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ET exclusively brings to you Walter Isaacson's biography of Steve Jobs.



He didn't have filters most people have when saying things to others. His view of the world was binary: you were brilliant or you sucked. He was a control freak and astonishingly imaginative. Here's an extraordinary portrait of an extraordinary man.

His personality was reflected in the products he created. Just as the core of Apple's philosophy, from the original Macintosh in 1984 to the iPad a generation later, was the end-to-end integration of hardware and software, so too was it the case with Steve Jobs: His passions, perfectionism, demons, desires, artistry, devilry, and obsession for control were integrally connected to his approach to business and the products that resulted.

The unified field theory that ties together Jobs's personality and products begins with his most salient trait: his intensity. His silences could be as searing as his rants; he had taught himself to stare without blinking. Sometimes this intensity was charming, in a geeky way, such as when he was explaining the profundity of Bob Dylan's music or why whatever product he was unveiling at that moment was the most amazing thing that Apple had ever made.

At other times it could be terrifying, such as when he was fulminating about Google or Microsoft ripping off Apple. This intensity encouraged a binary view of the world. Colleagues referred to the hero/shithead dichotomy. You were either one or the other, sometimes on the same day.

The same was true of products, ideas, even food: Something was either "the best thing ever," or it was shitty, brain-dead, inedible. As a result, any perceived flaw could set off a rant. The finish on a piece of metal, the curve of the head of a screw, the shade of blue on a box, the intuitiveness of a navigation screen, he would declare them to "completely suck" until that moment when he suddenly pronounced them "absolutely perfect." He thought of himself as an artist, which he was, and he indulged in the temperament of one.

His quest for perfection led to his compulsion for Apple to have end-to-end control of every product that it made. He got hives, or worse, when contemplating great Apple software running on another company's crappy hardware, and he likewise was allergic to the thought of unapproved apps or content polluting the perfection of an Apple device. This ability to integrate hardware and software and content into one unified system enabled him to impose simplicity. The astronomer Johannes Kepler declared that "nature loves simplicity and unity." So did Steve Jobs.



This instinct for integrated systems put him squarely on one side of the most fundamental divide of the digital world: open versus closed

The hacker ethos handed down from the Homebrew Computer Club favored the open approach, in which there was little centralized control and people were free to modify hardware and software, share code, write to open standards, shun proprietary systems, and have content and apps that were compatible with a variety of devices and operating systems.

The young Wozniak was in that camp: The Apple II he designed was easily opened and sported plenty of slots and ports that people could jack into as they pleased. With the Macintosh, Jobs became a founding father of the other camp. The Macintosh would be like an appliance, with the hardware and software tightly woven together and closed to modifications. The hacker ethos would be sacrificed in order to create a seamless and simple user experience.

How Steve Jobs remade the tech world

Jobs launched a series of products over three decades that transformed whole industries

The Apple II which took Wozniak's circuit board and turned it into the first personal computer that was not just for hobbyists

The Macintosh, which began the home computer revolution and popularized graphical user interfaces

Toy Story and other Pixar blockbusters, which opened up the miracle of digital imagination

Apple stores, which reinvented the role of a store in defining a brand

The iPod, which changed the way we consume music

The iTunes Store, which saved the music industry

The iPhone, which turned mobile phones into music, photography, video, email, and web devices

The App store, which spawned a new content-creation industry

The iPad, which launched tablet computing and offered a platform for digital newspapers, magazines, books, and videos

iCloud, which demoted the computer from its central role in managing our content and let all of our devices sync seamlessly

And Apple itself, which Jobs considered his greatest creation, a place where imagination was nurtured, applied, and executed in ways so creative that it became the most valuable company on earth

This led Jobs to decree that the Macintosh operating system would not be available for any other company's hardware. Microsoft pursued the opposite strategy, allowing its Windows operating system to be promiscuously licensed. That did not produce the most elegant computers, but it did lead to Microsoft's dominating the world of operating systems.

After Apple's market share shrank to less than 5%, Microsoft's approach was declared the winner in the personal computer realm. In the longer run, however, there proved to be some advantages to Jobs's model. Even with a small market share, Apple was able to maintain a huge profit margin while other computer makers were commoditized.

In 2010, for example, Apple had just 7% of the revenue in the personal computer market, but it grabbed 35% of the operating profit. More significantly, in the early 2000s Jobs's insistence on end-to-end integration gave Apple an advantage in developing a digital hub strategy, which allowed your desktop computer to link seamlessly with a variety of portable devices.

The iPod, for example, was part of a closed and tightly integrated system. To use it, you had to use Apple's iTunes software and download content from its iTunes Store. The result was that the iPod, like the iPhone and iPad that followed, was an elegant delight in contrast to the kludgy rival products that did not offer a seamless end-to-end experience.

The strategy worked. In May 2000 Apple's market value was one-twentieth that of Microsoft. In May 2010 Apple surpassed Microsoft as the world's most valuable technology company, and by September 2011 it was worth 70% more than Microsoft. In the first quarter of 2011 the market for Windows PCs shrank by 1%, while the market for Macs grew 28%. By then the battle had begun anew in the world of mobile devices.

Google took the more open approach, and it made its Android operating system available for use by any maker of tablets or cell phones. By 2011 its share of the mobile market matched Apple's. The drawback of Android's openness was the fragmentation that resulted. Various handset and tablet makers modified Android into dozens of variants and flavors, making it hard for apps to remain consistent or make full use of its features.

There were merits to both approaches. Some people wanted the freedom to use more open systems and have more choices of hardware; others clearly preferred Apple's tight integration and control, which led to products that had simpler interfaces, longer battery life, greater user-friendliness, and easier handling of content.

The downside of Jobs's approach was that his desire to delight the user led him to resist empowering the user. Among the most thoughtful proponents of an open environment is Jonathan Zittrain of Harvard. He begins his book *The Future of the Internet-And How to Stop It* with the scene of Jobs introducing the iPhone, and he warns of the consequences of replacing personal computers with "sterile appliances tethered to a network of control."

Even more fervent is Cory Doctorow, who wrote a manifesto called "Why I won't buy an iPad" for *Boing Boing*. "There's a lot of thoughtfulness and smarts that went into the design. But there's also a palpable contempt for the owner," he wrote. "Buying an iPad for your kids isn't a means of jump-starting the realization that the world is yours to take apart and reassemble; it's a way of telling your offspring that even changing the batteries is something you have to leave to the professionals."

For Jobs, belief in an integrated approach was a matter of righteousness. "We do these things not because we are control freaks," he explained. "We do them because we want to make great products, because we care about the user, and because we like to take responsibility for the entire experience rather than turn out the crap that other people make."

He also believed he was doing people a service: "They're busy doing whatever they do best, and they want us to do what we do best. Their lives are crowded; they have other things to do than think about how to integrate their computers and devices." This approach sometimes went against Apple's short-term business interests.

But in a world filled with junky devices, inscrutable error messages, and annoying interfaces, it led to astonishing products marked by beguiling user experiences. Using an Apple product could be as sublime as walking in one of Zen's gardens of Kyoto that Jobs loved, and neither experience was created by worshipping at the altar of openness or by letting a thousand flowers bloom. Sometimes it's nice to be in the hands of a control freak.

Jobs's intensity was also evident in his ability to focus. He would set priorities, aim his laser attention on them, and filter out distractions. If something engaged him, the user interface for the original Macintosh, the design of the iPod and iPhone, getting music companies into the iTunes Store, he was relentless.

But if he did not want to deal with something, a legal annoyance, a business issue, his cancer diagnosis, a family tug, he would resolutely ignore it. That focus allowed him to say no. He got Apple back on track by cutting all except a few core products. He made devices simpler by eliminating buttons, software simpler by eliminating features, and interfaces simpler by eliminating options.

He attributed his ability to focus and his love of simplicity to his Zen training. It honed his appreciation for intuition, showed him how to filter out anything that was distracting or unnecessary, and nurtured in him an aesthetic based on minimalism.

Unfortunately his Zen training never quite produced in him a Zen-like calm or inner serenity, and that too is part of his legacy. He was often tightly coiled and impatient, traits he made no efforts to hide. Most people have a regulator between their mind and mouth that modulates their brutish sentiments and spikiest impulses. Not Jobs. He made a point of being brutally honest. "My job is to say when something sucks rather than sugarcoat it," he said. This made him charismatic and inspiring, yet also, to use the technical terms, an asshole at times.

Andy Hertzfeld once told me, "The one question I'd truly love Steve to answer is, 'Why are you sometimes so mean?'" Even his family members wondered whether he simply lacked the filter that restrains people from venting their wounding thoughts or willfully bypassed it. Jobs claimed it was the former. "This is who I am, and you can't expect me to be someone I'm not," he replied when I asked him the question. But I think he actually could have controlled himself, if he had wanted.



When he hurt people, it was not because he was lacking in emotional awareness. Quite the contrary: He could size people up, understand their inner thoughts, and know how to relate to them, cajole them, or hurt them at will.

The nasty edge to his personality was not necessary. It hindered him more than it helped him. But it did, at times, serve a purpose. Polite and velvety leaders, who take care to avoid bruising others, are generally not as effective at forcing change. Dozens of the colleagues whom Jobs most abused ended their litany of horror stories by saying that he got them to do things they never dreamed possible. And he created a corporation crammed with A players.

The saga of Steve Jobs is the Silicon Valley creation myth writ large: launching a startup in his parents' garage and building it into the world's most valuable company.

He didn't invent many things outright, but he was a master at putting together ideas, art and technology in ways that invented the future.... Some leaders push innovations by being good at the big picture. Others do so by mastering details. Jobs did both, relentlessly. Was he smart? No, not exceptionally. Instead, he was a genius. His imaginative leaps were instinctive, unexpected, and at times magical.

He was, indeed, an example of what the mathematician Mark Kac called a magician genius, someone whose insights come out of the blue and require intuition more than mere mental processing power. Like a pathfinder, he could absorb information, sniff the winds, and sense what lay ahead.

Steve Jobs thus became the greatest business executive of our era, the one most certain to be remembered a century from now. History will place him in the pantheon right next to Edison and Ford. More than anyone else of his time, he made products that were completely innovative, combining the power of poetry and processors.

With a ferocity that could make working with him as unsettling as it was inspiring, he also built the world's most creative company. And he was able to infuse into its DNA the design sensibilities, perfectionism, and imagination that make it likely to be, even decades from now, the company that thrives best at the intersection of artistry and technology.



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We do them because we care about the user, and
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– Steve Jobs