

THE BUFFALO NEWS

Apple co-founder's legacy offers lessons for us all

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on October 13, 2011 - 12:01 AM

There has been a lot of ink spilled, or pixels lit as he would have preferred to say, about the untimely demise of Apple co-founder Steve Jobs.

In reflecting on his life and death, it would seem that his greatest contribution to the world may not be the electronic gadgets that are part of our lives, but his relentless focus on the customer experience.

The customer experience of being a citizen in this great country of ours is being undermined by the intransigence of our major political parties. With CEOs and boards of directors seemingly out to feather their own nests in the face of abysmal failures, a retrospective look at the anomaly that was Steve Jobs may be instructive.

People don't care how much you make as long as you are making their lives better. Jobs was worth \$8 billion at the time of his death, yet America revered him. People who had never met the man, including myself, experienced a sense of personal loss at his death. None of us begrudged him his fortune, or paying premium prices for his inventions. Can you say that about any other CEO in America? Have we got a disconnect here?

We need to do a better job at channeling our brainpower. In America we employ a lot of very bright people who design ever more efficient ways to kill our enemies, or to pay the tax bill we owe to the government.

If we had redirected some of that awesome brainpower to a useful pursuit, such as cancer research, which would help all of us, could we have had Jobs around for a few more years? Would our collective lives have been richer?

In the end, the best idea wins. Apple became the first or second most valuable company on earth based on the strength of its ideas, and its ideas evolved over time. Jobs was not an engineer. His genius was a recognition that everything is about the end-user experience. We loved him because he never forgot that we came first.

America recognizes beauty and elegance and will pay up for both. Apple's products have never been cheap. In fact, buyers have always paid a premium for its products. You would think that other companies would pick up on this. Apparently not.

It pays to embrace the future. The recording industry almost went out of business until Jobs showed it how to make a buck in the digital age. The industry's reluctance to change its old business model is typical of many of our dying industries, as well as our public schools.

It takes courage to change. Now that Apple products are ubiquitous, we forget the courage and risk it took to bring those products to market. Whether or not we are geniuses, fundamental change requires courage.

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