

Lessons for Legal Leaders from Steve Jobs and Apple

There are some valuable lessons for all legal leaders in the way Steve Jobs and Apple went about their business.

By Sean Larkan Edge International Communiqué, September 2011



A great deal has been and will be written about Steve Jobs, who this week resigned after a remarkable career as CEO of Apple. There are some valuable lessons for all legal leaders in the way he and Apple went about their business.

Clear understanding of the "why."

In Simon Sinek's "Start with Why" he argues persuasively that highly successful organizations understand that people buy why you do something not what or how you do it. Jobs and Apple clearly understood this; their core essence, their "why," their reason for being is epitomized in their "think different" mantra and how they conduct business. Of course, they also knew what they were about and how to do it, as they built not only a hugely efficient but highly profitable organization.

Most organizations, and law firms, are clear about what they do and how they do it; very few are clear about or can articulate their "why."

A magical inter-relationship between cultural attributes, values and brand.

I recently had occasion to visit Apple stores in Durham USA and a week later those in Perth and Sydney, Australia. It felt like I was entering the same store, so similar was the atmosphere and were the people - colorful and professional - the level of service, friendly and professional and of course the décor, slick and inviting. Better than any other organization, I believe, they understand the importance of a seamless alignment of brand, cultural attributes and values. Most organizations deal with these separately and write them on paper; Apple and Jobs do them and thread them into everything. They have managed to ensure that every touch-point with Apple is seamless. As a result, deep-seated trust has developed amongst loyal customer bases, who have become Apple's most powerful marketing gatekeepers. A particularly important message for global law firms with offices in far-flung places.

Lessons learned - a strong management team and leadership succession.

Apple and Jobs learned a lesson from the first time he left Apple. On that occasion the organization was left in disarray and suffered. Not this time. Jobs has provided for succession. Tim Cook, tough, able and respected, has been groomed for close on a decade and often stood in for the CEO role. Cook has himself been credited with much of Apple's recent successes. In turn, he is supported by a strong, visible management team. Jobs is staying on as Chairman. In this way they

have built business media credibility, so much so that this recent news has been greeted in a muted, quietly confident way. As a result the shares have dipped but not plunged. Customers are sad but not panicked.

Dealing with the detail

Jobs has undoubted charisma, has a wonderful track record and has had exciting products to announce; this he does not take for granted - when he launches a new product he works at it like it is the most important presentation he has done in his life. He doesn't "leave it to marketing;" he spends not just hours but days practicing until, when he delivers it, he seems relaxed and laid back. He does this with such determination and so successfully that he has become the ideal that others look up to in relation to presentation technique. Tim Cook has done the same in relation to manufacturing efficiency and supply chain delivery. They seem to leave very little to chance.

Understanding strategy

Jobs and Apple understand strategy; while meticulous in getting the detail and internal efficiencies right, they know that strategy is about setting direction and achieving competitive positioning. Their vision, and a clear, competitive road-map for the future, is in place.

Actually putting the customer first, not just talking about it

Probably the most striking feature of what Jobs and Apple have done is to carry on business in such a way that they deserve trust and loyalty. They have done this by building into their organizational DNA customer service in the truest sense. Anyone who has dealt with their stores to return a product, or shopped online, can attest to this. It is "*customer first, ask questions later.*"

Not only have they done the business and leadership things well, they have built a creative, fun and adventurous place to work where staff and customer loyalty and trust is second to none. Something every legal leader can aspire to.

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