



November, 2019 In The Know Summary

## **The Infinite Game**

by Simon Sinek

**Discussion Facilitator:** [Pamela Krist](#)

**About the Book** | Based on the game theory of James Carse (1986), this book explores the responsibility that businesses and their leaders have to society at large. Sinek identifies the Five Core Criteria that allow businesses to survive in the long-term. At the core of the book is the belief that people in business are motivated by a higher-level goal—not just profit.

### **The Concept of a “Finite” versus “Infinite” Mindset**

Sinek talks about finite games, where the goal is to win, and infinite games where the point is to keep on playing while constantly adapting and improving.

*In finite games, like football or chess, the players are known, the rules are fixed, and the endpoint is clear. The winners and losers are easily identified.*

*In infinite games, like business or politics or life itself, the players come and go, the rules are changeable, and there is no defined endpoint. There are no winners or losers in an infinite game; there is only ahead and behind.*

Source: [Simon Sinek](#)

### **“Five Core Criteria” of an Infinite-Minded Organization**

In order to survive/thrive, such an organization must have all five elements, including:

1. **A Just Cause**—Provides a specific vision of the future. People must have the will to contribute to the organization and see it succeed.
  - Our Founding Fathers said, “We hold these truths to be self evident.” This is a vision for the future. Must be inclusive, service-oriented, resilient, idealistic. Created to inspire others to be part of it.
2. **A Trusting Team**—Enables members to do their best.
  - Shell wanted to develop a world-class drilling system. Someone advised the CEO to focus on trust and consider the (sometimes risky) working conditions of the employees. The company set out to focus on creating a culture where it is okay to ask for help—and where it is okay to make a mistake. Over time, this approach improved safety and made the organization successful.
3. **A Worthy Rival**—Inspires continuous improvement. Rivalry is different than the notion of being in competition, where there is always a winner/loser. Sinek says you should find someone to benchmark against.
  - Sinek himself talks about an author who was successful before Sinek was, and the rivalry that motivated him.

- Larry Bird/Michael Jordan example.
4. **Existential Flexibility**—Initiates disruption to a business model or strategic direction.
- Former CEO of Unilever stopped doing quarterly calls with investors. After a few years, other companies started doing the same thing.
  - Broad Institute brings scientists and thinkers together in a collaborative space. They use “open source” format for all research findings.
  - Creator of Polio vaccine did not patent it. He wanted to save lives vs. profit from it.
  - When Bill Gates learned that people were still dying from something as avoidable as diarrhea, he set out to solve the problem with basic healthcare and sanitation. See [Netflix series](#).
5. **The Courage to Lead**—Willingness to take risks for the benefit of an unknown future. Need to take the risk to ask the question and identify a need. It takes bravery to move forward. We need to have higher ethical standards. Need to be mission-driven, for the good of the people. High ethical standards are critical. Some big pharma have ‘Just Cause,’ but have not committed. Sinek calls this “feel good marketing.” Having a good or bad leader does not mean mission success or mission failure.

### Discussion Highlights

- How do you keep energy going if you do not have milestones? JFK set a milestone for the US to be first to the moon. We made it to the moon, and then the energy waned. Important to not only have milestones but also have vision / “north star.”
  - If you work on strategic planning and set a vision, how do you keep it going?
- Example of Infinite/Finite: Sinek compares “football” (with score, games) to “fitness” (go to the gym, but what do I get out of it?).
  - If you set interim milestones “I will lose 2 lbs” or “I will work out for 20 min” you can measure progress to the infinite game. Also keep mindset of “healthy lifestyle” rather than “I want to fit into my wedding dress.”
  - [Younger Next Year](#): Author talks about diet and gives advice, “Don’t eat crap.” Even though he believes in nutrition and exercise, the author did not follow as closely unless he had a race coming up. He realized he needed a race in order to stay on track.
- One of the coaches talked about working with clients to develop a Purpose Statement so “it’s larger than you” as a leader. Sinek’s “Just Cause” is a similar-type declaration.
- What about people who do not have the authority (based on title/position) to make change?
  - [Courageous Followership](#): If you work in an organization with a “finite” mindset, and you have an “infinite” mindset, you have capacity to partner with leadership and convince them that there’s a bigger universe.
  - [The Art of Quiet Influence](#): This book has great strategies for influencing when you do not have positional authority. Refer to discussion notes on the [In the Know portal](#).
- The book talks about organizations, but it also applies to individuals. How do individuals have our own “Just Cause” and move forward?
- Everything Fairfax County does is seen through an equity lens. Who would be “Worthy Rivals,” per the model? (Other counties).
- Talking about the concept of the “Worthy Rival”: Perhaps the word “Compare-itor” is more useful than the word “Competitor?”

### Infinite Life

- Sinek talks about the concept of “Infinite Life” which means leaving things better than you found them, impacting those around you, and building trusting relationships.

- “Infinite Life” can be useful for coaching. Activity is to write your own obituary or write your own retirement plan. When you are 75, what do you want people to say about you? Also, if I am a mid-level manager, what is my personal vision for myself? How does that square with what I have chosen for my job?

#### Related Resources

- Laura Mendelow’s [blog](#)
- [Courageous Followership](#)
- [The Art of Quiet Influence](#)
- [Younger Next Year](#)
- [Netflix series](#): Inside Bill’s Brain: Decoding Bill Gates

\*The Chesapeake Bay Organizational Development Network (CBODN) Book Club is a monthly session, open to all learners. Each month, a presenter shares highlights from a book related to leadership, business, or coaching. There’s no obligation to pre-read the book. The session summary is intended to provide a recap of the conversation at Book Club, rather than serve as a thorough book summary. [Register here](#) for upcoming events. For a listing of Book Club summaries, [click here](#).