



**John Brandon**  
Technology Industry

At the time of this interview, John Brandon worked for Apple, as VP of the Americas and Asia Pacific

He also had served as president and chief executive officer for Academic Systems Corporation (ASC), where under his leadership, ASC became the leading supplier of technology-based content to the higher education market. He also spent ten years at Adobe Systems, Inc., helping to create their application software business, and serving as vice president and general manager of North America. He received his bachelor of arts degree from the University of California at Davis...

professional

**What character qualities do you look for when hiring?**

The first thing I look for is somebody who can think. Are they somebody who can work hard? Are they somebody who can tell the truth, especially in tough times? Because the nature of business is, that there's going to be as many bad days as there are good days. I want to have people that have a sense of integrity and truth telling and do their best work when things aren't going well, not just when they're going well.

**What are the 2-3 most valuable lessons you learned in your career?**

The most valuable lesson I learned was that no matter what the price, the truth is always worth telling. There are really no short cuts to take. There are no short cuts to quality. You need to pay attention to some of those fundamentals and not to what the market place says at this particular time. It's very telling in the Silicon Valley right now, that some of the very companies that were told, "You could do this or you could do that because that's what we value" are now being told by the very same set of investors that there's no value in that, and that they really shouldn't have done that. Now issues like profitability and meeting delivery schedules and all those other things are important again. Well, they were always important. And so as a CEO, you have to decide what's right and do it, whether it's comfortable or not.

**What was your worst career decision or mistake?**

I think my worst career decision was not so much about making a job choice, it actually was some choices I made about some people that I hired. I decided to short circuit a process of interviewing and reference checking because I felt pressured to get people hired. And by doing that, I hired one executive that turned out to be a disaster. And that executive's tenure with us was a complete waste. It set the company back an entire year. It's all because I didn't do the due diligence that I knew I should have done, because I felt the pressure, the urgency of making the decision. I'd say to this day, that's still my worst career decision. The thing that comes to mind is that there is more to life than hard work, money and increasing your portfolio. There's that old saying that on your deathbed, no one ever looked back and said, "I wish I spent more time in the office." And so if I had one piece of advice, it is consider the cost. None of us know how long we get to stay here on earth. We're given a fixed amount of time. So we as executives need to make decisions. And every decision has a consequence, every decision has a cost. So be wise about thinking about the cost. Just not now, but long term. Because it is going to cost and there will be consequences. Think it through.

personal

**How do you define success? How has your definition evolved?**

The way that you define success is, are you accomplishing the things that are most important to you as an individual? That can be in any particular category. So you define what's important to you in terms of your personal life and your personal relationships, your marriage and your relationship with

your kids. What's important to you in your professional life, in terms of what's happening in your career and with your company? Are you doing the kinds of things you want to do with your physical life, in terms of staying in shape, doing all the things that you hope will bring about a long and healthy life? And then finally, how are you doing spiritually? Because we are spiritual beings. That's part of our experience. And then whatever that means to you. Are you doing the kind of things so that you're spiritually healthy? So when I think about success, there's a report card that I fill out in all of those areas. If I meet my goals in those areas, ultimately that's some level of success.

### **What is the difference between success and significance?**

When I think about significance, it's making an impact. It's making a difference. When it's all said and done, I want to ask myself at the end of my life, "Did it matter that I was here? Did I affect people that I cared about or causes that I cared about in a really positive way? Did it matter that I was here on earth?" When I think of significance, that's what I think of. And so for me, it's how I look at my marriage. Did I sacrifice my marriage because of my career? Are my kids healthy, good individuals, good citizens? People that have a good self-image? How about some of the causes that I care about. When I think about significance, it's making an impact in those areas.

### **What does balance mean to you? How important is balance to success?**

The only way you can win in the long term is to have some sort of balance. I live in such a crazy world in high tech that there are moments of really long hours and lots of craziness, which by any measure is out of balance. But I try really hard so that doesn't become the standard for my life. That's not the normal lifestyle. What I want to do is be able to set some priorities in my life and then really meet those priorities in areas of relationship, in areas of health, in areas of business, in areas of ministry, in areas of service, all the things that I think are personally important.

### **How do you prioritize your time/values? What are your priorities?**

First of all, I don't make it in a vacuum. I have a standard. I happen to believe that there are real Biblical principles that are important to both men of faith and men not of faith. And they have to pay attention to those. Number two, I listen to what my wife says. She knows me best and we make our priorities together. Third thing, I have a group of men that I surround myself with, that know me best, they love me, they care enough to tell me the truth. It's in that group of influences that I set my priorities and that's what determines my priorities.

### **How do you deal with stress? How did you used to deal with stress?**

The way that I deal with stress is two ways. First of all, just physical exercise. But the second thing is, I really build some limits in my life. I know myself well enough that when the stress starts to build, I can start to tell. So I build some limits in terms of how much sleep I get and how much work I can really do. Without a set of perimeters to keep me in check, I won't be able to manage the stress.

### **Have you ever had a wakeup call in your life?**

Never in the sense of having a heart attack or a stroke or losing a loved one. When I think of wake up calls, those are the classics. That's never happened to me. But I had a mid-life crisis at 29 and it was essentially because of some things that happened in a job situation. I realized that fundamentally I had to rethink about what I wanted to do with my life. Because it was a situation where by lots of people's point of view . . . I was having tremendous success. But in reality, I realized that to continue that success, I was going to need to compromise some things that were pretty important to me. I went through a period where I took a really hard stand and it essentially cost me my job. Through that, it made me rethink a lot about who I am and where I really wanted to spend the rest of my life. In some ways that was a wake up call.

### **How do you define yourself?**

When it comes to defining yourself, I think the thing I've learned is that fundamentally we're to define ourselves in terms of relationships. And the most important relationship is our relationship with the Heavenly Father. The God of the universe somehow has decided that he wants to be our friend. The highest calling, the thing that's most important for us is to actually get to know Him. That's the most

important relationship. Out of that comes health in the other relationships ... in marriages, with parents, with children, with friends. That's the way we need to begin to think about ourselves. Because we're not lone rangers. We were not designed to live life on our own terms, by ourselves. We were designed first to live in community with God and then those people that he blesses us with in our lives.

s p i r i t u a l

**Can you follow Christ and still have a successful career, family and such?**

The answer is not only can you follow Christ and still have a successful career, I would say that it's through following Christ you're going to be better in your career. For the very simple reason...that's going to make you a better leader. It's going to make you a better person, so that you then have a new self-confidence, a new set of purpose. You're less likely to focus on yourself, to look out for others, to truly lead with the best interest of them at heart. And so I would say that it's actually out of your faith that you will be more of a success in the business world.

**How does your faith help you in your professional life?**

Faith helps my professional life a great deal. Because it's the vitality that comes out of my relationship with Jesus that makes a difference. It's out of that that I have a healthy self-image. It's out of that that allows me to focus not on myself, but on others. So as a CEO, when I'm to lead and to mentor and to look out for a group of people, I'm able to truly be a servant leader. Not because I know how to do that on my own, but because it comes out of the examples that Jesus set for us. It's out of the freshness that comes out of the faith that has grown out of that relationship.

**How has God /faith changed your perspective on fulfillment, significance and success**

Much of my life, until I was 29, was based around achievement. In whatever areas, whether it was grades or athletic achievement or achievement early on in my career. I also applied that concept of achievement in my spiritual relationship. And so in many ways, I define my personal faith by the things that I was doing. And then I realized that really what God wanted was not my achievement but my worship and my relationship and my desire to know Him. It wasn't about what I did, but about who I was to become. It wasn't about my achievement, it was about these character qualities that He wanted to build in my life. In that way, faith really changed my idea of success.

**What is the hardest thing about being a believer in your line of work?**

The hardest thing about being a believer in my line of work is knowing that I am going to be responsible for people that want to succeed in a world that regularly tells them that the end justifies the means, and that you should win at all costs. We're going to be judged competing with companies that live by that very set of rules. I need to be able to sacrifice some of that success to do things the right way. And that's a challenge. Because sometimes, especially when you're in a publically held company and you have to deliver results on a 90-day basis, it's very short term oriented. You need to be able to sacrifice some of that success because the right thing long term is not going to give you the best short term results. It's hard because as a believer, as a man of faith, I absolutely need to do what's right, even if it doesn't provide the short term results that I know I'm being judged on. There's that tension there. Even so, you've got to do the right thing.

**Is faith critical to leadership or character?**

Faith is crucial to character and leadership. Because your faith is built out of relationship to God, the Father, through Jesus. Character is then rooted first out of a relationship and then from His word. We actually have a blueprint where we can follow. It gives us advice about how we can become the kind of men that God really wants us to be. My favorite passage of Scripture is Psalm 15 where King David asked the question, "What kind of man does God like to spend time with?" And then he answers about a series of character qualities that that man should develop in their lives. That's my life passage. That's what I want to be known as.



**What are the costs of following Christ in your career and would you change anything?**

I had a situation where the first start up I ever went to work for was a wild success. The company went public and I was employee number 17, so I had a really nice equity stake. It was everything I wanted it to be. But a funny thing happened. I found myself in a situation where I had to confront the entrepreneur founder and CEO over an issue of integrity. Knowing that the confrontation was probably going to cost me my job. But I was called to do that and I did that. And 90 days later he essentially had run me out of the company. So I know a little bit about paying a price when you need to do the right thing.