

A
DENT
IN THE
UNIVERSE

36 PROVEN BUSINESS
LESSONS FROM
STEVE JOBS



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36 Proven Business Lessons From Steve Jobs

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Preface

Life is a great gift, and therefore we shouldn't waste it in mediocrity. Instead, your goal should be to live your life to the fullest. Don't settle for something less than that.

That goal led me to start a blog called [Life Optimizer](#) back in 2006. I chose the name to send the message that we should get the most out of our lives. Life is something we should *optimize*.

That goal also led me to write this book. The idea is simple: *if you want to be good at something, you should learn from the winners in that field*. If you want to be a good writer, for instance, you should learn from the best writers. If you want to be a good basketball player, you should learn from the best basketball players. Similarly, if you want to get the most out of your life, you should learn from the winners in life. Those who live exceptional lives have a lot to teach us. Learning from their lives can help us improve ours.

In this book, I want to share with you the lessons I have learned from the life of Steve Jobs. My main source for Jobs's life stories is [Walter Isaacson's book](#), but I complemented it with materials from other sources. From all these sources, I extracted the lessons which I believe can improve our lives.

Why Steve Jobs? Because his life offered a lot of lessons

on how to be successful at work, especially business.

I think it's obvious why Jobs is a good model here. As Isaacson wrote in his book, Jobs transformed no less than six industries: personal computers, animated movies, music, phones, tablet computing, and digital publishing. He was also the man behind [one of the greatest business turnarounds in history](#).

I wrote the lessons in this book mainly with small business owners in mind (though most of the lessons are also applicable to other lines of work). Small business here can range from a single-person business to a business with several people in it.

Why small business owners? Because *I believe that running their own business is the way to go for many people*. Given the uncertainty of the economy, it's dangerous to leave the fate of your livelihood to someone else. By having your own business, you will have a better control of your livelihood. Nobody can fire you.

That doesn't mean that you should quit your job and jump with both feet into your business though. I don't recommend that. What I recommend instead is to start a side business and build it over time. That way you will still have the income from your day job. Then, when your side business has become big enough, you can consider leaving your day job.

This book is for those who are thinking about starting their

own business or already have one. My hope is that it can help you achieve your full potential.

How to Apply the Lessons in This Book

To get the full benefit from this book, obviously you should *apply* the lessons. But since there many lessons to choose from, it will be overwhelming to try to apply all of them at once. So you should choose only a few of them in the beginning.

Here is a suggestion on how to do that:

1. As you read the lessons, mark the ones that resonate with you.
2. After you finish the book, review the lessons that you have marked and evaluate the potential impact of each of them. Which ones do you think are the most applicable to your situation? Which ones do you think can give you the most benefit?
3. Choose just the few best ones and focus on applying them. It takes time and willpower to apply a lesson, so you shouldn't spread yourself too thin. In fact, you might want to start with just one lesson. You can always select more lessons to apply later.

Since applying the lessons will take time, you should treat this book as a guidebook rather than a quick read. From time to time, you might want to refer back to it to see if there is anything else that you can apply.

Now that we have seen how to apply the lessons, let's start digging in.

LESSON ONE

Do Things Right, Even for the Unseen Parts

Jobs's father taught him some useful lessons that would impact him for life. One of them was the importance of doing things right, even for the unseen parts of one's work.

His father loved to build things like cabinets, fences, and so on. He said that it was important "to craft the backs of cabinets and fences properly, even though they were hidden."

This is a lesson that Jobs kept for the rest of his life. He applied it when designing his own products years later. For instance, when developing the early Apple computers, he insisted that their circuit boards be printed beautifully, even though the customers would never see them. Those around him objected, but Jobs eventually prevailed.

He sometimes went too far with this principle (as we will see later), but I think the core principle here is good: *you must always keep your standard high.*

The reason for this is that mediocrity creeps into our work little by little. It might start small, but it's contagious. If you compromise in the areas that can't be seen, you might soon find yourself compromising in the areas that *can* be seen.

What started as a small compromise could soon affect the overall quality of your work.

For that reason, it's important that you always keep your standard high. By doing the right thing even for the unseen parts, you will ensure the quality of the rest of your work.

LESSON THIRTY-FIVE

Handle Crisis the Smart Way

In running your business, you might come into a crisis. Crisis could come even if you have prepared everything well, so you need to learn to handle it.

Apple experienced a crisis in 2010 when the iPhone 4 had an antenna problem that caused it to sometimes lose connection. It became a big issue in the media and culminated with *Consumer Reports* deciding that it couldn't recommend iPhone 4.

At that time, Jobs was in Hawaii with his family. His response to the crisis went through three stages:

1. *Denial.* At first Jobs denied the problem and said that it was a move by Apple's competitors to make Apple look bad.
2. *Hurt.* After it became clear that the crisis was real, he became hurt and took the criticism personally.
3. *Acceptance and taking responsibility.* Soon after that, he accepted the situation and took responsibility to resolve it.

These three stages describe what most of us go through

when we face a crisis. First, we might deny the crisis. Next, when we could no longer deny the reality, we might become hurt by all the criticisms.

Going through these two stages is normal because nobody wants a crisis. But the important thing is to quickly move through them to the third stage: acceptance and taking responsibility. What makes the difference is how quickly you move to the third stage. The sooner you do it, the better.

Once Jobs got into the third stage, he handled the crisis well. Here is how he handled it:

1. He Gathered the Facts About the Situation

First of all, he gathered all the relevant facts. For instance, he got iPhone 4's dropped-calls data from AT&T and compared it to those of the other mobile phones. By collecting the facts, he could get a comprehensive understanding of the *real* situation, not what the media said.

2. He Asked the Opinion of Those He Trusted

Next, Jobs called a few people he trusted, including longtime partners that had helped him in the early years of Apple. He gathered these people to ask their opinion on how to handle the crisis. Since they had the facts at hand, they could devise a good strategy.

3. He Was Honest, But Also Put the Situation Into Context

When the time came to give a press conference on the issue, Jobs was honest about the problem. He admitted that they were just humans and could make mistakes. But he also gave the numbers and mentioned that other mobile phones had similar problems. So he said that, yes, iPhone 4 had a problem, but so did the other phones. By doing this, he put the situation into a good context.

4. He Gave the Customers a Win-Win Solution

After giving a contextual understanding of the situation, Jobs said that if anyone was unhappy, they could either return the phones or get a free bumper case that would remedy the problem. This way Jobs gave the customers a real solution to their problem.

The solution was in the sweet spot between what was good for the customers and what was good for Apple. If Jobs ordered a recall, it might be good for the consumers, but it would be bad for Apple's finance and reputation. With this offer, Jobs saved Apple's interest while also giving the customers a solution. Jobs and his team could find this sweet spot because they knew the real situation. They knew that this solution was enough to solve the problem.

As it turned out, the return rate was much lower than expected. In fact, it was even lower than that of iPhone 3GS which didn't have an antenna problem. Jobs and his team handled the crisis well.

To recap, here are how you should handle a crisis:

- Accept the situation and take responsibility.
- Gather the facts about the situation.
- Given the facts, seek advice from those you trust.
- Be honest, but put the situation into context.
- Find a win-win solution.