



What's Your Why?

Charity Shock
by Bill High



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An excerpt from *Charity Shock*

I was at a lunch recently with a friend. He asked me about all the different ventures I was involved in. I drew a few of them out on paper. Finally, at one point, he leaned in and asked the question—really the key question—“Why are you doing this? Is it to make money? Is it just a good idea? Why?”

Without hesitation, I remarked, “I’m doing this because I believe we’ll impact families around the country and for generations to come.”

In a similar vein, he leaned further in and spoke with strength, “Now that’s something I could be part of!”

Simon Sinek produced a popular video called “Start with Your Why.” In the video, he describes the importance of communicating why you do what you do. According to Sinek, “People don’t buy what you do; they buy why you do it.”^[1] To prove this theory, he used Apple as an example. While other companies sold the features and benefits of their products, Apple sold their why—challenging the status quo and thinking differently.

And what happened? Apple won. They sold far more products than any of their competitors.

In the context of the nonprofit world, the product you’re selling is your particular cause. Many charities tend to talk about what they do—their programs and the features of their programs—but they don’t talk about why they do it. However, the truly successful charities tell stories to demonstrate why they exist. They tell stories on why their founders, president, and staff do what they do. They demonstrate that their work is not just a job or a way to raise money; it’s a life mission.

In the book *Talk Like TED*, author Carmine Gallo recounts helping a bank executive prepare a presentation about his bank’s involvement with United Way. The executive had crafted a dry story about the bank’s commitment to the cause and how much his employees contributed each year, a presentation that was riddled with numbers and charts. It was informative, but not emotional.

Then Gallo told the executive, “Tell me about your personal connection to United Way.” Instantly the executive forgot about his numbers and charts and dove into his story:





"I was two years old when my father abandoned the entire family. I was four years old when my mom remarried, and that's when I learned the definition of abuse. My first vivid memory was my mother lying in a pile of glass and my stepfather standing over her threatening to cut her throat if she didn't do exactly what he said. I remember thinking, where is my father and why is he allowing this man to do this to us?"

The executive grew up to be an angry young man, until at age twenty-five he enrolled in a United Way program that helped him curb his anger and make good choices. "I'm proud of the man I've become," he concluded.

Gallo encouraged the executive to scrap his original presentation and go with the personal account. The executive did, and ended up delivering a story that moved his audience to tears and brought forth a standing ovation. When he shared it with his coworkers, they gave the largest employee contribution of any division within his bank.[2]

Too often I find nonprofits are quick to jump into what they do, but they neglect this pivotal issue of the why. Without the why, it's just more flies buzzing in the room.

Below are some practical questions to help you articulate the "why" for your ministry:

1. When was the first time you felt Jesus inviting you into this mission?
2. What scripture spoke to you during the invitation phase of your calling?
3. What concerns or objections did you present Jesus with early on?
4. What was the turning point (tangible signs, answered prayers etc.) where you began listening intently for His voice?
5. Describe the moment you surrendered to His calling.
6. In less than 8 words, describe your ministry to a complete stranger you meet in line at Starbucks. Be as thorough yet concise as possible.

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