



What we don't need to learn from Steve Jobs

Walter Isaacson's recent biography of Steve Jobs, the demanding former head of Apple, apparently doubles as a management guide for many executives. Some have even donned the deceased executive's trademark black turtleneck sweater.

I'm all for learning from others. I've had a number of bosses over the years, some good and some very, very bad. I nearly quit a job after receiving an email from one mid-level manager who reprimanded me for doing something that "wasn't my job." The problem was, it was my responsibility. It was a task given to me by his boss. Yet I nearly responded to the vicious, curt and overall demeaning tone of his email with a "four-letter" filled resignation letter. Fortunately, I allowed myself to calm down before hitting the send button. I used the delete button instead, but within a few months I chose to move on.

Jobs was known for his brusque, often intimidating style. He also possessed extraordinary talent and drive. My former mid-level manager seemed to share Jobs' natural "gift" for bullying. The problem was he didn't have Jobs' track record of success, nor had he earned the respect of those he regularly berated, something that Steve Jobs clearly had.

There's a danger in selectively picking and choosing certain traits to emulate. Jobs was effective not because he could bully people or because

he focused so intently on design or any other single trait for which he is so admired. It was the package, the complex and nuanced way all those traits melded together that allowed Jobs to succeed.

As Isaacson said (in an article in the *Wall Street Journal* discussing executives using his book as a management bible): "I hate when people say, 'I'm like Steve Jobs, I drive people to perfection.' I say, well, make sure you have his talents as well."

In other words, wearing black turtleneck sweaters and bringing employees to tears with a harsh and degrading demeanor isn't going to help you build your company.

I'm not suggesting there isn't something to learn from Jobs. Quite the contrary. He did some extraordinary things (that might be the understatement of the year) and had a vision and drive that surpassed the majority of executives. He was able to do what he did because of the unique makeup of his personality. Hijacking "pieces" of someone else's approach and simply dropping them like bombs on your employees will most likely have harmful effects.

My goal has been to adopt and apply the traits I most admire and eschew the ones that leave me feeling at best unappreciated or at worst abused. But to make them work, I must make them my own.

Trying to shoehorn Jobs' management style into your business will likely be about as effective as installing a Windows operating system onto your Macintosh computer. You might be able to make things run, but the two weren't created for each other. And why would you want change your approach in the first place? You created and built your business with your unique talents. You developed a team that has become accustomed to your management style and works well within it. There is always room to learn, adapt and grow. Chucking that aside and adopting the Jobs approach seems foolish — something Steve Jobs certainly wouldn't have done.

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