

Book Review: Steve Jobs

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Title: Steve Jobs
Author: Walter Isaacson
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656 pages

Steve Jobs at one time aimed to put a dent in the universe. In a way he managed to do that by changing the way the computer was brought to the people. His journey is chronicled in a new, authorized biography, currently topping best-seller lists around the world.

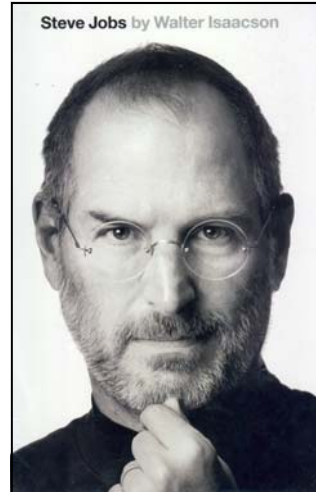
"Great minds discuss ideas, average minds discuss events, and little minds discuss people."

The above quote is apt in dissecting the life lessons of Steve Jobs. On the most basic level, individuals may start adopting Jobs' dietary regime. Parents will start emulating Paul and Clara Jobs' parenting style to nurture the next Steve Jobs. Those in the computing industry will reminisce on the early stage of the development of the personal computer, recalling its winners and losers, and how things could have taken a different turn in the past.

But Jobs' legacy is not the products he has put out, his attitude or his approach. It is in his vision to drive *Apple* and ultimately, the computing world forward.

In 2005, Steve Jobs delivered a commencement speech in Stanford University and it is among the most watched commencement speeches on *You*

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Steve Jobs

most watched commencement speeches on *You Tube*. The speech outlined three lessons from Steve's life. His recent official biography recorded these three lessons.

Product Design Matters

The success of the *Macintosh*, *iPod*, *iPhone* and *iPad* can be attributed to *Apple's* ability to create electronic devices to satisfy consumers' appetites. By appealing to the consumer's aesthetic taste, *Apple* in the first decade of the 21st century created a transportation system to navigate through the increasing capacity of the World Wide Web.

Apple's products and services have been subjected to their fair share of criticisms, in spite of their commercial success. *Apple* has been accused of promoting a closed or walled system, with arm-twisting techniques, so that book and software companies continue to abide by their regulations if they wished their products to be placed in *Apple's* iTunes Store. The deep integration between *Apple's* hardware and software is the envy of organizations and even governments.

Imagine that the government of Malaysia is, by default, a corporation tasked to come out with products (policies) that will appeal to its consumers (citizens). Apart from satisfying the hunger of citizens for aesthetics, the product will need to cater to customers' unrealized needs, have enough room to deal with defects/failures, and provide a well integrated system for the masses. Designing a policy in isolation is not a walk in the park but to design it with multiple other policies amidst a changing environment is daunting.

Find Visions to believe in

The second important lesson from Steve Jobs is on finding a vision. Jobs would not have been a business legend without a clear vision. He went to great lengths to expand his horizons. His endeavours ranged from experimenting with drugs to a trip to India. His visions were highly influenced by the rapid technological changes that took place in Silicon Valley, where he grew up, went to college and lived.

The challenge of policymakers is to create an ecosystem where strong and positive visions can flourish. 'Knowledge economy' and 'innovation-driven economy' are among the catch-phrases thrown around to describe the next stage of growth for Malaysia. However, the cultivation of the next generation of 'tech-visionaries' will require more than enrolling thousands of school-leavers in engineering programmes or pouring billions into technological-driven companies.

It is regrettable that private publishers in Malaysia choose to increase the number of lifestyle magazines rather than take a chance with a publication that is able to shape the next generation's visions



One of Apple's iconic products— the iPad

The positive impact of the Internet is that technological changes and ideas can now flow easily to every corner of the world. Unfortunately, this stream of information is also clogged with 'noise,' such that even information searches on the Kardashians on Wikipedia count as knowledge activities. Therefore finding the right vision is a daunting task; it requires the right kind of nurturing and exposure to the right contents.

A way to increase our citizens' view of the world is to provide them with enough challenging literature especially in Science and Technology. It is unfortunate that at the local level, the task to promote this worldview is now left to the Academy of Sciences' *Estidotmy* and Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka's *Dewan Kosmik*. Those with means can always go to established bookstores in Kuala Lumpur for the latest edition of *Scientific America* or *Popular Mechanics*. It is regrettable that private publishers in Malaysia choose to increase the number of lifestyle magazines rather than take a chance with a publication that is able to shape the next generation's visions.

Turn Vision into Action with a lot of Help

In Jobs' Stanford's speech, he spoke about the *Whole Earth Catalogue*, a publication started in 1968 that, in a way, shaped Silicon Valley's groupthink in the late 20th century. The *Catalogue* worked by listing 'tools' that the editors found useful for developing in a person the power to

conduct his own education, find his own inspiration, shape his own environment and share his adventure with whoever is interested.

The notion that any man or woman is an actor able to influence or change the world, was something very important for the likes of Steve Jobs and Bill Gates who ushered humanity into the information and communication technology revolution.

Silicon Valley in 1976 helped launch Apple Computer and all it took was Steve Jobs' drive to combine the available resources around him. Its first product, the *Apple I* personal computer kit was just an assembled circuit board aimed at assisting computer hobbyists and turning them from their preoccupation with building a machine to writing machine language. In the quest to come out with *Apple I*, Steve Jobs had to make use of the resources around him; i) the necessary personnel (Steve Wozniak), ii) commercial floor space (The Byte Shop), and iii) raw material inputs (Cramer Electronics). Seeing the success of *Apple I* and the possibility of greater success for *Apple II*, Steve Jobs was encouraged to seek capital of US\$250,000 from Mike Markkula.

Apple Computer grew to be one of the most successful and admired companies in the world. Steve Jobs' greatest contributions were his ability



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to leverage on other peoples' strengths and to envision products and services that could 'wow' the world.

The policymakers' job is not to create the next Steve Jobs. Given the resources in government, leveraging on other peoples' strengths so as to reach a certain goal should come easily. This however will not guarantee success. There should be the willingness to go back, look at each input and to cut out the unnecessary parts.

Steve Jobs by Walter Isaacson shows us that any one of us can be like Steve Jobs; all we need is a clear vision, and the ability to transform inputs into an awesome outcome.