



## The Key to Impactful Leadership | Simon Sinek

### [00:00:00] Guest Intro – Simon Sinek

Darin: Hey everybody welcome to the show. This is Darin Olien. This is the Darin Olien Show. I am so stoked and optimistic that you will have an incredible time listening to this podcast because Simon Sinek is this insatiable optimist. He started the Optimism Company. Come on, you ready to sign up for the Optimism company? Yeah, you are. Simon has broken the internet with some of his talks. It's Ted Talk on the concept of a why giving real depth to what you are doing, specifically companies; having real vision that goes beyond just the bottom line. It reaches out beyond that and really then creates that powerful aspect of what real companies can do and what real companies can create. He's been a New York Times bestseller. Leaders Eat Last. The Infinite Game, A bit of optimism in addition, and then a couple books on the concept of why. Check out his TED Talk, check out his books. they are incredible. We are here to help other people. Self-help is all over the place. Simon really feels that in order for us to really ignite that connective tissue that give us real purpose, real positivity, real depth to our being and what we are doing is that, is being a leader and reaching out beyond ourselves and in the fabric of helping other people and I can't agree more. He's a trained ethnographer. He's fascinated by people and organizations that can make the greatest and the longest lasting impact. And that's what we need more than ever. His unconventional and innovative views on business and leadership will ignite something inside of you. Without a doubt, he's helped people in the government, the Ran corporation, US military, you name it, he's been everywhere. This guy is all about vision, purpose, asking questions and igniting different conversations so that we have different outcomes. Enjoy and learn from a different way of thinking about you, your life and what you are doing, and enjoy this amazing conversation with this amazing guy, Simon Sinek.

### [00:02:48] Podcast Intro

Darin: You are listening to The Darin Olien Show. I am Darin, and it is my life's mission to find and share healthy and sustainable ways of living. In this podcast, I talk to inspiring people and professionals from around the world to uncover ways that we, as humans can improve our lifestyles, strengthen our mindsets and take better care of this beautiful planet we call home. If you are looking for motivation to take the next steps towards a happier, healthier life then you are in the right place. And I am stoked that you are here. So, let's do this. This is my show, The Darin Olien Show.

### [00:03:31] Interview Commences

Darin: Welcome man, I am super stoked to talk with you and man, Simon, you have been busy. I was trying to prepare for this conversation. It's like there's 1,001 questions and rabbit holes to go down, but what I really love just to shout out to the optimism company, just that creation alone and then the works behind it. I just want to give a clap right now. So,

Simon: Ah, thank you very much.



Darin: Let's just jump into that. So the part of the maturation of your work and it pretty clear the mission of helping people rather than almost the overconsumption of self-help. So the framework of your own company, just gimme a second on that and how you are looking to move that needle.

Simon: Yeah, so there's an entire section in the bookshop called Self-help, but there's no section in the bookshop called help Others. And I think that's the thing we are missing since the 1970s when the self-help industry began. It's done very well for itself. And the question is, it has taught us a skill but it's also teaching us to be preoccupied with ourselves. And I think as social animals one of the things we have forgotten is we also need to learn to help each other. And if you look at some of the challenge that plague us today, whether it's disengagement at work or loneliness at home or struggle to find the job we love or find the relationship that we love, all of those things, the antidote to all of those things is another human being. And our ability to help somebody else find the thing that they are looking for actually gives us the thing we are looking for. And I am living proof of that. It's when I learned the value of service, everything that I wanted to feel, everything that I wanted to achieve started to fall in place only when I learned to serve others first.

Darin: Yeah, that's beautiful and just unpacking that a little bit, that idea that ethnographer, I am curious like a step back from that because 2009 you have this Ted talk that blows up. You have the children's talk, like it seems like every major talk, you are hitting a pulse point on what people want to hear, need to hear. For you in exercising, leaning into this, how did you get to this point and what was the impetus for you trying to figure some of this out or why you started leaning into this?

Simon: Well, my work is semi biographical, which is I am dealing with my own challenges and finding solutions to those challenges. And if those solutions work, I share them with my friends and if it works for them, then I realize there may be something there to share with other people. The reason I started the Optimism company was to help others learn the skills of helping others.

### **[00:06:10] Talking about the why**

Simon: because I wouldn't be where I am today if it weren't for the help of others. And so when I did start with why I was going through a period in my life where I had lost my passion for my own work, this is a theme that I think a lot of us have had and people gave me stupid advice like Do what you love. I am like, I am doing the same thing I don't love it anymore. Find your bliss, thank you. What the hell am I supposed to do with that? Like it's all perfectly true. It's just not very actionable, it's not very practical. It wasn't until a dear friend of mine came to me when I was going through this really dark period of having lost my passion and was too embarrassed to tell people that I didn't want to wake up and go to work because superficially everything was fine. Wasn't until a dear friend of mine came to me and said, something's different, something's wrong that I come clean. And lifting that weight off my



shoulders gave me the breath that I could find a solution. And the solution was I that I found was this thing called the why. I realized I knew what I did, I knew how I did it, but I couldn't tell you why I was doing it. And I became obsessed with finding my why and it restored my passion to levels I had never ever experienced before.

Simon: So, I did what anybody would do. You share something beautiful with your friends, you read a great book, you see a great movie, you tell your friends, you got to see this movie. Why I did the same thing. I developed this little construction that I called the Golden Circle. Why? How? What? ; that's helped organize our lives and our work quite frankly. And our end companies, the reason I call it the Golden Circle is if you know the golden formula, it's this magical formula that seems to explain everything from leaves to beauty to snowflakes. And so when I realized the broad application of this magical little formula, I am like, oh my God, I have to call it Golden. But I shared it with my friends and my friends started making crazy life changes as well and it was totally organic. Friends would say, Can you come to my apartment and tell my friends about it? So you see the help others industry already be happening already back then, which is each of my friends wanted to share it with their friends. And I would show up at someone's apartment in New York City and stand in the living room and tell about this thing called "The Why" and help people find their why, for a hundred bucks on the side. And people just kept inviting me and I just kept saying yes. And before I knew it, I had an entirely different career talking about this thing called the "why", which was not in the plan. And something I embraced wholeheartedly because it brought me unbelievable joy. And it's one of the most common compliments I get, which I am grateful for, which is people tell me all the time that they use my work to help them tell others what they are trying to say. And again, I love that, I love the idea of sharing and I think we are going through a phase in our society right now where we hoard information and we hoard things because we think it gives us a leg up and we think gives us some sort of proprietary knowledge or advantage whether an individual over other employees or a company over other companies. And at the end of the day, the more we can share about the things that we have learned, not only do all ships rise in a rising tide, but also it actually makes us more valuable. It makes us more valuable cause we are the person who's willing to share and at the end of the day talk its implementation that's difficult, it's not the idea. So yeah, I am a great believer that if you find something that has value in your life, please share it with others because it might have value in theirs.

Darin: Yeah, beautifully said. I mean as I was kind of going back through, I had heard a few of your talks and I was going back through and just the breaking down and articulating that thing, the Martin Luther King effect, the Apple example, it's the very clear example that you give of like it's the what, but everyone's hyper focused on the what or the IP or the best idea. And like you said before in this golden circle idea, the why, and I just want to also thank you right now too because I've been talking about the why for a very long time, trying to articulate it in the best way I can and pass it on. But you have made it very simple and clear in that sense like, shit now I am more efficient at unpacking it and also unpacking it for myself. And then even as I was getting ready to talk with you, other projects, other shows, other things that I am doing, I am like, oh shit like it's giving me material that's deeper and has depth and has meaning. And like you have said several times you want to outlast; talk about



competition a little bit because my God, we are hyper focused on beating people, on being right on competition. I am afraid of it, I need to work harder like talk about that a little bit. How we can shift that culture?

Simon: My life and my work has been very much influenced by a philosopher named Dr. James Carse, who in the mid-1980s defined these two types of games, finite games and infinite games. Finite game is defined as known players fixed rules and it agreed upon objective. Football, baseball, if there's a winner necessarily, there have to be losers and there's always a beginning and middle and end to a finite game.

### **[00:10:52] Eliminate the idea of competitors**

Simon: Then you have infinite games. Infinite games are defined as known and unknown players, which means you don't necessarily know who all the other players are and new players can join at any time. The rules are changeable, which means every player can play however they want. And the objective is to perpetuate the game, to stay in the game as long as possible. So, we are players on infinite games every day of our lives, whether we know it or not, you can't win education, you can come in first with the finite amount of time you are at school where we agree upon the timeframes, the school year and the metrics grades, nobody wins education, nobody wins learning, nobody wins healthcare, nobody wins global politics and nobody wins business. But when you hear the language of so many people, they talk about being number one, being the best and beating their competition based on what? Based upon what agreed upon objectives, metrics or timeframes. And this is a problem because when we play with a finite mindset in an infinite game and we play to win in a game that has no finish line, there are some very predictable and consistent outcomes. The big ones are the decline of trust, the decline of cooperation, the decline of innovation. And when people become obsessed with beating their competitors in a game where there is actually no winner, there's no winning career, you can get a promotion, sure, but there's no winning career and there's no winning in business. And so beating your competition is actually based on what? Based on revenues, profit based on what? One year, five years, ten years, the lifespan of the company like what? It's all nonsense. It's all made up.

Simon: And so, we spend so much time reacting to what another player has done rather than focusing on how we can improve. And so one of the things that I've learned is to completely eliminate this idea of having competitors, which is I have no competitors in my space, none. There are other players who do what I do and some of those players do some of the things that I do better than me and those players are my worthy rivals. And it is better to respect and study your worthy rivals because their strengths reveal to you your weaknesses. And if you can have your weaknesses reveal to you, that means you can work on your weaknesses. Because ultimately as individuals or organizations, we are in a state of constant improvement. That's all we are trying to do is be better today than we were yesterday, be better tomorrow than we were today that's all this game is. Whether it's your life, your relationships, your business, whatever it is, it's a game of constant improvement. And so to obsess about beating your competition actually takes us away from constant improvement because it might make us do something short term or it might make us do



something expedient because it gives us a short term leg up or use cheaper ingredients or trick somebody or you know, because it can drive revenues. And all that does is weaken our own organization that's all it does. That's all it does and so I don't think of competitors at all. I think of worthy arrivals and by the way, worthy rivals can change. I get to pick who they are and I get to pick the reasons that they are my worthy rivals and I am in a state of constant improvement thanks to them. And sometimes it's something small and sometimes it's something big. But I am grateful to all those who do similar things to me because it makes me a better player.

Darin: Yeah, so important and I am listening to you and I am like man, I don't know of many companies or many individuals frankly that are playing infinitely and most of which are playing finitely and where it lies the right and the wrong and the good and the bad and the politics and this and that and it stays in that same place. I promise this, I do this, I do this, I promise that. Like it's just mind boggling. And I don't want to be flippant in saying this, but is it as easy as saying if someone's not willing to look at themselves and look at their company objectively, and I know they are, it's an organization, but yet we are a complex organization too. The ego or the preservation of the perceived, this is who I am, this is what we do, blah blah blah, keeps us from that healthy inclusion of other information, healthy rivals, et cetera, et cetera. And maybe does it come down to not having that why and having that bigger just cause?

Simon: I mean the simple answer is yes. People come up to me all the time and say, but Simon, you have to understand we are the best and we are number one. And I always say the same thing for now, for now none of this lasts. And that's why constant improvement matters. What was very interesting when Covid struck in the beginning of Covid, people asked me, you know, did this destroy your idea set? And it did the opposite. It reinforced it. When Covid struck not a single organization on the planet, A total of zero was trying to beat their competitors. Nobody was studying their competitors, nobody was obsessed with their competitors. Not a single company was worried about beating their competition. Every single one of them was obsessed with staying alive. And it proves that you can run a successful organization without focusing on what somebody else is doing or obsessing with trying to beat them. You can worry about what they are doing to learn from them. And that survival mentality is actually the correct mentality to use In good times or hard times. In hard times we have to make sure that we will continue to exist. Well in good times we have to say to ourselves, we have to make sure we will continue to exist. And that might make some of the choices that we make very different than the ones we would make when we think that we had the best year ever. Let's distribute all the money to everybody immediately and leave the bank account dry. Well what about next year? But we are deciding that we want to continue to exist forever. It just makes us a little more cautious and not in a bad way. I am a great believer in risk taking. I am a great believer in innovation, I am a great believer in breaking things. But when you have stable foundation in the quality of your culture, the will of your people and the resources you have in the bank, you are better equipped to take risk. Because risk inherently requires failure. That whole idea of innovation and is experimentation and the definition of experimentation is trial and error, you have to fail to succeed. And I think people forget this, the year that Babe Ruth broke the record for home



runs is the exact same year that he broke the record for strikeouts. If you want to hit home runs, you got to strike out, that's just how it works. And the question is, are you prepared for the strikeouts? Not just excited about the home runs.

Darin: You got to swing, I think of a friend of mine who's currently now in the last six years got the largest alternative to single use plastic on the planet. He has its innovation material science company only six years ago and he told me several times he's an engineer and he said, I want to eliminate single use plastic from the planet. And no mechanisms existed to produce alternatives to plastic other than just the mechanisms to produce plastic because it's so good at its job and it's so freaking cheap. But he's set out to do it and now he's just on a rocket ship, nine of the top 10 CPG companies on the planet are now signing on because he's created an industry that didn't exist for these kind of things. And the thing that stood out to me that now makes more sense and what you just said and that that is we create an engineering team so that when they fail they know how to take the notes and take all of the learnings from the failures and then exercise that in the next step.

Simon: Correct and they are not failures, they are falls because you get back up from a fall failure, we would like to avoid but falls. And I think where the danger lies and this story of an innovator who's coming up with something that can profoundly improve the quality of our lives is not new. Unfortunately the story that is also not new is once they succeed, they become very protective of their position. So, as you said, nine out of the 10 big CPG companies have signed on and so he's going to make a ton of money, he is going to become the bill of the ball. And the question is now will he become defensive and worry about other people chipping away at his market chair? And the reality is, and this is why I love the infinite game, is multiple organizations can be wildly successful selling the same thing at the same time. What does it mean to be number one? Is that important for him that more companies do business with him than anybody else? Or is his priority that more companies switch to plastic alternatives than anything else? And I've seen this pattern before. Well they abandon the founding cause because money shows up and money becomes very addictive and then you start getting investors involved who start demanding, I want more money this year than I got last year. So you better make these decisions so that I get more money, I don't care. Yeah, yeah, yeah, your mission's beautiful. I wish him all the success, but the real challenge to his ability to maintain an infinite mindset is not his ability to launch the technology, it's his ability to maintain that infinite mindset once he's successful.

Darin: That's right, I've been involved in the other companies, I've created some products in the nutrition space where they were kind of first to market and then the innovation stopped and it was not my control because I was hired by them. And then now all of a sudden you see competition comes in and the ethos of how and why, it's like they gave me the keys to the castle, do this and just let me worry about selling it. I am jumping both sides because I also think individuals, because not everyone, there's a lot of entrepreneurs out there and there's individuals, but I also think of people working really hard at companies that they don't have the reasons, they don't have the depth, they don't have the why, but they are smart.



Because I am like, the fabric of society is crazy right now. And without that reason, without that why that you are talking about, it's scary to me.

Simon: I get this question a lot. You know, I work in a company and my boss doesn't get it, what do I do? Or the company is finite minded and only cares about short-term results. What do I do? I get this question a lot. The answer is, is that you live with an infinite mindset, then you show up to work every day and you make sure that your colleagues and coworkers, which includes people up the chain of command.

### **[00:20:38] What is leadership really?**

Simon: And down the chain of command, that you can worry about your boss too they are human beings. And you say things like, Are you okay? How are you? A friend of mine who's a Marine Corps general, he says his test for leadership, when you ask somebody how they are doing, you actually care about the answer. And every one of us can choose to be the leaders we wish we had. And so you can live with an infinite mindset and operate in an infinite way without being the leader or the founder or the boss. You can be a cognitive machine and you can come to work with a sense of service and cause that you are trying to advance, that you can do at work, that you want to go to work or you want to come home at the end of the day with the knowledge that the people who with whom you work are going home feeling inspired, safe and fulfilled. And you can contribute to that and the irony is not only will you enjoy work more, but usually the work product improves and then leadership tends to either leave you alone or say what are you doing? But you are also gaining a skill set and those around you are gaining a skill set and eventually the tail wags the dog, which is all those people eventually promote out of your group and they end up infecting the rest of the company. And before you know that terrible leader has moved on, that finite minded leaders moved on. And it's now you're thinking in that way of that service mindedness that is infected the whole company. And like I said, the infinite game is about creating organizations that outlast us and so we can outlast any leader as well if we choose to play with an infinite mindset.

Darin: Yeah, and just for everyone listening, the infinite game is the book that we are referring to a lot here and there's so many different little nuances here that are so powerful and let's kind of talk about leadership a little bit because, I think of that as leading your life, leading your family, also leading your organizations. And you had this one little simple thing like listen, a leader is anyone who's being followed in some form or fashion, right? I heard you say that and it makes all sense. So talk about the difference between being in charge of someone, like everyone said, Oh, I am a leader, I am in charge of all these people, but the nuances of what that actually means.

Simon: Yeah, leadership is one of the most misunderstood ideas I think in our lives. Leadership has nothing to do with being in charge. Leadership is about taking care of those in our charge and the definition of leadership is the awesome responsibility to see those around us rise. So, if you are a parent, you want to see your kids rise, you know, if you are a



friend, you want to see your friends rise. If you work in a company, you want to see your colleagues or subordinates rise. We confuse leadership with hierarchy and rank. And I know many people who sit at the highest levels of organizations who are not leaders we do is they tell us because they have authority over us, but we don't follow them. The choice to follow is just that. It's a choice I'll do is you tell me but I don't follow you, there is a difference. Many of us have left jobs to follow our boss to a new job. we have done that, that's followership. And so when we say, you know, leader is anybody who's somebody who follows you, they have made the choice to follow you. A leader is anyone who, where others have made the choice to follow you, not because you have authority over them. That's not followership, that's just rank. And the most important thing is leadership does not come with rank. I know many people who are junior in companies who've made the choice to look after the person to left them and the person to the right of them. We would follow them anywhere. So every single one of us has the opportunity to be the leader we wish we had regardless of where we are in the organization. We can choose to lead our families as well. We can choose to lead our friends, we can choose to be there in service. And the great irony of leadership is the best leaders are actually the best followers because they always see themselves in service to something greater. Even the pope is not the top. He follows something even higher. And that's the point, which is the best leaders, whether it's a vision or an inspiring leader or a cause, they see themselves in service to something even greater than themselves, even if they achieved the highest rank.

#### **[00:24:32] Habits of Waste Ad**

Darin: You know, I get comments from listeners all the time and they say things like, 'Hey, I want to help save the planet but I just don't know where to start'.

Here's the thing, take personal responsibility for your impact on yourself - which also has a powerful impact on the environment. That's why I do these Fatal Conveniences all the time. Big changes really do start with small steps. When we do better things for us, it has positive downstream effects, as opposed to many of the things that we are doing now that have negative downstream effects. That's why I love companies like Habits of Waste. They want to increase the number of imperfect environmentalists by educating everyone on ways that we can truly make a difference in the steps that we are making. Habits of Waste's main goal is to get to the core of environmental problems using easy and engaging methods that we can easily get behind. They were the geniuses behind 'Cut Out Cutlery' that led to the state of California's new law that helped reduce that single-use plastic. They also were behind the 'Eight Meals Campaign', which challenged meat eaters to just slow down a bit and set goals of eating eight plant-based meals a week, that's it. That equates to 40% less animal products per week. Because if a family of 4 ate 8 meals every week, it's the equivalent to driving a hybrid car for a year to find out more of how you can get involved with campaigns that not only help you but help the climate and make this earth just a better place. We can check them out at [www.habitsofwaste.org](http://www.habitsofwaste.org). They offer daily and weekly challenges for everyone to turn intention into action and integrate a better healthier life and a better healthier planet.

#### **[00:27:03] Interview continued**





Darin: I studied Carl Rogers back in the day, active listening, active caring. Like when you are just sitting across from someone, they don't actually don't have to say anything other than one question. How are you and genuinely care? You have a great example of that. I don't know how far back that goes, but I am sure you have plenty more now. But that barista that told you that he loved his work because all management, he felt a part of it. They cared about him and what the hell happened where all of a sudden, we didn't care about our fellow human. It just seems the most common sensical thing to do is to have empathy and care about someone in your organization doing something with any sort of meeting. What the hell happened?

### **[00:27:58] Service over self-preservation**

Simon: This is a simple answer, I think. Well, let me tell the story about the barista because it's a nice story. So, I was on a business trip in Las Vegas and the client very generously put me up at the Four Seasons and they happened to have a coffee bar in the lobby at the Four Seasons in Las Vegas. And so, one afternoon I went and bought myself a cup of coffee and the barista working that day was a kid named Noah. And Noah was funny and charming and engaging and I stood there for far too long buying a cup of coffee because I just enjoyed talking to Noah. And as is my nature, I asked Noah, do you like your job? And without skipping a beat, Noah said, I love my job. Now in my line of work that's significant like is rational, I like the work, I like the people, I like the challenge, I make good money, I like my job; love is emotional. It's a higher order connection like do you love your wife? I like her a lot, it's not the same thing. And when I asked Noah, do you like your job? And he said, I love my job, my ears perked up. This kid has a higher order connection to his work. So immediately I followed up and said, can you tell me specifically what the Four Seasons is doing that you would say to me that you love your job? And without skipping a beat, Noah said, Throughout the day, managers will walk past me and ask me if there's anything that I need, anything that they can do to help me do my job better, not just my manager, any manager. And then he said, I also work in another hotel and there the managers walk past me and catch me when I am doing something wrong or they are just trying to drive our performance. He says there, I like to keep my head below the radar. I just want to get through the day and collect my paycheck. Only at the Four Seasons he said, do I feel I can be myself. Now this is the exact same human being and yet our experience of him will be profoundly different not because of him but because of the leadership environment in which he works. And we are always so quick to blame the person, but I always say, well where are they working? This is the exact same human being. And the fact of the matter is at the other hotel they were way more concerned with performance. And so, when you ask you a question, why have we given up on empathy and why have we given up on service? It's because our incentive structures at work have been all predominantly based on individual performance and we have set up structures in our companies. Whereas how do you advance yourself, not how do we advance the organization or how do we advance the team?

Simon: And so, one of the things that we celebrate the greatest generation for and the reason we probably call them the greatest generation, is not just that they defeated fascism and Hitler, but it's that they were united in common cause they came together in remarkable,



remarkable ways and it was that love and comradery that we envy and want back. And so, I think that over the eighties and nineties, the rise of Jack Welch and GE and sort of short-termism, we have done great damage not just to our businesses and our economy, but we have done great damage to our relationships and to each other because we have created incentive structure that actually incentivizes to be less human. We have seen it bleed over outside of business. We see it in politics now. Politicians are now way more preoccupied and this is the left and the right. I don't care, they are all crap. They are now way more preoccupied with winning their own elections or keeping their party in power than they are serving the nation. They all talk about serving the nation, but in reality, we know we are not idiots like we are highly attuned social animals. We can tell the difference and we see it. Our founding fathers never intended for professional politicians. The intention was you leave the farm, you leave your law firm, you come serve your country for a few years and then you go back to your farm and you go back to your law firm, whatever it is. But we now have professional politicians that have been in office for 30 years. We now have a professional class of politician. And that was never the intention.

Simon: The idea was service, not self-preservation. Because like anyone who's been in a job for 30 years, you are deathly afraid of not having that job anymore. And when you are deathly afraid of not having that job anymore, you will do anything to keep it. I had a very uncomfortable conversation with a congressman a bunch of years back, uncomfortable for them, not for me. We are in a closed-door session was just me and them, no aids, no staffers, no nothing. And I said, you know what your problem is? Is how I started the conversation. I say, You guys are so preoccupied with winning your elections that you won't sacrifice your job for this country. I said, I know people who wear a uniform who would sacrifice their lives for this nation and you won't even sacrifice your job for this nation. And I said and besides, if you did lose your election, you are going to become some lobbyist and make more money than you have ever dreamed of. So, whether you lose your election or win your election, what exactly are you losing? You either have power or you will have money, take your pick. And then I think that's largely the problem, which is true service for those who choose to lead us. It comes with a social contract. And this by the way, is not me just spouting idealism. This is deeply, deeply grounded in our anthropology, in our biology because there's an anthropological reason, we have leaders. It's not just an accident, if you go back to the origins of humankind for thousands and thousands of years, tens of thousands of years, we lived in populations that were never larger than about 150 people. That's how big a tribe generally was. And we, it's called Dunbar's number and that we cannot maintain more than about 150 close relationships. That's historical and that's still true to this day. And for good reason, we don't have enough time to have that many relationships and we can't remember everybody. That's why it's about 150. Some journalists did some experiment when the internet started to show up on Facebook and they went through all of their 800 Facebook friends. And the question is, do you know who everybody is? And the A, they didn't know who everybody was or if they reached out to everybody, the people didn't necessarily know who they were. The number where you all kind of knew each other netted out at about 150. So, we cannot maintain more than about 150 close relationships, right? And again, that is historically based because we lived in these tribes that are about 150 big. We didn't start farming until about 10 or 12,000 years ago. That's when we could maintain



bigger populations. Anyway, I digress. If we are living in these populations of about 150 in a tribe, there are some very practical considerations which is we have to cooperate because otherwise we are going to die these the safer two tigers and things.

Simon: And in these auste times, somebody brings food back to the tribe, we are all hungry and we all rush in to eat. Now if you are lucky enough to be built like a football player, you can shove your way to the front of the line. But if you are the artist of the family, you are going to get an elbow in the face. This is a very bad system for cooperation because if you punch me in the face this afternoon, the odds are I am not going to wake you and alert you to danger tonight. Bad system. So, we evolved into hierarchical animals where we are constantly assessing and judging each other on who we are based on the social hierarchies, the social picking orders. And it's different for different populations. So, if you are a scientist, that's how many papers have you published? If you are an athlete, it's how many medals have you won? And we are constantly assessing and judging each other. And if you are in an organization that is a formal hierarchy that tells us who's above us and who's below us. If I am a peon and you are an executive vice president, I will hold the door open for you. And that's the point we are constantly assessing and judging who's alpha, who's above us in the social hierarchy. And when we assess that someone is alpha, we evolve to voluntarily step back and allow our alphas to eat first. So, our alphas get first choice of meat and first choice of meat. And though I may not get to eat first, I am guaranteed to get food and I don't get an elbow in the face. Good system. And this persists to this day. There's not a single one of us that is morally offended to giving our alphas preferential treatment. Absolutely none, I can prove it. Not a single person is morally outraged that somebody more senior than you in the company makes their highest salary. No one is outraged by that. We may think they are an idiot, but the fact that they have a slightly bigger office than us or a better parking space, outrages no one. However, we do not give our alphas these perks for free and there are perks. Remember if I am senior and I left my jacket in the other room, someone will get my jacket for me. If I am junior and I left my jacket in the other room, I get my own jacket like that's how it works. There are definitely perks that include money and prestige that come with being alpha, which is why we all want the promotion. We all want to move up in the social hierarchy because it comes with huge benefits. But those benefits do not come for free. There's a deep, deep seated social contract that when danger threatens the tribe, it's the person who's actually stronger, actually smarter, actually better fed, actually better taken care of, that will rush towards the danger to protect us. That's why we gave you first choice of meat because we want to keep your gene in the gene pool. we are not idiots. We don't get those perks away for free. And when that deep seated social contract is violated, that's when we have moral outrage. We are not morally outraged by a leader of a company making more money than us. We are morally outraged When the company misses its numbers, its arbitrary numbers, that leader would soon sacrifice their people than sacrifice their bonus that they would announce layoffs to meet the arbitrary projections rather than give up their bonus. That's where the moral outrage comes from. And quite frankly, we should have moral outrage to a politicians or business people that would soon as sacrifice our interests so they can preserve their benefits. Because that is absolutely the violation of what it means to be a leader. You can absolutely enjoy the perks that are given to you. I am not saying you have to live like a pawper, you can absolutely enjoy the perks, but those perks come at a cost. And



that cost is sometimes self-interest and self-sacrifice. And that is the tradition definition of leaders. And the leaders that we love are the ones that are willing to do that.

Darin: I think of very few people that fit in that category that are running significant companies. I am astonished that and I self-sacrifice agree with you. Like I understand I can get my head around, I can intuit, I can feel, I can understand that social hierarchy of course. And then when that violation happens in front of our face, the collapse of this and bail out of Sally Mae, all of that stuff. And it goes on and on and on every day. And this person does that, and that person does this. And it's happening more and more all the time, right? And in some apathetic way we are just kind of accepting it. But at the same time, I don't know about you, there's a bubbling, there is a boiling point, there is a line in the sand for a lot of people and I think the last few years certainly has poured, I will call it nitro oxide on the flame.

### **[00:38:10] Justified moral outrage**

Simon: My concern is that there is moral outrage because we have been living in a society and this is not a new thing. This has been going on since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Since the Soviet Union collapse, we have seen a tremendous rise in finite minded thinking, selfish behaviors. Jack Welch, who I've devoted my entire career to undo everything that that man did. The former CEO of GE who popularized mass layoffs, who popularized shareholder supremacy, who popularized rank and yank. And all these stupid ideas that don't actually benefit the companies or their employees or their customers over the long term and have done tremendous damage to our economy by the way, which I am resisting the urge to digress, that we have been raised in this way of doing business to the point where we are. There is tremendous moral outrage and unfortunately there are politicians on both sides of the aisle that are leveraging our moral outrage for their self-benefit, which I find ironic and further disgusting. And again, I blame both sides. I see it happening on both sides, which is the attempt to leverage moral outrage quite rightfully place moral outrage from years and years and years of good hardworking people sort of being forced to pay the price so that some small group of people can protect their perks. And that moral outrage has been bubbling up. We see it in populous movements on the left and the right. And like I said, the sad part is because there is no effective leader right now, we don't have a Martin Luther King right now. We don't have a leader of the movement that is putting it into words that helps us understand what our moral outrage is and how we can fix it. All we know is that we are angry. That's all we know. It's very hard for us to understand why we are angry.

Simon: And so, a skilled politician on either side of the aisle who's able to channel our moral outrage against the other side, not for their cause, not for that's leadership to fight for something, but against that our moral outrage is channeled against someone or something. We live in a nation right now where both parties accuse the other of treason and being traitors, are you kidding me? We all love our country. We disagree on how the country should run. We should disagree on are how to advance the country. But we are now at the point where we accuse each other of being traitors just because we have a different political opinion. What is happening to us? I think we need to start holding our politicians accountable for misusing our moral outrage. And we have to start looking internally and saying, oh my



God, I am a part of the problem. I am the one who refuses to talk to my uncle at Thanksgiving. I am the one who, when somebody has a different political opinion, I get angry and start yelling or throwing things and screaming at the television. I am part of this problem. You raise the point at the very beginning like how hard it is to look inside and say, Oh my God, that's me. And I think the solution in this nation doesn't come from demanding that the other side fix it. It comes from us looking internally saying, I fix it, I will lead. That's what it means to lead. I will go first. Leadership doesn't mean you have the highest rank; it means you took the risk to go first. It doesn't matter who goes first. What matters is whoever goes first is the leader. And to say to ourselves, to our families, to our friends, we are part of the problem. Until we can learn to listen, we can learn to understand, we can learn that someone else should feel seen or heard or understood. We will never fix the problem. But again, we have moral outrage at that. It shouldn't be for me to listen to them. They should listen to me. Well good luck with that because that's not going to accomplish anything because no one's going to listen. And so, leadership is the very, very, very hard work of stepping into discomfort, of taking the lead, of doing the thing that has to be done that no one else is doing. And taking accountability and responsibility that I am part of this because I am part of this fabric of this society, which means that my opinions and the way I talk to my friends and the way I talk to my children are part of this. And the moral outrage at another group. Let's reserve that for our real enemies who exist outside our borders, but the moral outrage at each other. Ah man, there's no place for it. We will rip each other to shreds. Both sides are accusing each other of destroying the democracy. And the irony is it's because the both sides accuse each other of destroying the democracy that our democracy is being destroyed.

Darin: And it's so much of that if you change, if you do this, we are good or the country's good or I am good. If you didn't do that, I would be better. It's that whole thing of that lack of allowing the world to mirror to you. Where are you a tyrant? Where are you separated, where are you judging? All of that stuff. That's the hard work, Simon like that's hard work for people.

Simon: It is very hard work and then it goes right back to the beginning of why I started the optimism company, which is an organization dedicated to teaching and fostering the skills of leadership. Why? Because I want people to learn the skills of service, of taking care of each other. I want to build the help others industry. That's why I founded the company because we lack those skills and we lack the courage to say, shit I am a part of the problem. It's much easier to say, you are the problem. It's really hard to say, I am the problem, or at least I am a part of it. And then we can't help but do that without adding a but statement like I am a part of the problem, but so are you. No, no, no, no, but no, but I am a part of the problem done. By the way, if you are married and in a long-term relationship, good luck with always accusing your partner of being the problem and good luck saying, but when you take responsibility, you got to take some responsibility and you got to learn to grow inside the relationship as an individual if you want the relationship to thrive. Well, we are in a relationship with each other in society. That's what a society is and it's either a polite society or it's an aggressive society. And I would rather live with people that I profoundly disagree with but can have a conversation with them than people that I profoundly or mildly disagree



with it. We can't listen to each other at all. I have a close friend who we have very, very different political opinions, diametrically opposed. And we didn't know this about each other when we first met. We learned about this in the relationship and at one point we were talking about some subject, and I know I thought it, but I think I actually said, how can you be so stupid? And she stopped and said, you just called your friend stupid. And I realized, what have I done?

Simon: I am judging, I have replaced my curiosity with judgment and what I need to do is replace my judgment with curiosity. And I took a step back and said, you are right. And instead of telling her that she was wrong and giving her the list of arguments as to why she was wrong, so I could prove her wrong or I could be right, instead I learned to listen and I learned to ask questions and I learned to be curious about her points of view and why she has those points of view. And the more I listen, I could always find something that we go agreed on always. And as soon as I was able to find the thing that we agreed on, she became more open to my point of view. And I am very, very proud of our friendship and so is she. Because we are living proof that you can be literally polar opposites of a political spectrum and have love for the other person. And I have deep love for her and I know that she would be there for me no matter what because there are things that matter more than my political opinions. And there are things that matter more than her political opinions, which is, is she a good friend? Does she share my values? Will she be there for me when I really need it? Will I be there for her when she really needs it? And the answer in all of those is yes, a resounding yes. Like this is not impossible, it just requires hard work and a lot of discomfort.

Darin: The thing that is obvious in you are saying that the values of that friendship, the values of that person, like going through all of that stuff, number one, you are exercising the medicine that you are also preaching in terms of what we need to do. And that is every time very difficult to stop and own that stuff. But I agree with you like through that the richness of life and connectedness, vulnerability and connection deepen. So, hats off and I am glad that you are doing that because you are seeing the value to be able to exercise the optimism company and all of these things because I am in any way I can help. I love this subject matter. I've had to pull back on the values getting all messed up with the politics and the rights and the wrongs and all of those things. And I too have a handful of friends that I just realized and discovered they have completely different views and we are still friends.

### **[00:46:43] Replace judgement with curiosity**

Simon: That's just the thing like I don't want to have a friendship where I have to walk on eggshells or avoid landmines that I think is false, which is you maintain these friendships. So as long as you don't go into like you can come over to my house as long as That's you don't go into that half of the house, like that's not a warm and welcoming home. And I would rather have a friendship where we learn to navigate those things and we learn to listen to each other and hear each other. And we can still come out of the other side disagreeing, but we don't lose respect. I would rather that we learn, like I said, replace judgment with curiosity to find out where that comes from. Like how would they raise where it comes from, like what it



means to them. Let them empty their buckets, learn these three phrases. Go on, tell me more. What else? And that's part of the trick to good listening. And you are not waiting for your turn to speak. you are genuinely trying to understand and you don't have to agree, but you do have to hold space and the ability to learn that magical skill, it makes those friendships even deeper because you recognize that we can disagree and yet we can still talk about those disagreements and still have deep love for each other and still hug each other. At the end of the day. It's very, very difficult to say to ourselves, I suck at this. I am part of the problem. Like that level of accountability is really hard. And that's part of it, which is nobody wants to admit that level of vulnerability that we are part of the problem. It's much easier to accuse the other side of being a part of the problem. And sometimes those people are our friends. I read a statistic the other day that the majority of the America doesn't want to date somebody who voted for the other political candidate that they voted for. And I was like, that's where we are right now. I don't even want to talk; I don't even want to go on date with you. I don't even want to date with you if you voted for something different, someone different. Now the odds are that if somebody voted for something different, if they are deeply, deeply ingrained in that ideology, you probably won't have the foundation for a relationship. But we don't actually know why people vote. Not everybody who votes for one candidate versus another is a deep ideolog. Sometimes they just voting for party because they are lazy or sometimes, they just don't like the other candidate more than they, you know, we vote for the lesser of T evil sometimes or sometimes they are just fed up with something or sometimes it's a protest vote. Like we don't know why people, that's what we have to go find out. But I was just really saddened by the fact that I won't even go on a date with someone that who voted like, at least go on the date. It doesn't matter and that's where we are. And like I said, I think we as individuals in this nation have a lot of work to do. And I am optimistic by the way, I am optimistic. People like me shouldn't have a career like it's embarrassing that I have a career. I talk about trust and cooperation. There should be no demand for my work. But the fact that people want to watch my videos or read my books or come take a class at the optimism company, the fact that that is happening is proof that people are looking for these skills, they are hungry for these ideas. And that makes me really optimistic that people are interested in our work. That means we are hungry for it. The fact that there's demand makes me very, very optimistic.

Darin: What are you the most optimistic about right now?

Simon: I am optimistic that we will be the phoenix from the ashes that we will emerge and I think we are in for a few more years of pain. I don't think it's going to turn around quickly. I think we are relatively leaderless in our nation, where are the Martin Luther Kings, where are the vox lock hobbles? Where are the leck vales? Where are they? Where are the great orators? Where are the ones capable of not just rallying but inspiring people to come together? Remember Martin Luther King, 25% of the audience, audience who showed up on that day in front of the Lincoln Memorial. 25% of the audience was white. You have to remember that there was unification. It was Republicans, Democrats who came together for civil rights. We have to remember that it's not just the ability to rally people, it's the ability to unify people that makes great nations. And if you look at the presidents who had outsized impact, you know Ronald Reagan enjoyed cross party support and more than a lot of



presidents. JFK similarly, what we need is not somebody who's exquisite at rallying a base of which both sides of the parties are picking their leaders who best at rallying a base. But I am interested in leaders who are great at inviting the others in and telling those who believe with us. We have work to do and I am optimistic who we will get there, but I think we have a few years of pain ahead of us.

Darin: Simon, dude, come on man. Keep swinging, brother. I appreciate it and keep the optimism high and I love your work and keep picking it apart so that we can fully understand and have more of the tools. I just really grateful for you and I am more optimistic than ever. Stay connected dude, let me know what's going on and love to support in any way that I can.

Simon: Thanks Darin, I really appreciate it. Thanks for giving me a forum to share my ideas, take care of yourself and take care of each other.

Darin: Thanks brother.

#### **[00:51:10] Podcast Outro**

Darin: Thanks for tuning in to this episode of the Darin Olien Show. I hope you took something valuable away from this conversation that will help improve your life in some way. If you would like to learn more about my incredible guest, you can find all of their information in the show notes on my website. If you enjoyed this episode or even you didn't like it, please rate this podcast, the team and I value your feedback so we can continue to give you the most value possible. We want you to get the most out of every podcast. So please rate, subscribe, share - anything you feel called to do. I truly appreciate it and I love and value your support. So, thank you and I will meet you in the next episode.