

Mastering the Infinite Game

Simon Sinek defines finite games as known players, fixed rules, and an agreed-upon objective. The infinite game has known and unknown players, the rules are changeable and the objective is not to win, but to keep playing – to perpetuate the game.

These two games crash together when you pit finite players against infinite players because finite players are playing to win and infinite players are playing to keep playing. From this mindset comes very different strategic choices. The finite player will always find themselves in a quagmire, racing through the will and resources they need to stay in the game.

“There is no such thing as winning business—it doesn’t exist.” – Simon Sinek

With a finite mindset in business, you will see a decline in trust, cooperation, and innovation. Eventually the organization will run out of the will and resources to stay in the game (also known as bankruptcy or merger and acquisition).

Elements of a Company Playing the Infinite Game:

1. **Just cause.** The passion or hunger that compels you to do what you do. This is what powers you to outlast your customers. A cause so powerful you would willingly sacrifice your own interest to advance the cause.
2. **Trusting teams.** Companies who invest the time and energy to build a culture where people feel safe to be themselves. People who can raise their hands and say, “I made a mistake,” without any fear of humiliation or retribution.
3. **Worthy adversary.** Companies who acknowledge their rivals and treat them with respect but do not measure success or failure against them. These companies know their competitor is themselves and success/failure should be measured against the just cause. The rival can show companies their weaknesses and lead to a focus on self-improvement every day.
4. **Existential flexibility.** Companies who understand the goal is not win, but instead to outlast competitors. This is the capacity to make a dramatically huge strategic shift in an entirely new direction to advance our cause. To achieve this you need to be crystal clear about your just cause, as this will guide decisions. And you need to work with people who love and trust you as there will likely be short-term pain.
5. **Courageous leadership.** Leaders who play the infinite game prioritize the just cause above anything else. They have the courage to say, “That’s bad for business and I’m going to do it differently.”

The finite game still matters and hitting your year-end goal is important as a metric of speed and distance but that’s only one mile within a marathon that never ends.

If we want our people only to be finite-driven, then our frontline employees will enforce the rules without compromise because that’s what protects the bottom line. By focusing on the long game, we ask them to offer good judgment and good customer service, and sometimes do something that may cost the company a small amount of money, because it protects long-term relationships.

Senior executives need to keep their eyes on the infinite game. Leading with an infinite mindset means leaving our organizations in better shape than we found them, and that we will build organizations that inspire other people to want to continue to build them without us.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/workday/2019/04/30/simon-sinek-applying-the-infinite-game-mindset-to-business/#27c7afdc33dd>

<https://leaderchat.org/2017/10/27/simon-sineks-5-steps-for-mastering-the-infinite-game-of-leadership/>