

Lessons from Steve Jobs

By Craig Smith

I recently read Steve Jobs biography by Walter Isaacson and another book, the Wide Lens by Rod Adner, which suggests how to use innovation and collaboration for business success with examples from Apple and other companies. No matter if you are fan of Apple or not or what you think of Steve Jobs, here are six lessons from Steve to consider utilizing to make your organization more successful.

- **Focus** – “Deciding what not to do is as important as deciding what to do!” You cannot be all things to all people. Don’t struggle with being spread too thin and delivering too many programs or products. Focus your efforts on those that have the highest impact; match your passions, skills, and capacity; provide collaborative opportunities; and are fundable and contribute to the sustainability of your organization.
- **Simplify** – “It takes a lot of hard work to make something simple, to truly understand the underlying challenges and come up with elegant solutions.” The solution does not need to be complex and stakeholders are much more likely to engage if they understand what you are doing, how you do it and/or what you are offering. Keep it simple!
- **Put Products Before Profits** – “My passion has been to build an enduring company where people were motivated to make great products.” It is important to build the capacity of individuals, organizations and communities, and to bring the most promising practices, tools and information to your organization. Dedicating time to being entrepreneurial and enhancing existing programs and developing new cutting edge services is crucial to success.
- **Push for perfection** – “Caring deeply about what customers want” and taking the time to push for perfection are vital to success. Training, technical assistance and mentoring will help your team excel at what you do and taking time to evaluate and adjust as necessary.
- **Tolerate Only “A” Players** – “Prevent ‘the bozo explosion’ in which managers are so polite that mediocre people feel comfortable sticking around. If you have very good people, you don’t have to baby them.” Hire slowly doing the diligence to ensure you have a good fit with your work and organization and when necessary, in the words of Jim Collins from the book Good to Great, transition quickly to another “seat” or “off the bus.”
- **Engage Face-To-Face** – “Creativity comes from spontaneous meetings, from random discussions.” Allow for time to connect regularly in person and virtually when you are not together by using video. And bring all of your staff and board together as frequently as possible or at least a couple time a year. Leave time at gatherings and retreats for “open Space” that is totally unstructured allowing the group to connect and creatively address opportunities and challenges.