

Re:Focus

simple ideas to help you thrive

by Simon Sinek

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Fitting In

Have you ever gone to a sporting event and seen someone on the subway wearing the same jersey as you and said, “Hey”? Why’d you do that? Was it simply because they were wearing the same clothes as you?

The most basic human desire is to feel like you belong. Fitting in is important. When we see that someone supports the same team we do, we feel a sort of bond, for no other reason than that we perceive that we share something in common with them.

Our desire to feel like we belong is so strong that we seek it out. This is what gangs offer a teenager in the inner city. With no strong family unit and no strong school bonds, a young, disenfranchised man or woman will join a gang to feel like a part of something. That sense of belonging is important to us because with a sense of belonging, with a sense that we are surrounded by people who understand us and see the world as we see it, we feel more comfortable. We feel safer. We’re even able to form bonds of trust much easier.

I recently attended Comic Con in New York City. The event, which attracts thousands of comic book, movie, anime, and manga enthusiasts from across the country and around the world, is like a big geek convention. The black sheep of their schools, families and the general population, the ones labeled misfits simply because they are a little too into graphic novels, video games and their characters, all descend upon Comic Con like Mecca.

I’m one of those black sheep. I’m one of those geeks. I love science fiction -- always have. I went to Space Camp as a kid, I have little Boba Fett busts and caricatures on my desk and I can often be heard making obscure references to or quoting lines from Star Wars. I like stories of the classic hero, of good versus evil, the ones in which the good guys wear white and the bad guys wear black... and I love a good sword fight. But I’d never been to a Comic Con before, even though I’d always wanted to.

I have friends who are majorly into the cosplay culture and have urged me to go to a convention for no other reason than to meet others like me. And so I did. I recognize, however, that there is a difference between attending and participat-

ing. I understand that to watch from the sidelines does not make you a part of the game. And so I decided that, for my first con, I was gonna go all out. I enlisted the help of a couple of friends -- my friend Miracole, who is pretty big into the cosplay world, hooked me up with an amazing costume and my friend Kendra went to the convention with me.

I went as Snake Eyes from G.I. Joe (the version I grew up with, not the modern movie version). And it was amazing. I couldn't walk 10 feet without someone wanting to have their picture with me. Throughout the day I heard people calling out, "Hey, Snake Eyes." Anywhere else I would have been a dork or a misfit, but at Comic Con, dressed in head-to-toe spandex, I felt comfortable. I was with people who liked me for me, for all my idiosyncratic ways.

The experience was more powerful than just a fun day at Comic Con -- this was about human nature. So often in our lives we put ourselves in uncomfortable positions because we think we have to. We go to law school or become accountants because our parents told us it would be good for us, not because we wanted to. We choose one job over another because it pays better, not because we are good fits. We offer a view of ourselves to the outside world based on what we think they want from us, not based on who we really are. We do the things that we hope will gain us acceptance all in search of that comfort, that feeling like we belong. But, ironically, all that twisting and turning actually makes us more uncomfortable.

I used to hide my geekiness. I used to cover it up for fear that others would judge me. I wanted to fit in like anyone else, so I acted the way I thought would gain me most acceptance. But this weekend, at Comic Con, I learned a big lesson. The goal is not to bend or change ourselves so we fit the norm; the goal is to find the group in which we are the norm. No matter who we are, no matter what our values or beliefs, our tastes or proclivities, there is an entire culture or subculture out there just like us. I learned that, instead of expending energy to fit into the group, it's better to expend energy to find the group in which you fit.

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