

Steve Jobs — Inspiration for Innovation and Quality

In October 2011, the world lost one of its most creative and innovative computer and technology experts — Steve Jobs. There are seven industries that Jobs revolutionized during his career: animated movies, digital publishing, music, personal computers, retail stores, telephones and tablet computing. As a co-founder of Apple Computers and Pixar, and co-owner of 317 Apple patents and trademarks that have made a tremendous impact on our daily lives, his message to us was simple, but clear — Pursue your dreams and see opportunities even in life's setbacks.

"Steve's brilliance, passion and energy were the source of countless innovations that enrich and improve all of our lives," read a statement by Apple Computers. Pixar stated that "he saw the potential of what Pixar could be before the rest of us, and beyond what anyone ever imagined. Steve took a chance on us and believed in our crazy dream of making computer animated films". Similar statements were issued by many other companies and leaders describing what Steve Jobs meant to them and to the world of computers as we know it today.

Steve Jobs left his mark on many things and, remarkably, in spite of the many difficulties he faced, he lived an extremely creative life geared towards constant change and innovation. In his own words, "innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower"! And for all of us, he was a leader with a huge legacy to follow.

If we are to learn something from Steve Jobs and his life-long path of innovation, what would that be and how can we apply it in our daily professional lives? Luckily for all of us, Jobs left road signs to lead us to a prosperous future. Those are his principles of creativity and innovation which, if properly understood and implemented, could become his most valuable legacy for future generations.

People

The most valuable asset of any organization or any project are its people. They can create the "impossible", imagine something "never thought of before", change the "unchangeable", and go places "where no man has gone before". Jobs noted that innovation has nothing to do with how many research and development (R&D) dollars someone has. When Apple came up with the Mac, IBM was spending at least 100 times more on R&D. It's not about money. It's about the people you have and how you lead them.

Culture

Innovation and invention come from environments that encourage cooperation, sharing, synergy and trust, where no one is afraid of making mistakes. Work teams need freedom in order to be creative, to develop and follow exciting ideas. They need support, fairness and appreciation, if they are to come up with new solutions or with something to benefit all; new ways of doing business, new services or new products. Steve Jobs insisted that "sometimes when you innovate, you make mistakes. It is best to admit them quickly, and get on with improving your other innovations." Jobs created a remarkable organization chart around him, in which all key decision makers were just one or two steps away. He also implemented a culture of accountability throughout whole company.

Initiative

According to Jobs, real success cannot be achieved by waiting for someone else's request for a particular action, a special feature, a function or a service. Success can only come from self initiative and by taking a proactive approach. Responsibility for our future is in our hands and our actions. Jobs was quoted as saying that "it's really hard to design products by focus groups. A lot of times, people don't know what they want until you show it to them." The work environment needs to support initiatives and a culture where "everyone has the sense that right now is one of those moments when we are influencing the future."

Focus

In order to do a good job, or make a good product or service, we must eliminate all unimportant ones. In 1997, after having returned to Apple as interim CEO, Jobs cut 70% of the products that Apple was working on. According to many business analysts, focusing his business saved Apple. It was one of Jobs's great strengths, knowing how to focus. "Deciding what not to do is as important as deciding what to do... that's true for companies, and it's true for products." The famous saying "creativity is just connecting dots" is attributed to Jobs. "Creative people are able to connect experiences they've had and synthesize new ideas. Unfortunately, that's a rare commodity. A lot of people haven't had very diverse experiences. So they don't have enough dots to connect, and they end up with very linear solutions."

Simplicity

Although Jobs always evangelized great products as the foundation of Apple's success, the real success was in his inordinate ability to simplify complex systems and turn them into easy to use products. In his own words, focus and simplicity were his mantras. Jobs believed that "Simple can be harder than complex: You have to work hard to get your thinking clean to make it simple. But it's worth it in the end because once you get there, you can move mountains." Indeed, Jobs changed millions of lives by simplifying technology and making it easy to use, exciting and beautiful.

Quality

If there is one main characteristic of Steve Jobs that has pervaded his entire career, it is a genuine obsession with quality. For some people that worked with him Jobs was a "quality freak". He often insisted not only on the specifications to be met, but that they go above and beyond in order to ensure the best quality possible. He believed that there is no shortcut to excellence and that we all need to make a commitment to excellence as our priority.

The logic is simple. We all need to use our talents, abilities, and skills in the best way possible. This little extra will get us ahead of others. We need to live by a higher standard and pay attention to the details that really do make the difference. Excellence is achievable; decide to give your best and you will be amazed with what life gives you back.

"Be a yardstick of quality," is Jobs' message to all of us.

Hard work

Jobs was "convinced that about half of what separates the successful entrepreneurs from the non-successful ones is pure perseverance." Hard work is the only way to achieve long lasting success. Jobs lesson is hard work and love for what we do will lead us to success. Success

leads to happiness but real happiness can only come when we realize that we have changed someone's life for the better.

All these principles are valuable reminders of real values and of the purpose of things we do in our daily lives and careers. But one of Jobs' quotes is of the utmost importance and has direct implications to the current situation in most of our professional environments. Jobs noted that "the cure for Apple is not cost-cutting. The cure for Apple is to innovate its way out of its current predicament." Could there be a better and clearer message for all of us, so used to having all kinds of "innovative" cost-cutting measures imposed on us, that the way out is not through another "financial yoga exercise" but through innovation? Constant change and innovation are the only way to overcome further cuts and create a secure and prosperous future for us and everyone else around us.

Lets all adopt and live by Steve's famous saying "I want to put a ding in the universe!"

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