# The ILEETA Journal

## ILEETA

International Law Enforcement
Educators and Trainers Association

# The Infinite Game
## by Kerry Avery, M. Ed.

The keynote speaker at the opening ceremonies of the 2017 International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) conference was Simon Sinek; author of the books Start with Why, Find Your Why, and Leaders Eat Last. The focus of his speech was a thought provoking concept of the infinite game. He has book coming out called The Infinite Game later this year which I'm eagerly anticipating.

In his presentation he explained the difference between the finite and infinite game. A finite game has known players, fixed rules, and a definition for winning. The infinite game has known and unknown players, changeable rules, and the objective is to perpetuate the game or stay in the game as long as possible.

I'm sure Simon already knew this, and it's why he chose this topic for an IACP keynote, but as I was contemplating what he was saying I realized that policing is an infinite game! There is no winning in law enforcement. I'm fairly confident we all know we are never going to eradicate crime. Then I had another epiphany, training is also an infinite game.

Historically war was a finite game with an identified purpose and known players. In this video on the infinite game, Simon Sinek discusses how this was not the case in the Vietnam War. Now we have the war on terror which is one side fighting to achieve the goal of eradicating the groups trying to gain control through fear, while the extremists are fighting, willing to die for their belief system, and will continue to recruit members. One side is playing finite game with a set goal, and the other side is playing an infinite game. How is the war against a belief system won?

The book isn't out yet, but I wanted to open the discussion on how this concept applies to law enforcement training. There is no doubt, we're in an infinite game. There is no winning at training. There will never be a point where we can train officers in everything they need to know with 100% proficiency before they put on the badge and walk out the door.

What struck me with this topic is when Simon said the people who understand they're playing an infinite game use a different set of rules. What does that mean for us? What are the rules?

### We're Not Competing to Win

A finite game has a definition for winning. The objective of the infinite game is to perpetuate the game for as long as possible. There is no winning. We are only in competition with ourselves, and the objective is to keep improving. How do we do that in training? Understand learning theories and instructional design. Adult learning is an ongoing field of study with over 50 years of research. I spent 9 years studying adult education and I still spend

an inordinate amount of time reading books and research. Engage with others in the training and education field (inside and outside of law enforcement) to share experiences and discuss ways to "build a better mousetrap."

Simon says (pun intended) the infinite player understands that sometimes you have the better product and sometimes they have the better product. There is better, not the best because there is no such thing as winning for Microsoft and Apple. What are you doing to keep improving your training? In 15 years of designing and developing training programs, I have never gotten to the point where I'm 100% happy with the final product. There is always room to incorporate more engagement through formative assessments, more opportunities to apply content, and better review activities. Visuals, handouts, and instructor manuals are other components which can be improved. You should be reading the course evaluations, and looking for ways to keep improving your design and facilitation skills. At the end of every course I reflect on the question, "What would I do differently if we could start this project again?"



**Working With What We Have**

In a finite game, the players spend money and resources to win. Simon used the Vietnam War as an example of this. The forces who were playing to win ran out of resources and came home. The infinite player knows that investing a bunch of resources in the short term will not

result in a win. The goal is to work with what we have and keep progressing. If your agency can afford a new simulator without having to drain resources from other areas – great! If the entire agency is going to suffer, we have to find other ways to improve and progress. Advances in technology continue to offer new methods for facilitating learning at a rate that exceeds our ability to incorporate them appropriately. Focus on making incremental improvements. Progress is a continuous journey, not a destination.

One small change I made was to incorporate a countdown timer for exercises. This helps participants manage their time, and keeps the class running on time. Another change I made was utilizing the online polling program Socrative to facilitate questions in class and issue post-course evaluations. These are examples of improvements which did not cost any money, but made my courses more efficient and effective.

Pillars of the Infinite Game

In his talk, Simon provides the following list of pieces in the infinite game:

1. Just cause

2. Courageous leadership

3. Trusting teams

4. Worthy rival

5. Flexible playbook

Just cause is understanding why your organization exists. People believe in the cause and want to see it advanced. ILEETA is a prime example of an organization full of people who believe in the importance of quality training and want to see it advance.

Courageous leadership requires leaders who believe in the cause and will do things to better the cause, even if it requires their own sacrifice. They sacrifice themselves, not their people. On a personal level this is centered in ethics and integrity.

Trusting teams means creating an environment where people are not afraid to share mistakes, and ask for help without any retribution. In a training environment, this is the goal in your classroom. The research is clear, learning from mistakes is effective for encoding information in to long term memory.

Worthy rivals help reveal your weaknesses. This is an everlasting game and our goal is to perpetuate it as long as possible. Law enforcement is more collaborative than competitive, but we still drive each other to keep improving.

A flexible playbook is getting away from the "way we have always done it" because the only way we can even try to keep up with the changes in crime and policing is to have a growth mindset. We are not limited by what we have always done.

"Change is life. Stagnation is death. If you don't change, you die. It's that simple. It's that scary." - Leonard Sweet

I'm looking forward to reading the Infinite Game by Simon Sinek when it is released later this year, but until then I am going to continue to contemplate this concept and how it applies to law enforcement training.

Reference

The Infinite Game. (2018). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tye525dkfi8

## ILEETA
**About the Author**
*Kerry Avery is the owner of Odin Training Solutions Inc.. Kerry has a Master's degree in Education and over 14 years' experience designing training programs, including 9 years working with law enforcement to develop classroom, online and blended learning courses. She has worked with law enforcement agencies at every government level in Canada, with US companies, and internationally in Central America, and Ukraine. Kerry is the managing editor for the ILEETA Journal, and has presented at the ILEETA, IADLEST, and IACP conferences. She can be reached at Kerry.Avery@shaw.ca.*