

Steve Jobs as an Artist

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Throughout his significant career at Apple, NeXT, and Pixar, Steve Jobs demonstrated great persuasive skills in relating to a wide variety of audiences. In doing this, he demonstrated his use of principles common to the performing and visual arts. As such, he represents a significant role model for those advocating a greater use of the arts in managing organizations of all types. He demonstrated that managers and entrepreneurs like himself might greatly benefit from a study of the arts in the classroom as well as exposure to the work of significant artists.

The Persuasive Leader

It has been argued that innovative business strategies were the key to business success, but great strategies were of no value unless they were successfully implemented and that persuasive skills were an important element in the process of implementation (Carroll, 1998). This idea was presented in a chapter of a book entitled *Managing Strategy Implementation* (Flood et al., 1998). In a later book entitled *The Persuasive Leader: Lessons from the Arts* (Carroll & Flood, 2010), it was argued that persuasive skills must be learned from the arts, especially the performing arts. In this book, many examples of persuasive leaders from biographies, literature, and films were presented along with descriptions of their behaviors. It was argued here and in a later paper that all of these leaders were following principles of the performing arts to attract audiences to their messages. An analysis of persuasive leaders revealed that they used voice techniques, body movements, costumes, scenery, music, and other approaches common to theatre, film, opera, and even ballet to attract audiences to their visions for the future of their organizations. In teaching a course on Persuasive Leadership developed from this book, film clips of persuasive leaders from different fields were used to illustrate such artistic principles.

One film clip used in the Persuasive Leadership course was that of Steve Jobs discussing with employees his vision and strategic plans for NeXT, his second company. This meeting was originally shown in a 1986 PBS program on entrepreneurs. In this film clip, Steve Jobs used various dramatic voice and body language techniques in addition to powerful words and stories to excite his audience and persuade them to buy into his vision. His effectiveness at doing this was illustrated by the fact that

business leader Ross Perot called Steve Jobs and offered him an investment of some twenty million dollars after the airing of the program. Since then, many other film clips of Steve Jobs making presentations became available for viewing online. These included his 2005 commencement address at Stanford University, a 1998 presentation at a MacWorld conference in New York City, a presentation he made at the opening of a new Apple retail store, and even his first public presentation in 2005 when he introduced the Apple computer to the general public.

Steve Jobs as a Performing Artist

In 1984, Steve Jobs made his first presentation introducing the Apple computer to the general public. Jobs slowly walked on stage with a cloth bag. He was wearing a suit and a bow tie unlike his later signature costume of jeans and a turtleneck shirt. He then dramatically opened the bag and placed the new Apple computer on a stand on the stage. He inserted a disc into the computer and the computer's capability to present beautiful images and its elaborate type face possibilities was revealed. He even presented an image of himself thinking on the screen. During this time, the theme music from *Chariots of Fire* was being played (other companies also have used this particular piece of music to create a certain emotional tone in an audience). He had the computer speak to the audience in a mock machine voice. The voice started with the statement, "I'm sure glad to get out of the bag." In his 2005 Stanford University commencement address, Jobs told three very dramatic stories of his own life and the lessons he learned from these stories that would also apply to the young people in the audience. The stories were told with dramatic flair and incorporated Aristotle's principles of persuasion through appeal to certain targeted emotions, the use of logic, and the creation of credibility for the speaker. In his other filmed presentations, Jobs appeared in his signature turtleneck and jeans, used dramatic images, and spoke very effectively with a specific choice of words, stories, good timing, dramatic emphasis, and poetic elements.

Steve Jobs as a Choreographer

Choreographers create memorable dance performances with a particular goal in mind and by following a certain process to achieve that goal. The goal is to achieve an engaging aesthetic experience in an audience. To achieve this goal they must create harmony among various elements such as the music, the dance movements, the costumes, the scenery, and the lighting. In such matters, choreographers may also utilize various other artistic professionals such as lighting experts or costume designers. Choreographers usually observe hundreds of previous dance performances in order to see what was done previously and what might be possible to do given the right dancers. They carefully choose their dancers considering their vision of an actual future performance. They rehearse frequently before the actual performance making incremental changes depending on what works aesthetically and after determining what their dancers are actually capable of. Those choreographers who are truly excellent also have the ability to motivate their performers to constantly strive to do

their best and emphasize the concept of the company or team. In a similar manner, Steve Jobs' performances were carefully choreographed and staged. He planned his presentations in great detail. He considered the props, the steps, the words, and other elements of his performances.

Like any good choreographer, Jobs understood the importance of the dancers; he carefully selected his dancers. All of the key talent at Apple were selected personally by him. He allowed them to make mistakes and he worked to help them improve their performance. He communicated his vision of the future and constantly reminded them of the importance and relevance of what they were doing. He stressed the importance of teamwork and helping each other to perform better. He was a masterful choreographer.

Steve Jobs as a Visual Artist

In addition to the performing arts, creative human visual artists have existed since the beginning of recorded time in the fine arts and crafts. Visual artists are distinctive in their ability to notice things in the world that are overlooked by most people and to communicate their insights effectively following aesthetic principles. There is a vast literature on aesthetics and the aesthetic response, as well as numerous biographies and autobiographies of artists across time periods. One famous book describing world famous artists was *Vasari's The Lives of Artists* written in the 1600s. This literature showed the truth of the statement that the most important skill of the artist lies in the eye rather than the hand. Jobs, on a visit to a Xerox research center in his younger years, saw future product possibilities in some early computer developments which most others failed to see, even those within Xerox itself. The computer mouse and other innovations came about in this way. He kept close track of the innovations occurring in the computer field, constantly meeting and discussing new ideas with knowledgeable individuals in this field just as all great artists do. He exhibited these skills repeatedly in his later years as well.

Very skilled artists also have great patience and a willingness and inclination to seek perfection by numerous re-analyses and incremental changes. Skilled artists are also willing to destroy their own creations for failing to live up to their standards or vision. Descriptions of the product design processes followed by Jobs often indicate that he was very much in this artistic tradition, continuing to seek perfection and possessing higher standards than his colleagues and contemporaries. Artists also tend to be individual thinkers quite resistant to attempts to make them conform to the expectations of others. Here again the descriptions of Jobs by those who have observed him support these characteristics. Jobs noticed this characteristic in the lives of historical artists described to him in lectures and his own reading and made this a part of his self-identity.

Steve Jobs as an Experimenter

Well-known artists have also been known for their experimental approaches. Picasso moved through various periods of composition throughout his life on an experimental basis. Monet once did four paintings of a person with the wind blowing

on the figure from four different directions in order to identify the optimum aesthetic effect. Fine artists dissatisfied with a particular surface have experimented with adding sand to the paint or changing the surface of the canvas by bending it or folding it in different ways. Great artists are quite willing to abandon ideas that do not work out. Personal observation of the artists can provide support for this idea also. Steve Jobs was also an experimenter in the sense that he often tested different product configurations and production processes in his efforts to maximize both performance and aesthetic outcomes. He abandoned many design products that did not prove satisfactory in an aesthetic and a performance sense. Jobs' biographer (Issacson, 2011) provided many descriptions of him changing product design elements until they met his expectations.

Steve Jobs as a Calligrapher

The favorite college course for Steve Jobs was a course in calligraphy. This course at Reed College was taught by a famous professor who was very well-known as a master of the subject and art form. Calligraphy is a term derived from the Greek words for "beautiful writing." It involves lettering with a brush or broad tip instrument most often created by the calligrapher. Calligraphy styles vary with geography. There are distinctive Western, Asian, and Islamic forms of calligraphy. In China, in the past, calligraphy was considered a higher form of artistic expression than was painting. There has been empirical research on the arousal power of certain computer generated calligraphy images. For example, in one study, a comparison of alternative forms showed that the one with the intermediate level of complexity resulted in the most stimulation (Smets, 1973).

Calligraphy combines visual aesthetics with the aesthetics of words and language represented. There can be a harmony of several of the arts in calligraphy, as Jobs discovered when he studied it. Also, the teacher in the course taken by Jobs frequently discussed the works of famous artists such as Picasso and Michelangelo, as well as philosophers such as Aristotle (Isaacson, 2011). Jobs was exposed to an overall view of the arts and humanities in this one course of study which certainly contributed to his artistic sensitivity and appreciation throughout his life. Beautiful calligraphy can be very arresting and aesthetically appealing at first glance. Its curves, shapes, and variations in texture and blackness and emphasis on stark simplicity and lack of clutter can be observed in the design and appearance of the various famous technological products associated with Jobs. Jobs himself said in his 2005 Stanford University commencement address that his exposure to the art of calligraphy significantly influenced the quality of the output of the Macintosh computer and all subsequent computers. His exposure to calligraphy and the lectures relating this to the other arts likely contributed to his creative design capabilities at later stages in his life. Also, just being exposed to Asian calligraphy which is less familiar to Westerners given its appearance and having to read it from right to left is likely to create cognitive effects in the brain which widen one's artistic perspectives and modes of evaluating new ideas, concepts, and developments. It can possibly create a higher openness to the perceiver as well.

Steve Jobs as a Story Teller

Good persuaders use stories effectively since stories have been the way most human beings have learned and been persuaded since the beginning of time. Persuasive stories often account for what has previously transpired in the history of an individual, group, organization, or even a nation. It is a communication of experience which is of interest to an audience looking for guides to action to achieve certain goals or to avoid certain undesirable outcomes.

The experiences of Jobs at Pixar, a computer animation company which turned out to be a great success, are not as well known to the general public. Jobs learned about films as an artistic medium through this experience. He came to appreciate the importance of great stories rather than just technical innovations for economic success in this industry. Many films incorporated the arts that Jobs was familiar with such as photography, music, stories, and the various other visual arts.

Personal stories can be memorable or the opposite, depending on their characteristics and how they are told. Thousands of words have been written and spoken on how to make the delivery of words or stories more effective orally or in writing. The stories should not be too long, they should be relevant to the audience's concerns and interests, they should be presented with passion, they should describe some conflict, and they should explain how the conflict was or could be resolved. Stories presented as drama have their own rules for success. Oral presentations of all types tend to be far more effective when they follow principles of dramatic technique dating back to the writings of Aristotle. Certainly Jobs exhibited many of these principles in his many presentations both inside his company as well as when speaking to outside audiences.

The storytelling abilities of Steve Jobs were shown in many of his presentations which were filmed over the years and are now available online and were visible in his commencement speech at Stanford University. In the three short stories he told about himself and his life he followed the principles of effective story telling. He kept the stories short, told multiple stories, discussed issues of great interest to students at that stage in life, and he focused on his personal experiences and perceptions. In addition, he included dramatic examples in the stories.

Stories have important functions other than being entertaining. The success narratives as told by Jobs and countless others over the centuries have the function of learning what it is possible to do or achieve in life if certain principles or ways of thinking are utilized. They are also motivating in that they demonstrate what is possible for humans to achieve. Stories on organizational histories as Jobs frequently gave to others in his company gave the recipient a sense of organizational identity, pride, and a sense of life's meaning. Jobs and other such storytellers dealing with history and personal stories are accomplishing what most humans desire to do, which is to leave a favorable legacy.

Steve Jobs as a Member of Creative Networks

Artists are very often active members of social networks. A social network has been defined as a little world composed of individuals who have something in common, such as interests, values, capabilities, etc. Individuals like to associate with others similar to themselves and who provide each other with benefits such as knowledge, psychological support, help, etc. Biographies of artists have described these activities and associations in some detail. Steve Jobs sought out the company of well known entrepreneurs like himself such as Gates and Perot and various engineers and artists. He wanted to bounce ideas off of people he respected and identified with. The same kinds of behaviors can be seen throughout the history of art. Artists seek out other artists like themselves for evaluation and suggestions. This can even be seen among quilt makers and knitters in neighborhood groups.

Artistic Influences and Role Models

It would seem that Steve Jobs was exposed to the arts as most people have been. He was exposed to music of all kinds. He liked Mozart and The Beatles even as a young man. At Reed College he completed a demanding course in calligraphy which is a rarified artistic field which has many aesthetic aspects highly relevant to modern electronic product design. Calligraphy had obvious influences on the fonts and typefaces of the products designed by Jobs in concert with his chief designer Jonathan “Jony” Ive. Ive subscribed to certain ancient design principles revolving around the idea that less was more and simplicity and harmony created engaging aesthetic properties. In the performing arts Jobs was familiar with important figures such as the opera singer Maria Callas. He even incorporated images of some of them in his products. Steve Jobs was also a serious student of photography. He collected photographic images and studied them carefully according to his biographer Isaacson (2011). He possessed many cameras over the years and was greatly skilled in their use. He was familiar with the work and achievements of many famous photographers. One of his heroes was Edwin Land who developed the Polaroid camera and created a very successful company to produce and market it. Land was a creator and an entrepreneur like Jobs. Jobs was apparently thrilled when he had a chance to meet Land in person. Photographs as compared to paintings present a realism that can have a strong emotional impact on the viewer. They can be especially powerful in creating a greater sense of humanity especially when the subjects depicted are suffering and especially when they are like ourselves. Jobs seemed to have some degree of this sensitivity to humanity and he seemed to have a deep understanding of human beings, along with their needs, strengths, and weaknesses.

Steve Jobs and the Mindset of a Significant Artist

There are obviously different levels of artists in terms of creativity and significance. Paintings can vary in price from forty dollars to forty million dollars. Pedestrian artists might consist of those who do informal or formal marketing audience surveys to find out what ordinary people want and then are able to give it to them. Significant

artists are motivated by inner voices rather than outer voices and give the public what they don't even know they want. Jobs has voiced this idea many times. Great artists often have a great deal of self-discipline as various biographies of great artists indicate. They also have a great deal of self-confidence and can be high in narcissism which can enable them to stick to a vision in spite of criticism or doubts from others. An example may be seen in the career of the musician Bob Dylan who was greatly admired by Jobs and who became his friend later in life. Both Dylan and Jobs as well as many other historical artists could ignore the feedback of others while keeping tuned in to their inner voice and vision. Dylan could ignore the "boos" he heard at times during his concerts. Significant artists also are keen observers and can see things in a depth beyond the capabilities of most. They examine the work of others in their chosen fields very closely and are also highly observant of what is happening in the various environments and worlds around them.

A recent book by David McCullough documented how most major American artists, writers, and innovators made long visits to France in the 19th century to carefully study the innovations and new ideas of others in their chosen professions. Many significant innovations created by famous innovators were also of an incremental nature rather than that of some entirely new idea or perspective. Jobs quoted Picasso as saying that all artists are thieves of ideas to some degree and that they are also not mere imitators. Jobs declared that he and his company always built upon the ideas of others and he did not apologize for this. There are arguments for the value of incremental innovations versus radical new ones. Obviously there is also less risk and time and effort savings in building on existing ideas rather than creating entirely new ones.

Importance of This Case Study of Steve Jobs for Management

It is highly likely that the artistic experiences of Steve Jobs accounted for much of his later success. The issue though was whether his experiences have relevance for the education of future managers. It seems that the answer must be a strong yes. There is an enormous amount of research literature on the effects of art education on students' cognitive abilities, creativity, innovativeness, and various types of student academic performances and later consequences which can be obtained in a web search and by reading arts oriented academic journals. Gazzaniga (2008) is one among many sources of this literature. In fact, numerous Ph.D dissertations have been completed on this issue. It is now increasingly recognized that exposure to the arts can be of benefit to participants in management development programs. Descriptions of two museum programs in Boston were developed for managers being trained at Harvard and MIT in Boston. Organizations such as AACORN are composed of management-oriented academics and art professionals from Europe, Canada, and the US. AACORN members have been active in arts oriented management development activities for a number of years, even though admittedly research on the effectiveness of such activities is deficient.

In summary, Steve Jobs was both a creative artist and a masterful artistic performer. He provided an ideal model of the type of leader necessary in many of the newer fields of endeavor being continuously created today. His life and experiences have also provided an example of the value of exposure to all of the arts to management success

for prospective managers and entrepreneurs. The arts are essential to both the processes of creation and communication. Jobs respected the arts and the process of change and growth embodied in the arts. He sought perfection like many artists and did not allow current tastes and wants to determine the nature of his creations. This is much like the actions of the great chef in the film “The Big Night” where this inherent conflict between conforming to present tastes or leading them is vividly displayed with the chef representing artists in the culinary arts. Jobs not only realized their importance but even preferred employees who were well-acquainted with the arts. Edward O. Wilson has called for a “consilience” or a greater unity of knowledge from the existing fields of knowledge including the humanities and arts, science, and technology (Wilson, 1998, 2012). Jobs believed in this concept and his success at Apple would appear to validate the benefits of that proposal.

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