With

The Split, Start With Why – Simon Sinek (2009)

The split is the moment when a company's *Why* (its founding purpose, cause, or belief) drifts apart from its *What* (the products, services, or metrics it delivers). *This often happens as a business grows and success brings layers of management, systems, and shareholders.* The founding clarity of "why we exist" gets buried under "what we sell" and "how we operate." The organization may still be profitable, but it loses its **distinctive** energy. Employees feel **less inspired**, customers feel **less loyal**, and decisions become more about short-term gains than the long-term mission.

The split is a natural risk as companies succeed and scale. Founders should watch for it especially during growth and leadership transitions. If you find yourself in split territory, the cure is to ***reassert the Why*** in everything — strategy, hiring, leadership, and storytelling — before the organization drifts too far.

Hazard Zones

Founders should be alert to the split at certain inflection points, such as:

1. **Rapid growth** — when systems, processes, and new hires start to dilute the original story.
2. **Leadership transition** — especially when founders hand over to professional managers.
3. **Investor pressure** — when financial targets overshadow purpose-driven decisions.
4. **Market success** — ironically, success itself can be dangerous, because "what we do" becomes the focus, and "why we do it" gets taken for granted.

Signs to look out for, which might suggest you're in split territory:

- ***Employees*** talk more about targets, features, or competition rather than mission.
- ***Customers*** lose sight of what makes the brand distinctively different
- ***Decisions*** are driven by efficiency or profit, not resonance with the Why.
- ***The founder*** feels like they're constantly "reminding" people of what the company is really about.

The Split, Start With Why – Cont.

What to do about it

Sinek's advice is less about prevention (the split is almost inevitable) and more about repair and re-alignment:

1. **Re-anchor in the Why**
    - Revisit and re-articulate the founding purpose.
    - Share origin stories and values with employees (why the company started, what problem it exists to solve, who it exists to serve).

2. **Put Why at the heart of strategy**
    - Ensure product, hiring, and market decisions flow from the Why.
    - Ask at every decision point: does this advance or dilute our purpose?

3. **Empower leaders who "get it"**
    - Hire and promote people who believe what you believe.
    - Ensure culture carriers are in key positions, not just high performers on paper.

4. **Communicate from the inside out**
    - Don't just market what you do, remind the world (and your team) why you do it.
    - Use storytelling that reconnects to meaning, not just metrics.

Some activities help keep the why alive:

1. Origin Story Retelling - *Purpose: Reconnect to the spark that started everything.*

- Invite the founder(s) to tell the story of why the organisation began — not the "what" or the "how," but the belief or cause.

2. Future Headlines - *Purpose: Anchor the Why in a forward story.*

- Ask: If we stay true to our Why, what headline do we want written about us in five years' time?
- Create and share headlines, then distil themes.
- Effect: Turns Why into a vivid, energising picture of the future.

3. 90 day Sprints to Purpose - *Purpose: Build accountability around purpose.*

- Each person states one priority they'll focus on in the next 90 days that aligns with the Why.
- Write these on a shared board or doc.