

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Simon Sinek | How to Win The Infinite Game (Episode 300)

A finite game — like hockey or Chutes and Ladders — has a clear set of rules, a designated endpoint, and a criteria that separates the winners from the losers. But an infinite game — like the course of a life — has more elusive metrics not easily discerned by its players. In his latest book, *The Infinite Game*, Simon Sinek shows us how we can operate with an infinite mindset to enjoy success in a game with constantly shifting and boundless parameters.

In this episode, Simon joins us to discuss *The Infinite Game* as well as explore deeper subjects like trust, focus, branding, and the way we look at our career or business as an extension of ourselves.

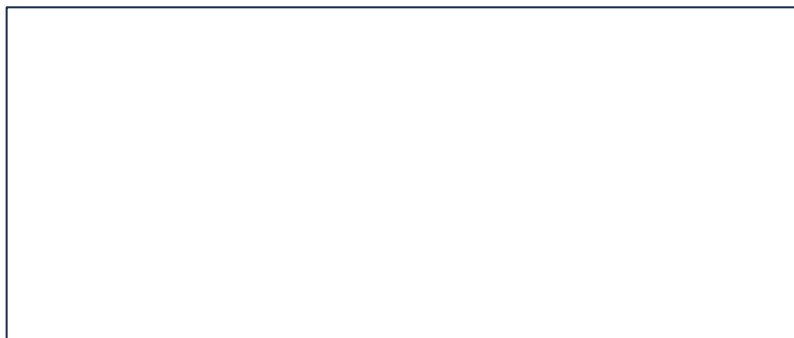
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Rooting for You

Public speaking can be nerve-racking. But whether you're giving a TED Talk, a business pitch, or a science fair presentation, Simon reminds you to remember that the audience is ultimately on your side.

"The audience is rooting for you," he says. "They always are, and they're pretty forgiving. And the more that you point out the stuff that's wrong, the more it's going to go bad. The message is what matters. That's why people are there. And I understand you want perfection, but sometimes that's out of your control. I think that's part of what makes the really effective ones, like I said, I've seen it on stage before, the really good ones, it's really about the message and not about them."

No matter how well you rehearse your speech, there's always the possibility that some unforeseen circumstance — from technical difficulties to allergies to a bad night's sleep — will intervene to throw off your focus. Keep your message in mind and understand that the audience is rooting for you to convey that message. Consider how you might practice your speech in a distraction-heavy environment so you'll be seasoned against derailment should the unthinkable happen.



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Your Own Worst Critic

High performers don't tend to let themselves off the hook too easily when they err. Heck, they don't even tend to lose themselves in celebration when they do well, because they know they could always do better. While it sounds like a prescription for massive anxiety (and it is), there's something to be said for not settling with the bare minimum of what's possible.

"These folks are at the top of their game because they're very, very hypercritical of themselves," says Simon. "Some of the highest performers I know are very hypercritical of themselves, more hypercritical of themselves than they are of other people or other people can be of them. I'm probably my own worst critic for sure, and I notice the little things that probably other people miss. I think anybody who's satisfied with the job that they're doing isn't growing. I mean, I definitely had things that I do where I walk over and like, 'That was good.' Like, I know when it's good, but I also know when I could do better."

Do you think you're hypercritical of yourself, not critical enough, or somewhere in between? While there are obviously cons to being hypercritical of yourself, consider what you might do to strike a balance that keeps you focused on the challenges that result in personal growth while not depriving yourself of a good night's sleep. Like the audience we discussed above, remember to root for yourself rather than trying to heckle yourself into a state of perpetual misery.

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Pencil Yourself In First

“When I overcommit myself, I have only myself to blame,” says Simon. I think one of the things we can all do — regardless if you have a nine to five job, if you have more control of your own schedule or not — is we can still build in time for ourselves. The thing that I started to do is because personal time or going to the gym or anything like that started to become flexible. Someone’s like, ‘We need to have a meeting with you.’ I’m like, ‘Okay, I can go to the gym tomorrow.’ And what ended up happening is I got out of shape and I wasn’t sleeping, and things get worse and worse and worse. And so I just became much more prescriptive and much more sort of dogmatic about protecting these blocks in my calendar. So if somebody called and said, ‘Is Simon available?’ The answer would be, ‘I’m sorry, he’s engaged now.’ They don’t have to know what I’m doing. I’m booked.”

At the beginning of the week (or whenever you regularly map out your schedule), make sure to block out time specifically for self-care *first*. This could be an hour to go to the gym or take a walk in the morning, and maybe an hour in the evening just to unwind and read a book, watch TV, or play video games without being committed to anything or anyone else during that time.

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Wander and Wonder

“Ideas don’t happen when we’re connected,” Simon says. “Ideas happen when our minds have an opportunity to wander. Our conscious brains, our thinking parts of our brains, have access to the equivalent of something like two feet of information around us. This is the part of the brain we access when we access our expertise. But our subconscious brain has access to the equivalent of 11 acres of information. And this is why we have our great ideas in the shower, when we’re driving, when we’re going out for a run, when we’re just going for a walk. Because the brainstorming session actually isn’t the time to solve the problem. The brainstorming session is the time to ask the question. Your subconscious brain won’t solve a problem for something you’re not thinking about. It will attempt to solve something for a problem you’re really facing or an idea you really have.”

Figure out what works for your own idea generation and maximize your ability to capture these ideas when they appear. If you have great ideas in the shower, take longer showers and keep a dry erase marker handy to write on the tiles like Simon does if you have to. If you have good ideas when you run, bring a notebook along or have your phone handy (in airplane mode to avoid outside interruption) and take vocal notes. Where do you have your best ideas? What can you do to record them to review later?

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Finite and Infinite Games

In his book *Finite and Infinite Games*, philosopher James Carse defined finite games like baseball, football, and chess as having known players, fixed rules, an agreed-upon objective, and clear winners and losers. But the concept of an infinite game is trickier because it has known and unknown players, the rules are changeable, there are no referees, and the objective is to perpetuate the game and stay in it for as long as possible. Simon's latest book, *The Infinite Game*, focuses what we can do to thrive in this more uncertain territory.

"We are players in infinite games every day of our lives," says Simon. "These are the games that have no finish line. There are no agreed-upon metrics. There are no agreed-upon rules. There are no agreed-upon timeframes. There's no such thing as winners and losers. You can't be the winner in your marriage. You can definitely be the loser, but you cannot be a winner, right?"

"So when we view the other players [in an infinite game] as competitors, it's a finite mindset, because that means we want to beat them, because that's what competitors are for. I want to be the winner. I want them to be the loser — which is very unhealthy in games that have no finish lines, like our careers, like in business, because what ends up happening is we look for shortcuts. Our perspective becomes shorter and shorter timeframes, and it ends up hurting trust, cooperation, and innovation."

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Are you playing any infinite games right now with a finite mindset? How might you switch to a mindset more conducive to the ever-changing variables of an infinite game? What changes when you try to keep the game going instead of racing for an imaginary finish line you'll never reach?



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Worthy Rivals

“The concept of viewing other companies or other individuals as competitors is really unhealthy,” says Simon. “I mean, if you have a competitor at work, it means you will undermine them so that you can improve your sales numbers, so you can get the bonus. That’s insane. You work for the same organization. And some companies, some leaders, actually promote internal competition, which is really bad for the organization. So I like the term rival. And some of the rivals are worthy of comparison. They’re worthy rivals, and a worthy rival is another player in the game whose strengths reveal to you your weaknesses. They’re really good at something that makes you so uncomfortable, sometimes even angry, that you want to beat them — that you hate them sometimes. You have visceral responses. But in reality, it’s because they’re revealing something uncomfortable and it’s easier to take that uncomfortable energy and direct it at them rather than looking at yourself.

“We’ve all had the experience where somebody we worked with at work got a promotion and we got mad. Think about that for a second. We’re getting angry at somebody else’s good fortune. What is it about that person that is touching a nerve inside us? That’s a worthy rival. And the whole point of worthy rivalry is to recognize these people. You don’t have to like them. You don’t have to agree with them. But you have to respect them. To recognize these other people or organizations, because their strengths reveal to us our weaknesses, and our opportunity is to look at our weaknesses and build on them, to work on them.

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“In other words, it’s a self-improvement exercise, as individuals or as organizations. And there are always other players in the game who are better than you. Always. So I would much rather view the other players in the game as worthy rivals rather than competitors.”

Do you have any obvious worthy rivals in any of the infinite games you’re playing right now? Name them. If you can’t think of any off the top of your head, Simon recommends considering the people who make you uncomfortable on an emotional level because they’re doing something right that you haven’t quite wrapped your head around yet. Accept the challenge of this worthy rivalry and see what observing them can teach you.

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Infinite Mindset Capitalism

If you're looking for an example of how capitalism can be played with an infinite mindset, Simon points to The Container Store's co-founder Kip Tindell. When recession struck and the company's steady growth dipped 13 percent for the first time in 30 years, not a single person was laid off as a cost-cutting measure. Instead, it was made known that they would have to look for other ways to tighten the belts, and an amazing thing happened.

"Spontaneously, [employees] started taking it upon themselves to find more opportunities," says Simon. "Some of them would take business trips and not submit their expense reports. They downgraded their hotels voluntarily — they were not told to do it. So they'd stay in an economy hotel versus a luxury hotel. They even called vendors and said, 'Can you help us out? We need to cut costs.' And the vendors said, 'Sure.' Which is unheard of. Why should your vendors cut their costs to help you save your money? It's because of years and years and years of looking after their employees. The employees wanted to look after the company. It's after years and years and years of treating their vendors with respect that the vendors wanted to pay back, and it's a very human thing. There's no company that could have instructed their employees to downgrade their hotels or pay their own expenses on business trips, [but] there was this amazing sense of camaraderie and pride, like, 'We're going to figure this out together.' And because it was spontaneous, it worked."

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If you're lucky enough to work for a company led by an infinite thinker like Kip Tindell, congratulations! But if not, what would it take for you to be as committed to your company's success as The Container Store's employees were during the recession? If you're a leader at your company, what might this example change about the way you view and treat your employees?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their response to the questions posed above.

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Breaking the Rules

How many times have you come away from a customer service experience feeling like your needs *could* have been met without much hassle (for either side), but you were denied because of , as it was perhaps sheepishly explained to you by the representative, “company policy?”

Simon says: “Poorly led organizations, people say things to you, ‘I’m not allowed to do that. It’s against the rules.’ ‘I’m not allowed to do that; I’ll get in trouble.’ But you’re eight months pregnant and you’ve got a heavy thing, like, ‘I’d love to help you, but I can’t. I’ll get in trouble.’ That’s a poorly led organization. A well-led organization, they know what the rules are. ‘We don’t trust people to follow the rules. We trust people to know when to break the rules. And we hire good people, and we take care of them, and we build up their confidence, and they know the rules. But there’s always an opportunity to break the rules because it’s the right thing to do.’ The best organizations give their frontline employees the discretion to make decisions.”

Do you feel your place of employment allows its employees — at all levels — a reasonable amount of discretion to break the rules with minimal consequence when it’s the right thing to do? If not, make sure to share this episode with your boss! If you’re the boss, do you give your employees this level of discretion? If not, what finite-thinking reasons might be holding you back from trusting them enough to do so? What benefits might your company enjoy if you approached the issue from a more infinite-thinking perspective?

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The Dividends of Reciprocity

When infinite-thinking former Burberry and Apple executive Angela Ahrendts ensured the companies under her leadership offered the same benefits to their retail employees that their HQ employees enjoyed, the initial reaction of her finite-thinking peers was that this policy would be a money-hemorrhaging extravagance.

“Angela actually ran the numbers,” says Simon. “What she discovered is that the cost to take care of these people was net-zero because it was offset by the savings because they had so little turnover. They had a much smaller recruiting department because they weren’t constantly hiring new frontline retail people and training them. [And] most shoplifting happens by employees. The numbers I’ve heard are astonishing — that the average retail store suffers 10 percent losses from shoplifting, most of which is by employees. But if you look at the best-led organizations, they suffer two and three percent shoplifting numbers. What Angela found out was the reduced recruiting costs, not to mention the fact that it’s hard to train somebody up every single few months to get the kind of quality of knowledge, basically, the net expense was zero.”

How well does your own company rate in this department? If it leans toward the finite, sharing this episode with your boss or leaving a copy of Simon's book on their desk with the appropriate chapter marked could be a subtle way of making a point. And if you're the boss, run the numbers and see how spending a little more now to generate goodwill and loyalty among your workforce might save you a lot more later.

Full show notes and resources for this episode [can be found here.](#)

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About



Join us as we get deep into the untapped wisdom of the world's top performers – from legendary creators to intelligence operatives, iconoclastic writers to visionary change-makers.

We deconstruct the playbooks of the most successful people on earth – and learn new strategies, perspectives, and insights you can't find anywhere else. Then, take these valuable insights into your own life and live what you listen.

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