

by Jim Karpen

The Leadership Lessons of Steve Jobs

His Apple legacy inspires generations

the legacy of Steve Jobs may never be equaled. First there was the Apple II, which jump-started the personal computer industry. Then the Macintosh, which changed the way people use personal computers. Then the iPod, which was easy and fun to use, and took over the MP3 player market. That was followed by the iPhone, which has revolutionized mobile phones. And most recently the iPad, which is leading the way into what he called “the post-PC world.”

As CEO of Apple, he did things his way: no market research, no focus groups. He didn’t ask what consumers wanted. He simply intuitively knew what they would like, and he demanded that his company create it. By the fall of 2011, Apple had pushed past Exxon to become the world’s most valuable company, with annual revenues jumping toward \$100 billion.

How did he do it? How did a college dropout who started a computer company at the age of 20 in his parents’ garage go on to create such a success and have such a remarkable influence on the world? What can the leaders of today and tomorrow learn from Steve Jobs?

● #1: failure isn't all bad

Steve Jobs failed many times. And each time he used that failure to his advantage. At the age of 30, when Apple was 10 years old and had revenues of \$2 billion and 4,000 employees, Steve Jobs was fired from his own company. He had a disagreement with the CEO he had picked to help run the growing firm, and the board of directors showed him the door.

He felt at a loss for a few months, but then realized that he still loved what he did: creating great technology. If he couldn’t do it at Apple, he’d simply start another company. And he did. He called it NeXT Computer.

The computer NeXT developed had a more powerful operating system than Apple’s. Eleven years later, when Apple was faltering without its founder at the helm, it purchased NeXT, his new one, so that its robust operating system could be the basis of Apple’s new generation of machines. Steve Jobs returned to Apple and then pushed it from one revolutionary product to the next, transforming whole industries.

In his famous 2005 commencement address at Stanford, he said that getting fired was the best thing that ever happened to him. “The heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything. It freed me to enter one of the most creative periods of my life.”

He sometimes also failed in small ways, such as the first version of the MacBook Air, which many complained about and which got tepid reviews. Yet he knew what he wanted, and just kept refining the design. Now it’s transforming the laptop market and other manufacturers are racing to come out with similar “ultrabook” computers.

“Failure isn’t bad,” says Phil Simon, author of the new book, *The Age of the Platform: How Amazon, Apple, Facebook, and Google Have Redefined Business*. “Failure is often necessary. Edison said that he didn’t invent the lightbulb; he invented 99 ways not to do it.”

Whether you’re a CEO or a student, don’t be afraid to fail, he explains. And if you do fail, use failure to your advantage. Don’t give up.

● #2: money follows passion

When Apple fired Steve Jobs he no longer had a company, but he still had the passion, the love. For him, this was primary. Everything followed from that. In his Stanford address he said, “Have the courage to follow your heart and intuition.” Trust your destiny.

“The only way to do great work is to be passionate about your career,” says Sarah Hathorn, a leadership coach and CEO of Illustra Consulting. And Steve’s passion was technology. He never made any decisions based on short-term profits. Only one thing mattered in every decision he made: was it beautiful technology that made people happy.

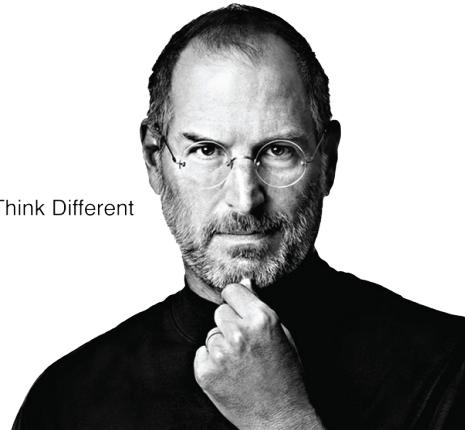
Book author Simon says that passion was not only the impetus for Steve Jobs, but also for the founders of Google, Facebook, Amazon, and Yahoo. “Money and success follow passion. It’s that simple. When I look at the companies that I profile in my book, they are/were all run by passionate folks—not those simply collecting a paycheck.” Simon’s advice for young people is, don’t settle for anything less. “Quit that boring and unfulfilling job to chase your dreams.”

Q1: What motivates most students: the fear of failure, or the desire to succeed?

● #3: be a little crazy

A corollary of being passionate is a willingness to be a little crazy—that is, to go your own way, even when it seems counter to everything that everyone else is doing. In his book *Only the Crazy and Fearless Win BIG!*, Arthur Wylie points out that technology companies had traditionally always focused on performance.

 Think Different



But Jobs had the crazy notion that Apple products should be cherished for their look and feel. For him, form was just as important as function.

Jobs was so convinced of his rightness that he wasn’t afraid to go his own way, even if it seemed odd to others, and against convention. That step—of being different, so different that it draws notice and might even seem a little crazy—takes courage. And young leaders can benefit from emulating that.

“From Steve Jobs, we learn that success comes not from being the cool kid who hangs with the in-crowd, but from developing your own, often unproven, view of the world and its needs and desires,” says Robert Mittelstaedt of the Carey Business School at Arizona State University. “We learn that leadership is not about being liked (he was a very tough boss), but about superior performance in whatever you do.”

Think Different was Apple’s tagline for years. But to think different you have to be a little crazy, passionate, and unafraid of failure. These are the leadership lessons of Steve Jobs.

John Strelcky is a leadership expert and author of *The Big Five for Life: Leadership’s Greatest Secret*. “As teens start thinking ahead to college and beyond, many fall victim to the ‘can’t, have to, shouldn’t, nobody makes money doing that’ mentality,” he explains. “This leads to some troubling results. For example: 30% of entering freshmen dropout, the average completion of a college degree now takes six years, and 64% of employees under age 25 report being unhappy in their jobs.”

Strelcky’s advice? “A better route is to find one or two people who have excelled in the field you want to excel in and learn everything you can about those people. They are proof it is possible, so focus your time and energy on them and not on the people who have no idea how to do what those people have done.”

And, Strelcky reminds: “The common thread among truly successful people in fields as diverse as those of Steve Jobs to Justin Bieber is they are passionate about what they do. That passion is what creates drive, and that drive is what leads to success.”

2: Can high schools help students find their passion? Explain.