



Innovate the Steve Jobs Way

7 insanely different principles for breakthrough success

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Introduction

There are very few people in the world today more closely associated with innovation than Apple co-founder, Steve Jobs. He is the classic American entrepreneur — starting his company in the spare bedroom of his parents' house and pioneering the development of the first personal computer for everyday use. Jobs was fired from the company he had started but he returned in 1997 . It was 12 years later, and Apple was close to bankruptcy . Jobs not only saved the company but in the next 10 years reinvented not just one industry but four — computing, music, telecommunications and entertainment (let's not forget he's the CEO of a little company called Pixar).

In 2010, Fortune magazine named Jobs the CEO of the Decade. Also, the famed New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman wrote a column in which he declared America needs more jobs — Steve Jobs. He meant that innovation and creativity must be nurtured and encouraged to help the United States and other countries emerge from the global recession.

Everyone wants to learn more about Steve Jobs, yet very few journalists have identified the core principles that drive Jobs and his success. Until now, that is. My book *The Innovation Secrets of Steve Jobs* (McGraw-Hill, 2010) reveals the 7 principles that are largely responsible for his breakthrough success; principles that have guided Jobs throughout his career and, more important, principles you can adopt today to “think different” and reinvent your company, product or service.

Principle One: Do what you love.

In 2005, Steve Jobs told Stanford University's graduating class that the secret to success is having "the courage to follow your heart and intuition." Inside, he suggested, you "already know what you truly want to become." Jobs has followed his heart his entire career, and that passion, he says, has made all the difference. It's very difficult to come up with new, creative ideas that move society forward if you are not passionate about the subject.

"I think you should go get a job as a busboy or something until you find something you're really passionate about," Jobs once said. "I'm convinced that about half of what separates successful entrepreneurs from the non successful ones is pure perseverance. . . Unless you have a lot of passion about this, you're not going to survive. You're going to give up."

How to do find your passion? Passions are those ideas that don't leave you alone. They are the hopes, dreams and possibilities that consume your thoughts. Follow those passions despite skeptics and naysayers, who do not have the courage to follow their dreams.

Principle Two: Put a dent in the universe.

Steve Jobs attracts evangelists who share his vision and who help turn his ideas into world-changing innovations. He has never underestimated the power of vision to move a brand forward. In 1976, Steve Wozniak was captivated by Jobs' vision to "put a computer in the hands of everyday people." Wozniak was the engineering genius behind the Apple I and the Apple II, but it was Jobs' vision that inspired Wozniak to focus his skills on building a computer for the masses. Jobs' vision was intoxicating because it had four components that all inspiring visions share: It was 1) bold, 2) specific, 3) concise, and 4) consistently communicated.

In 1979, Jobs took a tour of the Xerox research facility in Palo Alto, California. There he saw a new technology that let users interact with the computer via colorful graphical icons on the screen instead of entering complex line commands. It was called a "graphical user interface." In that moment, Jobs knew that this technology would allow him to fulfill his vision of putting a computer in the hands of everyday people. He went back to Apple and refocused his team on building the computer that would eventually become the Macintosh and forever change the way we talked to computers. Jobs later said that Xerox could have "dominated" the computer industry but instead its "vision" was limited to building another copier.

Innovation — the kind with a big "I" that moves society forward — doesn't happen without a bold vision. What vision do you have for your career or your company? Yes, you need to follow your gut and do something you are passionate about. But while passion fuels the rocket, vision points the rocket to its ultimate destination.

Principle Three: Kick start your brain.

Creativity leads to innovative ideas. For Steve Jobs, creativity is connecting things. He believes that a broad set of experiences expands our understanding of the human experience. A broader understanding leads to breakthroughs that others may have missed.

Breakthrough innovation requires creativity, and creativity requires that you think differently about...the way you think. Scientists who study the way the brain works have discovered that innovators like Jobs do think differently, but they use a technique available to all of us — they seek out diverse experiences. This reminds me of the story behind Apple's name. The idea fell from a tree, literally. Jobs had returned from visiting a commune-like place in Oregon located in an apple orchard. Apple co-founder and Jobs' pal, Wozniak, picked him up from the airport. On the drive home, Jobs simply said, "I came up with a name for our company — Apple." Wozniak said they could have tried to come up with more technical-sounding names but their vision was to make computers approachable. Apple fit nicely.

Jobs creates new ideas precisely because he has spent a lifetime exploring new and unrelated things — seeking out diverse experiences. Jobs hired people from outside the computing profession. He studied the art of calligraphy in college (a study that found its way into the first Macintosh), meditated in an Indian ashram, studied the fine details of a Mercedes-Benz or European-made washer-dryers for product ideas, and evaluated *The Four Seasons* hotel chain as he developed the customer service model for the Apple Stores. Look outside your industry for inspiration. Bombard the brain with new experiences. Remove the shackles of past experiences.

Principle Four: Sell dreams, not products.

Steve Jobs doesn't rely on focus groups. "Steve Jobs avoids most focus groups like the plague," says tech analyst Rob Enderle. "It comes down to the very real fact that most customers don't know what they want in a new product." Apple customers should be glad Jobs doesn't do focus groups. If he had, they may never have enjoyed iPods, iTunes, the iPhone, the iPad, or Apple Stores. He does not need focus groups because he understands his customers really, really well. Yes, sometimes better than they know themselves! When Jobs returned to Apple in 1997 after a 12-year absence, Apple faced an uncertain future. Jobs closed his presentation that year at Macworld in Boston with an observation that set the tone for Apple's resurgence: "I think you have to think differently to buy an Apple computer. I think the people who do buy them do think differently. They are the creative spirits in this world. They are people who are not out to get a job done; they are out to change the world. And they are out to change the world using whatever great tools they can get. And we make tools for those kinds of people...A lot of times people think they're crazy, but in that craziness we see genius."

Sure, "listen" to your customers and ask them for feedback. Apple does that all the time. But when it comes to breakthrough success at Apple, Jobs and his team are the company's best focus group. Asked why Apple doesn't do focus groups, Jobs responded: "We figure out what we want. You can't go out and ask people 'what's the next big thing?' There's a great quote by Henry Ford. He said, 'If I'd have asked my customers what they wanted, they would have told me 'A faster horse.'"

How do you see your customers? Help them unleash their inner genius, and you'll win over their hearts and minds. Nobody cares about your company or product. They care about themselves, their dreams, and their goals. Help them achieve their aspirations, and you'll win them over the Steve Jobs way.


Principle Five: Say no to 1,000 things.

Steve Jobs once said the secret to innovation is “saying no to 1,000 things.” In other words, Jobs is as proud of what Apple does not do as he is about what Apple does choose to pursue. He is committed to building simple, uncluttered design. This philosophy allows Apple to build a continuous stream of products that wow and delight customers for their elegance and simplicity.

In October 2008, Apple introduced its next-generation MacBook laptop computer. Jobs invited Apple design guru Jonathan Ive onstage to explain the new process of building mobile computers, a process that allowed Apple to offer notebooks that were lighter and sturdier. Ive told the audience that Apple’s new “aluminum unibody enclosure” eliminated 60 percent of the computer’s major structural parts. Reducing the number of parts naturally made the computer thinner. Contrary to what you’d expect, eliminating parts also made it more rigid and robust—the computer was stronger. According to Ive, “We are absolutely consumed by trying to develop a solution that is very simple, because as physical beings we understand clarity.”

Your customers demand simplicity, and simplicity requires that you eliminate anything that clutters the user experience — whether in product design, website navigation, marketing and advertising materials, or presentation slides. Say “no” more often than “yes.”

This advice applies to your career and personal life as well. The lesson — don’t spread yourself too thin. Find the career that intersects your passion, skill, and the ability to make money doing it. Once you find it, focus on it, work at it, and dedicate yourself to excellence in that area. Say “no” to anything else that will distract you from pursuing that career. If you are looking for work or frustrated with your current job, there will be plenty of friends, families, and colleagues who offer unsolicited advice on what’s best for you. Filter out the ideas that might derail you from the career that best matches your strengths and passion. When you find it, pursue it with a single-minded sense of purpose.



Principle Six: Create insanely great experiences.

Steve Jobs has made the Apple Store the gold standard in customer service. The Apple Store has become the world's best retailer — generating more revenue per square foot than most other brands — by introducing simple innovations any business can adopt to create deeper, more emotional connections with their customers. For example, there are no cashiers in an Apple store. There are experts, consultants, even geniuses, but no cashiers. According to Jobs, “People don't want to just buy personal computers anymore. They want to know what they can do with them, and we're going to show people exactly that.”

Apple created an innovative retail experience by studying a company known for its customer experience — The Four Seasons. According to Ron Johnson, Apple senior vice president of retail operations, Apple Stores would attract shoppers, not by moving boxes, but by “enriching lives.” Apple would offer customers a concierge-like experience, much like a customer would receive in an elegant hotel. The lesson — don't move the “product.” Enrich lives instead and watch your sales soar. Carefully review each customer touch point with your brand, and take the opportunity to create more meaningful relationships with your consumers. Look outside your company for ideas on how to stand out from your competitors. Above all, have fun. Passion is contagious. If your employees are not having fun, your customers will not be, either.

Principle Seven: Master the message.

You can have the most innovative idea in the world, but if you can't get people excited about it, it doesn't matter. For every idea that turns into a successful innovation, there are thousands of ideas that never gain traction because the people behind those ideas failed to tell a compelling story.

Steve Jobs is considered one of the greatest corporate storytellers in the world because his presentations inform, educate and entertain. By giving extraordinary presentations, he stands out as a leader and communicator. You are being judged to a large degree on your ability to communicate what you do. The big difference between extraordinary communicators and the average leader is that people like Jobs use presentations to complement the message. The speaker is the storyteller; PowerPoint slides (or in Jobs' case, Apple Keynote slides) serve as a backdrop to the story.

To give a presentation like Jobs, you must learn to avoid bullet points and to think visually about bringing a story to life. Read my book *The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs* (McGraw-Hill, 2009) for tips and techniques to create a presentation that would make Steve Jobs proud.

Conclusion

In a documentary on the making of the film Jaws, Steven Spielberg said that he was forced to improvise when the mechanical shark failed. He asked himself, "What would Hitchcock do?" The answer: Hitchcock would never show the shark. Today the global economy is in the jaws of the worst recession in decades. How can you emerge from the recession stronger, more inspired and more innovative than ever? Steve Jobs has been leaving clues to his success for more than 30 years. We need to look at history as a guide and ask ourselves, "What would Steve Jobs do?"