

The End of the Steve Era

Written by Bob Snyder
25 August 2011

It had to come. If not now, later, but the end always comes. Steve Jobs resigns, handing Apple over to Tim Cook. You can read Steve's own [short resignation letter here](#).



The computer world, the consumer electronics world...aye, the whole world...is worse off for the resignation of Steve Jobs.

You know he wouldn't resign if it wasn't for his health. The body gives out long before the spirit and that just drenches this news with a rain of sadness.

Across the world, an outpouring of emotion washes across the internet--much delivered via the now-famous devices that Steve built.

It was 1976, actually on April Fools' Day, that the two Steves-- Wozniak and Jobs-- created a new computer circuit board in a Silicon Valley garage. I actually remember their first press release later that year...and I discarded it as insignificant at the time. How would you have ever known? The electronics trade press that year were full of the rise of Sony's Betamax, boomboxes, and personal computers were not yet.

Why do we love Steve Jobs so much?

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Unlike the Woz who is practically cuddly, who is the overall good guy, who is the Engineer we all admire...the other Steve was...well, prickly. He could bite your nose off in disagreement. He rolled over his product managers with no shame. He verbally pistol-whipped anyone that stood in his way.

Frank Perdue, America's pre-packaged chicken king, used to say: "It takes a tough man to make a tender chicken." Well, it took a tougher man to make a better Apple.

We love Steve Jobs because he was tough...not your macho-muscle tough...but the type of tough that Winston Churchill verbalized: Never, never, never give up.

To understand Steve, you need to understand Steve grew up in the '60s...and went to college (only briefly) in 1972. This was the time period where if you were young and American in California, you were probably long-haired and against the war in Vietnam and against authority in general.

At public rallies, to crowd approval, in those days Jerry Rubin could shout: "Never trust anyone over 30."

In this milieu, Apple was founded to give computers to the people instead of to business and to military. Apple was founded as anti-establishment and at that time the establishment was big business/big government as represented by IBM.

The original Macintosh [launched to a standing ovation](#) .

I bought my first Macintosh when it was launched by Dixons in London. It was the first commercially successful personal computer that used a mouse and a graphical interface. You knew when you opened the original Macintosh (later re-badged as Macintosh 128) that MS-DOS would become history. It simply blew you away, the way Steve's products today still inspire customers.

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With brilliant visual images, the famous Macintosh commercial directed by Ridley Scott played during the SuperBowl in 1984...and it resonated the Apple mission: power to the people! Watch the famous [Macintosh commercial](#) as an allegory of Steve flinging his hammer to break the zombie-like trance that Big Business held over its managers, preventing them from seeing what consumers really want..

One year later, in 1985, Microsoft would concede defeat with MS-DOS and launch Windows OS. It looked suspiciously like a copy of the Mac interface. When Mac fans cried "Foul," the PC fans simply claimed Apple stole the concept from Xerox Parc anyways. It's one thing to take an idea from a think-tank lab and bring it to market and it's another for a big company to copy it from a competitor. Much of the Mac fan base's anger with Microsoft can still be traced back to this point. Yet, Microsoft won that battle.

The conversion of Microsoft to icons on the desktop hurt the niche Mac.

Later that same year, 1985, Steve was publicly ousted from the company he founded in a famous row with John Sculley, a ex-Pepsi CEO that Jobs ironically brought in to run Apple because *Wall Street* wanted "a businessman," not a Visionary. How wrong was Wall Street....

At that time Sculley was seen as the saviour of Apple. Really. With only some public sentiment on his side, Steve Jobs was discarded, forgotten and Sculley reigned until 1993. His role at Apple actually granted him a big enough high tech halo that the soft drinks exec even wrote a book as a high tech guru.

When Sculley left Apple, he plummeted from sight...out of high tech..out of the halo that Apple had given him.

Apple had hard times. By 1997, the company asked Jobs back as an "advisor." Steve had launched NeXT, bought Pixar...neither were a huge success at the time and Steve grabbed the opportunity to get back to his dream, Apple.

But it wasn't easy...Apple had lost its way. If it wasn't for a mercy investment of \$150 million by

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Microsoft, maybe Apple wouldn't have made it. It must have taken a big swallow for Steve Jobs to get that money from Bill Gates. But along the way, part of being tough, is doing what has to be done. In 2000, Jobs was once again officially named CEO.

In 2001, the first iPod and first Apple store. In 2003, iTunes. In 2007, Apple releases its first iPhone. In 2010, the iPad sold 15 million units.

Steve's computer animation company, Pixar, changed forever the way Hollywood made animation films (and Disney, the giant in this genre, bought the company for its know-how).

When everyone dismissed his interest in starting his own retail outlets, Steve persisted in a way not unlike Bob Dylan insisting on his electric guitar to audiences that loudly disagreed. Yet, Apple stores went on to become an unrivaled retail phenomenon with 325 stores, each averaging \$40 million in sales per year. Steve's concept of retail scored the highest sales per square foot in the world, proving Big Box retailers still have a lot to learn. Many manufacturers have tried to copy his retail success as Apple made it look easy, yet these others only ended up shutting their doors in retail failure.

It was the greatest comeback in tech history... no, the greatest in business history.

We love Steve Jobs because he rose quickly on his personal talents, fell down, picked himself up and had another go. And succeeded. We love Steve Jobs because he thumbed his nose at big business, all the while he became one. We love Steve Jobs because he showed up Big Business...first the PC business, then the consumer electronics business, then the mobile phone business and the music industry.

He showed Big Business that they don't really know what their customers really want...and that for all their workgroups, product teams, committees (and other Big Business "bs")...one man, one person, one very determined individual who would not accept the traditional corporate compromises could create great products and change the world.

This has never been about perfection. Steve isn't perfect and Apple makes mistakes, too.

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We really love Steve Jobs because his best product is not anything by Apple: it is his struggle to be an individual in a world that would have us all toe invisible lines.

And now, Steve's departure...shrouded with health issues, will leave the world less one hero...but the legend will live on.

Go [Steve Jobs Quits as Apple CEO \(Reuters\)](#)