

Reflections on Leadership



Starting with Why

February 2017

In 2009 Simon Sinek wrote a best-selling book titled *Start With Why: How Good Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. In the book he put forward the idea that the message of every organization needs to start by addressing the question of why – “*What is your purpose, cause, or belief*”. He argued that this approach is essential in meeting the basic human need to belong – a feeling based on shared values or beliefs. The discipline of how something is done, and the consistency of what an organization does is still required, but cannot replace the motivation of staff and the loyalty of customers that occurs when everyone understands why an organization was founded and what it believes.

Recently Sinek was featured in a YouTube conversation on the attitudes of Millennials (those born between 1982 and 2000). This very entertaining discussion focuses on how the millennial point of view was shaped by family life and education, and why this represents a challenge to the organizations that employ them. It turns out that this particular generation entering the workforce is even more inclined to look for meaning in their work and to focus on the question of why. From my perspective, this is a trend that we are likely to see in future generations as well.

Understanding the question of why is not just about reaching the millennial generation. It has been an important consideration across time and cultures. In the years following the opening of China in the late 1980's, a number of



groups of young professional people from China visited the United States to learn about American culture. Bill Moyer, one of PSL's board members with extensive international experience and I were asked to host a Chinese group studying retirement and senior care. The tour and conversation was cordial and informative. But when we mentioned PSL's commitment to providing charity care to those with insufficient resources, the conversation became much more animated. Why would someone do such a thing for a person that was not a family member? Who are these donors who just give their money away? What is in it for them?

Pointing to PSL's history did not seem to provide much clarity. Why would a woman of means like Ellen Parker, forgo a life of comfort and ease to serve seniors and children with her time, attention, and wealth? Why would individuals and churches pool their resources to meet the needs of individuals that were largely ignored

by governmental and other private interests? The only thing that made sense to our new Chinese friends was the donor getting a break on their taxes.

For PSL the question of why has historically been addressed by our mission statement and values. Recently the PSL Board undertook the task of updating the mission statement and values to provide a better, more concise expression - answering the question posed by Sinek; “*What is your purpose, cause, or belief?*” The following is the revised PSL Mission and Values:

Presbyterian Senior Living Mission Statement

Guided by the life and teachings of Jesus, the mission of Presbyterian Senior Living is to provide compassionate, vibrant and supportive communities and services to promote wholeness of body, mind and spirit.

ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

- 1. Inclusive** – Reach out to include all persons in the communities in which we serve, as recipients of service, employees, and volunteers.
- 2. Transparency / Integrity** – Adhere to the highest standards of transparency, honesty and impartiality to assure the public trust in the organization and its mission.
- 3. Quality** – Promote successful aging and enhance the quality of life of those we serve through the

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provision of exceptional services, innovation, maximizing the options available to seniors, and empowering them to choose the services that best meet their needs.

- 4. **Stewardship** – Be good stewards of the resources available to the organization with the goal of achieving the greatest good to the greatest number of seniors in the most cost effective manner possible, and to focus on environmentally sustainable practices in every aspect of PSL’s ministry.
- 5. **People** – Provide PSL staff and volunteers with a supportive, rewarding and challenging environment that gives opportunity for a satisfying experience in the service of others.
- 6. **Community Benefit** – In addition to providing subsidized care to those with limited financial resources, offering support to local people, clubs, schools, churches and social service agencies, and governmental entities to strengthen the fabric of the communities we service.

Many aspects of the mission statement are the same, or similar to the previous mission statement: like compassion; vibrant, supportive communities (Belonging); and wholeness of body mind and spirit.

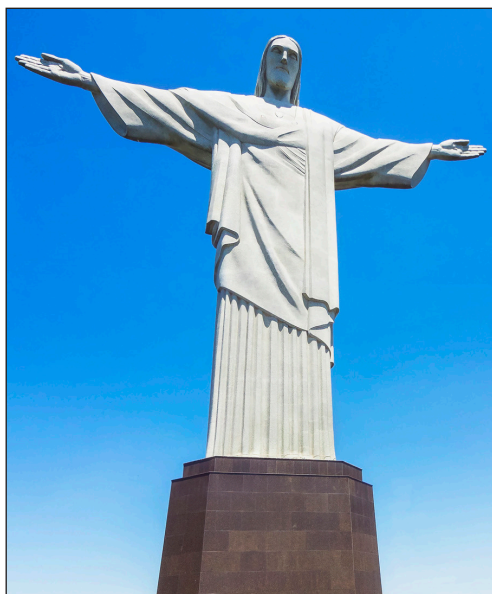
The new term “Guided by the life and teachings of Jesus” replaced the previous phrase “Christian understanding”. It was felt that this revision affirmed PSL’s faith based reason for existence better than the term “Christian” that in recent years had been used in a more politicized context.

So what is meant when we say that PSL is “Guided by the life and teachings of Jesus? First of all, as a Jew, his teachings were based on the Old Testament concepts of justice, love of God, and

love of neighbor. One of my favorite expressions is found in Micah 6:8 – *“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and walk humbly with your God?”* Jesus’ own words from Matt 22:37 illustrates this foundation – When asked by a group of Pharisees, which is the great commandment in the Law, he replied, quoting from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments rest all the Law and the Prophets.”*

But Jesus expanded these on these concepts, often taking them to somewhat uncomfortable dimensions. For example:

- Love means being inclusive, reaching out to all. Jesus was known as the friend of sinners and the outcasts of his time, even those considered untouchable by the rest of society. (Mark 2:16-17). (Mark 1:40- 42).
- To whom should love be extended? We should love even those who are considered our enemies (Luke 6:35).



- Who is your neighbor, and what does compassion look like? The parable of the Good Samaritan in the 10th chapter of Luke illustrates that everyone is your neighbor, and compassion is the expectation for every person. Sometimes the most virtuous among us are the least outwardly religious.
- Is there a limit to forgiveness to those who have wronged us? Forgiveness should be extended indefinitely – seventy times seven. (Matthew 18:21 – 22).
- What is generosity? Generosity is measured by the intention and depth of sacrifice – as illustrated in the Widows mite (Luke 21, 3-4).

These are just a few of the examples of what it means to be guided by the life and teachings of Jesus in the work of Presbyterian Senior Living. Notice that these expressions are free of judgmental and condescending attitudes that often characterize people across all social, religious, and political boundaries in our modern society. The self-righteous are not examples of Jesus’ life and teachings.

It is my experience that Sinek is spot on in his observation about the need to start with answering the question Why. I also believe that organizations that adhere to a well-crafted mission statement create an atmosphere where Tim Keller’s definition of meaning can be found - *“To have both an overall purpose for living and the assurance that you are making a difference by serving some good beyond yourself.”*

Blessings,