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Lessons NOT To Learn From Steve Jobs

Eric Savitz, Forbes Staff

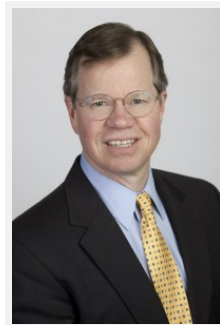
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Guest Post Written by Doug Hardy

Doug Hardy, Principal of The Content Guild, is a business writer and content strategist. He is currently consulting at Babson College.

First of all, you are not Steve Jobs.

As the tsunami of well-deserved hagiography [surges through the business press](#), entrepreneurs can be forgiven the temptation to discover [the trick or method that will turn them into world-changing geniuses](#). Copying the outward appearances of Steve Jobs, his behaviors and quirks, rather than internalizing his principles, is the temptation of every wannabe business revolutionary. Also, expecting similar business results just by aping his particular tastes won't make you magic or power your stock price. Ask [Microsoft](#).



Doug Hardy: Learn from Steve. But you're not Steve.

Making the most of Jobs' lessons is a matter of unraveling what made him great from what made great copy, and so here are a few distinctions:

- **Temperamental is not the same as demanding.**

What boss doesn't savor the ability to judge people perfectly? Hey, if Steve Jobs got results by firing people in the elevator whose offense was not being able to articulate on the spot their value, why can't I? Jobs got away with inexcusable outbursts because they were part of the whole (charismatic) person. If being temperamental isn't absolutely necessary to your success, don't give yourself a pass on common civility. If you must obsess over every detail, you'd better be right.

- **Pretty is not the same as beautiful.**

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Pretty is an external look, and Apple's many imitators got good at it (hi, [Android](#)). Beautiful is an inner experience born of interaction with the object (or software, or music, or person). Pretty is the junk food of design. Beauty in design feeds the soul.

- ***Choosing the best ideas is not the same as having the best ideas.***

How many CEOs have told me "I can do just about everybody's job in the company better." Too many, and to give them the benefit of the doubt, often they are misstating the case – they mean they're a pretty good judge of which ideas will work. If you think your design ideas are better than those of your designer, you're wrong. If you're right, you need a better designer.

- ***Persistence is not the same as stubbornness.***

Persistence is a refusal to surrender. Stubbornness is a refusal to change.

- ***Presenting brilliantly is not the same as having something brilliant to present.***

Much has been made of Jobs' product introductions. They were beautifully choreographed and rehearsed (there's that discipline again), but as I watch them in review, I'm underwhelmed by the hype and the proliferation of words like "incredible, fantastic, phenomenal." Read as a script, the enthusiasm wears thin. The power of his presentations came from the product magic; we too were thinking "Wow, that's incredible," because of what we saw and imagined. The famous moment in which Jobs drew an iPod Nano from his coin pocket was a terrific piece of showmanship; it was only possible because the Nano was so improbably small. We laughed at the joke; we were awed by the object. (Incidentally, this is why so much of Apple's print advertising works. The object is the star, not the presentation. Even [the "I'm a Mac" TV commercials](#) personified the object – and made us laugh.)

- ***Being successful is not the same as never failing.***

Jobs' hit products changed the world, and some of his pet products bombed ([Mac Cube?](#)) Internally, the Apple process of generating umpteen prototypes forced designers and programmers to risk failure (and Steve's notorious scorn). It made them better.

- ***Don't be Steve.***

Copying what Steve Jobs did, and how he did it, violates his insistence that we follow our own instinct, our hearts and guts. Doing that will make you the best Steve Jobs you can be. Doing anything else in imitation of him won't make you a world-changing genius any more than wearing a black [St Croix turtleneck](#), [jeans](#) and [New Balance 991 sneakers](#).

Studying Steve Jobs' personality and achievements, the word "inimitable" comes to mind, and in that word might be the most important lesson. The way to succeed like Jobs is to reflect on how he worked and how he lived and why he succeeded. He was an original, and the surest way to fail is to imitate him.

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