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Column: My Perspective. From the December 2012 Issue.

As practitioners and business owners, it's important to consistently evaluate our firm's internal systems. Only through honest analysis, can we identify areas of weakness and work to enhance overall operations.

With this in mind, I often wonder if practitioners also ask themselves the deeper "Why?" questions—the questions that go beyond standard process and procedure and force them to look at why they do what they do every day. "Why do I practice accounting?" "Why do I come into the office each day?" "Why do I work really long hours from time to time?" "Why do I invest in my firm, my staff, and my clients?"

Have you ever taken the time to really think about the answers to these questions? Asking why is a great exercise to get you thinking about your firm, but it's sometimes a tough question to answer. On a day-to-day basis, we may think that we know *why* we do what we do, but without concentrated thought, do we really?

This concept of "why" has been swirling around in my head for quite some time now. In 2010, Simon Sinek gave a very inspirational TED Talk on the topic (http://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action.html).

He asked the question: "Why are some organizations able to inspire while other organizations do not?" He explains that, today, people don't buy a product or service as much as they buy into why you do it. He offers Apple as the perfect example, asking "Why is Apple so popular?" The answer: because today's consumer requires more than a product that simply functions, they require a product that they connect with... that they believe in. And as we all know, few companies have been as successful as Apple in offering products that consumers truly believe in.

In reference to employees, Sinek also explained that the goal should not be to hire

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look more deeply to appropriately answer the “why” questions. It’s a tough exercise, I understand, but can be very enlightening and rewarding.

Allow me to clarify a bit more. As very recent empty nesters, my wife and I took advantage of our newfound freedom and took a trip to Paris, France and southern Italy. Being in Italy reminded me of the clothing designer Brunello Cucinelli. In short, his story is that for the past seven or eight years his clothing line has grown exponentially.

Cucinelli represents one of the most expensive brands on the market, yet it is growing by 35-40% each year. A main reason for the brand’s success is that Cucinelli has a very clear “why.” It’s about a passion for what he does, which he passes on to his employees, his clients, and his community. He embraces his heritage and his art, which is reflected in the quality and beauty of the clothes, the company’s facilities, and the creative culture. For all these reasons, his employees and customers are totally engaged with the brand and Cucinelli’s *why*.

If you’ve overlooked your “why,” it’s time to consider it. Take a moment to sit down and really think through why you do what you do. Pinpoint your passion and review if that is reflected throughout your firm. You may be surprised at what you find—realizing it’s time to make some serious changes.

Firm Management

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