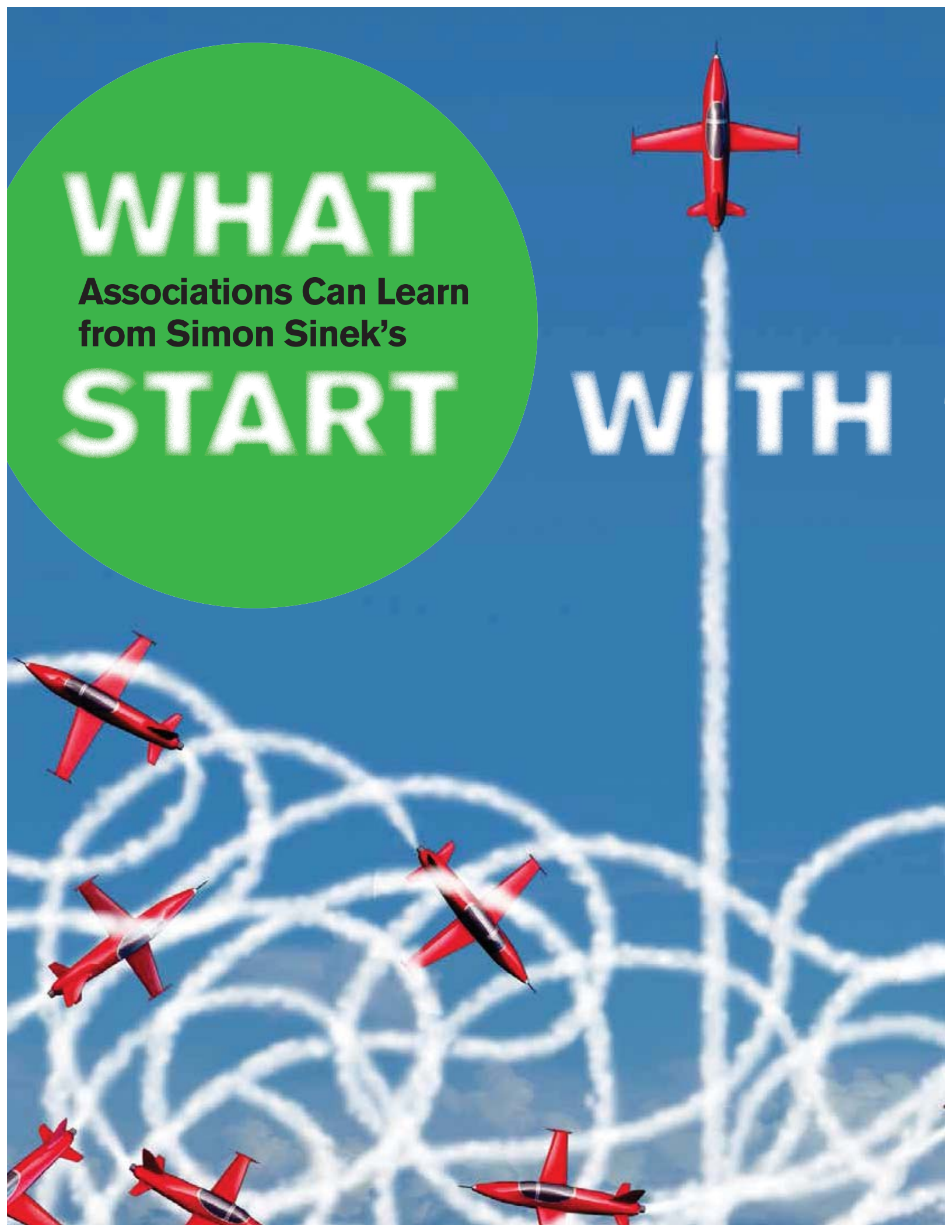


# WHAT

**Associations Can Learn  
from Simon Sinek's**

# START

# WITH



By **Molly Sausaman**, Operations Director,  
Rocky Mountain Insurance Information Association

Simon Sinek is best known for popularizing the concept of “Why” and for explaining the concept in his TED Talk “How Great Leaders Inspire Action”—the second most-watched TED Talk of all time.

Simon is fascinated by the leaders who make the greatest impact in their organizations and in the world, those with the capacity to inspire, and he has discovered some remarkable patterns about how they think, act and communicate and the environments in which people operate at their natural best.

With a little discipline, he says, any leader can inspire others, both inside and outside their organization, to help advance their ideas and their vision, and the concept *Start With Why* explains the reasons some leaders and organizations are more innovative, more profitable, command greater loyalties from customers and employees alike, and, most importantly, are able to repeat their success over and over.

Do you know your Why? What does that even mean? And, let’s not forget about the question we’re all thinking right now... How can we apply Sinek’s concept of Why to our associations?

Let’s take a look at Simon’s “golden circle” tool. The golden circle has three layers:



**Why:** The core purpose, cause, or belief of the organization. It’s *why* the organization exists.

**How:** *How* the organization fulfills that core belief.

**What:** *What* the organization does to fulfill that core belief.

Sounds simple, but when businesses lack a clear mission, they tend to focus on short-term economic gains at the expense of long-term success and customer loyalty. The simple act of clarifying your Why and communicating it clearly to others has a significant impact on an organization’s success.

As Simon emphasizes, “People don’t buy *what* you do, they buy *why* you do it.”


In terms of marketing, Simon found that most organizations have it backwards. They start with their what and then move to how they do it. Most of these organizations don’t even bother to mention why they do what they do, or worse yet, *don’t know* why they do what they do.

If you don’t know why you do what you do, how will you ever get members to be loyal? If you talk about what you believe, you will attract those who believe what you believe. Why is it important to attract those who believe what you believe?

According to Simon, great organizations are built on a common cause and by people who put each other first.

How do you help your members’ natural abilities shine? How do you demonstrate the qualities of leadership and serve them to give them what they need? To make your association a leader in your industry, you need to make sure you offer your members everything they need





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**Every organization with the ability to inspire starts with a person or small group of people who were inspired to do something bigger than themselves.**

— Simon Sinek

to work at *their* best. That's how loyalties are created—a critical piece of member retention.

Simon Sinek explores how great leaders can inspire cooperation, trust and change, and drive behavior. Those who inspire give people a sense of purpose or belonging that has little to do with any external incentive or benefit to be gained. They create a following of people—supporters, voters, customers, workers—who act for the good of the whole not because they *have to*, but because they *want to*. Likewise, we follow those who lead not because we *have to* but because we *want to*.

Simon uses the example of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to illustrate how great leaders are able to inspire people to act.

People who believed what Dr. King believed took his cause and made it their own. They created methods of spreading the word about his 1963 March on Washington to more and more people, and as a result, 250,000 people showed up to hear him deliver his famous *I Have a Dream* speech. Simon proposes that none of Dr. King's followers showed up for Dr. King—they showed up for themselves. It's what *they believed* about America that drove them to travel to hear him speak.

Trust is a feeling that begins to emerge when we have a sense that an organization is driven by things other than its own self-gain. To gain and retain members, an association must earn trust by communicating and demonstrating that it shares the same values and beliefs of those who work in the industry it represents. And to communicate and demonstrate those values and beliefs, we must first know our organization's Why.

Do you know your association's Why? Think about its core purpose, and then think about how you market your membership products and services. Understanding Why is essential to knowing how to communicate How and

What you do. Remember, having loyal customers is about attracting people who share your core purpose, cause, or belief. *What you do* simply serves as the proof of *what you believe*.

With that in mind, think about how to incorporate Why into your marketing materials. Every time you write an email, a social media post, or a web page, start with Why to explain the underlying value of what you are promoting and include context on how your readers identify with your Why.

Think about your members and prospective members. What drives your long-time members to remain loyal? Are you targeting prospective members based on demographics alone, or are you looking for people who share your organization's core values?

Start thinking about the internal motivation that drives purchase decisions—in this case membership in your association. People will only join your association if they believe in your cause, so clearly defining your Why will help in creating marketing campaigns that inspire and drive behavior.

And don't forget that Why is why your current members already belong. They believe what you believe. Tap them to advocate for you. Word of mouth is one of the most powerful forms of marketing. When someone believes in your Why they are more than a customer—they are an evangelist.

So get to it... *Start With Why*. Spread your cause and strengthen your membership in the process. And never forget: People don't buy *what* you do, they buy *why* you do it. ■



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