

Steve Jobs' Ten Step Roadmap to Building an "Insanely Great" Company

by Steve Jobs (a.k.a. Mark Goulston)

After the Bay of Pigs debacle in the early 1960's, Kennedy went to Eisenhower and asked him, "What went wrong?"

Eisenhower responded, "You didn't have a (step by step) process for making decisions."

Kennedy learned his lesson well and had a better process when the Cuban Missile Crisis occurred which quite possibly may have saved the world from a nuclear war.

I don't like failing. I mean I *really hate* failing. And I failed Apple twice. First when they demoted me – BTW they didn't fire me – and like the petulant person I was, I took \$100 million and one share of Apple stock and all my marbles and left. Then Apple couldn't sustain itself without me, and a-hole that I was, I reveled in it. Except for one thing. I still loved Apple. I just hated the bozos they brought in to fix it.

The next time I failed Apple was after I died.

In both cases *I* didn't have a step by step process to make the "je ne sais quoi" factor in my head sustainable. Putting Tim Cook and Jony Ive in – and Apple wouldn't have succeeded without them – did not a sustainable disruptive visionary company make.

I said at Stanford that you can't connect the dots going forward, you can only connect them going backwards and hope they'll connect in the future.

I ran out of future. However, I came back to connect those dots and explain not just what I did, but what I thought behind what I did between 1997 and 2007 and the unconscious (now made conscious) strategy I followed. BTW connecting dots is not just about strategy, it's about connecting people into that strategy.

Before I launch into the steps, one of the reasons strategies most often fail is because the language is too obtuse. Vision, Mission, Strategy, Execution, Culture, Values, etc. are corporate mush mouth and the bottom 70% of a company doesn't give a sh-t about them. *They're* worried about whether they'll have a job in three months. So like we did at Apple with our products, I commit to "Keep It Simple Stupid" and use language a 5th grader and all of your employees can understand. Such clarity and knowing exactly what their jobs are will help corporate culture improve more than pizza, beer and now pot parties. Finally, it's also a way to communicate to your Board and investors who will also be clearer about your company and have more confidence in it.

1. Needs

For the majority of people in a company, the word "goal" is confusing and intimidating. That is why if you ask people their goals they often hem and haw or just throw out some number to get their boss off their back.

Not everyone has goals, but everyone and every company has needs. When I came back to Apple in 1997 it was a mess. That is why I only wanted to be Interim CEO at first, because if it failed, I didn't want yet another Apple failure on my head. Those three needs were: a. To make money – to pay for overhead, have a runway to develop "think different" products and deliver a return on investment to investors who had all but given up on us; b. To consistently astonish customers and now you have to add socially redeeming stuff for the millennials and c. To develop a team and fully engage employees to zealously commit to fulfilling "a" and "b."

2. Results

When I came back I identified what result(s) which if achieved would fulfill the three needs above.

Regarding “a” above and before we were back to making money with great products, I maneuvered Bill Gates to give us \$150 million when Microsoft was conveniently being investigated by the justice department as a monopoly and it would have been worse if Apple went away.

Regarding “b,” we needed to go back to creating products that caused customers to go: “Whoa! I can’t believe what I’m seeing,” “Wow! That’s astonishing, amazing and unbelievable,” “Hmm... that is just too good to not buy regardless of the premium price,” and “Yes! I want it, I need it, I can see what I can do with it. Sold!”

Regarding “c,” before I left Apple the first time, people were mainly functions, even worse, just appliances to me. Pixar taught me a great lesson. While I was thinking about how to sell off its technology to get some of my \$10 million investment back, I left John Lasseter, Ed Catmull and their team to do what they did without too much of my interference. As a result, they produced *Toy Story*, which became a blockbuster that I maneuvered into an IPO. With that, I became a billionaire overnight and voila, I’m the “comeback” kid. So I learned to value – not to be confused with going easy on – special talent like Tim Cook and Jony Ive. I also like to think I was less of an a-hole after I came back, but I’ll leave it to fans and critics to judge that.

3. Plan

Next I realized we needed a plan to make all of the above happen, and especially “b” how to make: “Whoa! Wow! Hmmm... Yes!” happen in customers’ minds and wallets. I didn’t even know what Ux was when I died, but apparently a lot of people think I knew a lot about it. So what kind of Ux would result in “Whoa! Wow! Hmmm... Yes!” It’s not rocket science. Rather it involved seven elements. Whatever we made needed to be:

- a) Relevant – It’s had to satisfy what customer want and will want in their future vs. building crap that only you like and then you have to hard sell the world to get rid of your excess inventory. Learned my lesson on that with Next.
- b) Simple – The world makes everyone feel stupid outside what they know. And it’s gotten worse since I died. If we could turn 3 steps into 1, we did it.
- c) Reliable – People also don’t like getting frustrated when something doesn’t work. Apple used to be the least frustrating technology a consumer could buy. It’s not as good as it once was and they need to improve that.
- d) Convenient – You know how impatient I was for all my years at Apple? The world is becoming that way, so don’t make anything that’s inconvenient. People are just too impatient to tolerate that.
- e) Fun – I learned at Atari that when you bring a video arcade into a home, you not only hooked kids, you hooked their parents. Fun puts a smile on people’s faces.
- f) Beautiful – If fun puts a smile on people’s faces, beautiful and elegant takes their breath away as they experience awe. Awe is a much more lasting experience than “Gee, how neat!”
- g) Socially Redeeming – This wasn’t such a necessity when I was alive, but the upcoming generation is really committed to making the world a better place. So try not to hurt the world. The way it looks, it doesn’t need your help to be a more dangerous and scary than it already is.

4. Tasks

Again words like “roles” and “responsibilities” and even “skills” and “resources” are too abstract to many of your people who are literal. Everyone understands the word “tasks.” So we figured out what tasks needed to be done to accomplish the plan above.

5. Skills and resources

After we decided on those tasks, we came up with the skills and resources that would be needed to accomplish them. This often meant moving people around who had different “titles” because they had the skills to accomplish the tasks.

6. Selection and Recruiting

We identified, hired and placed people with the skills, ability to access resources and a track record of successfully doing both to perform the tasks above.

This included discovering someone in one department with amazing skills that weren't being used and moving them to another department to make the most of their potential value to the company. This is usually under the auspices of talent recruitment and development. We made sure they weren't just check the boxes types.

I remember Jony Ive nearly crapping in his pants when I came back because he had been under Gilbert Amelio. Jony even had a letter of resignation because he thought he'd be discarded.

I didn't do that with him because I immediately recognized the skills he had that he hadn't been using under the old leadership. Most importantly he became singularly the designer with the top ability to see into my head and be able to intuit what I was thinking and turn that into actual products. That's a skill, I never had. My skill was recognizing the "Whoa! Wow! Hmmm... Yes!" when I saw it but not actually designing or building it.

7. Follow Through and Follow Up

As most people who knew me – and Jony knew this very well – focus and remaining focused is the single key element in accomplishing anything significant. I had the focus, but it wasn't easy to maintain. What people don't know is that the forces in my head that kept pulling me in different directions were as strong as people doing it to me from the outside. That may explain why I was so intense all the time. It was because so much stuff in my head and from the outside continually conspired to pull me off focus.

BTW "follow through" and "follow up" are much better "employee experience" words than "accountability" which immediately puts most people on the defensive.

8. Motivation

One of the small changes I made when I came back to Apple was to offer much better food in the cafeteria. It's amazing the positive impact of just replacing crappy food with better food. Another of the other things I did to keep people motivated was having people feel pride, enthusiasm and passion about what Apple created and built. Pride is associated with creating incredibly high quality products – that have the "Whoa! Wow! Hmmm... Yes!" and the seven aspects of great user experience. Enthusiasm is associated with execution. If you have great ideas but can't get anything accomplished, people feel frustrated and become demotivated. Finally, passion is about being part of disruptive innovation and being along for a journey into the future. Being part of the future can make up for a lot of sacrifices people make. Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos know exactly what I'm talking about.

9. Review

This goes back to maintaining focus. We instituted regular, productive, and non-time wasting meetings to stay on top of steps 1 – 8 above.

10. "Go to" crisis team

Finally, I had taken enough hits in life to know that sh-t will always hit the fan sooner or later. To not have a group of key "go to" people to pull together can cause waves of anxiety, "sky is falling" panic to set in. Tim Cook and Jony Ive were two people I would always go to when a crisis hit. They also served Apple well by being able to keep some of the crappier sides of me from spewing out and wreaking havoc during some of the rough times.

I regret that I didn't connect the dots in life for Apple that I did above, but hope they'll follow them now. That's because *I* followed them and used them to build an "Insanely Great" company.

You can too.

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