

Leaders Eat Last by Shelley Levitt

Simon Sinek says leadership lies in placing others first.

Being a true leader, says Simon Sinek, author of *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't* (Penguin), isn't about being in charge, having all the answers or being the most qualified person in the room. Instead, it's about creating a "circle of safety," a culture that leads people to feel protected and free from danger inside the organization. That, in turn, allows them to focus their time and energy on protecting the organization from outside threats and on seizing big opportunities.

Here, from Sinek, are five precepts of his leadership vision.

- 1. Leaders have to accept that their responsibility is not the performance of the company but the performance of their people**, and that doesn't mean numbers but whether people are working to their greatest potential. Are they being given opportunities to try and fail and try again?
- 2. Leaders, whatever the size of their organizations, are those willing to put the interests of other people before their own.** For entrepreneurs or small-business owners, that means committing ourselves to the success of our clients and our customers and showing up every day not simply to grow our own bottom line but to help somebody else's bottom line.
- 3. Online communities function like any other community.** You can't just milk social media to tell people about your company without being willing to serve. Instead, use these platforms to offer and share information that has value to other people even if it has no direct impact on you whatsoever.
- 4. When an employee is going through a slump, don't fire them, coach them.** Consider the tech company Next Jump, which has a policy of lifetime employment. Once firing wasn't an option, more care was taken to hire the right people—evaluating not just skills and experience, but character as well. Training became much more comprehensive; peer counseling groups were formed in every part of the company, and performance evaluations became more open, honest and real. Turnover went from 40 percent—average for the industry—to 1 percent. The best leaders don't come down harder on people whose performance is lagging; they come to their aid.
- 5. Temper idealism with realism and accountability.** While we'd want all our client relationships to be long, fruitful and marked by reciprocity, the economic realities of business sometime require us to say yes to clients that we know are going to be difficult. If someone rakes you over the coals during the contract negotiations—guess what?—they're going to rake you over the coals later on, too. Treat the relationship for what it is: a short-term hit. When you've gotten what you need—better cash flow, say—politely move on. We sometimes need to take on difficult and unreasonable clients, but let's do it consciously.