

## Reflections of Steven Jobs: Lessons and Guidance for Entrepreneurs

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### Abstract

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*Rising from nowhere, over the course of his lifetime, Steve Jobs ascended to unprecedented success and affected the lifestyles of commoners as well as the computing environments of major corporations globally. Twice the leader of Apple Computer, Jobs competed successfully against the heavyweights of the computing industry, such as Microsoft. Through his entrepreneurship and leadership, in financial terms, Apple eventually became known as the most valuable company. Such successfulness cannot neither be ignored nor taken lightly in terms of what may be learned from his lifetime of accomplishments. This paper highlights various lessons for entrepreneurs that may be gleaned from examining Steve Jobs' lifetime of accomplishments.*

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### 1. Steven Jobs

Steven Paul Jobs, known as the Pirate of Silicon Valley, was a famous American businessman and investor (Leyshan, 2013). He was born on February 24, 1955, and died on October 5, 2011 (Lentz, 2012). In his childhood, he was adopted by a family in Palo Alto, California (Blumenthal, 2012). In 1976, although he dropped out of college, at the age of 21, he and his good friend Steve Wozniak founded Apple Computer in his garage (Lentz, 2012; Weiss, 2016). After founding Apple, he twice led the company, and also contributed toward the successfulness of the Pixar entertainment company (Shea, 2013). *Forbes* magazine showed that his net wealth was about \$5.1 billion in 2009 thereby making him the forty-third of the richest people in the United States (Forbes, 2009).

His corporate efforts resulted in remarkable achievements. He played a pioneering role among several industries, including computer systems software and hardware via the Mac; the entertainment industry via Pixar; the music industry via the iPod; the retail industry via an array of Apple stores and iTunes; and wireless telecommunications via the iPad and the iPhone (Lussier & Achua, 2016). Jobs changed the way that people use technology and the Internet. In the process of development and design, he always paid attention to the smallest details of Apple's products. For instance, when it debuted in 2007, the iPhone was described as a "thing of beauty" because it resembled a "piece of jewelry" instead of exhibiting the characteristics of an electronic "gadget (Schlender & Tetzeli, 2015)."

Jobs masterfully demonstrated the ability to promote Apple's products, and generate excitement and anticipation. He loved his products and his presentation always aroused the enthusiasm of the people; this ability was unmatched by his peers. Whenever Jobs made a presentation, he often said: "there is one more thing" before he finished his presentation (Isaacson, 2011, p. 438). He would then announce the significant thing, and receive much applause (Isaacson, 2011). He asked Apple employees to have strict secrecy, because he believed this strategy would raise expectations regarding any upcoming apple products (Isaacson, 2011). Apple's new product releases have enjoyed the fervor of worldwide demand. It is the opinion of this author that most of the successes of Apple are owed to Steve Jobs because he put his spirit into his company and spared no efforts to protect Apple.

Undeniably, Jobs was a good innovator and an excellent visionary. However, everybody has advantages and disadvantages; he also had pros and cons. Like anyone, Jobs was human and fallible. Jobs possessed and exhibited the imperfections of human nature. He was often viewed as being vicious and ruthless toward both colleagues and his competition (Klein, 2015).

Despite his tendency to pursue extremes in business and personal matters, Jobs experienced outspoken criticism because some thought he was obsessed with his pursuit of perfection (Isaacson, 2011). In any case, regardless of either positive or negative opinions, an examination of his accomplishments provides lessons that may be beneficial for entrepreneurs. Through pondering Jobs' accomplishments, five themes are present: creativity and vision, dissatisfaction, personal involvement with emotion, attentiveness to details, and acknowledging the saliency of change.

## **2. A Lesson for Creativity and Vision**

The first lesson one learns from examining Jobs involves creativity and vision. If someone doesn't have the supportiveness of their co-workers or investors, then their ideas and actions may seem outrageous. It is the opinion of this author that the reason why Jobs was great and famous is that he had the visionary ability to mix artistic charm with the miracle of technology. Probably the most prominent examples are the iPod and the iPhone. Jobs exhibited a talent for making new and complicated products easily accepted and used by people. Jobs believed that fascination with products involved not only the innovation of the product itself, but also necessitated creative ideas and motivating styles among products (Beahm, 2014).

Jobs had a visionary, pioneering spirit. He was always willing to take his team to find new breakthroughs. Early in his career, Jobs and his teams often worked for 90 hours weekly, and challenged themselves to work for both creativity and inspiration (Beahm, 2014). They thought it was meaningful and interesting to get into an area where others had never heard or known before (Beahm, 2014). The leadership in this type of process provides a very important role. If the leader exhibits failure, then followers are less apt to follow the leader (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011). Essentially, if a leader loses confidence or interest that results in some failure, others may abandon unequivocal efforts toward success. Every coin has two sides. Sometimes, the pioneering spirit pushes people into dangerous situations. Blazing trails is much like gambling – it often demands the trust and support of co-workers, colleagues, friends, and investors.

Entrepreneurs may consider creativity and vision as considerations of Jobs' life. His first computer was an extremely creative endeavor. However, it was unfinanced for Jobs because of his creativeness that was perceived as being outlandish yet visionary. Although organizations must be concerned with enhanced competitiveness and uniqueness of products and services for satisfying market needs and wants, creativity may often be viewed as controversial or disinteresting to investors (Von Stamm & Trifilova, 2009). Maintaining vision is necessary for the long-term interests of any individual or organization (Doss, Sumrall, McElreath, & Jones, 2014). Modern entrepreneurs must be mindful of the resistance that often goes hand-in-hand with creative vision.

## **3. A Lesson for Dissatisfaction**

When Jobs worked on the Apple II in the 1980s, he crafted an inexpensive product with a set of gaming paddles, cassette, keyboard, Breakout game, and a manual (Goldstuck, 2007). Despite the product's attributes, improvements were forthcoming. Jobs inspired colleagues toward higher levels of quality and performance, and deemed mediocrity among colleagues as unacceptable. Termed his "reality distortion field," Jobs exhibited the ability to motivate others toward achieving excellence and accomplishing incredible feats (Wilkerson & Weiss, 2016). Morris (2013) describes this influence and persuasion as follows: "He reminded me of Rasputin. He laser-beamed in on you and didn't blink. It didn't matter if he was serving purple Kool-Aid. You drank it. It was a self-fulfilling distortion. You did the impossible because you didn't realize it was impossible." Essentially, Jobs possessed the ability to persuade others toward achieving greatness while maintaining a robust dissatisfaction for the current statuses of products or performances.

Such dissatisfaction and influence may often be considered extreme. For example, after the introduction of the LaserWriter printer, which set a new industry standard, Jobs opted to remove all of Apple's remaining, unsold dot-matrix printers from the market (Elliott, 2012). Although both Jobs and his management personnel realized that many consumers would purchase the obsolete dot-matrix printers, he demanded their removal (Elliott, 2012). Removing the outdated printers, which were incapable of printing graphics and generated printouts of low-quality, would incite financial losses (Elliott, 2012). Regardless, Jobs did not care about the financial losses, and emphasized quality of product within the marketplace (Elliott, 2012). Similarly, as time progressed and technology changed, Jobs demanded the removal of the aging Apple II product line, much to the dismay of Apple's upper management given that financial losses would occur (Elliott, 2012).

Entrepreneurs may consider this lesson from the contexts of executive leadership responsibility and Jobs' dissatisfaction that contributed toward providing higher qualities of products within the marketplace.

A primary goal of executive leadership is the maximizing of shareholder wealth and rendering decisions that are in the best interests of the organization and its stakeholders (Doss, Sumrall, & Jones, 2012; Parkinson, 1997). Jobs' dissatisfaction with product quality and demanding the removal of inferior products from the market contrasted with this traditional theme of managerial finance. Instead of opting to pursue increased profits and maximized wealth via liquidating the dot-matrix printers and aging Apple II machines at reduced prices within the market, Jobs' decision to remove them represented a debatable position that contrasted with would be deemed as a sound action from the financial perspective. Essentially, Job's decision sacrificed incoming cash flows and potential profits from aging products for the provision of newer, more expensive products of much higher quality within the market. His decision caused some consternation and disagreement within the executive management faction. Regardless, Jobs maintained his position despite its unpopularity.

Given these notions, entrepreneurs must be mindful that dissatisfaction with something may lead to decisions are perceived as unpopular. Entrepreneurs must be mindful that standing by their decisions may generate consternation, and requires tenacity. No guarantees exist that dissatisfaction with something and unpopular decisions will lead to successful organizational outcomes. Jobs' dissatisfaction incited debate, scrutiny, and quarrel. Modern entrepreneurs must be mindful that their decisions may often subject them to much scrutiny and debate, and that their positions may sometimes disagree with what others may perceive as being in the best interests for the organization. Entrepreneurs must not fear labels as eccentrics.

#### **4. A Lesson for Personal Involvement and Emotionalism**

Steve Jobs had a personal stake in his creations. Jobs was involved personally in reorganizations, with product designs, and with people (Clapp, 1992; Snickars & Vonderau, 2012; Young, 1988). Jobs stimulated others toward improved performance and challenged them individually (Austin, 2013). Generally, Jobs' colleagues were challenged, and they met challenges and finished tasks simply because they were held accountable for their performances (Austin, 2013). Jobs also took a personal approach toward his competitors, especially Microsoft (Austin, 2013). For example, despite a tumultuous "love-hate relationship" between Apple and Microsoft, Jobs is remembered for his vicious attacks against Bill Gates and his full-page advertisement that welcomed IBM to the personal computer industry (Austin, 2013).

Personal attacks are often perceived negatively among professional settings, and may often generate failure, ostracism, or rifts between individuals. However, approaching work tasks with emotion, when leveraged positively to generate better results organizationally, can be beneficial. Emotion cannot be defined with preciseness, it represents a state of existence involving awareness, and it can be leveraged either positively or negatively to influence the performances of individuals (McManus, 2013). Positive emotions include pride and joy whereas negative emotions include anger and shame (McManus, 2013). By inciting an emotional response among individuals, one may influence the behaviors of others (McManus, 2013). Jobs provoked emotional responses in others quite vehemently and successfully. This ability was evidenced by his ability to motivate others toward achieving excellence and performing incredible feats (Wilkerson & Weiss, 2016).

Entrepreneurs may be mindful of Jobs' effective uses of personal involvement and emotional influence throughout his career. Entrepreneurs have a vested stake in the long-term success of their individual projects, endeavors, and companies. Entrepreneurs who have a direct and deep personal interest and stake in their projects tend to leverage tacit knowledge effectively and appropriately (Corbetta, Huse, & Ravasi, 2004). Organizationally and among personnel, personal involvement and emotion demonstrate that an entrepreneur is someone whom employees often "see and relate to" during the course of the workday (Longnecker, et al., 2008). Personal involvement and emotion also may be considered from the personnel perspective. Employees that experience some level of participatory decision-making exhibit greater commitment levels among organizations (Sumrall, Cox, Doss, & Jones, 2008; Sumrall, Doss, & Cox, 2007). Given the potential of personal involvement and emotion to affect ventures via organizational influences and personnel motivations, entrepreneurs must neither discount nor understate their importance.

#### **5. A Lesson for Attentiveness to Details**

Jobs was attentive to detail, and espoused this mindset throughout his organizations. Similar to Walt Disney, Steve Jobs understood that attentiveness to details was crucial for achieving greatness (Eden & Long, 2014). During his childhood, Jobs exercised meticulous attention to detail in order to successfully implement a prank involving the switching of bicycle locks (Gillam, 2012). This preciseness remained a substantial characteristic throughout his adulthood and career.

For instance, at Pixar, Jobs was fascinated by the detail-oriented results that were generated by animators, and the improvements that were exhibited within each succeeding production (Schlender & Tetzeli, 2015). While leading Apple, his attention to detail influenced the crafting of products, stores, and manuals (Akdeniz, 2014). Essentially, Jobs was concerned with details through practically every facet of his organizations and projects.

Attention to detail is a strong lesson for entrepreneurs. Being detailed is a necessity for any business venture – from operating sewing shops to the planning of businesses (Bergemann, 2015; Morse & Mitchell, 2006). Attention to detail is a consideration of product success among markets (Morris, 2009). Detail orientation is necessary for crafting financial budgets (Kaplan, 2015). Entrepreneurs must understand the details of any venture before pursuing their intended undertaking (Olaopa, 2013). Attentiveness to detail is a necessity of understanding processes that are necessary for innovation (Trusko & Gupta, 2014). Despite the importance of details, many entrepreneurs hire subordinate managers whom are concerned with the details of operational management among organizations (Hacker, 2015). Although entrepreneurs are mindful of vision and strategic interests, they must not ignore the saliency of details toward ensuring successful business ventures.

## **6. A Lesson for Embracing and Forging Change**

Steve Jobs was a personal computer industry pioneer who changed the way that people perceive and use science and technology. Mobile electronics, such as the iPhone and the iPad, now pervade modern lifestyles, and are common among many households and organizations. Such devices changed lifestyles and work settings by enabling instant, portable communication between people. Through his vision for technology, Jobs transformed the face of society. Challenging the status quo of something is a foundation of transformational leadership (Doss, Glover, Goza, & Wigginton, 2015). Essentially, Jobs was a transformational leader who embraced change. He influenced the crafting and maturing of Silicon Valley from a desolate orchard into a technological hot-spot (Estes, 2011).

Entrepreneurs must realize that they will experience change during their ventures. Change is the only constant aspect of life (Dyer, 2007). Humans are capable of addressing changes that affect organizations toward the long-term interests of the firm (Doss, Guo, & Lee, 2012). All organizations experience change through time, and humans are the catalysts for both embracing and inciting change (Doss, Guo, & Lee, 2012). Societies that accept the inevitability of change often spawn much entrepreneurial activity (Ogbor, 2009). Entrepreneurs must accept change, and advocate it positively throughout their organizations (Troemel, 2013). Essentially, change is an inevitable reality of life. All entrepreneurs must acknowledge the necessity of change during their ventures.

## **7. A Lesson for Quality**

Examining Jobs' lifetime of accomplishments necessitates a consideration of quality. Entrepreneurs must be concerned with quality. Continuous improvement is a reality of enhancing quality among organizations, ranging from the processes whereby products are generated to aspects of customer service (Doss & Kamery, 2006a; Doss & Kamery, 2006b). During the course of his life, Jobs exhibited concern for product quality throughout his ventures (Steiber & Alänge, 2016). From a corporate perspective, Apple was heralded as an organization that continuously sought improved quality of product (Luckhurst & Morin, 2015). Even after Jobs' death, the pursuit of quality exists at Apple. The ongoing competitive saga between Apple Maps and Google Maps highlights these notions. By improving its Apple Maps systems, a more robust software package is presented to satisfy market consumers whereby Apple may gain market share. Throughout its history, Apple exhibited different forms of improvement and quality enhancement. For instance, when Jobs removed dot-matrix printers from the market in favor of introducing a higher quality LaserWriter, a better product was introduced within the competitive market to satisfy consumers.

Quality is a prime consideration for entrepreneurs among their products and services. Market feedback often provides insight regarding quality perceptions among consumers (McDaniel, 2002). Quality is affected and influenced by market activities and forces (Kirzner, 1973). Essentially, according to Hatten (2016), quality may be viewed from two perspectives: 1) perspective of the organization in which a product or services satisfies an established criteria or requirements, and 2) perspective of the market consumers who experience the product or service. The former is objective regarding the organizational requirements whereas the latter is subjective with respect to the preferences of consumers. Entrepreneurs must be mindful of these different quality perspectives. Just because the organization believes it is fielding a quality product does not necessarily mean that market consumers will concur and readily accept or reject the offered product or service.

## 8. A Lesson for The Future

No one can forecast the future with full and complete certainty and accuracy; unexpected events may occur that interject dynamics, situations, and emergencies that were unimaginable when speculating anticipated organizational futures and events (McElreath, et al., 2014a). Apple now progresses into the future without Jobs. Some arguments exist that Apple will not be as innovative following the demise of Steve Jobs (Bolton, 2014). Despite these arguments, Apple's future may unveil a variety of products that are palatable for the tastes of market consumers. Examples include new iPad versions, the Apple Watch, and new varieties of iPhones (Alidori, 2015). Features of these products may include solar charging abilities, physical impact resistance, sidewall display abilities, improved touch accuracies, biometric security, and attack detection (Alidori, 2015). Each of these innovative developments contributes toward satisfying one of the earliest Apple goals – crafting “highly personal” technologies with which consumers may bond (AppleInsider, 2016). Whether such products receive market acceptance that rivals the successes of their predecessors will be determined in due time. Regardless, despite the loss of Jobs, Apple continues to pursue its earliest vision of providing personal technologies that are meaningful aspects of human lives.

At the time of this writing, without its visionary co-founder and guiding mentor, because of its refusal to craft software for decrypting iPhone data, Apple finds itself embroiled in a conundrum with the U.S. federal government that involves considerations of liberty and privacy versus the interests of maintaining national security (Dolan & Kim, 2016). In instance, given the dangers of terrorism that may adversely impact American society, considerations of public safety are relevant aspects of legally addressing Apple's lack of software to decrypt iPhone data (Dolan & Kim, 2016). This notion is especially important given the endangerments that are harmful to society. Any number of organized crime factions and terrorist organizations seek to harm U.S. interests both domestically and overseas (McElreath, et al., 2014b; McElreath, et al., 2013; Wigginton, et al., 2015). Potential threats may transcend national borders both physically and virtually among electronic environments (Doss, Henley, & McElreath, 2013a; Doss, Henley, & McElreath, 2013b). Electronic technologies are used by criminal and terrorist organizations for a variety of purposes ranging from simple communication to spreading propaganda (Goloskokov, 2015). Given such uses of technology versus the interests of national security, coupled with Apple's lack of decryption ability for iPhone data, Apple finds itself in a legal and societal conundrum. At the time of this writing, no resolution to this dilemma was finalized. Time will determine the outcome of this matter.

Nothing lasts forever. At the time of this writing, Apple experienced its toppling from a much-heralded status as the most valuable company because Alphabet, a Google organization, surpassed its financial value to become the “world's most valuable public company (Levy, 2016).” This situation embodies the nature of competition between the technology giants. Competition between Apple and Google may well define and influence the future of computer industries (Williams, 2014). Some arguments exist that the competitive dynamics between Apple, Amazon, and Google represent an emerging form of a monopolistic paradigm in which competitive actions are exercised through leveraging market forces and power (Cooper, 2015). Within this competition is the refining of technologies among the competitors. For instance, at the time of this writing, Apple is revitalizing and improving its Apple Maps product to better compete against Google Maps (Heisler, 2015). Thus, despite its unseating, Apple pursues continuous improvements among its products to compete weightily and formidably within its market. Time will eventually reveal the competitive victors.

These events represent lessons for entrepreneurs regarding an ignorance of future events. Despite the best efforts to forecast, generate pro forma expectations, identify endangerments, or to speculate the dynamics of competition that may impact strategic pursuits, no entrepreneur truly knows the future. Although change is a constant in life, no entrepreneur can truly foresee what types, scopes, magnitudes, and externalities of change will impact their ventures. In this sense, a simple lesson for entrepreneurs is straightforward: some things will always be unknown.

## 9. Conclusion

Steve Jobs experienced a remarkable life. Although time and chance happen to everyone, Jobs experienced levels of successfulness that were probably unimaginable during his formative years. His accomplishments were achieved neither quickly nor overnight; instead, they necessitated a lifetime of effort, tenacity, commitment, creativity, and perseverance. Although Jobs possessed future visions, achieving them involved accomplishing even the smallest of details on a daily basis. Essentially, by taking care of the immediate concerns, the long-term accomplishments took care of themselves. Quality and excellence were interjected among both the small and large endeavors. Entrepreneurs are advised to approach their ventures similarly.

Jobs' endeavors incorporated future vision tempered with the reality of change through time. Similarly, entrepreneurs must possess and maintain a future vision that accommodates change through time. Market preferences may change through time; market competitors may change through time; laws and regulations may change that affect organizational strategies and operations; products and services will come and go through time via their respective life cycles; and unforeseen happenings may affect markets and the competition therein. Although one cannot predict the future with full certainty and accuracy, entrepreneurs must make valid efforts toward understanding the details of the competitive markets and the expected forces that will influence their strategies, operations, decisions, and endeavors. Although some understanding of markets may exist and change may be acknowledged, entrepreneurs must not lose sight of future vision.

Entrepreneurs should remember that all good things must come to an end. Everything has a life cycle. Steve Jobs experienced his life cycle between the years 1955 and 2011 (Lentz, 2012). Over the years, Jobs and Apple launched a variety of products, ranging from the MacIntosh and Lisa machines to the modern iPads, iPhones, and iPods. Obviously, the MacIntosh and Lisa product lines were relegated to history and obsolescence. The popular products of modern times, representing current forms of iPads, iPhones, and iPods, will experience the remainders of their respective life cycles. Certainly, market preferences change through time contributing toward the growth, popularity, saturation, decline, and demise of many products and services. Entrepreneurs must be mindful that nothing lasts forever.

Very few entrepreneurs will experience the same level of notoriety and fame that Jobs experienced throughout his lifetime. However, entrepreneurs may study and mimic many of the attributes that contributed to both Jobs' and Apple's successes through the years. Any entrepreneur is well advised to maintain vision while minding immediate concerns; to acknowledge, accept, and embrace the reality of change positively; to realize the finality of life cycles; to understand markets and to compete effectively and efficiently; and to interject an unequivocal commitment to quality and details within their endeavors. Entrepreneurs should never be completely satisfied with the status quo; instead, they should always evaluate their situations and explore opportunities. Entrepreneurs should be innovative and creative to satisfy market needs and wants. Such were the characteristics of Jobs throughout his life and career. Pursuing such activities is certainly no guarantee of success for any entrepreneur, but it provides a basis for enhancing entrepreneurial activities and endeavors.

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