

These Are Not Uncertain Times: Ways to Pivot, Lead and Thrive – Simon Sinek with Dave Asprey – #740

Announcer:

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Dave Asprey:

You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey.

Today's podcast is going to be something special because our guest today is someone who I would consider and who would consider himself to be an unshakable optimist. Someone who is looking at a vision of a world that doesn't yet exist, until I'm excited about the interview, right? A world in which the vast majority of people are waking up in the morning inspired, feeling safe anywhere on the planet, and feeling fulfilled by what they do at the end of the day. And he started on his quest by asking why people find their why and how they find their why and he thinks that leaders need to eat less and that together is better, and he's looking at the finite and infinite games that we all play throughout our life. You're going to get a lot out of today's episode from that introduction.

And the guy, if you haven't guessed yet, is Simon Sinek a very well-known author, trained ethnographer and just a fascinating guy all around. And I asked him on the show now, because this is the time when his work is probably most impactful for all of us. So, listening to this episode is going to be great. Simon, welcome.

Simon Sinek:

So good to be here. Thanks for having me.

Dave:

I've actually wanted to have you on the show for about three years and I've been sort of saying Simon's one of those guys who has an unusual brain and you've got a book called *The Infinite Game*, which is what I want to talk to you about now. But I just figured because so many people are stressed, so many people are kind of caught in this whirlpool of "There's so much chaos, I don't even know what to believe anymore. If the world doesn't seem as bright as it did a year ago." What do you say to counter that or do you even counter that?

Simon:

So I think there's a difference between sort of blind positivity and optimism and I think blind positivity, though instinctively, it sounds like a good idea, is not a good idea, which is like, "Everything's fine. Everything's good. Don't overreact. Everything's fine," which you look outside the window clearly that's not the case. It's like it's raining and you're telling me it's a sunny day.

But optimism is very different. Optimism is not the denial of the current state. Optimism is the belief the future is bright and so, to be optimistic is the same as saying, "Look, we're in a dark tunnel. It's hard and I don't know how long this tunnel is, I don't know how long we're going to be in this tunnel, but I see a light at the end and I know we're going to get there and we just have to keep marching forwards together and we may even be stronger when we come out of it." And so for me, optimism is the fixation on the bright future.

Dave:

I have found that optimism as a form of self-deception is really powerful and useful.

Simon:

Oh, yeah, without a doubt. I mean, I think positivity or negativity, optimism or pessimisms are both forms of self-deception because the reality is neither is right and neither is wrong, right? It's a journey.

Dave:

Yes.

Simon:

Neither is absolute. There are good times and there are hard times and I think the pessimist sees the hard times and it becomes sort of like, "We'll never get out of this and they and they see the negative in everything. And I think the optimist, again, just as self-deceived, chooses to see the positivity. The good news is, is the research shows that a positive outlook increases your health, increases the quality of your friendships and your relationships, and at the end of the day, I would rather wake up in the morning, me personally, I'd rather wake up in the morning excited about the future than depressed about it.

Dave:

There you go. I've extended a lot. I actually think it's real that I have a great chance of living to at least 180 and I choose to believe in that future, and there's math behind it in the whole book and all that kind of stuff. I also decided that I'm going to tell myself that reincarnation is real, because it might be and if I choose to believe that and I can get my body to believe it, I'll be less fearful in my daily [inaudible 00:04:00], even if I'm totally wrong, it doesn't matter. It's just a mindset that frees me.

Simon:

Exactly. I mean, I'll give you a funny example of mindset and perception of the world. So, a friend of mine, and we work out over FaceTime together. We just, we both set up our iPads and just, we do the same workout together. That's what we do.

Dave:

That's cool.

Simon:

And we were doing a particularly difficult workout one day and in the middle of it, I said, "Hey, I've got some good news and some bad news." And she said, "Well, what's the bad news?" "So, well, the bad news is we're only halfway done." She says, "Well, what's the good news is?" Then I said, "Well, the good news is we're already halfway done." Right? And literally, it is the exact same circumstance, but depending on the perspective, one is really depressing and will make it hard to finish and the other is really exciting and everything feels downhill. So, I mean, that to me is the best example of how a mindset can affect your day.

Dave:

So, how would one go about in the middle of a pandemic where you haven't seen friends and loved ones in a while. It seems like the bar is higher to wake up and say, "Yeah, the future is only brighter." Is

there a specific tip or trick that you use, that lets you just wake up going, "Wow, there's actually a volcano outside today, like how am I going to get through that one?"

Simon:

Well, when this whole thing began and to some degree I think we've normalized, even if it's still weird and still difficult. For people who are still choosing to wipe down their groceries, it's not a panic situation anymore, now it's a routine. Like, "I've done it a million times. I know what to do. I know how to do it and I got my routine." Like you open your Amazon box and you have your routine, but at the beginning where everything felt like a panic situation like touching anything, being anywhere near anything. It's like if death was the next occurrence like that's how so many of us felt.

The thing that helped me was I thought about my grandmother who lived through the Blitz. My grandmother who lived through the Blitz, the Nazi bombing of London and the Blitz went on for, I can't remember exactly, it's like 11 weeks or something, ridiculous, and 60% of all of the homes in London were destroyed. And so, when we're at home, doing our own thing, we are completely safe and can you imagine actually never feeling safe, ever, like at any moment, your house could blow up, and you just sit there hoping it doesn't.

And my grandmother lived through this, and she went to work every day and like, there was a building there yesterday, that's not there today. And I just thought if she can get through that, we can get through this. And that really, really helped me at the beginning. It really helped me the beginning that. The mantra was "This too will end." It may be, like I said, it goes back to that dark tunnel, which is, "I don't know how long it's going to last, but this too will end. This is a difficult and temporary part of the journey."

Dave:

And it's extremely temporary because things won't continue the way they are for more than a year or two. And you can look at the history of every pandemic in the past and generally, things go back to normal after a little while. A little while, historically, but at the time, it sucked. And I hear all these comments people saying, "Oh, it's a war." Wait a minute. Watch a documentary about World War I troops and what they went through, that's a war. And you look at what we're doing, you know what? My Amazon Prime took three days, not one, but I can get all the food I need delivered to my door during a pandemic. Like this is the most luxury-laden pandemic in all of human history and this sucks, right?

Simon:

And it's for some people, it's a boogey pandemic, but for too many people, the stress is extreme. Lost income and whether the food can be delivered by Amazon or not, the question is do I have the money to buy that food? So, I-

Dave:

That is a different issue. The fact that it's possible to do that is what I'm talking about, yes.

Simon:

Yeah. No, no, for sure. And I think it sucks is I think what it nets out of.

Dave:

It does suck. And that's why I wanted to have you on now because I've been getting a lot of questions from people who are saying all right exactly what you said. Well, yeah, I know that basic services are running, which they oftentimes wouldn't in a time like this, which is great, but to avail myself of them, I kind of need a new job, right?

Simon:

Yeah.

Dave:

How do I pick my next step? What's my professional direction will be? And how do I reinvent myself because I was a server at a restaurant and it looks like half of restaurants won't exist at the end of this because of our amazing government decisions.

Simon:

Yeah.

Dave:

So, how would you talk to someone who, like me I've worked at Baskin Robbins scooping ice cream. I mean, if that was my job when this thing hit, I don't know what I would do either. How do you tell someone to reinvent themselves because you're a pro at that?

Simon:

So, I think crisis is the great revealer, right? In an instant, we discovered which companies had strong cultures and which company had weak cultures, because you could see how the companies keep the people came together or they fractured and it was every man for themselves. And I think it also revealed a lot about bloating in a lot of industries, if I'm honest. It's kind of like insurance, which is like nobody expects their house to burn down, but we all have insurance, just in case it does. We don't want to lose everything, but we have a backup plan just in case of the most horrible thing happening.

And I think, so if you look at for example, I was talking to an actor friend of mine and I live in New York City and there are a lot of actors and you start to look at them and so many of them have never had a real acting job in four years and there's this weird sense of pride that goes with being the starving artist. "I'm a server and I'm an actor, and that's my life." And you're like, "Well, do you have any other skills because what happens if this acting thing doesn't work?" Like, "No, no, no. This is my dream." And it's like, if you said, "My dream is to be an accountant, but I've never had an accounting job in four years," you'd be like, "Ah, I think maybe another skill set? I think maybe this is not going to work out."

And so, in some places, I think having another skill set is a really important thing. We are all dynamic human beings. We have more than one ability and I think to know what your strengths are, so that, not that you're necessarily doing two things simultaneously, but if the dream doesn't come alive or a pandemic hits, you're at the point where you're kind of like, "Okay, I can make this I can make this pivot." We pivoted our business and where we pivoted to was something I've been thinking about for a long time, but never pulled the trigger. And so now we had this amazing opportunity because we couldn't do the old thing anymore and so, some of the thinking had already happened.

It's worth also bringing up the finite-infinite mindset as Dr. James Carse explains, he was the originator of the theory of finite and infinite games. And just for those who don't know, I'll give the quick

definition. He shared that, "A finite game is defined as known players, fixed rules, and an agreed upon objective." So, football, baseball, right? There's always a beginning, middle and end and if there's a winner, there has to be a loser. Then you have infinite games. Infinite games are defined as known and unknown players, which means a new player can join at any time. The rules are changeable, which means you can play however you want, and the objective is to perpetuate the game, to stay in the game as long as possible.

It turns out we're players in infinite games every day of our lives, whether we know it or not. There's no such thing as being number one in your marriage, right? Like you can be number two, but you can't be number one, right? There's no such thing as winning education. No one's declared the winner of careers. No nation becomes the winner of global politics and there's definitely no such thing as winning in business because there's no finish line, there's no agreed upon objectives. It just doesn't exist.

And the problem is, so many people operate with a finite mindset. When you listen to so many leaders, they talk about being number one, being the best and beating their competition, based on what? And so one of the aspects of a finite mindset versus an infinite mindset is a finite mindset clearly wants to win, except what happens if the game has no finish line and if you play to win in a game that has no finish line, you destroy trust, cooperation and innovation?

And one of the characteristics of a finite mindset is they are afraid of surprises and afraid of uncertainty, and that's why they look to exert excessive amounts of control, that's why timeframes are very short because you can control the numbers for the quarter, maybe even the year, but you cannot control them for five and 10 years, you just can't. And so, we'd like to keep short timeframes so we can exert control. Also, all the thinking happens in the past. So, you see this with athletes, right? They practice, practice, practice, practice, practice, so that there are no surprises or military personnel, like they train and train and train and train and train and train, so that they're prepared for any eventuality, no surprises.

And you hear them use this language like, "Oh, I didn't have to think, I just relied on my training or I didn't have to think it was in my muscle memory." Because at the point of something happening again, all the thinking has been done in the past. So, in those circumstances, something completely new, completely different can completely throw off the system because there's been no thinking for this.

And infinite mindset is the complete opposite. An infinite mindset embraces surprise and believes that there is opportunity in uncertainty and so, they do not look to exert control instead they look to sort of open up their minds and say, "Ooh, what could we do?" And so, you saw this happen in the pandemic, both for individuals and for organizations where when this uncertain thing happen, by the way, just as a quick aside, I love when people keep saying during these uncertain times-

Dave:

Drives me nuts.

Simon:

All times are uncertain.

Dave:

I know.

Simon:

There's never been a time that was certain never. It's just that something happened that you didn't expect that reminded you that time is uncertain. It's like these times were exactly as uncertain as they were every other time in history, anyway, but I digress.

And so when the pandemic showed up and surprised everybody, the people who have the finite mindset, the organizations that maintained a finite mindset, panic was the first reaction and they hunkered down and it became about them. What are we going to do? What am I going to do? How are we going to make money? How are we going to survive was the reaction? And those organizations have really struggled to pivot. The ones that had a better time pivoting are the ones that seemed to have more of an infinite mindset, which is, "Well, this is unexpected. All right, what could we do with this?"

Like, "Let's pretend, even though we have a company, let's pretend that we're a startup and we're starting our business right now for the first time, what would we do and how to bring it to life?" Now, of course, for some industries, this is very difficult. An airline, being a startup airline in this world, you probably wouldn't start up an airline, I get it, I get it. But for a lot of businesses, it really helped, because they pretended that they were startups and had that startup mentality, was entrepreneurial once again, there was a lot of pressure, a lot of excitement and a lot of teamwork, just like all startups.

One of my favorite examples of a pivot was a pizza place in Chicago called Dima's Pizza that they made 70% of their revenues from selling slices, so clearly they weren't prepared for delivery and all of that stuff when the pandemic hit and their business dried up just very, very quickly. But what was so clever is they looked at their resources and didn't view them based on their industry, they looked at them based on their capabilities. So for example, they had a pizza oven and to anyone else, they'd say, "Well, a pizza oven is for making pizzas." And they said, "No, a pizza oven can burn much hotter than a regular oven, so what can you do with a really hot burning oven?" And turns out you can bend industrial grade plastics at that temperature.

Dave:

Wow.

Simon:

And so what they started to buy was sheets of industrial grade plastic, and they started to make face shield, PPP that they sold to hospitals.

Dave:

Wow, with a free slice. I love it.

Simon:

Well, I don't even know if they did the pizza, but they delivered the face shields in pizza boxes and I felt that was genius, which is if we were starting a business right now and we have these resources, what could we do with these resources based on the market demands. And at the end of this, they may go back to selling pizzas, so they may have two businesses, which I just think is really clever. But it's that kind of mindset, which I so admire.

Dave:

I've always had that hacker mindset. That's why I was a computer hacker like, "Oh, I'm not supposed to get into that. Let me see if I can figure out how." And it's not always a good mindset to have and it seems like in most of the tech companies where I've worked, there's oftentimes a very small number of

people who have that mindset and sometimes they're in executive management and sometimes they're not, but they're usually kind of identifies like "That's a big idea guy, right? And he may not shower regularly, but you should go talk to him because he'll think of something weird."

Is it your belief that everyone has that in them or is this an organizational thing or is it you need to find someone whose brain is weird who's really good at thinking that way?

Simon:

Yeah. This is why we have teams, because no one can do everything, of course not. And this is why teams exists because if I go do everything, I wouldn't need you.

Dave:

Exactly.

Simon:

And so, when we pivoted one of the things we did. I got this idea from my friend Jen Waldman, which is I showed up to the team and said, "Okay, here's the deal. I want 15 ideas." First of all, I gave the vision. I said, "Here's where we're going, here's what I imagined, here's what I want to pivot to, but beyond that, I don't really know, so what I want from everybody is 15 ideas each within 48 hours." And if people wanted to work in teams, I was fine with that. And so, they're like, "48 hours?" I'm like, "Yep, 48 hours." I'm like, "15." "Why 15?" "And the reason is because if I asked you for three or four ideas, you're going to give me the same three or four ideas that I already came up with.

Dave:

Yes.

Simon:

Like we're doing, the good ideas are at 9, 10 and 11. So everybody had to bring 15 ideas to the table and before we presented our ideas, I gave a little preamble and I said, "Okay, listen. This is not about competition. This is about contribution. I'm fully aware that there are some people on this team who are going to have six amazing ideas and some people on this team, they're going to have zero, right? And I'm okay with that. I'm not keeping scores. It's not a competition," because what I also recognize is that the people who are having the ideas probably are not the best people to execute on those ideas.

Dave:

Very important point.

Simon:

Right? Where the people who didn't have any good ideas are probably really good at executing ideas, they're probably better at process than anybody who came up with the ideas. And so if anything, the thing that this will reveal is where our strengths are and how we're going to work together. And so, morale was really high, even if one person had a lot of ideas and one person had none and I didn't let anybody give the whole list. I did two or three, then two, or three, then two, or three and what ended up happening was, we all kept building upon each other's ideas. And so by the end, we had a set of ideas that no one could claim because they were now an amalgamation of all the contributions. And we took them from the idea of people and we went to the operations people and said, "Make this."

Dave:

Nice.

Simon:

And we made a very simple thing. We bucketed the ideas into three categories: Green, yellow, and red. Green was an idea that we could execute this week. Yellow was an idea that would require a couple of weeks and red, no matter how good the idea was something that was just either too time or too resource heavy, and so, we just put it on a back burner and said, "Maybe one day, we'll get to that." And then we just said, "Okay, here are the green ideas. We need them done this week." And they did.

Dave:

How big of a team are we talking about to do this?

Simon:

This was with combinations of everybody involved, freelancers and everybody, it was probably about 12 people, 15 people.

Dave:

Okay, so good-size team.

Simon:

Good-size team, yeah.

Dave:

That's a fantastic idea and if you're listening to the show, you can actually do that right now if you still don't have direction with what's happening. Now, tell me about the outcome. So, you had a really heavy travel and speaking schedule, I know because I lived the same life. I'm on stages. I was on stages a lot. I write books, I travel and also that CEO kind of thing in my other life. But my life changed substantially and actually income changes, too because you get paid to speak and you can talk about your books and you're generating a wave behind your ideas when you go to do that. It's about the content. So, what changed after this in your life now that you're not traveling?

Simon:

Right. So, most of our income for our organization was based on in-person speaking workshops, things like that, and we have a team of folks who do those things and of course, that dried up immediately. And so, what we did seemed to match a pattern that I saw other organizations that were doing that also successfully pivoted, which is the ones who are struggling to pivot, they double down on their old business model, right? And basically said, "Okay, we do keynotes. How are we going to do keynotes online," right? And that's a hard thing to sell.

And you saw this, not just in this industry, but we're seeing this in education now, right? We're seeing teachers who are trying to teach the same class that they taught in front of 30 kids, looking at a Zoom call with 30 kids and like taking attendance the same way they used to take attendance. "Please everybody."

Dave:

A viewer, a viewer.

Simon:

"Everybody be quiet, so I can take." And it's like you can't just do what you used to do, but now do it online. It doesn't work that way because online is a different animal, it's a different environment. And so, the companies that were more successfully pivoting, instead of putting themselves at the center of the equation, like, "What are we going to do? How are we going to survive? How are we going to make more money?" They said, "Okay, we've got something valuable. How are we going to get it to people?" It was a giving mentality, like "There are people who want what we have, how are we going to help them get it?"

And so, we changed the way in which we offered what we do in a couple of different directions. We changed. We set up a whole online learning platform, which of course a lot of companies did. But for us, the in-person thing was really important. It's what I preach and so, we do live classes. There's an instructor, it is live, you come in, it is a scheduled time, and we recognize that sometimes it's inconvenient and from a business model, we're probably eventually going to have to do recorded stuff, but it was really important for us to do live online classes. It turns out that's also an easier pivot because I don't have to take the time to record it. Here it is. So, we do live online classes and we reached out to a whole bunch of friends and said, "We love your work, do you want to teach a class with us on our platform?" And we have like a real like online learning platform now, which I'm really proud of.

And then for my stuff, I started listening to what people needed and at the beginning, nobody wanted a freaking keynote. At the beginning, people were in full on panic mode and they just wanted some assurance, some optimism and some perspective and so, we started offering 10 minutes. So, I would come on at the beginning of someone's meeting for five or 10 minutes to be like, "All right, guys. I'm going to help you get the right mindset. Here's what I need you to focus on. Here's some thoughts. Here's how you can redirect. Here's how you can shift and I sort of help set up their meetings." And I did a bunch of those at the beginning of the pandemic.

Dave:

Smart.

Simon:

Yeah, because nobody wants an hour long rah, rah, "You can do it, yes, you can." Nobody wants that.

Dave:

Not over Skype, yeah.

Simon:

And definitely not over Skype.

Dave:

Or Zoom or whatever, yeah.

Simon:

Or whatever, yeah. And it's not like we have a crystal ball or we had some like proprietary customer research. We basically looked at ourselves and said, "What do we need?" Because if we need

something, odds are somebody else needs it. Well, the last thing we need is somebody to come and lecture us, but what we would love is someone to help, like push us or help us redirect, because that's what we were doing anyway. We were calling each other up. You were doing the same thing. We all called our friends and said, "Hey, what are you doing?" And you'd have a 20-minute conversation. They'd be like, "This is fantastic. Thank you." And sometimes you just needed to hear what someone else was doing to get you optimistic about what you could do. And so if that's what we were doing, that's what we wanted, then the odds are pretty high that somebody else needs or wants the same thing, so we made that available. And again, it's a listening versus a talking, it's a giving versus a taking mentality.

Dave:

It seems to fly in the face of what every startup disruptive technology book would tell you. Talk to your customers, do what they want. If you ask a farmer what they want, they want a bigger horse, they don't want a tractor. That's the oldest analogy forever. So, you didn't go out and do your customer-centric design processes and all that. You basically said, "Look, if I'm suffering and I need to do this, I'm going to make it and I know there'll be some other people like me."

Simon:

Well, I mean, let's look at, big companies don't have big ideas. Small companies have big ideas and then the big companies buy them.

Dave:

You know it's right.

Simon:

That's what happens and then it makes you scratch your head to say, "But I don't understand. I thought the big ideas happen when you have the best talent, all the resources, all the customer data and that's what big companies do." But that's not true.

Dave:

Yeah. There's no hunger.

Simon:

There's no hunger. Small companies have a vision that is bigger than the resources they have to accomplish it. So, creativity is the only thing you have because you don't have money. And I think big companies could be more innovative if their visions were bigger than the resources they had to accomplish it, but they have a lot of money, so they tend to have small visions.

Dave:

Wow.

Simon:

And the other thing is the way most companies start, most truly valuable companies that make something of themselves, none of them start because you read an article in a business magazine, you're like, "Ooh, that's a good business opportunity. I'm going to start that company." That's not how

businesses start. Businesses start because someone or a group of people suffer a problem or somebody that they know suffers a problem and they came up with an innovative solution for themselves or for the people they love, and that solution turns out is valuable to other people and that became the company.

Airbnb was started because a bunch of designers went to a design conference and there were no more hotels, they all stayed at a friend's house together and they had such a great time, and the friend charged them money to stay there because "Heck, man, we're all broke," and they slept on air mattresses. And they said, "Wouldn't it be funny if we started an air bed and breakfast?" Airbnb.

Dave:

Absolutely.

Simon:

They worked, right? And like, that's how almost every great business starts. I mean, yours is the same and mine is the same, which is weren't trying to start businesses. We were trying to solve a problem for ourselves. We built the business around that solution.

Dave:

It's ridiculous. And I'm so happy you're saying that. I hear a lot of entrepreneurs going down the wrong path there and sure you should talk to your customers and all that, but I will tell you Bulletproof created three of the five categories of [inaudible] and they're all multiple hundred million dollar categories. They didn't exist and it's because "I couldn't buy it and I wanted it." And so there's multiple players in each one, that's all good, but it comes from ignoring the customer at first and meeting a pressing need that people don't know they have. And so I love it that you're sharing this because it's the opposite of what every big company does, and they have these big meetings about innovation. "How do we become more innovative?" And sometimes it's, "Well, make something that you can't buy."

Simon:

And it really is very ironic, right? So like, a company wants to be authentic and so, what they do is they conduct customer research, so that they can be [inaudible], which is the exact same as you and me going to our friends and saying, "Hey, listen, I really want to be authentic in my friendship with you, so could you please tell me how you want me to dress and how you want me to speak to you, so that you'll like me more?" And your friend is going to be like, "What?" You'd be like, "No, no, I really I want to show up for you, so tell me how you want me to dress and how you want me to speak to you, so that you'd like me more." And your friends are going to be like, "I just want you to be yourself."

So, why would companies think that by asking people who they should be that people will then proceed them as authentic. The logic is exactly the same. And this is why companies with vision stand out. This is why the companies we "love" stand out. It's because they aren't asking the customer who we should be, they're being themselves and they attract the customers who are attracted to that and they repel the customers who are repelled by that. And if you have a brand that some people love and some people hate, the odds are you stand for something because if you stand for something, some people are going to disagree. But if you're just kind of like stand for nothing, then that basically makes you a commodity. I buy you when I need it and when it's cheap enough or if it's convenient, I don't really care. I don't have love. I may like it, but I don't love it.

Dave:

Right. It's really funny. The love thing from that comes out of authenticity, it's like in high school, "Hey, how do I be one of the cool kids?" Look, if you're asking, you're not. It's a state of being that cannot be faked and-

Simon:

And that's what authenticity means. It means I say and do the things I actually believe. And, I mean, what you started with the Bulletproof is a spectacular example. There are people who love coffee, but they may like one coffee of another but they're not loyal, they don't love. They may love a taste, but they don't love a company and if something comes along, like I have a friend who's a diehard coffee fanatic, and I'd be like, "Dude, you got to try this one." And he'd be like, "Sure," right?

Dave:

Right.

Simon:

Where Bulletproof, it's a freaking religion for some people. It's no longer the taste. There are other coffees that you may actually like the taste better, but it's not about the coffee, it's about the belief set. It's about the identity. It's who I am. When you wear a Bulletproof T-shirt, for example as you are, it says something about who you are not just what tastes you like. And I think that is about as good as it can ever get it.

Dave:

It's something that had to be said and there's a bunch of people listening who are, I'm going to call them, the young internet marketing crowd. And I'm going to add on top of what you're saying, if you're going to build an authentic helping brand by taking another person's idea that you saw online or even worse, copying their content, changing a few words and calling it yours, Simon, has anyone ever done that with your work?

Simon:

Yes. Yes, they have.

Dave:

How does that make you feel as a creator?

Simon:

I am old fashioned. I believe in honor and I believe in people who act honorably, and I'm upset by people who act dishonorably. And so, if somebody is using my work, and they say, "This was inspired by Simon's work."

Dave:

That's cool.

Simon:

I am very flattered by that and I love that they've actually maybe even built upon my work and made my work even better. I think that's honorable. And I don't mean about little details. They could steal a little

quote here [crosstalk 00:32:01] and I don't care about that. I'm talking about like, "I'm going to give Simon's speech."

Dave:

Oh, God, yeah, those guys.

Simon:

[crosstalk 00:32:08]. And there has been a couple of people who literally gave my speech like memorized and never said, "I'm inspired by Simon. This is what he says," right? Which I'm totally fine with. And so for me, it's not about whether they take the ideas or not take the ideas, I want the ideas to spread. I want people to take the ideas. It's just that act honorably. It's kind of like footnoting. The difference between plagiarism and not plagiarism is in the back of the book. There's a tiny little reference that says, "Oh, by the way, I took that from another book." That's fine. Footnotes and endnotes are legitimate. You can take ideas from anywhere you want, it doesn't ruin the reading of it. You don't have to say, "I took this idea from this." As long as somewhere you give the credit, you've just produced a fantastic work. But the minute you leave that endnote out, that's actually plagiarism. That's actually a crime.

Dave:

And making it about honor is such a fantastic concept, because that's what it is. It's about honor and integrity.

Simon:

It's all it is.

Dave:

And the reason I'm asking that is we're talking about authenticity and so if you're saying, "I'm going to build an authentic brand, I'm going to copy that other thing out there usually than go compete with them, which means you say bad things about it." And like, that's unnecessary, everyone knows that that's happening. And so, I'm going to encourage people listening if you want to start a business, do something that hasn't been done that way before and you'll probably succeed.

Simon:

Or if you want to be a me-too brand, which is fine, then simply say that, right? Apple didn't invent the multi-gigabyte mp3 player. They didn't invent the iPod, right?

Dave:

It was Creative Labs.

Simon:

Right, Creative Labs out of Singapore. Exactly. But what Apple did is they said we didn't invent it, we just did it better.

Dave:

Yeah, that's cool.

Simon:

And so, you're allowed to do that you're allowed to say, "Look, here's the guy who came up with the idea and we think it's genius, but here's the thing, they weren't smart enough and so, we took what they invented and we made it even better."

Dave:

Yes. And that's evolution, we love that.

Simon:

And that's evolution, and by the way that is proprietary. That is authentic. I mean, you look at almost, especially in the early days, the Japanese barely invented any products. They just took all the products that existed and made them even better and it drove their economy, then they started inventing. They started inventing the Walkman and things like that, but even now, if you've ever gone to Tokyo, if you've ever gone to Japan...

Dave:

Yeah. I love that.

Simon:

... they have coffee shops that are better than any coffee shop I've ever been to in Italy.

Dave:

Best coffee in the world goes to Japan.

Simon:

Best coffee in the world.

Dave:

Yeah.

Simon:

Have you tried their pizza? It's better than pizza I've had anywhere in the world.

Dave:

It's like Michelin created pizza, everything there, yeah.

Simon:

The Japanese are so obsessed with making things good, they don't actually care if they invented it or not. They take something and they make it the best that can possibly be and they study how to make coffee and they study how to make pizza even though they didn't invent it and I love that. They don't claim ownership over the origination. They claim ownership over the quality.

Dave:

Over the perfection and the cost of process.

Simon:

Over the perfection and that, by the way, is absolutely proprietary because not everybody can invent and not everybody's a visionary, but you can have a very, very, very, very, very successful, even a leader brand if you were the Johnny Come Lately, that's totally, totally legit.

Dave:

Love this.

Simon:

In fact, I don't think Apple invented much of the stuff that it does.

Dave:

It mostly came from Xerox, PARC or Microsoft.

Simon:

Yes. Yeah. I mean, that's-

Dave:

I'll say Microsoft got most of it from Xerox. It's okay. It's building on it and making it better.

Simon:

It's all a mishmash, yeah, yeah, anyway, but we digress.

Dave:

We do. Let's talk about something that is a top of mind for people right now and it's trust. Because if you're an old school manager sitting in your glass office looking out over your armies of cubicle dwellers, which isn't really life anyway, you can see that they're doing their work and people already had trust issues with their teams before the pandemic, because people play politics as people don't do this, saying they're going to do and all those things. And you've done a lot of work, particularly in your most recent book around trusting teams. How do we do that? How do we know we can trust our colleagues who are only at home with their cats?

Simon:

So, one of the things, I have to have another sort of aside. One of the things that I think is funny is how many companies are saying, we pivoted to an online company, and turns out, we're really good at it. So, it makes us wonder if we should ever go back to the office or not. Everything's working fine. It's like that's because all the relationships already exist. Good luck making new hire and building trust with that new employee completely over the internet. Good luck with that. Do you have any idea how difficult that is?

And I mean, we've had a distributed online company for about 10 years and I can tell you from personal experience that building trust over the internet is much more difficult than doing it in real life because building trust inside a company is no different than making friends or falling in love. It's not the big things. We don't build trust in the meeting. It's not the meeting that builds trust. It's walking into the meeting. It's walking out of the meeting. It's sitting waiting for the meeting to start and be like, "Hey,

Julie. I heard your dad was sick. How's he doing?" "Oh, thanks for asking. He's doing much better. Thank you very much." It's saying, "Hey, you want to get lunch?" It's bumping to somebody in the hallway and like, "Oh, I meant to tell you something," right?

That's where trust is built. It's what Isaac Stern said. Isaac Stern said, "Music is what happens between the notes." Trust is built between the meetings. And so, online, you actually have to schedule those between times that have nothing to do with work, which is much more difficult.

Dave:

I did something weird with Bulletproof. I've lived on an island the whole time since I founded the company on Vancouver Island and I've had maybe one employee here. The rest of the team has been distributed in the very beginning and then mostly in Seattle and L.A. So maybe two, three years into the company, I said, "You know what? We should all meet each other." So, since I had to fly everyone somewhere anyway, I just flew everyone to Hawaii. And then we spent a week in Maui, doing stuff.

Simon:

Whatever.

Dave:

Strategic planning, whatever, just building the teams and then we went back and it really helped, because that FaceTime, having meals together and all that.

Simon:

Of course.

Dave:

I think we might see some companies, I don't need the headquarters, but we're just all going to get together every now and then and swap microbes because they're probably the basis of trust anyway.

Simon:

And it's all, it's yeah.

Dave:

And I'll do that.

Simon:

No, I sorry to interrupt. You're right. I mean, even distributed online teams, we do the same, we still have to meet now and then.

Dave:

Bring them together.

Simon:

I was thinking of we'll have business trips, like one group will go to meet another group to work for a week.

Dave:

Yeah. And that's kind of the role of conferences, "Hey, these four people in the company are going to go to this conference, and they're going to get time together." And so, the depth of the conference industry that are replaced by virtual conferences doesn't do that, so I think we will have that travel and that's why travel will come back because even if you can survive or thrive, like we did for many years, without a headquarters, you still have to get the FaceTime to do the internet.

And so, I wanted to validate that with you, but okay, let's say for the next year, there's just not going to be very much travel. Is there something people can do who are listening in order to be more trustworthy or to feel more trust for people who probably deserve it and maybe less trust for those who don't?

Simon:

Yeah, so the answer is yes, but as I said before, it requires more work.

Dave:

Okay, but what's the work?

Simon:

So, for example, yeah, so for example, usually the Zoom calls that we're having, the meetings we're having are their update meetings or their strategic meetings or their tactical meetings or their product update meetings and like it's all meeting, meeting, meeting and it's work, work, work. And we need to allow for something that's not work. That's just about us. So, we recommend a weekly huddle, preferably a Monday morning, but it doesn't matter.

And it should be not about work. It should not be about work. It's like what we do is everybody checks in. We say what's on your heart and what's on your mind. People say what they did over the weekend. You discover that people have families, you discover their stresses. People will say, "It's a really rough weekend. My eight-year-old's struggling with the pandemic." And somebody else says, "Oh, mine, too." And you're finding common ground that have nothing to do with work.

In other words, we're starting to see each other as human and then we usually answer either a fun question or a profound question, and we just go around the room. Everybody has two minutes. We spend an hour on the phone, on the Zoom, and then we're done and we're just checking in. Plus, all the humanity of just checking in with people as a human being like if you see somebody had a hard time on one of the meeting calls or even on, they talked about how they had a hard weekend on the huddle, for example, somebody will pick up the phone and call them and be like, "Hey, how are you doing? You okay?"

And what I think was so funny is, somebody asked me recently, how has leadership changed during these times? And the answer is, it hasn't. If anything, the tenets of good leadership just became more important, so whether somebody was an effective or ineffective leader prior to the pandemic, they follow their human instincts, they picked up the phone and they checked in and their team to say, "Hey, listen, how are you? I just want to make sure you're okay. This is a crazy time." Well, that's called good leadership. We don't need a global pandemic for you to do that. You should be doing that all the time.

And so, all of those little things like think of people as human beings, check in on them. If somebody's performance declines, don't assume that they're an idiot. Don't assume that they're irresponsible, assume that that something's happening in their home life that maybe they're struggling

with because this is a really, really hard time and stress is unbelievably high. It's stress on marriages, stress on families, stress on kids, stress on people who are single.

And remember, leadership doesn't come with rank. You don't have to be the person with the title to operate like the leader. Leadership is the responsibility to take care of those around us, so anybody can pick up the phone and say, "Are you okay?" including checking on your boss. "Hey, boss, you were really hard on us in the meeting today, are you okay? I'm worried about you."

Dave:

You know what? That piece of advice right there is one of the most valuable career builders you will ever hear. In fact, that's probably one of the top 10 things that have been on my show.

Simon:

[crosstalk 00:42:45]

Dave:

The one time in my 20s, I did that. My boss was losing it. I said, "Hey, can we get a cup of coffee?" And just her whole demeanor changed and you could tell, she's like, "Oh, my God, someone's watching out for me." Because especially with younger teams, it's all about "Boss, Boss, boss." So yeah, just taking care of your boss and just letting them know you have their back will grow your career. And it's actually an act of service and it's an act of kindness, so I'm happy you said that. And I've never thought of it that way, so you called out something special there.

Simon:

Thank you.

Dave:

Now, you started a new podcast, which is very new called A Bit of Optimism.

Simon:

Yeah.

Dave:

How do you like being a podcast host?

Simon:

So, we've been thinking about doing a podcast for ages, but I wanted it to be mine. I wanted it to be uniquely me and we actually came up with a great concept, which the pandemic made it impossible to do.

Dave:

Of course.

Simon:

And so, I'm really enjoying it. I'm really enjoying it. They're wonderful conversations about things and I'm showing up as a student in all of those conversations.

Dave:

Yes.

Simon:

I'm not a host. I'm not an interviewer. I'm a student. And the people who I bring on, some you've heard of and some you've never heard of. And that wasn't interesting to me, like it wasn't interesting to me to take the same list. I mean, unfortunately, you know this, which is there's a circuit and it's the same 15 people doing all the podcasts. And those are good and valuable, don't get me wrong, but somebody else was already doing a better job of that.

Dave:

Right.

Simon:

I couldn't do it better than what was already being done. And the way we approached it was, I love some of the conversations I get to have and some of the people I get to meet over the course of my career and I always feel selfish that that I'm having these conversations in private. And so the way we put this together was that I want to have a conversation with somebody, as if I'm sitting in a restaurant and the table next to me is like leaning in and eavesdropping on my conversation. And so that's what we're doing and I'm actually really, really enjoying it.

Dave:

I have found that there's three ways that I learned the best and the first one is teaching. When I was a teacher at the University of California, man, I had to grind that content into my brain, so I could teach it flexibly, nimbly, and, get a standing ovation at the end of the semester, which happened a few times, but not always. Like I worked and I sucked at the beginning, right? So, teaching, it's always in there. You write a book, it's thousands and thousands of hours of thinking and massaging and crunching and taking out everything that's not essential and you grok it and you know it.

But the third way of learning is you talk to the masters who already did that and can communicate well and podcasting became addictive for me, in a good way, because I get to talk to you guys like you. Like this conversation was really fun, and I would have had it over dinner, right? And if your mindset's like that and I do hear that on A Bit of Optimism on your show...

Simon:

Thank you.

Dave:

... where you're like, "Hey, what can I learn here," and just think "Maybe other people want what I want." And so, I like your show. I think you're doing great.

Simon:

Thank you.

Dave:

Well, you have some time on stages and like how to interact with people and it shows, but seriously, just as from someone who's done it for a little bit longer, I think you're onto something good and your mindset that you just explained, anyone who wants to start a show anyone who just wants to have a good dinner conversation, that's the mindset, like how do I learn here? And so, thank you for just somehow knowing to do that the right way, because a lot of podcasts are...

Simon:

Thank you.

Dave:

... "Hey, everybody, look at me." That's not what it's about, so.

Simon:

Right. It's like, I'm sure you get this as well. People come to me say, "Hey, I want to be a public speaker. How do I get started?" I'm like, "What do you want to talk about?" They're like, "Well, I don't know yet." I'm like, "Well, you've got it backwards." It's like, "I never wanted to be a public speaker, but I had a thing that I never stopped talking about." Every conversation, people are like, "What are you up to?" I started pulling out napkins and drawing circles and then what happened was they said to me, "Can you come and talk to my team about this?" And I went, "Sure, I guess." And it turns out, I became a speaker.

But I think it's funny when somebody says "I want to be a speaker," but you don't know what you want to speak about. It's the opposite. You have to have something that you believe in, that you love that other people want to hear and speaking is just one of the many ways in which you can share it.

Dave:

What I think they're saying is, "I want attention." And that is not a good motivation for doing things. Not at all. Well, Simon, we are coming up on the end of your available window here for the show. Thank you for your time. Your new podcast is called A Bit of Optimism.

Simon:

That's it, yeah.

Dave:

And you could find it anywhere podcasts are distributed. How's that?

Simon:

Anywhere they like to listen to podcasts, yep.

Dave:

Yep, and your most recent book, which is totally worth reading, especially right now, during the pandemic, is *The Infinite Game* and your website is Simon Sinek (S-I-N-E-K).com. Anything else you'd like to leave our listeners with, a little bit of extra wisdom?

Simon:

Just, this is an amazing opportunity, as I said before, all the tenets of good leadership are more important now than ever. So, think of others and look after others, especially the people you know, so take care of yourself, take care of each other is really what it's all about.

Dave:

Beautiful. Beautiful energy. Well said. Simon, honored to have you on Bulletproof Radio. You're always welcome back if you have something new that you just have to share.

Simon:

Thank you.

Dave:

In the meantime, if you guys are looking for more podcasts to listen to, it's a new podcast. It's a noteworthy podcast, and it's by a guy who really knows his shit, so there, I just got the expletive word on this thing. There you go. Darn it. Anyhow, Listen to Simon's new show because it's worth it. Have a great day.