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Executive Editor, Frank Shushok, Jr.  
and Simon Sinek Talk about  
Educational Practices Affecting  
Student Life and Student Learning  
on American College Campuses

Frank Shushok, Jr.



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Simon Sinek discusses the problem with leadership in higher education today and the cost to our students.

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# Challenging Our Assumptions: Executive Editor, Frank Shushok, Jr. and Simon Sinek Talk about Educational Practices Affecting Student Life and Student Learning on American College Campuses

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**Simon Sinek**, Founder of Start With Why, is an unshakable optimist. A trained ethnographer, he is the author of three books: the global best seller, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*; the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* best seller, *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and*

*Others Don't*; and his newest book, *Together Is Better: A Little Book of Inspiration*. Fascinated by the leaders who make the greatest impact in their organizations and in the world, he has discovered some remarkable patterns about how they think, act, and communicate, as well as about the environments these leaders help

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FRANK SHUSHOK, JR. AND SIMON SINEK

create. He has devoted his life to sharing his thinking in order to assist other leaders and organizations in inspiring action. He is best known for popularizing the concept of “Why” and for the talk he gave on the subject that is the third most watched talk of all time on TED.com, with more than 31 million views. He lives in New York.

**Shushok:** *I’d like to begin our conversation with a more personal angle. I love asking people I interview about how they’ve changed. I would value your reflections about the ways the 20-year-old Simon is different than the 30-year-old Simon and, now, the 43-year-old Simon. What are the most salient lessons growing older has taught you?*

**Sinek:** I think the 20-year old Simon was like most 20-year olds, which is had all the answers and wanted to be valuable. I didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life, but I learned early to be introspective. I loved the idea of working to be a better version of myself. In college, I remember calling it “the external third person,” which is the ability to look at myself as if I were outside of myself, and critically say, “Okay, that was a good idea. That was a bad idea. You spoke well there. You spoke poorly there.” Sort of taking account-

ability for my actions. That was the beginning of a journey, but still with a lot of uncertainty about what my future would be like.

The 30-year old Simon learned the most valuable lesson of my life, which is I don’t have to know all the answers, and I don’t have to pretend that I do. It was about that time that I started to learn the lesson that I can ask for help, and I can accept it when it when it is offered. Accepting help doesn’t make me look bad; it actually makes me stronger and better and helps people respect me more. I think the 40-year old me is much more patient and relaxed. In my 20s and 30s, there was a lot of impatience, a lot of feeling like I was wasting time if I did something that wasn’t just right for me. I have learned that there is value in waiting.

**Shushok:** *I would like to go back to your comment about learning to be introspective early in life. Was introspection a practice your environment helped develop? Or, conversely, was this a natural inclination for you?*

**Sinek:** When I was in junior high school, I was a big-time follower, and had a best friend named Adam. I had a fight with Adam, and then, the next day I had no friends at school, and I remember no one would sit next to me on the bus. I came to a realization, even at

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that young age, that I was allowing someone else be responsible for my happiness. You know, Adam was the alpha male among our friends. I had to be nice; otherwise, I would have no friends. After the pain of that, I remember realizing that was a stupid model for living. I made a conscious decision that I would become more independent, and I would be responsible for myself. I started experimenting with expressing myself. I went to school where everyone wore jeans and t-shirts and sneakers. I started experimenting with wearing black

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We love feedback. Send letters to executive editor Frank Shushok Jr. (aboutcampus@vt.edu), and please copy him on notes to authors.

shoes instead of sneakers, so I had white socks and black shoes. By high school I started experimenting with colored socks. I was testing out subtle expressions of individuality, which continued to grow as I got older. I was learning to be comfortable with being different. I remember that people would make fun of me, and I learned to be fine with that.

**Shushok:** *Since our readers work mostly in higher education settings, they will be interested in knowing about your educational journey up to and through college. As you look back, what was college like for you? What did you learn? Why did it matter?*

**Sinek:** I had a liberal arts education, which I loved. I was a curious kid with lots of interests. I took the maximum course load available and more. I realized there was so much I wanted to learn and so much I was interested in that I actually took extra courses. I would approach professors and ask, “Do you mind if I just take your class? I won’t take any of the tests, because it doesn’t count, but I just want to sit in your class for the semester. Do you mind?” Most professors said yes. I took all kinds of classes that didn’t even show up in my transcript simply because I was interested.

I’m an oral learner. I don’t learn well by reading. But I learn extremely well from listening and from talking about the subject—I found joy by going to all those classes. As long as there was a good professor, I didn’t need to read the books. And when I found a good professor, I took everything they taught.

## The Creative Process

**I’VE ALWAYS BEEN A CURIOUS** kid, but I have only recently been able to explain my creative process. People ask me, “How do you write a book?” I share that there are all kinds of strategies. Some treat it like a job and work from nine to five every day. Some have a goal where they write 2,500 words every day, and they don’t stop until they do. I use neither of those methods. My method comprises days of guilt and self-loathing, punctuated by hours of sheer brilliance. The problem is that I don’t know when those hours will strike, so I just sit around watching TV and surfing the internet, hating myself until something strikes.

The reality is that I’ve only recently been able to articulate my creative process, which is different than what I know it is for others. The way a lot of people do something is by coming up with an idea and then figuring out how to execute that concept. That’s not my process. I tend to put myself in the middle of chaos and find a pattern, and once the pattern is developed, I pursue it. So, my process begins before I have the idea, where most people have the idea before they begin the process.

I majored in cultural anthropology in college. As a trained ethnographer, I’m good at paying attention to the world around me. I’m always in the middle of it. This is where the curiosity lies, and it all goes back again to when I was in college. I am constantly doing things and trying things, and it frustrates my team. They say, “Why are you doing that?” And my honest answer is that I don’t know. I tell them, “let’s just try it – something may come of it.” It’s not flavor of the month and it’s not shiny objects. It is me literally putting myself in the middle of chaos. If I see nothing, that’s okay. I absolutely love the process. It is the way a lot of artists and choreographers work—sitting in chaos first. I’m comfortable with that. I embrace that. I’ve only recently been able to articulate what that system is, what the process is for me, and I think it helps my team at least understand that it’s not random.

**By the way, I can’t stand this debate about whether students should drop out of college and start a business instead. I think people are making something that is complex binary. It’s not binary, it’s not either/or, it’s both. It’s not that the world is the best teacher, it’s not that college is the best teacher. It’s that you need both.**

**Shushok:** *I think it is fair to say the process you describe is different than the way most colleges and university educations are organized. How did you reconcile this learning style with the college environment as a student?*

## Learning How to Learn

**Sinek:** For me, chaos doesn’t have to exist only in formal ways—it can be informal and about paying attention to the world that surrounds me. For example, I

took an individual study with the dean of students—I was his only student. I was in student government, and I ended up writing a paper on insecurity and how it affects leadership skills, although I didn't even realize I was doing leadership back in college. In fact, I wrote a paper on all my colleagues in student government. I would pay attention to how they would lead and would react to situations.

By the way, I can't stand this debate about whether students should drop out of college and start a business instead. I think people are making something that is complex binary. It's not binary, it's not either/or, it's both. It's not that the world is the best teacher, it's not that college is the best teacher. It's that you need both. What formal education provides you with is discipline. It provides you with learning how to study, learning how to think, and critical thinking. I can tell you the professors who taught me how to think, who taught me how to question authority, who taught me how to form an argument so that I'm qualified to question authority, even if that person has more degrees than I do. I can tell you the names of those professors who taught me those skills. I could not have done that without formal education.

Of course, I learned the hard way. When I first got to college, I picked all my classes based on work load, and I got terrible grades because I was unmotivated and unengaged. Then, I picked all the courses based on quality of professor, regardless of the work load, and then I was engaged and doing well because I was enjoying the teachers. So, I had to learn that lesson. Without a formal education, how would I ever learn how to learn? I had to learn that I was an oral learner. I had to learn that I'm no good learning from books. That means, I would purposely take classes where I had to write papers as opposed to take tests. I would purposely take classes where we had a robust discussion and not just overly relied on the book; otherwise, I wouldn't do well. I learned that.

But at the same time, you have informal learning. I think this is the value of being involved in student government, in cocurricular activities. It's important that you put your phone, television, video games away and actually interact with people. There's learning to be done there. We're not learning when we're disconnected; we're learning when we're engaged. I don't think it's binary, and I wish people would stop debating it. I think if anyone picks one way or the other, you are going to be at a significant disadvantage in one way, shape, or form.

**Shushok:** *These are thought-provoking points you're making. Let me push this a little further. Perhaps one of today's most pressing conversations in higher education is about its purpose. As we debate the "why"*

*behind our collective work, what insights, challenges, or encouragement might you offer us?*

## Leadership in Higher Education

**Sinek:** I think too many institutions of higher education are broken. This comes from talking with both teachers and students. Teachers are fully aware of this; I'm not revealing any dirty secret here. I think every teacher knows this. And this is from my own experience teaching at a college level. The challenge is that presidents who are installed in these jobs are put there to raise money, not to not to take care of their teachers and their faculty, and colleges are run like businesses rather than anything else. Fundraising and how much money a president can bring in as seen as a sign of success, which I think is quite frankly backwards. When you prioritize money over your teachers, it's gross, and it will destroy the culture. And politics run rampant in universities today, which is also disgusting.

**The folly of it all is the faculty and administration inside a university would be more willing to try new things, to experiment, to develop new ways of teaching if the people who run the university took care of them and created a culture in which that was promoted, advanced, rewarded, and recognized.**

There's the old adage, "Do you know why academics are so competitive? It's because the stakes are so low." Unfortunately, there is some truth to that, and we can see the corruption in academics over and over. We see it in medical and pharma at a lot of places, where you see reputable doctors doing studies for money. I have no problem with the fact that they need funding, but it becomes a rationalized game. That's why I think there needs to be better leadership at the top of a lot of our institutions. I understand you need money to run these



organizations, but it's not a finite game; it's an infinite game. It's about building an institution that will last forever, not about "how much money can I bring it this year?" If you focus on the former, the money will come—it always does. To kowtow to people who wave money in front of your nose, you can't; you just hold your nose and swallow and take the money. What happened to integrity?

I think if that were to happen, you would find more innovation at universities. The folly of it all is the faculty and administration inside a university would be more willing to try new things, to experiment, to develop new ways of teaching if the people who run the university took care of them and created a culture in which that was promoted, advanced, rewarded, and recognized. I'd rather it not be about how many papers a professor publishes but whether their students say, "I'm learning a lot from that professor." I saw it happen many years ago when I was at college. The most beloved professor on campus (he was incredible, he was the best teacher any of us have ever had, he was the reason I became an anthropology major, he was the most engaging guy I've ever met my life) didn't get tenure because he wasn't publishing enough. Basically, we had shitty professors who published a lot, and we let go of an amazing professor because he didn't publish enough. It was a joke. I mean, universities aren't there to publish; they're there to teach students. I think that's sometimes forgotten.

**Shushok:** *I want to keep talking about leadership. What do you think are particular challenges to leaders in these sorts of environments? What are the most common mistakes or the likely leadership pitfalls to guard against?*

**Sinek:** People ask me this question in every industry, right? "What are the leadership challenges in academia? What are the leadership challenges in small business? What are the leadership challenges in public companies? What are the leadership challenges in government, in politics, in the military?" And the answer is "it's all the same challenge!" Which is, you have an organization filled with people, and how do you inspire those people to want to come to work every day, feel safe while they're there, and return home fulfilled at the end of the day? It's the exact same challenge for absolutely everybody; it is not unique to anybody.

To the second part of your question—the victimization needs to stop. People in the middle (whether you're a teacher or you're a mid-level administrator complaining about the senior executives), complaining about the administration gets us nowhere, and at the end of the day, we cannot *change* the people above us. I get this question all the time: "How do I convince the president to change, to become a better leader?" And

the answer is: "You can't." So, what are you even worrying about it for? Every single one of us has the opportunity to *be the leader we wish we had*. Leadership is a choice, not a rank. Rank affords you authority, nothing else. Leadership comes from the willingness to see those around us rise. Every single one of us, should we want to, can commit ourselves to seeing that our

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fellow teachers, our fellow students, our fellow faculty, our fellow administrators love coming to work, feel safe while they're there, and return home fulfilled at the end of the day. We don't because it's *hard*, and sometimes, it's thankless. And there is a very real risk associated with being the leader because sometimes it means speaking truth to power and getting in trouble. Sometimes, it means doing the right thing and not the expeditious thing, which means you actually could put your job on the line. The risks are very, very real, which is why I don't sugar coat it. Not everyone's cut out for it, and I don't fault anyone for that, but I think we have to stop blaming those above us and start taking responsibility for ourselves.

You know, I say the same about politics, which is we get the politicians we deserve. It's not a republican or a democrat thing—you could have said this for the last 20 years. We keep complaining that our politicians are ineffective, but they're not the divided ones—we are! They are not the ones not willing to listen—we are!

We need to start looking at ourselves and be accountable for how we act when we show up to work and stop blaming those "in power." Plus, I think you earn the right to complain. I think you have to try to solve the problem in some small way yourself before you're allowed to complain about it. You're not allowed to sit on your arm chair and complain about anyone or anything. You don't even have to exhaust every possibility; you just have to try in some small way to fix

the problem yourself, and then, you earn the right to complain.

**Shushok:** *As you've been out and about and talked to people at all kinds of organizations, and as you try to make sense of why leadership does or does not occur, is it boiling down to people not equipping and making that decision for themselves?*

**Sinek:** No, I don't think that's the case. What I mean is that's only the first step. The first step to being a leader is you have to want to be one, right? So yes, intent and intention do matter. You have to want to learn to ride a bicycle before you can ride, so it's the same here. Leadership is a skill like any other; it is a learnable, and like any skill, it requires study and it requires hard work. All the leaders that I know, the ones that I admire, are all students of leadership. None of them consider themselves experts. They all consider themselves works in progress, and they love talking about the subject. Anybody who thinks they are an expert just because they've attained rank or position—run far away from those people. It is indicative of no leadership ability whatsoever. It's just ambition.

I think anybody who wants to commit to the path of leadership has to: a) know that it's a practice, a skill, a learnable one and b) commit to a lifetime of study of it. It's kind of like being a parent. Everybody on the planet

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has the capacity to be a parent. That doesn't mean everybody wants to be a parent, and it doesn't mean everybody should be a parent, but you can if you want. Leadership is the same, and every single one of us has the capacity—it doesn't mean everybody wants to, or it doesn't mean everybody should. But if you're up for the challenge, you're up for the hard work, then it's one of the most rewarding things you can ever do in your life.

**Shushok:** *I want to switch directions at this point. This past year, your analysis of millennials in the workplace received tens of millions of views and enlisted much discussion and even critique. In retrospect, what was the most important point you wanted to share in*

*that interview? What, if anything, might you revise or add to that conversation?*

## The Millennial Generation

**Sinek:** Every single meeting I have, every single conference that I speak at—literally every single one—someone will raise their hand and ask me the Millennial question. I got the question so often that clearly “there must be a there, there.” If that many people in every single industry say they're struggling, well then they must be struggling, and if it's across literally every single industry, then it must be a thing. So, it's based on research that I'd done for *Leaders Eat Last* (because a lot of what I talked about was already in my book) and based on my own observation and talking to many, many young people, both high school students, college students, and recent college grads, and some slightly older than that.

I fashioned an answer, and the answer I fashioned, I would give at all these conferences, and the reaction I got was amazing. It helped those who are facing the challenge relax, and they kind of had a new perspective on it. Those who are the Millennials often came up to me afterwards and thanked me, and some of them cried because they thought it was them. They blame themselves; they thought that they were the broken ones, and they realized they're not broken. It's just having to accept that we all grew up a little differently, and it shapes our world view and some of our habits—good, bad, or indifferent.

I rail against those who criticize me for saying that I can't make generalizations about an entire generation. I answer “of course you can” because we're all subject to whatever is going on in the day and age that we come of age. If your grandparents, who grew up during the Depression and World War II, are a little bit miserly or frugal, that's because *they grew up during the Depression!* Right? They are not broken or flawed. It's because they came of age in a time when they had to be that, and it stuck with them. Some of those habits that we form when we come of age are good, and some of them are bad, and some are nothing—innocuous. If you came of age during the 1970s, during the Vietnam War and Richard Nixon, odds are you are a little bit cynical of people in power, or authority, or government, right? It's not a good thing or a bad thing, that's just when you came of age.

This generation that came of age at the turn of the millennium and are the first generation to come of age where the Internet and cell phones are ubiquitous. Well, that has an effect, and it has positive effects and negative effects, and you have to call a spade a spade. Of course, of course, of course, not every person

in the generation is affected by it, but there are patterns, there are absolutely legitimate patterns. The way somebody in the 1950s raised their kids is different than the way somebody in the 1990s raised their kids—good and bad.

All I attempted to do was express empathy for the generation that is often criticized and judged unfairly, and simply overlay a filter of empathy to say, “Wait! Wait, before we judge, let’s understand the conditions in which they grew up,” and this will help you understand the behaviors that may frustrate your ability to lead this generation. But also for the Millennials themselves, many of them who are struggling with self-confidence; many of them who are struggling to form deep, meaningful relationships; many who are struggling to deal with stress in the workplace, it helps them understand they’re not alone. The minute you understand you’re not alone, you’re in a much better position to solve the problem because when you feel alone it’s absolutely debilitating, and it becomes a vicious cycle.

**Shushok:** *Can I talk with you a little bit about loneliness? I think that resonates when we visit with college students—a lot of college students talk about a feeling of loneliness, even while being in the midst of lots and lots of people. I wonder if you have any thoughts about that?*

## The Disconnection of Social Media

**Sinek:** Loneliness has nothing to do with how many people are around you, right? The sense of loneliness is a feeling that you have no one to turn to. It’s a sense that no one understands you. It’s the sense that you feel like you’re going through life alone. What solves loneliness is friendship, and mentorship, and teachers—this is what solves the problem. We have created environments, well-intentioned, that have done damage to our ability to solve our own loneliness.

I’ve already talked about the addictive qualities of cell phones and social media. By the time students get to college, too many of them already have the addiction, and some of the statistics are alarming. Compare it to alcoholics: if a child discovers alcohol before they’re 15, if they drink regularly before the age of 15, 40 percent of them are likely to become alcoholics. 40 percent! I can’t remember the exact numbers of the study, but if they simply wait until something like the age of 19, the number drops precipitously—it drops to something like 8 percent. If you compare that to other addictive things like social media and cell phones, because the addictive qualities of those things are exactly the same as alcohol, it means if kids are exposed to these things with no regulation prior to the age of 15, it means 40 percent of them are going to

grow up with addictions. Which means, 40 percent of them are going to grow up without the ability to cope with stress. Instead of turning to a person, they’ll turn to a device, or worse.

It’s a real thing. Many students are showing up in college addicted. It’s not that it’s too late, it’s that they’ve already formed habits. The habits they’ve formed are about not connecting to people but rather connecting to their device. When they’re walking from class to class and not talking, they’re on devices. When they’re feeling lonely, they’re not asking a friend for help, they’re going online for help, right? Schools, as well-intentioned as they are, aren’t helping. Allowing students to have cell phones in classrooms hurts. Allowing students to have computers in classrooms, and if you have to have a computer, allowing them open access to the Internet is absolutely ridiculous to me. Especially when there are conclusive studies that demonstrate that kids who take notes on computers absolutely capture more data, but they’re not learning how to think critically. Students who take notes on paper actually are better decision-makers later on in life because when you’re taking notes on paper, you are forced to learn which information is important, which means they become better at discerning. So why aren’t universities taking this real data and applying it to the classroom? And the drive for online learning—yes, it has value, and yes, it works alongside other learning,

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I’m not all for or against any of these things—I think many of these things are out of balance.

The advantage of a classroom is not so much what we learn, but we interact, and we ask, and we fight with each other, we debate, and we debate with our professors, and all of that—the social stuff that’s very



difficult to measure. This is the stuff of learning, relationships; it is the stuff that combats loneliness, the stuff that makes us feel safe and cared for. I'll give you one real-life scenario because I know your campus has a Corps of Cadets. My example just happens to be from the Marine Corps. For many years, the process in the Marine Corps if a marine wanted to change their death benefits, they had to fill out a form, probably in triplicate, and have their NCO sign off on that form. If the NCO saw that marine was taking their mom off their death benefits, for example, their NCO would likely look up to them and say, "What's going on?"

## At What Cost?

**IN THE NAME OF EFFICIENCY**, in the name of saving time, reducing red tape and saving money, that entire process has been digitized. Now, a marine simply logs on and goes to the appropriate page of the Marine Corps internet, and changes their death benefit—no human interaction required. The Marines also know that close to a 100 percent of Marines who commit suicide will change their death benefits within a week of committing suicide. But because we've removed the human being, we have actually removed the flags that allow us to intervene.

So, the question I raise is, "What's the cost of the money we save?" I have no argument with the desire to "make things lean and save money and blah, blah, blah..." all good pursuits, but everything, everything, comes at a cost. Everything comes at a cost, and the question that I raise is in some cases, is it worth the cost? The drive for efficiency inside a classroom begs the question, is it worth the cost? I don't think that the analysis is being done on campuses, and then my question is, "Why not?" It's the students who are suffering, not the school! The school's making money, is lean, again "blah blah blah." It's not the school that is suffering, it's the students, it's the students!

I hope at least some universities start asking the question: "In our drive to make money or save money, or whichever one it is, our drive for efficiency in learning and on-line classes and all of these things, are we considering the costs?" The costs are the fact that universities are dealing with students taking leaves of absence due to depression at rates never seen before in history, the result is a rise of suicide among this generation, the result is a rise in the number of mass homicides committed by this generation. In the 1960s, there was one school shooting. In the 1980s, there were 27. In the 1990s, there were 58. In the past decade we've had over 120, and 70 percent of them were perpetrated by kids born after the year 1980. Why isn't someone saying, "Hello? There's a there, there."

Of course, these are not causal relationships, but there's definitely a correlation. Do you know which demographic has the highest rate of increased suicide right now? Girls, 10–15 years old! The number of girls 10–15 years old who killed themselves has tripled in the past 15 years. Girls 10–15 years old spend 40 percent more time on social media than boys. Again, it's not a causal relationship, but there's a correlation. And it's these children, with whom we are not intervening or labeling with addiction. And, the ones who don't kill themselves but are still subject to the same stresses

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and strains, and trying to keep up and be popular with how many "likes" they get, they're entering high school and then university.

That's your student pool. Not everybody who goes through that is going to kill themselves; clearly, the actual number is still quite low, thank goodness. But that it's tripled in the past 15 years is very scary. Many students are showing up in university without the skill set to deal with stress, or their sense of self-worth is excessively aligned to extrinsic reward or extrinsic recognition. We all have it to some degree, and again, I am very, very careful about reminding people that I'm not for or against social media. I think it's fine, I think cell phones are great, but it's about balance. Drinking alcohol is fine, drinking too much is dangerous. Gambling is fun, gambling too much is dangerous. It's just a question of balance. It's the same with universities. It's not that online learning or computers in classrooms are bad; it's just, where is the balance? Have we tipped the scales too far?

**Shushok:** *Whew. That's a lot to consider. I want to shift our conversation slightly. Many of our readers are*

*in the “trenches,” so to speak, on campuses. They are in the classroom, working in residence halls, developing policies, raising money, among other important tasks. As you think about ways that higher education needs to change, what advice do you have for people in diverse roles who want to play a role in institutional transformation, especially related to the undergraduate experience?*

**Sinek:** So I go back to the answer I gave some moments ago—be the leader you wish you had. You may not be able to operate at scale, but you can operate. So, if you work in housing, I don’t care what level you’re at—you make sure, you make it your commitment—it becomes your job to make sure that your colleagues love coming to work, and they love and they feel loved, and they go home at the end of the day fulfilled, and feel like someone’s got their back. You make that your job!

**Shushok:** *Well, that’s a very empowering perspective for anyone, isn’t it?*

**Sinek:** Yes, absolutely, and what we find is that the tail *can* wag the dog. One small group in housing, and another small group in facilities, and another small group wherever, what you find is if you get a critical mass, actually the entire organization changes, with or without senior leadership being on board. I’ve seen it done; it’s incredible.

Now, the problem is I don’t know when. I don’t know. How long does it take to get into shape? How long does it take for exercise to work? How long does it take to get healthy once you start eating healthy? The answer is I don’t know. It’s a practice; you have to come to it, like brushing your teeth. If you commit to it every single day, I promise you, I promise you, I promise you, it absolutely works; I just don’t know when. And, once you get there, you can’t get lazy. You can’t eat healthy for a year and get healthy, and then start eating Big Macs every day. It doesn’t work that way. It’s a practice, such that even after you are healthy, you must maintain the practice.

**Shushok:** *Is there anything additionally you’d like to tell my colleagues working in the “trenches” of American college and universities?*

**Sinek:** You know, I think we could all stand to do a bit better taking care of each other. There’s an entire section in any book shop called “Self Help,” but there’s no section in the book shop called “Help Others.” We’re all so preoccupied with ourselves. “How can I lose 10 pounds? How can I find the job of my dreams? How can I find love?” We’ve forgotten that we’re social animals, and our very happiness is dependent on the love that we give and the love we receive from others. I would like to see books written that say, “How can I help my best friend find love? How can I help someone I care

about find a career that fulfills them? How can I help somebody near me live a healthy lifestyle?”

I think we need more service; we’ve become a pretty self-indulgent, self-involved population. It’s not a coincidence that the more self-focused we are, the less happy we get, and for someone who, like everybody else, would like to be happy and wants to be happy, I have learned that joy is different from happiness. You get happy when you get a bonus. You get happy when you pass the test or win the game, but those feelings don’t last. Deep feelings of joy and fulfillment come from service, which isn’t always easy and isn’t always

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happy. But my goodness, it’s the most wonderful thing in the world. It’s like raising a child—raising a child is hard work; sometimes you don’t like it. You may not like them every day, but you love them every day. That’s the difference between happiness and joy. We pursue happiness, but what we should be pursuing are really, really deep feelings of joy. That comes entirely from the relationships that we devote ourselves to and maintain.

**Shushok:** *Your most recent book, Together is Better: A Little Book of Inspiration, is much different than your two previous books. Could you share with readers what it is about, why you wrote it, and what you learned about yourself through the process?*

**Sinek:** Remember that chaos thing? I know the thing that set it off, which was I was sitting in my publisher’s office and we were talking about social media, and he asked me do I use it. I said yes, but I disobey the rules. He said, what do you mean? I said, well I’m on Twitter, but I don’t talk to anybody, and I don’t answer any questions. I simply use Twitter as a little holding ground for my random ideas, and I post them, and it turns out people read them! He asked how

many followers I have, and when I told him, he could not believe it. That made me realize while I was sitting in his office that maybe we should serve them up in a different format. I serve up my little ideas on Twitter, and we also have Notes to Inspire from our website of people who want them on a daily email. I thought it was responsible of me because I think it's important to put ideas in all media, because who am I to tell somebody that they have to choose one media over another? They should choose any media they want.

Then, I thought, wouldn't it be nice to publish a book of them I asked if he would publish a book for me, and he said yes. Now, the problem with a quote book is that they're boring, so I knew I wanted to illustrate it, but even that's boring, and random. So, what I did was I took Joseph Campbell's hero's journey, and I used it as an outline. I wrote a little story of three little kids who go across the playground looking for their vision—looking for a better life. Then, I took all of these quotes that I had (I started with many more), and I took the meaning of those quotes and plotted them on the same outline and then saw they matched up with the pictures.

My intention in writing the book was to say “thank you” because I realize my career or any success I may enjoy, it's not because of me. I'm an idiot, right?

My career is what it is because of the amazing people who surround me—some of them I know, some of them I don't know. It's people who take it upon themselves to recommend my work or use my work to help them express themselves. It's my amazing team that makes me look good, makes me look smart, makes sure I get things done. There are all these people who recognize that we are marching headstrong towards the vision of a better world, *because* of all the people.

You know, Martin Luther King didn't change the country by himself; he walked across a bridge with thousands of people with him. I think it's responsible for all of us to just acknowledge that and say “thank you.” So, if you notice, the first page of *Together is Better*, it says “to” and “from.” The book is designed to be a gift—a gift to someone you want to say “thank you” to for inspiring you or a gift you want to give to someone to inspire them. That's why I wrote *Together is Better*. It is a gift, it is an expression of gratitude.

**Shushok:** *Simon, you have been so generous with your time; that means the world, and you're just a ton of fun to talk to. You have so many provocative ideas, and I've just enjoyed it thoroughly.*

**Sinek:** Thank you for joining me and helping me to spread the message.