



# Socratic Leadership

## Three Lessons in the *Laches* and How to Teach Them

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### 1: Think in Questions

The central question in the *Laches* is “What is courage?” Socrates arrives at this question through what we call a *Question-Finding Process*. Instead of blindly trying to answer the first question raised—“Should our sons learn how to fight in armor?”—Socrates tries to find the right question, i.e., the question that needs to be tackled first.

“What’s the answer to the problem and how do we fix it? We get asked this question a lot.” But in today’s workplace, “it’s not about being the one with the answer anymore, it’s about being the one with the smart questions and having everyone answer [them] with you.” (Paul Bennett, creative director at IDEO, an international design consultancy)

#### The Five Why’s

Think of a recent situation where things did go wrong. Maybe you didn’t do as well on an exam as you hoped. Maybe you got into an argument with your friend. Ask yourself “Why?” five times. What do you think is the foundational question, i.e., the question that gets you closest to the root of the problem?

### 2: Think Like a Beginner

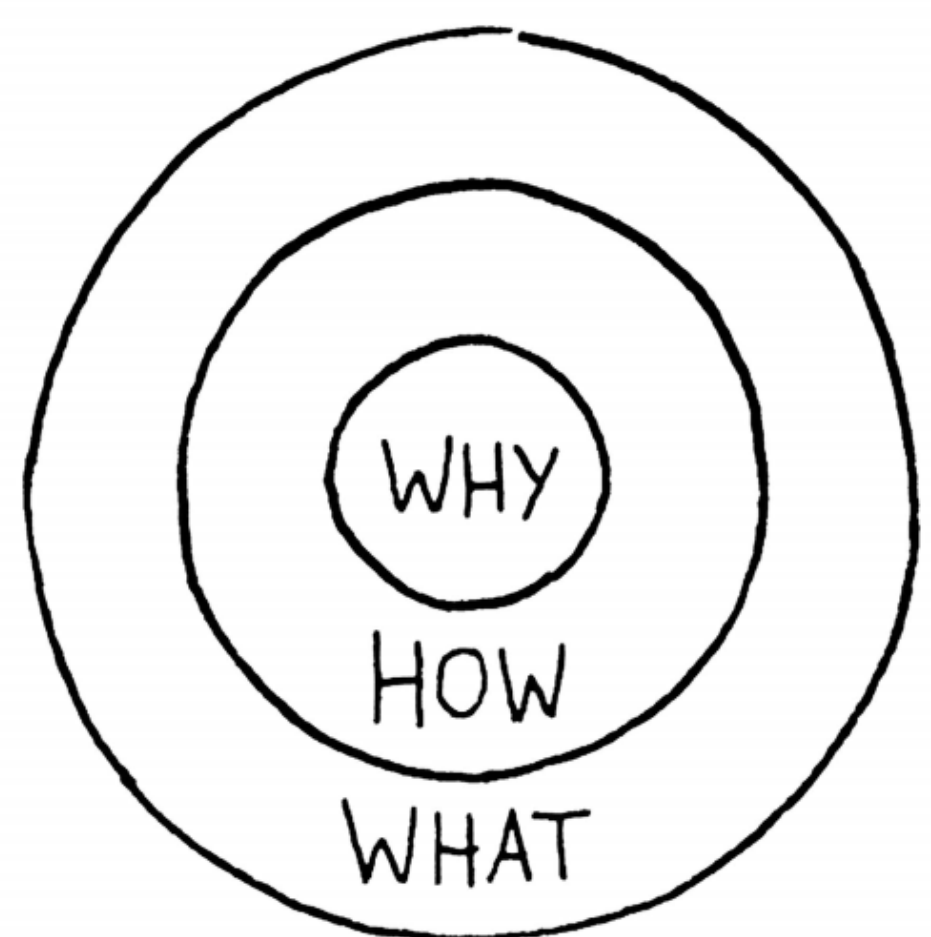
Socrates makes Laches realize that he has hoarded false beliefs about what courage is. He wants Laches to empty his mind by questioning his fundamental assumptions. We can compare this process to producing what Zen Buddhists call a Beginner’s Mind.

“I find that every couple of years now I have to re-frame how I think [...] and that only comes about by using Beginner’s Mind, and asking all kinds of fundamental questions. Through questioning, I eventually realize that the lenses I’m looking through to see the world around me are wrong and that I have to construct a whole new frame of reference.” (JS Brown, formerly at Palo Alto Research Center)



### 3: Be on a Mission

When Socrates asks “Why do you want your sons to learn how to fight in armor?” he inquires about the purpose of their actions: “Why are you doing what you’re doing?” He shows that Laches lacks knowledge of what exactly it is that he wants to achieve, i.e., courage.



“Very few people or companies can clearly articulate WHY they do WHAT they do. When I say WHY, I don’t mean to make money—that’s a result. By WHY I mean what is your purpose? Why does your company exist? Why do you get out of bed every morning? And why should anyone care?” (Simon Sinek, author on leadership)

#### Mission Questions

- What is Socrates’ mission question?
- What is your personal mission question?



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