



Book Review of *Steve Jobs: The Fascinating Leadership of Apple's Leader*

Robert Rader, Executive Director, CABE

Most of the leaders in the modern age are taught that displaying empathy, a sense of caring, seeing things from another's point of view and other traits related to emotional intelligence skills are key to building a great enterprise.

Much ink has been spilled about how the autocratic, top-down, Patton-like leader cannot succeed in today's business (or education) worlds. Such leadership is too harsh and doesn't take into account the civility and morale-building that is necessary to produce great work.

I submit that the rule is not nearly as black and white as we may think.

Steve Jobs, the great leader of Apple, who, as everyone knows, started the company with Steve Wozniak back in the mid-seventies, was the archetypal tyrant who ruled Apple with a steel determination, but also with a microscopic and unswerving focus on what he believed Apple must be.

As Walter Isaacson writes in his Jobs' biography, Apple's driving force was a person who used few social skills, whether or not he had them at all. Some examples, are:

- he would greet potential allies representing companies he wanted to work with, by telling them that their products were awful (actually he used a curse word);
- he treated his family poorly, except towards the end of his life;
- he cared little about charity, despite his great wealth; and,
- he as a recent *Fortune Magazine* put it, built a company based on secrecy.

Maybe we can understand secrecy as necessary to create the excitement and even frenzy over product launches and the reasonable belief that premature announcements of new products would harm the sale of older products. After all, who would want an iPhone

4, if they knew that the 4S was coming out soon?

Isaacson discusses how Jobs was not unaware of other peoples' feelings, but he used them as a weapon to break them down. Isaacson writes that "He could size people up, understand their inner thoughts, and know how to relate to them, cajole them, or hurt them at will."

But, despite his epic lack of people skills, Jobs built an empire with great, revolutionary, beneficial and beautiful products that have changed our world.

Isaacson's book was written at Jobs's request. Isaacson has written wonderful biographies of Einstein, Benjamin Franklin and others and this book is a fascinating read. While Isaacson writes about Jobs growing up in California, what I found particularly interesting was the narrative on how Jobs was a real '60's kid. He spent a year in India when he was in his teens, used LSD and, throughout his life, had very strange eating habits. He would eat only one thing for weeks, like carrots and, when he went to restaurants, he would order something, then often send it back three or four times, telling the waiter it was "inedible."

His formal schooling was hit and miss – he went to Reed College in California, but audited more classes than he attended. It was obvious that he was more interested in design and work with early computers than formal schooling.

Isaacson follows him through the early years, hits and misses with various computers over the years, his firing at Apple, his success with Pixar, his hugely successful return to Apple and the last months of his life. What kept hitting me, despite the huge successes was that even as he tried to balance his life with a more "humane" streak, he remained difficult to work with.

But, even so, with his brilliance, he created an army of followers, who knew that his products were top-notch and changed everything. They love Apple for its us-against-big, bad Microsoft theme and loved Jobs because he was a revolutionary – or at least portrayed

(continued on back)

himself as one, even as this company hired most of its workers outside the U.S. and freely admitted it stole ideas from others. Moreover, they loved Jobs in spite of his personality, because of his passion and desire to be at the crossroads of technology and the humanities and for his artistry.

Jobs loved art and design and worked extremely hard. He had his own very, very strong feelings and beliefs about what a product should look like and was involved in every aspect of product design, production, advertising and sales.

Despite his harsh manner with people, he put strong, highly intelligent people around him – a real “A” team. Those people he abused often ended up saying that he got them to do things they never thought possible.

So, as I sit here writing this review on an Apple iPad2, while I often use my iPod and also have an iPhone, it may seem incongruous to discuss Job’s leadership faults. But, the truth is that this very brilliant man, who built this huge company, had huge flaws as well. And, that’s the lesson: *in order to be successful as the type of person Jobs was, you also have to have much greater strengths.*

For a person who looked for balance through Far Eastern ideas, Jobs really had none, except in the strict sense of balance in the products he built. He was farsighted in regard to what the future could bring and how he could help get Apple there.

But, he was not the type of man that most employees today would want to work with. For most of us, collaboration, morale-boosting and using our emotional intelligence to help others is what motivates us.

And, makes our enterprises good places in which to work – and grow.

Jobs on Public Education

From Isaacson’s Steve Jobs

Towards the end of his life, Jobs gave his views on public education.

He “attacked America’s education system, saying that it was hopelessly antiquated and crippled by union work rules. Until the teachers’ unions were broken, there was almost no hope for education reform. Teachers should be treated as professionals, not as industrial assembly-line workers. Principals should be able to hire and fire them based on how good they were. Schools should be staying open until at least 6 p.m. and be in session eleven months of the year. It was absurd... that American classrooms were still based on teachers standing at a board and using textbooks. All books, learning materials, and assessments should be digital and interactive, tailored to each student and providing feedback in real time.”