



Is Steve Jobs a genius? YES! And, can salespeople learn from him? YES!

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Just read this night, flying from Detroit to Amsterdam, the biography of Steve Jobs! Amazing indeed! One thing is certain: none of the marketing handbooks even captures for 1% what Steve Jobs – and his colleagues did accomplish! I wonder, what do some of my colleagues teach to students? Honestly I do not know, but one thing is certain: most of what we teach is simply irrelevant! In my case however I try to be somewhat ;) relevant.

Apparently from the book is that most of the ideas that Jobs did develop were not developed at Apple. Rather these ideas were developed when he was young: being rejected by his father and adopted by another family he developed his personality: “a restless person feeling rejected”, working in his adopting dad’s garage: observing what it is to do “perfect” engineering; developing a fascination with Buddhism, dieting and esthetics which urged to him to be and think “pure” and being the rebellious person both at home and at high school and college which urged them to fight “status quo”. With these capabilities and imprints he went on step by step to develop computer prototypes and, yes, the Apple Empire.

Apparently people who met Steve could sense and notice his genius; this respect allowed him to get constant feedback from others, check ideas and make conjectures. There is no such thing as thinking deep, there is only thinking by connecting, checking, emulating and learning. By doing this for many years one builds “creative capabilities”. Perhaps we can call this an obsession? In the end I think so and this obsession takes years.

Some people argue we need to codify our knowledge and copy business models. But I now see more clear than ever that what makes a company is the “person” behind the plans and ideas and that it is the network s/he develops that determines how ideas develop. This building of ideas and producing new products requires constant work, passion but more important perseverance. But what is perseverance and why do people persevere? I am almost certain that people are fascinated and passionate because they “lack something” or “love to lack something” and this lacking is what they want to compensate. There got to be a personal issue if one wants to be motivated and remain motivated.

Currently I am studying that this motivation has something to do with hormones: when people feel a lack of something they develop cortisol – a kind of stress that on the one hand invigorates them but that also needs to be reduced (balanced). How do people reduce stress or cortisol? Cortisol can be reduced by getting in a winning mood evoked by being successful – in fact it comes down to the development of testosterone!

Now what has this to do with sales?

Salespeople too must have a constant passion in helping customers, solve customer's problems and make deals. But why do sales people have these passions? In many cases salespeople feel irritated when they encounter firms or people who sell something to them who do not care; it is from such experiences that they recognize opportunities, which they feel, can be solved or should be solved. But besides this, they also got to have this eagerness to solve this problem successfully; meaning it got to end up in a deal. In other cases they might be rejected by customers that make them a bit angry and this invigorates them to score and reduce the feelings of being rejected. In addition they also got to feel competitive.

When salespeople possess these characteristics, they can be more upfront when they see a problem with customers; in fact they become motivated to challenge a customer who in turn feels inspired. This eagerness in turn allows him to overcome his feelings of embarrassment. I felt the same about Steve Jobs; as he knew he had something to offer he became less embarrassing about telling where he stood for. Better salespeople say things but then also “do” what they say.

So what do I look for when I hire people or when I tell people to hire a salesperson? Salesperson's performance is both a function of their skills and the way he has been educated/trained by his parents? So I always look if a sales person has discipline? Is this person an entrepreneurial person and does he or she take initiative. Most of these abilities are in place when people were young.

When these salespeople act in the world, they in some sense feel not at ease when they do not perform well; hence they develop cortisol. The only way to get out of his “cortisol” mood is to win and make deals. Their pride (testosterone) goes up and they become or act like winners. They know they do not want to be part of a losing group but want to be leading. I ask them to read Steve Jobs! You will meet an inspiring world.

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