is a genuine mindset change; a redefinition of business as an Infinite Game.

And I ask Why is this book worth our time? Here are my three answers.

#1 – We are too focused on the next quarter. This book will compel us to take a longer view.

#2 — We are too focused on profits only. This book will take a more inclusive view – which will, ironically, lead to greater profits in the long run.

#3 – We are too focused on winning by beating our competition. This book will re-focus our attention to a “worthy rival,” in the midst of an “everyone can win” environment.

Here are a few key highlights from the book (the best of Randy's highlighted passages):

- *Decades after the Vietnam War, Robert McNamara, U.S. Secretary of Defense during the war, had the chance to meet Nguyen Co Thach, the North Vietnamese Foreign Ministry's chief specialist on the United States from 1960 to 1975. McNamara was flabbergasted by how badly America misunderstood their enemy. "You must never have read a history book," McNamara recounts Thach scolding him. "If you had, you'd know we weren't pawns of the Chinese or the Russians... Don't you understand that we have been fighting the Chinese for a thousand years?"*
- *Sadly, over the course of the past thirty to forty years, finite-minded leadership has become the modern standard in business.*
- *According to a study by McKinsey, the average life span of an S&P 500 company has dropped over forty years since the 1950s, from an average of sixty-one years to less than eighteen years today.*
- *We call it "vision" because it must be something we can "see."*
- *We need something with permanence for us to rally around.*
- *I am often surprised how many visionary leaders don't think they need to find the words for or write down their Cause. They assume that because their vision is clear to them it's clear to everyone else in the organization. Which of course it's not. A Just Cause that is preserved on paper can be handed down from generation to generation; a founder's instinct cannot.*
- *I often meet senior executives who seem to suffer from a kind of "finite exhaustion." It's a strange quirk of human nature. The order in which a person presents information more often than not reveals their actual priorities and the focus of their strategies.*
- *With each ethical transgression that is tolerated, we pave the road for more and bigger ethical transgressions.*
- *Put a good person in an environment that suffers ethical fading, and that person becomes susceptible to ethical lapses themselves. Likewise, take a person, even one who may have acted unethically in the past, put them in a stronger, more values-based culture, and that same person will also act in accordance with the standards and norms of that environment.*

He argues that you, and all business leaders, will default to the finite game. Over and over again. *Maintaining an infinite mindset is hard. Very hard.*

- **Here are five essential practices for the infinite game:**
- *Advance a Just Cause — A Just Cause is a specific vision of a future state that does not yet exist; a future state so appealing that people are willing to make sacrifices in order to help advance toward that vision. ...A Just Cause is not the same as our WHY. A WHY comes from the past. It is an origin story. It is a statement of who we are. ...A Just Cause is about the future. It defines where we are going. It describes the world we hope to live in and will commit to help build.*

- Build Trusting Teams
- Study your Worthy Rivals
- Prepare for Existential Flexibility
- Demonstrate the Courage to Lead

- **And this great just cause must be:**
 - For something — affirmative and optimistic
 - Inclusive — Open to all those who would like to contribute
 - Service oriented — for the primary benefit of others
 - Resilient — able to endure political, technological and cultural change
 - Idealistic — Big, bold and ultimately unachievable

- **He strongly warns against Ethical Fading:** *Ethical fading is a condition in a culture that allows people to act in unethical ways in order to advance their own interests, often at the expense of others, while falsely believing that they have not compromised their own moral principles. In fact, if we look closely, we begin to see signs of ethical fading in lots of businesses.*

- **And here are my five lessons and takeaways:**

#1 – The short game will likely end up with only short gains. Aim for the Infinite Game.

#2 – The goal is not short-term profits, but long-term...endurance; loyalty; community...

#3 – Be very clear about developing a true Just Cause. And stick to seeking to fulfill that cause!

#4 – The Infinite Game might save you from ethical fading. And that can only be good for our society (and, yes, maybe for your company).

#5 – Reject, and renounce, the “I must win” mindset.

This is a good book, with a great and important point. It is certainly worth a careful pondering...