

Kutztown University

## Research Commons at Kutztown University

---

KUCC -- Kutztown University Composition Conference

---

### The Dark Truth about Steve Jobs

Mike Dent

mdent637@live.kutztown.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://research.library.kutztown.edu/comconf>



Part of the [Business Commons](#), [English Language and Literature Commons](#), and the [Rhetoric and Composition Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Dent, Mike, "The Dark Truth about Steve Jobs" (2020). *KUCC -- Kutztown University Composition Conference*. 22.

<https://research.library.kutztown.edu/comconf/2020/2020/22>

This Individual Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by Research Commons at Kutztown University. It has been accepted for inclusion in KUCC -- Kutztown University Composition Conference by an authorized administrator of Research Commons at Kutztown University. For more information, please contact [czerny@kutztown.edu](mailto:czerny@kutztown.edu).

Mike Dent

Professor John Ronan

CMP 200

9 December 2019

### The Dark Truth About Steve Jobs

Apple is one of the most valuable companies in the world. Its products range from computers to smartphones to facial recognition software. Behind every new innovation are the genius minds working at the company headquarters in Cupertino, California, who craft each product to be better than the last. At the forefront of this technological powerhouse was Steve Jobs. He revolutionized the way humans interact with technology and the world, crafting products that only a mastermind could create. Despite his extraordinary leadership and intelligence, Walter Isaacson's 2011 biography, *Steve Jobs*, shows that Jobs was an egotistical, arrogant man who had the ability to easily manipulate those around him.

Taking a closer look at his life, it is clear that Steve Jobs always believed he was smarter than the vast majority of those around him. From an early age, he would routinely outshine his peers. He knew how to read before even entering school which made his elementary school years extremely easy. At the end of his fourth-grade year, Steve tested at a high school sophomore level. In fact, he was even able to skip sixth-grade altogether in order to learn more rigorous curriculum. By then it was clear to everyone and especially Jobs, that he was a gifted individual. Ultimately, this went to Steve's head and dictated how he treated others. His parents did nothing to humble their intelligent son; instead, they blamed the schools for not having a more rigorous curriculum that could appropriately stimulate their child's mind. Isaacson indicates that Steve from a very young age began acting out in school due to his boredom. What started out as

harmless pranks meant to pass time, ultimately turned into dangerous acts including setting off explosives under his third-grade teacher's desk. Whenever Steve's parents were called, they'd take their son's side on the matter. His father, Paul, even went as far as telling the principal of his elementary school, "Look it's not his fault. If you can't keep him interested, it's your fault" (12). A young Steve would never be punished for his pranks by his parents. They believed Steve was special, a characteristic that their son took to heart.

Isaacson shows that Steve Jobs's childhood beliefs transformed into the almost god-like persona he assumed in his later life. When he finally launched the first Macintosh personal computer and started to develop the Apple brand, he began describing himself as a "chosen one" (119). One of his lead engineers on the Macintosh project, Andy Hertzfeld, stated, "[Jobs] thinks there are a few special people—like Einstein and Ghandi and the gurus he met in India—and he's one of them" (119). This belief translated into the way he treated his coworkers and subordinates. He categorized his staff into two groups, those he liked and those he did not. The "gods" were those who did their work to Steve's liking, and the "shitheads" were scrutinized for every little mistake they made while being denigrated by Jobs (119-120). Eddie Cue knew firsthand what it was like to end up on Steve Jobs's bad side. As the director of Apple's fledgling MobileMe application program launch in the summer of 2008, he was in charge of meeting the strict demands of his unrelenting boss. After the application's release, it was plagued with user problems which infuriated Jobs. One day he called Cue and the other members of the MobileMe group to a meeting in Apple's auditorium. He simply asked the team of developers what the product was meant to do. After the team explained to Jobs what was supposed to happen, he screamed back, "Then why the fuck doesn't it do that?" (Kennaugh 101). He then proceeded to embarrassingly fire Cue on the spot in front of his team all while ridiculing his work. On the other hand, "gods" like Joanna Hoffman, a member of the Macintosh team, were

allowed to voice their opinions and get credit for their work. In one instance, Jobs had changed Hoffman's marketing plan to something completely different than what was planned. Hoffman furiously stormed up to Jobs's office stating she was "going to take a knife and stab him in into his heart" (122). When Jobs saw that she needed to be physically restrained from hurting him, he backed down and returned to the original plans. On another occasion, Jobs berated his advertisement director, Lee Clow, over what he thought was a difference in color from the one that was printed. Jobs called up his ad director and bluntly state, "You guys don't know what you're doing. I'm going to get someone else to do the ads because this is fucked up" (Germain 137). Clow was forced to sit Jobs down and show that his printed-out ad was the exact same color as the one Jobs had initially requested. Again, Jobs eventually calmed down but only after his "god" had proved his accuracy. "Shitheads" would not be given the same opportunity.

In addition to being egotistical, Isaacson shows that Jobs lied to his coworkers at Apple who in turn eventually dubbed this tendency to be his "reality distortion field" (117). Jobs had the ability to think whatever he wanted and convince himself that it was the truth. Bud Tribble, who was Vice President of Software Technology at Apple Inc, knew firsthand about Jobs's tendency to distort the truth. He briefed Andy Hertzfeld about their boss's "reality distortion field" when the two first began working together. Tribble explained, "If you tell him a new idea, he'll usually tell you he thinks it's stupid. But then, if he actually likes it, he'll come back to you and propose your idea to you, as if he thought of it" (120). Tribble's comments show that Steve had no problem actively lying to himself and others if it meant he was going to benefit from it. He coupled this dangerous way of thinking with tyrannical fear tactics meant to scare his employees. Debi Coleman, another Mac employee, stated, "[Jobs] would shout at a meeting, 'you asshole, you never do anything right!' It was like an hourly occurrence" (124). In a different occurrence, an advertisement director for the iPad remembers being Jobs shouting at him through

the phone, “Your commercials suck... The iPad is revolutionizing the world, and we need something big. You’ve given me small shit” (Germain 137) Vincent, fearful that he would lose his position, quickly remade the commercials to his boss’s liking. Jobs’s cruelty extended beyond his time at Apple as well. When he started the movie production studio Pixar, he was known to have fired underperforming employees without given them any notice. He would simply walk into the office in the morning and tell the individuals to get out. When one his earliest employees, Pamela Kerwin, stated that Jobs should give them two-weeks notice, Jobs responded very coldly, “Okay, but the notice is retroactive from two weeks ago” (Isaacson 198). Jobs eventually gave in slightly and offered meager severance pay to those let go, but his message was clear. The employees who survived his selections were expected to work up to their boss’s high standards in order to keep their positions. He even took steps to instill fear in new hires the minute they walked into Apple’s doors. One of his more common tactics was to sit in on first interviews and ask very embarrassing questions to see how the recruits would react. In one instance he asked questions like, “How old were you when you lost your virginity,” and, “How many times have you taken LSD?” (142). Of course, the majority of applicants were thrown-off by these questions, much to Steve Jobs’s delight. His successful instillation of fear among the many who worked under him was of course tactically planned. All these mind games were part of the psychological warfare he used in order to gain an advantage over others. If he could get under an employee’s skin and read their emotions, he could determine their vulnerabilities and exploit them in terms of performance. Joanna Hoffman understood the tactics her boss tried. Isaacson quotes her in *Steve Jobs* as saying “It’s a common trait in people in people who are charismatic and know how to manipulate people,” she said, “knowing that he can crush you makes you feel weakened and eager for his approval, so then he can elevate you and put you on a pedestal and own you” (121). As Bill Gates noted in a recent interview. He had the

ability to motivate his staff more than any other individual, despite the questionable tactics. Everything Jobs did was well-calculated, mixing fear-tactics and deceit with his overly aggressive standards to ultimately churn out some of the best pieces of technology to ever grace mankind.

Although it may have been hidden from the public's eye that Steve Jobs was somewhat tyrannical, his competition knew all too well what the Apple tycoon was capable of doing or saying in order to benefit. Bill Gates and his company Microsoft were one of Apple's earliest partners who then turned into competitors. Gates helped design the programming language for some of Jobs's computers like the Apple II and the Mac. However, Gates began competing with Apple when he introduced a graphical user interface on his PC devices that was taken from the design in a Macintosh computer. Jobs of course was incredible angry over at his friend turned foe. He called Gates to a two-day meeting in Silicon Valley to basically yell at him. During the meetings, Jobs accused gates of stealing Apple's brand-new idea. Gates calmly stated he liked Microsoft's product and intended to sell it to the mass market. Jobs became increasingly ruder during these meetings even going as far as saying "[Gates's product] is actually really a piece of shit" (178). Nothing was accomplished by the meeting except an assertion in Gates's mind that his competitor was a nasty businessman. In another instance, Steve Jobs attended the release of the Xerox Star by his rivals in 1981. After watching the presentation, Jobs was wholeheartedly unimpressed--so much so that he actually called up one of the hardware designers for the Xerox Star to voice his opinion. Bob Belleville just happened to be the guy who picked up the phone. He was told by Jobs that "everything you've ever done in your life is shit" (Gibney). In an unexpected turn of events, he then offered Belleville a position at Apple further confusing the hardware designer. Jobs's wrath extended to those who spoke out against him and his company as well. One *New York Times* writer knew this all too well. Joe Nocera wrote an article in 2008

criticizing Apple's management for covering-up the fact that Steve Jobs was in poor health. He believed the investors had the right to know when making financial decisions with Apple. Jobs responded to the write in a short letter, "You think I'm an arrogant asshole who thinks he's above the law, and I think you're a slime bucket who gets most of his facts wrong" (Nocera).

Not only was Steve Jobs egotistical to those who had no connection to Apple, Isaacson shows in another book on innovators that he also tended to be harsh with the partner companies that would work with Apple. VLSI Technology was a company that produced computer chips for Apple. During one particular manufacturing process, Jobs became aggressive with VLSI over the slowness of their order. He was so irate that he barged into a front-office meeting and called the employees at VLSI "fucking dickless assholes" (Isaacson, *Great Innovators*, 301). The company did end up getting the order completed, but not before angering the tech-mogul. Another Partner who ended up on Steve Jobs's blacklist was Ryan Tate, an app developer from a company called Gawker. Tate expressed displeasure in an email to Jobs about software on Apple's iPad that did not allow for design "freedom" according to the developer. Jobs responded with fire tirade which ultimately culminated with him saying, "By the way, what have you done that's so great? Do you create anything, or just criticize others' work and belittle their motivations?" (Germain 137). If a partner of Apple did not agree with Steve Jobs's vision, he had no problem voicing his displeasure or discrediting their work.

Finally, Jobs callousness extended into all areas of his life including weaving its way into his closest relationships. One of his earliest coworkers and friends was Steve Wozniak. Woz, as Jobs called him, helped design and build some of Apples first products. In the biography, Isaacson tells a story about when the duo was working for Atari, Jobs conjured a deal with a lead developer at Atari by the name of Nolan Bushnell. Jobs and Woz were going to create a new version of the game Pong for the release of Atari's new gaming system. As part of the deal, the

pair would receive a bonus if they kept the number of chips in the game low. Jobs did not disclose this aspect of the deal to Woz and cashed out the entire bonus when their payment came. Woz did not find out about the bonus until almost ten years later when a book about Atari was released with the story in it. Woz received a phone call from Jobs after the book's release where "[Jobs] told me that he didn't remember doing it, and if he did something like that he would remember it, so he probably didn't do it" (43). Woz was not the only close friend Steve went behind the back of. Daniel Kottke was an original employee of Apple and close friend of Steve Jobs in college and through post-school life. He was an hourly technician working at Apple in 1980 when he approached his long-time friend looking for benefits on top of his pay, namely stock options. Jobs told Kottke that he was not eligible for stock options due to being an hourly worker and not a salaried employee. In reality, Kottke should have been allowed to be given stock option, but Jobs did not wish to release any more ownership in the company than what was already distributed. Rod Holt, a lead engineer within Apple, tried to plead Kottke's case to Jobs who would hear none of it. Holt even went as far as offering to match whatever percentage of equity Jobs was willing to give Kottke. Jobs shot back coldly, "Okay, I will give him zero" (103). This callousness and lack of empathy extended even into his personal life. In 1978, he and his on-and-off-again girlfriend Chrissan Brennan had a baby girl named Lisa. Even before her birth, Jobs expressed doubt about the child being his. He stated he "wasn't sure if it was my kid, because I was pretty sure I wasn't the only one she was sleeping with" (59). Just days after Lisa's birth, Jobs left the family to go back to work at Apple. From the get-go he did not want to have anything to do with his daughter or baby mother. The two moved out of the house they were sharing with Jobs into a run-down house and began living on welfare. During this time, Jobs refused to acknowledge the fact that Lisa was his daughter and did not pay a cent in child support. Eventually, the County of San Mateo in California sued Jobs to try and prove his



paternity to the fatherless girl. Jobs tried his hardest to disprove the fact, but eventually a DNA test was ordered which proved Jobs to be the father. Even after learning the girl was his daughter, he refused to exercise his visitation rights for years; instead, he paid the monthly check to Brennan and continued working.

Without Steve Jobs, who knows what our world would look like. His innovative ideas transformed the way humans interact with each other and the world. But Walter Isaacson's biography, *Steve Jobs*, indicates clearly that despite his overwhelming success in life, Steve Jobs was not the god-like figure the public has made it out to be since his death. Instead, he was a conniving leader with an overinflated ego who used his abilities to produce state-of-the-art technology. Jobs was cruel to those he deemed inferior in intellect, and arrogant to the ones he put up with. His accomplishments should not be forgotten, but the full narrative should be scripted when discussing his legacy.

#### Works Cited

Germain, Marie-Line. *Narcissism at Work: Mental Disorders of Corporate Leaders*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Gibney, Alex, director. *Steve Jobs: The Man in the Machine*. CNN Films, 2015.

Isaacson, Walter. *Steve Jobs*. Simon & Schuster, 2011.

Isaacson, Walter. *Great Innovators: Steve Jobs, Benjamin Franklin, and Einstein*. Simon and Schuster, 2011.

Kennaugh, Warren. *Fit: When Talent And Intelligence Just Won't Cut It*. John Wiley and Sons, 2015.

Nocera, Joe. "Apple's Culture of Secrecy." *NY Times*, 26 July 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/26/business/26nocera.html>.