FROM THE PRESIDENT’S DESK:

Unlocking the Power of Purpose:
Simon Sinek’s “Start with Why” and the Evolving Nature of Our Why

Dear Readers,

In my first message published last summer, I introduced the concept of finding and connecting with “why,” meaning the purpose and values of a person and mission of an organization. I proposed that doing this is crucial to creating change and inspiring others. I didn’t come up with this concept, but I have firmly leaned into it since reading Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action, by Simon Sinek, at the beginning of my presidency. As I conclude my term, I want to come back to this and propose that my original notion of a “why” being static and unchanging has itself changed.

In the ever-changing landscape of personal and professional growth, the concept of purpose has emerged as a guiding light for individuals and organizations alike. Society of Dermatology Physician Assistants (SDPA) being no different. Sinek’s thought-provoking book has been instrumental in shaping my understanding of purpose and its profound impact on success and personal fulfillment. Sinek’s teachings have not only encouraged me and millions of others to delve deep into our fundamental motivations but have also shed light on the transformative nature of our “why” over time. In other words, our “why” can evolve.

Sinek’s central thesis in Start with Why is that the most inspiring and successful leaders and organizations start with a clear understanding of their purpose or their “why.” He argues that purpose goes beyond profits and drives individuals and organizations to achieve greatness and inspire others. By consistently aligning their actions and decisions with their core purpose, the leaders of organizations and businesses can motivate and inspire others, create lasting impact, and ultimately achieve long-term personal and organizational success.

While Sinek emphasizes the importance of starting with a clear “why,” he also acknowledges that our sense of purpose is not static but rather evolves over time. As we grow, learn, and gain new experiences, our perspectives and priorities shift, leading to a natural evolution of our “why.” However, my initial notion was that my “why” should not be fluid but rather a finite constant. I have learned over the last 12 months that not only was I wrong, but I was also naïve to the importance of personal adaptability.

On an individual level, our “why” can evolve as we embark on different stages of life. What might have motivated us in our early years may no longer hold the same significance as we gain new insights and undergo personal transformations. For example, a person’s initial “why” might have been to establish financial stability, but as they progress in their career and accumulate wealth, their “why” may shift towards making a meaningful impact on their profession and mentoring colleagues in order to find greater personal fulfillment. The last year has indeed been a time of great transformation for me as I entered my 40s, had a baby, assumed the role of president of an almost 5,000-member organization, and changed practices after almost eight years. Looking back, how could I think my “why” would not also evolve?
Just as my personal “why” has evolved, there exists potential for our organization’s “why” to shift as we adapt to internal and external circumstances and changes. Our organization’s leaders and staff gathered a year ago to “get back to the basics” by determining and focusing on our “why” in an effort to fulfill our mission. However, though my term as SDPA’s leader encompasses only a year, I failed to prepare and allow for evolution of this “why” during my tenure. This has been a lesson I will use as I move forward in my career and one I hope the future leaders will keep in mind.

Our organization’s “why” is centered around our members and profession. However, as the healthcare landscape evolves, new technologies emerge, or societal needs shift, the organization’s purpose must adapt to address these changes. This evolution of purpose allows our organization to stay impactful, successful, and relevant.

To utilize the power of purpose, it is crucial for individuals and organizations to engage in regular reflection and potential necessary adaptation. By periodically revisiting and reassessing our “why,” we can ensure that our actions and goals remain aligned with our evolving purpose. Whether planning periodic reassessment or reassessing due to adversity, self-awareness enables us to make informed decisions, set meaningful objectives, and stay motivated.

As I have learned in the last year, the journey of discovering and evolving our “why” is not always easy or straightforward. It requires courage and a willingness to embrace change. However, as Sinek’s teachings suggest, this process is essential for personal and professional growth. I am grateful for the journey of self-discovery and introspection and lessons learned as a result both personally and professionally.

As individuals and organizations, we must recognize that our sense of purpose is not fixed but evolves over time. By continuously revisiting our “why,” we can adapt to changing circumstances, stay motivated, and unlock our full potential for success and fulfillment and inspire others along the way.

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