

Simon Sinek Addresses RIMS 2013 with Lessons on Neuroscience and Leadership

Article By:

Morgan O'Rourke

Author and leadership expert Simon Sinek addressed the General Session at RIMS 2013 today with an inspiring keynote speech that looked at what makes good leaders and effective organizations so successful. But unlike a typical business presentation that relies on platitudes and buzzwords to state its case, Sinek turned to human biology to illustrate what motivates us and why we behave the way we do. According to Sinek, our actions boil down to the good feelings we get from four key chemicals in our body – endorphins, dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin – and that understanding these reactions may be useful for business.

For instance, endorphins provide a boost to complete physical tasks giving us the endurance to put in a little extra effort. Dopamine is why rewards make us feel so good. Serotonin inspires positive feelings of pride while oxytocin relates to generosity. These reactions are hardwired into us from the earliest days of primitive man and his search for food but they are still relevant in today's business world as people still follow these instincts to achieve common goals. We basically traded life and death goals of the tribe for the business goals of our organizations.

As a result, Sinek says that organizations need to understand that “business is not like a family, it *is* a family.” If leaders don't understand these needs, people will not be motivated or loyal to their modern tribe. Even worse, if these chemicals are not balanced it creates stress in employees, which blocks oxytocin and its immune-boosting powers for instance, and actually makes employees sicker. “Our companies are murdering us, and murdering our children,” he said.

The key is to promote a work-life balance that isn't only about time spent, but about building quality relationships even within the organization, so that people will be inspired by their leaders to do the right thing, not for their own self-interests, but for the good of the group.

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