

## Apple Coatings?

What Finishers can learn from the life of Steve Jobs.

I spent my most recent vacation with Steve Jobs. Not *the* Steve Jobs, of course. Rather, I spent a good part of the week with *Steve Jobs*, the biography written by Walter Isaacson. (Walter Isaacson, 2010 *Steve Jobs*. New York City: Simon & Schuster.)

For those lacking either the interest or time to work their way through its 630 pages, let me summarize the story. Jobs is a brilliant visionary, then he's really weird, then he's a jerk, then he's a brilliant visionary, then he's really weird, then he's a jerk, then he's a brilliant visionary, etc.

The brilliant visionary part wasn't a surprise at all. Jobs envisioned and brought to market such products and concepts as the Apple II, the Macintosh, the iPod, the iPad, the iPhone, iTunes, the App Store, the iCloud, Apple Stores and even digital Pixar films like *Toy Story*. Were an individual to produce any one of these they would be a labeled a brilliant visionary. Jobs was responsible for all of them.

"But he was weird?" Oh yes. A man who considered taking LSD one of the two or three most important things he had done in his life would certainly

fit that bill in my book. Moreover, for an extended part of his life he eschewed personal hygiene, showering but once a week. Early in his career he spent his office hours barefoot. The guy was strange.

"And a jerk?" Yes again. Andy Hertzfeld, a software engineer who worked on the Mac team and was a close friend of Jobs' told author Isaacson, "The one question I'd truly love Steve to answer is, 'Why are you sometimes so mean?'" Jobs regularly belittled and rudely criticized suggestions made by the members of his team only to claim them as his own ideas days or weeks later and proceed to implement them. He flew no license plate on his Mercedes and routinely parked it in the handicapped spots outside his office building, often taking up two such spots. These are just a few of dozens of examples of Job's abrasive personality reflected in the book. In the end, Jobs was contrite and the book makes it clear that he had some mild regret at the way he had treated others, but along the way, wow could he be a jerk.

Despite his bizarre nature and proclivity for meanness, nobody can argue with the impact he had not

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only on world of technology, but on the world. What lessons can finishers learn from Steve Jobs?

**Lesson 1: "A Players" are Key.** Jobs was maniacal about surrounding himself with the best people. His view was a binary; things were black or white, right or wrong, the best thing ever or totally horrible. In the eyes of Jobs, an individual was either brilliant or a bozo. If he thought you were brilliant he pushed you to perform beyond what you ever thought possible. If he thought you were a bozo he pushed you out. In the words of Jobs, organizations need to be "vigilant against the bozo explosion that leads to a company being larded with second rate talent." His



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intense focus on ensuring his team was top notch played a huge part in his success.

**Lesson 2: Impute.** Mike Markkula, the first major Apple investor and Chairman, championed this maxim as part of the original Apple marketing philosophy. To “Impute,” a company must convey its values and importance in everything it does. In Apples’ case, to impute meant to create products that were “playful, easy, creative and on the bright side of the line between hip and intimidating.”

**Lesson 3: Visual Factory.** Not exactly the words used by Jobs, but the concept carries. Finishers who are students of lean are familiar with the concept of “Visual Factory”: basically, the idea that any individual should be able to walk into a finishers’ facility in intuitively understand the flow of the manufacturing or finishing processes being performed there. In the case of Apple this concept rang true in the design of its stores. In the words of Millard “Mickey” Drexler, the CEO of Gap and friend of Jobs who was regularly consulted during as the first Apple Stores were conceptualized, “A customer should be able to walk into a retail space and understand the flow.”

**Lesson 4: Efficiency.** In his own way Jobs was obsessed with designing products and processes that minimized waste. According to Larry Ellison, the CEO of Oracle and longtime friend of Jobs, “If you look at the [Apple] stores and the products you will see Steve’s obsession with beauty as simplicity - this Bauhaus aesthetic and wonderful minimalism, which goes all the way to the checkout process in the stores. It means the absolute minimum number of steps. “

Apple Coatings? Perhaps not. But our industry can learn plenty from the life, success and approach of Steve Jobs. ■

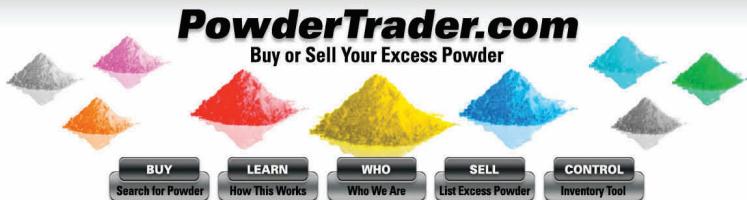
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