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Lessons from Steve Jobs

The recent death of Apple Computer founder, Steve Jobs, triggered an unprecedented outpouring of tributes from every corner of the globe. Jobs was in many ways the Thomas Edison or Henry Ford of our era. The impact that he and the company he founded had on reshaping the modern world are immeasurable. Steve Jobs biographer, Walter Isaacson, noted that Jobs had a major impact on six industries; personal computers, telephones, music, animated movies, digital publishing and tablet computing. Studying the lives of entrepreneurs like Steve Jobs is a valuable exercise. Studying his life and career offers lessons we can apply to make ourselves and our papers much more successful.

“The cure for Apple is not cost cutting.”

When I am working with a customer who is nervous about investing in advertising, I often talk about Steve Jobs. In 1984, Steve Jobs had a great product, the Apple MacIntosh that no one knew they needed. With all of his money tied up in creating and building a product that lacked a market, the start-up Apple was on the verge of bankruptcy. Looking at the situation, Steve Jobs realized that the only thing Apple needed to be successful was customers. Borrowing money that he could only repay if Apple could stimulate a major increase in sales, Jobs invested in advertising. He hired an agency to develop the now famous “1984” ad and purchased a spot during the Super Bowl that year. The highly creative ad quickly made Apple a household word and not only saved Apple, but jumpstarted the personal computer industry. As Apple became more and more successful, Jobs continued to invest in marketing and advertising to fuel the growth of his company.

Steve Jobs was eventually forced out of the company he founded. Within a few short years Apple again found itself teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. Jobs was asked to rejoin the company and revitalize it. He immediately announced major cuts in the company’s product lines and workforce. The one area that Jobs did not cut was the company’s investment in marketing, in fact he increased Apple’s advertising budget. He personally became involved in the “Think Different” campaign. Once again, Steve Jobs used advertising to drive sales and save Apple from failure. Steve Jobs had a gift for seeing through complex problems to find simple solutions. He understood that the life blood

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of any business is customers and that to attract customers a business needs to advertise. He grasped that no matter how deeply a company cuts their expenses; they will fail if they are unable to attract buyers for their products. I often share Steve Jobs wisdom with reluctant prospects, “The cure is not cost cutting.”

“My job is not to be easy on people. My job is to take these great people we have and to push them and make them even better.”

Steve Jobs could be very difficult to work for. He demanded excellence and refused to accept excuses. His team liked to talk about Steve’s “Reality Distortion Field.” Some how he didn’t understand that the average person had no interest in owning a computer or that you couldn’t sell individual songs for a dollar. Steve Jobs was not shy about setting “unreasonable” goals and then pushing his team to make his vision come true. Like all good leaders he never asked his people to do anything he wouldn’t do himself. Steve worked harder and longer than anyone else in his firm. He refused to be satisfied and was always looking for ways to improve his products and his processes. He challenged his people to find a better way and he wanted his employees to challenge him back. Jobs actually created an annual award for the Apple employee who got into the biggest argument with him. Never one to be limited by thoughts like, “it’s never been done that way before,” Steve Jobs encouraged outside of the box thinking. He famously flew the skull and crossbones on the flagpole at his headquarters and announced, “Why join the Navy, when you can be a pirate!” Steve Jobs fanatical dedication to excellence made his company a leader in a highly competitive industry and made Apple the world’s second most valuable brand. The next time someone tells you that the economy and the country are “going to hell in a hand-basket” or that “print advertising is finished” switch on your own personal “reality distortion field.” Focus on your goals and on pushing yourself and your team to become better and better.

That’s been one of my mantras -- focus and simplicity. 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.”

Surprisingly, Steve Jobs was not a computer “nerd.” Many of the people who worked for him possessed superior hardware design and programming skills. In an industry populated by scientists and engineers, he had the soul of an

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artist and a sales person. While many of his people had a better understanding of computers, Steve had an intuitive understanding of something much more complex, the human psyche. He designed products that made people's lives better. He created products that solved problems that many people weren't even aware that they had. He also knew that the best product in the world was worthless if people didn't embrace it. Every Apple product was designed to go beyond user friendly, Jobs wanted every product to be ridiculously simple to use. From the first single button computer mouse to the latest I-pad touch screen, he wanted every Apple device to be simple and fun to use. Steve Jobs knew that we all shy away from complexity. If presented with too many choices, we often choose to move on.

Steve Jobs also understood that simplicity is the key to effective communication. When he was launching some of the most technologically advanced products of the last three decades, he carefully avoided "geek speak." Instead of peppering his description of the product with bits and bytes of chips and algorithms, he talked about what the product could do to make his audience's lives better and more productive. He used simple language and told stories instead of reading off a list of product attributes and specifications. He painted such a clear picture of his products that everyone listening could picture themselves owning and enjoying them. He used simple slides, each bearing just a few words to convey his message. Perhaps the most compelling aspect of Steve Jobs legendary presentations was his visible passion. Because he had worked so hard to deliver the best possible product to the market, every fiber of his body exuded confidence. His enthusiasm was contagious and he made people want to own the latest Apple product at any cost.

Steve Jobs presentation skills are now studied in business schools around the globe and several excellent books have been written about his methods. As sales people, we should study and emulate Steve Jobs presentations. Watch one of his product launches online and pay close attention to these key points:

- Use simple language. Complexity is confusing. People are only motivated to buy when they understand how your product will make their situation better.
- It's not about your product; it's all about the customer. Only talk about your product in relation to solving a customer's problem. People are

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inherently selfish, customers don't care about your product or about you; they are only interested in improving their own situation. Talking about your product outside of this context only wastes their time and yours.

- Don't hide your passion. If you're not excited about your product, why should the customer be excited about it? Don't be shy about describing your products. Apple customers could see that Steve Jobs couldn't wait to tell them about his newest offering. In a 2006 Macworld address, Jobs demonstrated the latest Apple device and shouted, "Click—Boom!—Amazing!" Everyone in the room wanted to own "Amazing!"

"Insanely Great"

With Steve Jobs passing, the world lost a great innovator and leader. His life will impact the lives of virtually every person on the globe for decades, perhaps centuries, to come. He repeatedly stated his goal was to create products and companies that were "Insanely Great." Though sometimes they wanted to strangle him for pushing them so hard, his employees came to admire and even love Steve Jobs. Through his example and his refusal to accept anything from anyone but their very best, Jobs pushed his people to grow beyond their wildest dreams. As sales people we can share the role of advertising in Jobs success, we can adopt his passion for excellence to make our papers the best publication in the market and we can simplify our presentations so that prospects will understand how our papers can benefit them. Studying the biographies of successful people is one of the best ways to realize our individual potential in life. If we study the life of Steve Jobs and if we apply the lessons he taught to our lives, we too can be "Insanely Great!"

This article was written by Jim Busch of the Pittsburgh Pennysaver.

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