

JUST CAUSE

First they ate the animals in the zoo. Then they ate their cats and dogs. Some even resorted to eating wallpaper paste and boiled leather. Then the unthinkable. “A child died, he was just three years old,” wrote Daniil Granin, one of the survivors. “His mother laid the body inside the double-glazed window and sliced off a piece of him every day to feed her second child.”

These were some of the extremes the people of Leningrad were driven to during the Nazis’ nearly nine-hundred-day siege of the city from September 1941 to January 1944. Over a million citizens, including four hundred thousand children, died, many of them due to starvation. And all the while, unbeknownst to the masses, a stash of hundreds of thousands of seeds and tons of potatoes, rice, nuts and cereal lay hidden in the heart of the city.

About twenty-five years before the siege began, a young botanist named Nikolai Vavilov started building his seed collection. Growing up in a time when Russia was ravaged by major famines that killed millions of people, he committed his life and his work to ending hunger and preventing future ecological disasters. What started as idealism eventually became a highly focused cause for Vavilov. He traveled the world to collect various types of food crops and learn more about what made some more resilient than others. Before long he had collected seeds from over six thousand types of crops. He also started to study genetics and experimented with developing new strains of crops that could better resist pests or disease, grow more quickly, withstand harsh conditions or offer higher yields of food. As his work advanced, Vavilov’s vision for a seed bank crystallized. Just as we

keep a backup of important data should our computer crash, Vavilov wanted to have a backup of the seeds for all the world's food should any species become extinct or ungrowable due to natural or man-made disasters.

Having built up quite a reputation (and an even larger seed collection), in 1920 Vavilov left his life as an academic to become the head of the Department of Applied Botany in Leningrad. With the help of government funding, Vavilov was able to bring together a whole team of scientists to join him in his work and help advance his cause. Upon his arrival at the institution, Vavilov wrote, "I would like the Department to be a necessary institution, as useful to everybody as possible. I'd like to gather the varietal diversity from all over the world, [organize them all and] turn the Department into the treasury of all crops and other floras." And like any good visionary with an infinite mindset, he concluded, "The outcome is uncertain. . . . But still, I want to try."

Within two years, however, things had changed. This was Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union, and no one was safe. Not even the highly respected Vavilov. Over the course of his rule, which lasted from 1922 until his death in 1953, Stalin is said to have been responsible for the deaths of over 20 million of his own people. And sadly, the scientist who had devoted his life to helping his country's people found himself one of Stalin's political targets. Arrested in 1940 on trumped-up charges of espionage, Vavilov was subjected to over four hundred sessions of brutal interrogation, some lasting thirteen hours, all with the intent to break his spirit and coerce a confession that he was an anti-Stalin sympathizer. But Vavilov was not a man who could be easily broken, not even under such extreme conditions. Despite his captors' best efforts, Vavilov never broke. He never confessed to the false charges against him. Sadly, in 1943, at only fifty-five years old, the visionary botanist and plant geneticist who had devoted his life to ending hunger died in prison of malnutrition.

At the time of Vavilov's death, the siege of Leningrad was raging. There, in the middle of a war zone, hidden in a rather nondescript building in St. Isaac's Square, were the records of all the work Vavilov's team had done, and of course, their priceless seed collection, which now consisted of hundreds of thousands of varieties of crops. Beyond the obvious risks from shelling, the collection was also threatened by an explosion of rats in the city (the starving people had eaten all the cats, which would ordinarily control the rat population). And as if that weren't enough, Vavilov's

collection had also caught the attention of the Nazis. Obsessed with eugenics and his own health, Hitler knew the value of the seed bank and wanted it for himself and for Germany. The problem was, although Hitler knew of its existence, he did not know its location. So he tasked a group within his army to find it.

Despite the threats, and despite being subjected to the same grueling conditions as all the other residents of Leningrad, Vavilov's team of scientists continued their work throughout the siege. They ventured out in the middle of winter, for instance, to resow secret plots of potatoes in a field near the front lines. Though they were able to smuggle some of their work out of the city, the rest they kept hidden and under guard. The scientists were so devoted to Vavilov's vision that they were prepared to protect the seed bank at any cost. Even if the cost was their lives. In the end, surrounded by hundreds of thousands of seeds, tons of potatoes, rice, nuts, cereals and other crops that they refused to eat, nine of the scientists died of starvation.

When talking about his cause, Vavilov was once quoted as saying, "We shall go into the pyre, we shall burn, but we shall not retreat from our convictions." And those who joined him in common cause were more than inspired by Vavilov's words. They lived them. One of the survivors, Vadim Lekhnovich, who helped plant the seed potatoes and stood guard over them while shots flew through the air, was later asked about not eating the bounty. "It was hard to walk. It was unbearably hard to get up every morning, to move your hands and feet," he said, "but it was not in the least difficult to refrain from eating up the collection. For it was *impossible* [to think of] eating it up. For what was involved was the cause of your life, the cause of your comrades' lives."

The scientists who carried on Vavilov's work during the siege felt like they were a part of something bigger than themselves. This Just Cause, "a mission for all humanity," as Vavilov called it, gave their work and their lives purpose and meaning beyond any one individual or the very real struggles they faced in the moment of the siege. To have fed themselves or even to have fed the masses of starving residents in the city would have been a finite solution to a finite problem. Though they may have helped prolong the lives of some who would likely still have died or even saved the lives of others, they were looking beyond the immediate horizon. They weren't imagining the relatively few lives they could save in Leningrad;

they imagined a future state in which their work might save entire civilizations. Their work was not devoted to getting to the end of the siege; they were playing to keep the human race going for as long as possible.

What a Just Cause Is

Howard's Little League team was one of the, if not the, worst in the league. At the end of each lost game, his coach would say to the players, "It doesn't matter who wins or loses, what matters is how we played the game." At which point, the precocious young Howard would raise his hand and ask the coach, "Then why do we keep score?"

When we play in a finite game, we play the game to win. Even if we hope to simply play well and enjoy the game, we do not play to lose. The motivation to play in an infinite game is completely different—the goal is not to win, but to keep playing. It is to advance something bigger than ourselves or our organizations. And any leader who wishes to lead in the Infinite Game must have a crystal clear Just Cause.

A Just Cause is a specific vision of a future state that does not yet exist; a future state so appealing that people are willing to make sacrifices in order to help advance toward that vision. Like Vavilov's scientists, the sacrifice people are willing to make may be their lives. But it needn't be. It can be the choice to turn down a better-paying job in order to keep working for an organization that is working to advance a Just Cause in which we believe. It may mean working late hours or taking frequent business trips. Though we may not like the sacrifices we make, it is because of the Just Cause that they feel worth it.

"Winning" provides a temporary thrill of victory; an intense, but fleeting, boost to our self-confidence. None of us is able to hold on to the incredible feeling of accomplishment for that target we hit, promotion we earned or tournament we won a year ago. Those feelings have passed. To get that feeling again, we need to try to win again. However, when there is a Just Cause, a reason to come to work that is bigger than any particular win, our days take on more meaning and feel more fulfilling. Feelings that carry on week after week, month after month, year after year. In an organization that is only driven by the finite, we may like our jobs some days, but we

will likely never *love* our jobs. If we work for an organization with a Just Cause, we may like our jobs some days, but we will always love our jobs. As with our kids, we may like them some days and not others, but we love them every day.

A Just Cause is not the same as our WHY. A WHY comes from the past. It is an origin story. It is a statement of who we are—the sum total of our values and beliefs. A Just Cause is about the future. It defines where we are going. It describes the world we hope to live in and will commit to help build. Everyone has their own WHY (and everyone can know what their WHY is if they choose to uncover it). But we do not have to have our own Just Cause, we can choose to join someone else's. Indeed we can start a movement, or we can choose to join one and make it our own. Unlike a WHY, of which there can be only one, we can work to advance more than one Just Cause. Our WHY is fixed and it cannot be changed. In contrast, because a Just Cause is about something as of yet unbuilt, we do not know exactly the form it will take. We can work tirelessly to build it however we want and make constant improvements along the way.

Think of the WHY like the foundation of a house, it is the starting point. It gives whatever we build upon it strength and permanence. Our Just Cause is the ideal vision of the house we hope to build. We can work a lifetime to build it and still we will not be finished. However, the results of our work help give the house form. As it moves from our imagination to reality it inspires more people to join the Cause and continue the work . . . forever. For example, my WHY is to inspire people to do what inspires them so that together we can each change our world for the better. It is uniquely mine. My Just Cause is to build a world in which the vast majority of people wake up inspired, feel safe at work and return home fulfilled at the end of the day, and I am looking for as many people as possible who will join me in this Cause.

It is the Just Cause that we are working to advance that gives our work and our lives meaning. A Just Cause inspires us to stay focused beyond the finite rewards and individual wins. The Just Cause provides the context for all the finite games we must play along the way. A Just Cause is what inspires us to want to keep playing. Whether in science, nation building or business, leaders who want us to join them in their infinite pursuit must offer us, in clear terms, an affirmative and tangible vision of the ideal future state they imagine.

When the Founding Fathers of the United States declared independence from Great Britain, for example, they knew that such a radical act would require a statement of Just Cause. “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,” they wrote in the Declaration of Independence, “that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” The vision they set forth was not simply one of a nation defined by borders but of an ideal future state defined by principles of liberty and equality for all. And on July 4, 1776, the fifty-six men who signed on to that vision agreed to “mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.” This was how much it mattered to them. They were willing to give up their own finite lives and interests to carry forward the infinite idea and ideals of a new nation. Their sacrifice, in turn, inspired subsequent generations to embrace the same Cause and devote their own blood, sweat and tears to continue to advance it.

We know a Cause is just when we commit to it with the confidence that others will carry on our legacy. This was certainly the case for America’s founders. And it was the case for Nikolai Vavilov. Vavilov’s vision of a world in which entire populations, and indeed all of humanity, will always have a source of food, ensuring that we can survive as long as possible, carries on to this day. There are nearly two thousand seed banks spread across more than one hundred countries around the world that are continuing the work that Vavilov started a lifetime ago. The Svalbard Global Seed Vault in Norway is one of the largest. Located in a naturally temperature-controlled environment in the Arctic, the Svalbard Vault stores over a billion seeds from nearly six thousand species of flora. It is there to ensure that in the worst-case scenario, we would have a food source to keep our species alive. Marie Haga, the executive director of the Crop Trust, the organization formed in partnership with the United Nations to help support the work of global seed banks, points to Vavilov as the ostensible founder of the cause. “A century after [Vavilov’s] first journeys,” she said, “a new generation of dedicated crop diversity supporters continue to travel the world to conserve not only germplasm but also Vavilov’s legacy.”

Many of the organizations we work for now already have some sort of purpose, vision or mission statement (or all of them) written on the walls that our leaders hope will inspire us. However, the vast majority of them would not qualify as a Just Cause. At best they are uninspiring and

innocuous, at worst they point us in a direction to keep playing in the finite realm. Even some of the best-intentioned attempts are written in a way that is finite, generic, self-centered or too vague to be of any use in the Infinite Game. Common attempts include statements like, “We do the stuff you don’t want to do, so that you can focus on the things that you love to do.” It may be a true statement, it’s just a true statement for too many things, especially in a business-to-business space. Plus, it’s not much of a rallying cry. Another common generic vision sounds like, “To offer the highest quality products at the best possible value, etc., etc.” Statements like this are of little use for those who wish to lead us in the Infinite Game. Such statements are not inclusive. They are egocentric—about the company; they look inward and are not about the future state to which the products or services are contributing.

Vizio, the California-based maker of televisions and speakers, says on their website, for example, that they exist to “deliver high performance, smarter products with the latest innovations at a significant savings that we can pass along to our consumers.” I take them at their word that they do all those things. But do those words *really* inspire people to want to offer their blood, sweat or tears? When you read those words are you inspired to rush to apply for a job there? Few if any of us get goose bumps or feel a visceral calling to be a part of something like that. Such statements offer us neither a cause to which we would commit ourselves nor a sense of what it’s all for, both of which are essential in the Infinite Game.

Again, a Just Cause is a specific vision of a future state that does not yet exist. And in order for a Just Cause to provide direction for our work, to inspire us to sacrifice, and to endure not just in the present but for lifetimes beyond our own, it must meet five standards. Those who are unsure whether their purpose, mission or vision statement is a Just Cause or those interested in leading with a Just Cause can use these standards as a simple test.

A Just Cause must be:

- **For something**—affirmative and optimistic
- **Inclusive**—open to all those who would like to contribute
- **Service oriented**—for the primary benefit of others
- **Resilient**—able to endure political, technological and cultural change
- **Idealistic**—big, bold and ultimately unachievable

For something—affirmative and optimistic

A Just Cause is something we stand for and believe in, not something we oppose. Leaders can rally people *against* something quite easily. They can whip them into a frenzy, even. For our emotions can run hot when we are angry or afraid. Being *for* something, in contrast, is about feeling inspired. Being *for* ignites the human spirit and fills us with hope and optimism. Being *against* is about vilifying, demonizing or rejecting. Being *for* is about inviting all to join in common cause. Being *against* focuses our attention on the things we can see in order to elicit reactions. Being *for* focuses our attention on the unbuilt future in order to spark our imaginations.

Imagine if instead of fighting *against* poverty, for example, we fought *for* the right of every human to provide for their own family. The first creates a common enemy, something we are against. It sets up the Cause as if it is “winnable,” i.e., a finite game. It leads us to believe that we can defeat poverty once and for all. The second gives us a cause to advance. The impact of the two perspectives is more than semantics. It affects how we view the problem/vision that affects our ideas on how we can contribute. Where the first offers us a problem to solve, the second offers a vision of possibility, dignity and empowerment. We are not inspired to “reduce” poverty, we are inspired to “grow” the number of people who are able to provide for themselves and their families. Being *for* or being *against* is a subtle but profound difference that the writers of the Declaration of Independence intuitively understood.

Those who led America toward independence stood *against* Great Britain in the short term. Indeed the American colonists were deeply offended by how they were treated by England. Over 60 percent of the Declaration of Independence is spent laying out specific grievances against the king. However, the Cause they were fighting *for* was the true source of lasting inspiration, and in the Declaration of Independence it came before anything else. It is the first idea we read in the document. It sets the context for the rest of the Declaration and the direction for moving forward. It is the ideal to which we personally relate and that we have easily committed to memory. Few Americans, except for scholars and the most zealous of history buffs, can rattle off even one of the complaints listed later in the document, things like: “He has endeavored to prevent the Population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for naturalization of foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their Migrations hither, and

raising the Conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.” In contrast, most Americans can recite with ease “all men are created equal” and can usually rattle off the three tenets of “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” These words are indelibly marked on the cultural psyche. Invoked by patriots and politicians alike, they remind Americans of who we strive to be and the ideals upon which our nation was founded. They tell us what we stand *for*.

Inclusive—open to all those who would like to contribute

Human beings want to feel a part of something. We crave the feeling of belonging. We enjoy the feeling of being part of a group, like when we attend church, attend a parade or rally or wear the jersey of our favorite team when we attend a sports event. A Just Cause serves as an invitation to join others in advancing a cause bigger than ourselves. When the words of the Just Cause help us imagine a positive, specific, alternative vision of the future, it stirs something inside us that makes us want to raise our hand to join up and join in.

A well-crafted statement of Cause inspires us to offer our ideas, our time, our experience, our hands, anything that may help advance the new vision of the future it articulates. This is how movements come to be. It starts with a few people. Their idealized vision of the future attracts believers. Those early adopters don’t show up to get anything, they show up to give. They want to help. They want to play a role in advancing toward a new version of the future. The Cause that attracted them becomes their own.

Organizations that simply promise to “change the world” or “make an impact” tell us very little about what specifically they want to accomplish. The sentiments are good, but they are too generic to serve as a meaningful filter for us. Again, a Just Cause is a *specific* vision of a future state that does not yet exist; a future state so appealing that people are willing to make sacrifices in order to help advance toward that vision. We call it “vision” because it must be something we can “see.” For a Just Cause to serve as an effective invitation, the words must paint a specific and tangible picture of the kind of impact we will make or what exactly a better world would look like. Only when we can imagine in our mind’s eye the exact version of the world an organization or leader hopes to advance toward will

we know to which organization or to which leader we want to commit our energies and ourselves. A clear Cause is what ignites our passions.

“We only hire passionate people” is the oft-recited standard of many a person responsible for hiring. How do they know, however, whether the candidate is passionate for interviewing but not so passionate for the Cause? The reality is, EVERYONE is passionate about something, but we aren’t all passionate about the same thing. Infinite-minded leaders actively seek out employees, customers and investors who share a passion for the Just Cause. For employees, this is what we mean when we say, “Hire for culture and you can always teach the skills later.” For customers and investors, this the root of love and loyalty for the organization itself.

The quick-serve salad company Sweetgreen stands for something bigger than selling salads, for example, and they invite would-be contributors to join their Cause. Their stated mission is “to inspire healthier communities by connecting people to real food.” Real food, as Sweetgreen defines it, means ingredients from local sources that support local farms. Which is why their stores have different menus depending on which part of the country they are in. Though many of us may buy their salads just because we like their salads, those who are devoted to locally sourced food and want to support local farms will be drawn to work for and become the most loyal supporters of Sweetgreen. They will make sacrifices, like going out of their way or paying a premium, to buy from Sweetgreen. Supporting the company in some shape or form is one of the things they do to feel that they are advancing their own values and beliefs, their own vision of a better world. They feel included in the Cause.

Service oriented—for the primary benefit of others

A Just Cause must involve at least two parties—the contributors and the beneficiaries. The givers and receivers. Contributors give something, e.g., their ideas, hard work or money, to help advance the Just Cause. And the receivers of those contributions benefit. For a Just Cause to pass the service-orientation test, the primary benefit of the organization’s contributions must always go to people other than the contributors themselves.

If my boss offers me career advice, for example, that advice must be for the primary benefit of my career and not theirs. If I am an investor, I must

intend that the primary benefit of my contribution goes to helping the company advance its Just Cause. If I am a leader, I must intend that the primary benefit of my time, effort and decisions goes to those I lead. If I am a frontline employee, I must intend that the primary benefit of my efforts goes to the people buying our product or service. If there is only one party, if we are the sole beneficiaries of our work, that's not a Just Cause, that's a vanity project.

When Sweetgreen talks about the beneficiaries of its contributions, they talk about communities and people. They don't talk about what their contributions will do for Sweetgreen. And the drafters of the Declaration of Independence were clear that "We the people," not "We the leaders," would be the primary beneficiaries of their efforts and of the Revolution. If those who led the fight had made themselves the primary beneficiaries, then America probably would have ended up with a dictatorship or an oligarchy. With that new perspective, we instantly see what follows when a company says the primary beneficiaries of their work are shareholders, not customers.

The operative word in all this is "primary." Service orientation does not mean charity. In charity, the vast majority, if not all, the benefit of our contributions must go to the receiver. And any benefit the contributor gets is the good feeling that they contributed. In business, of course we can consider how our work will benefit us or advance our own lot. Of course we can expect and even demand to be fairly compensated and recognized for our efforts and results. We can want our investors to benefit too, just not at the expense of the company, the people who work there or the customers who buy from us. No beneficiary, no customer, should be forced to buy a substandard product and no employee should lose their job as a result of cost cutting performed to benefit a shareholder, who is, after all, just one of a group of contributors. Again, only when the primary beneficiary of the Cause is someone other than the organization itself can the Cause be Just.

This is what "servant leadership" means. It means the primary benefit of the contributions flows downstream. In an organization where service orientation is lacking (or treated as a sideshow rather than the main event), the flow of benefits tends to go upstream instead. Investors invest with the primary intention of seeing a return before anyone else. Leaders make decisions that benefit themselves before those in their charge. Salespeople ensure they do whatever they need to do to make the sale to earn their

bonus, regardless of what the customer needs. This is the common flow of benefit in so many of our organizations today. Too many of our cultures are filled with people working to protect their own interests and the interests of those above them before those of the people they are supposed to be serving.

The requirement that a Just Cause be service oriented is consistent with how infinite games are supposed to be played. The infinite player wants to keep the game going for others. A leader who wishes to build an organization equipped for the Infinite Game must never make decisions solely to boost their own compensation. Their efforts should go toward equipping the organization for the game in which it is operating. Even an investor must not be the primary beneficiary of their investment. Rather it is the organization in which they believe and whose Just Cause they want to see advanced that must benefit from their financial contribution. An infinite-minded investor wants to contribute to advance something bigger than themselves—which, if it is successful, will be highly profitable. A finite-minded investor is more like a gambler who bets solely so they may reap the reward. Let us not confuse the two behaviors.

The reason a service orientation is so important in the Infinite Game is because it builds a loyal base of employees and customers (and investors) who will stick with the organization through thick and thin. It is this strong base of loyalty that gives any organization a kind of strength and longevity that money alone cannot provide. The most loyal employees feel their leaders genuinely care about them . . . because their leaders genuinely do care about them. In return, they offer their best ideas, act freely and responsibly and work to solve problems for the benefit of the company. The most loyal customers feel the company genuinely cares about their wants, needs and desires . . . because the company really does. And in return, this is why loyal customers go out of their way or pay a premium to buy from that company over another and encourage their friends to do the same. And the best-led companies feel like their investors genuinely care about helping the company become as strong as possible in order to advance the Cause because the investors really do care. The results benefit all stakeholders.

Resilient—able to endure political, technological and cultural change

Leaders who wish to lead with an infinite mindset would do well to keep the example of the Declaration of Independence in mind. The founders' stated commitment to equality and unalienable human rights are evergreen. Over the course of more than 240 years, even as the nation's leaders, landscape, people and culture have changed, the Just Cause has remained as relevant and inspiring as ever. It is a Just Cause for an infinite time frame.

In the Infinite Game of business, a Just Cause must be greater than the products we make and the services we offer. Our products and services are some of the things we use to advance our Cause. They are not themselves the Cause. If we articulate our Cause in terms of our products, then our organization's entire existence is conditional on the relevance of those products. Any new technology could render our products, our Cause and indeed our entire company obsolete overnight. The American railroads, for example, were some of the largest companies in the country. Until advancements in automotive technology and a network of highways offered people a quicker and sometimes cheaper alternative to the train. Had the railroads defined their need to exist in terms related to moving people and things instead of advancing the railroad, they might be the owners of major car companies or airlines today. Publishers saw themselves in the book business instead of the spreading-ideas business and thus missed the opportunity to capitalize on new technology to advance their cause. They could have invented Amazon or the digital e-reader. Had the music industry defined themselves as the sharers of music rather than sellers of records, tapes and CDs they would have had an easier time in a world of digital streaming. By defining themselves by a cause greater than the products they sold, they could have invented services like iTunes or Spotify. But they didn't . . . and now they are paying the price for it.

Markets will rise and fall, people will come and go, technologies will evolve, products and services will adapt to consumer tastes and market demands. We need something with permanence for us to rally around. Something that can withstand change and crisis. To keep us in the Infinite Game, our Cause must be durable, resilient and timeless.

Idealistic—big, bold and ultimately unachievable

When the signers of the Declaration of Independence affirmed that all men “are created equal” and “endowed . . . with certain unalienable Rights,”

they were referring primarily to white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant men. Almost immediately, however, there were efforts to advance a more expansive and inclusive understanding of the ideal. During the Revolutionary War, for example, George Washington forbade anti-Catholic organizing in his armies and regularly attended Catholic services to model the behavior he expected of his men. Nearly a hundred years later, the Civil War brought about an end to slavery, and soon after that the Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship and equal rights to African Americans and former slaves. The women's suffrage movement took another step toward America's Just Cause when it gained the vote for women in 1920. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which protected African Americans and others from discrimination, were two more steps. The nation took yet another step in 2015 with the Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which extended the protections guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment to gay marriage.

If the founders of the United States had only set out a goal—to win independence—once it was achieved, they would have grabbed a pint of ale and sat around playing rounds of ninepins and ring taw while regaling each other with how great it was that they won the war. But that's not what happened. Instead, they got to work writing a constitution (which was only fully ratified seven years after the official end of the Revolutionary War) to further codify a set of enduring principles to protect and advance their big, bold, idealistic vision of the future. A vision that Americans have been striving to protect and advance ever since quill and ink touched paper . . . and will continue to protect and advance as long as we have the will and resources to do so. America's Just Cause has yet to be fully realized, and for all practical purposes it never will be. But we will die trying. And that's the point.

Indeed, the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, the Civil Rights Act and gay rights are some of the big steps the nation has taken to realize its Cause. And though each of those movements, infinite in their own right, are still far from complete, they still represent clear steps along the nation's march toward the ideals enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. It is important to celebrate our victories, but we cannot linger on them. For the Infinite Game is still going and there is still much work to be done. Those victories must serve as milestones of our progress toward an idealized

future. They give us a glimpse of what our idealized future can look like and serve as an inspiration to keep moving forward.

This is what the idealized journey of a Just Cause feels like—no matter how much we have achieved, we always feel we have further to go. Think of a Just Cause like an iceberg. All we ever see is the tip of that iceberg, the things we have already accomplished. In an organization, it is often the founders and early contributors who have the clearest vision of the unknown future, of what, to everyone else, remains unseen. The clearer the words of the Just Cause, the more likely they will attract and invite the innovators and early adopters, those willing to take the first risks to advance something that exists almost entirely in their imaginations. With each success, a little more of the iceberg is revealed to others; the vision becomes more visible to others. And when others can see a vision become something real, skeptics become believers and even more people feel inspired by the possibility and willingly commit their time and energy, ideas and talents to help advance the Cause further. But no matter how much of the iceberg we can see, our leaders have the responsibility to remind us that the vast majority still lies unexplored. For no matter how much success we may enjoy, the Just Cause for which we are working lies ahead and not behind.

When You Have Your Cause, Write It Down

The Founding Fathers of the United States were larger-than-life figures. They lived and breathed their Just Cause. This is often the case with inspirational leaders in business as well. But what happens when those charismatic keepers of the Cause move on, retire or die? I am often surprised how many visionary leaders don't think they need to find the words for or write down their Cause. They assume that because their vision is clear to them it's clear to everyone else in the organization. Which of course it's not.

Without finding the words for the Just Cause and writing them down, it dramatically increases the risk that, in time, the Cause will be diluted or disappear altogether. And without the Just Cause, an organization starts to function like a ship without a compass—it veers off course. Focus moves from beyond the horizon to the dials in front of them. Without a Just Cause

to guide them, finite-mindedness starts to creep in. The leaders will celebrate how fast they are going or how many miles they have traveled, but fail to recognize that their journey lacks any direction or purpose.

A Just Cause that is preserved on paper can be handed down from generation to generation; a founder's instinct cannot. Like the Declaration of Independence, a written statement of Cause dramatically increases the chances that the Cause will survive to guide and inspire future generations beyond the founders and those who knew the founders. It's the difference between a verbal contract and a written contract. Both are legal and enforceable, but when a contract is written it prevents any confusion or disagreement about the terms of the deal . . . especially for people who weren't there when the deal was made.

A written cause works like a compass. And with a compass in hand, each succession of leaders, their gaze looking beyond the horizon, can more easily navigate the technologies, politics and cultural norms of the day without the founder present.