

Can an Organization Stay Great without Its Visionary Leader?

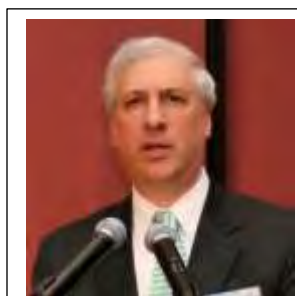
Mark P. Barry
March 10, 2014



“Steve Jobs” by Subhrajit Datta

Last June, in “Lessons from Apple under Steve Jobs,” I suggested what Unificationists could learn from the experience of Apple under its founder. Nine months later, and two and a half years since Jobs’ passing, Apple is facing more skeptics than at any point since its turnaround 16 years ago.

Now, many are asking whether Apple without Jobs can continue to make transformational products that will delight users. The reason is nothing Apple has introduced since fall 2011 — when Jobs died — has been innovative or disruptive, but simply modest improvements of existing products.



Mark P. Barry

Has Apple lost the essence of what made it great? Is it struggling to find new vision and identity after Jobs? And what can we learn from its current experience as Unificationists?

In the business world, two and a half years is generally not sufficient time to make any judgments — except in the world of high technology, where new products are constantly introduced, superseded, disposed, and market share frequently shifts.

That’s why many business analysts and journalists say it’s time to question whether the ethos at Apple has become complacent, satisfied merely to let existing products evolve rather than challenge the status quo.

Plenty of companies continue successfully after the passing or departure of their founders. But they were not Apple.

Apple did more for people in terms of the allure of its products and their ease-of-use than perhaps any other company in American history. It did so because of Jobs’ relentless quest to introduce the next “insanely great” product that everyone would want. Under his leadership, Apple was renown for taking the highly complex and reducing it to utter simplicity and usability in an unseen magical way.

When Steve Jobs’ cancer returned in 2008, he began laying the foundation for the company to continue after he would no longer be able to lead it. He set up a management team with specific personal qualities

to guide the company after he was gone. He established the internal Apple University in which company executives are taught to think like him. A strong guarantee of Apple's future success, Jobs observed, was to act like a startup, notably by putting small teams on crucial projects. Apple aimed to maintain its underdog culture.



Apple CEO Tim Cook led a memorial service for founder Steve Jobs at its headquarters in Cupertino, CA, on October 19, 2011 (photo: Apple, Inc.).

Since Job's death, Apple not only hasn't introduced a ground-breaking new category of product, but even lesser new products have been very buggy or unexpectedly mediocre – e.g., Siri, Maps, even iOS 7 and the iPhone 5C — something Jobs never would have tolerated. These days, Apple stresses it is true to its heritage, but it seems it's looking backward rather than forward.

In January, it commemorated the 30th anniversary of the introduction of the Macintosh computer (announced by its iconic Super Bowl ad). Apple produced a moving video created by 70 filmmakers all using iPhone cameras. But it would have been far better if on that anniversary it introduced another astounding, must-have product.

Apple's current CEO, Tim Cook, is an operations supply-chain genius. Yet his temperament and personality are the polar opposite of Steve Jobs. He is anything but charismatic and visionary. Observers say he is much less likely than Jobs to “bet the company” on the next disruptive product. The irony is Apple's stock has shed a quarter of its value in the last two years, which seems odd when the company is being so well run. But the expectations of Wall Street and consumers are for Apple to again “change the world.” That Apple clearly is not doing.

The Wall Street Journal suggests that Apple, which for 30 years set the technology agenda, seems on the verge of forgetting how to do what it did better than any other corporation. In a book to be released later this month, a top technology writer concludes it has become a “haunted empire.” The ghost of Steve Jobs hangs over Apple, but it is unable to perform as it once did due to complacency, hiring the wrong people, losing good people, and settling for lower standards.

For those who follow the Apple saga, all this is interesting but of little personal significance. But for Unificationists, it is relevant because we are affiliated with an organization whose charismatic founder passed away 18 months ago that is trying to regain its footing for the future and ensuing generations. Apple's story ought to hit home.

Although Steve Jobs had four children, none was interested in being groomed to succeed him. His wife, Laurene Powell Jobs, manages the family trust and is very involved in non-profit work, but not in Apple's business. The mantle of Apple was left to Tim Cook and design chief, Sir Jony Ive (an industrial design guru and a big reason why Apple became great, but who cannot fill Jobs' shoes).

To many Apple had almost a religious dimension. This was epitomized by what Jobs characterized as Apple's quest to create the best products at the intersection of technology and the liberal arts. Its products were created by engineers as artists, designed to bring joy and delight to their users, improving

communication among people, and enhancing the human experience. Beyond maintaining its business, this is the mission Apple had to continue in order to truly be Apple — not an ordinary company.

With the Unification Movement, the most important difference is it is now being led by the founder's wife, the cofounder of the organization, speaking with equal authority as her late husband. Mrs. Hak Ja Han Moon is the representative of the True Parents on earth, not merely a follower or someone brought up in the organization. For now at least, the leadership of the movement is logically in the best possible hands after Rev. Moon's passing.



Apple's new "spaceship" headquarters, Apple Campus 2, will house up to 13,000 employees when completed in 2016 (photo: Foster & Partners).

But eventual institutionalization of a religious movement is absolutely necessary — far more so than for a business. The issue arises as to what core values become institutionalized and inculcated in succeeding generations. Reviving the founding spirit is beneficial for the organization if it means retaining its core identity. That's certainly what Steve Jobs intended by Apple maintaining its startup spirit.

However, Apple came a long way from a 1976 garage startup — and especially since its turnaround in the late 1990s under Jobs' returning leadership, it was able to make worldwide impact with game-changing products like the iPod, iPhone and iPad. Days before Jobs stepped down as CEO in summer 2011, Apple was worth more than ExxonMobil or any other company.

While the Unification Movement also has come a very long way since its founding in 1954, and overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles, its global impact is still very much in the early growing stages. Unlike consumer products, which may be disposed of in a couple of years, a new religious understanding takes years, even generations, to spread, deeply root and have measurable, lasting impact.

But a year and a half after the founder's passing is perhaps not too soon to get a sense of how well we are doing and what it means to be Unificationists. For Apple, the standard was clear: to produce astounding, breakthrough products everyone wanted to have. Once a new product was available, it didn't take long to know whether Apple had succeeded. For the Unification Movement, we're sometimes not even clear or consistent what our product is, what we're asking people to do, and in what ways people will gain benefit from what we can share (e.g., see "Movement, Church or Business?" on this Blog).

While the cofounder is on earth, we need to take advantage of all we can receive and learn from her. But, as the succeeding generations, we ourselves are responsible to internalize her guidance, and adapt and present our message in ways the world can best receive. Although we are an international movement, each individual culture may have an optimal way to embrace our "product" (or message). Importantly, are we seen as a largely self-interested religious organization or are we truly willing to partner with others and fight for the same values and causes?

Right now there may be diverse views of how we should bring our organization into the future. All responsible voices should speak up — one never knows who may have the right idea at the right time that will make a huge difference. Certainly Heavenly Parent thinks bigger than any of us and will work through numerous avenues toward building the original world of creation.

For Apple to succeed after Steve Jobs, it must make products that amaze and delight. For the Unification Movement to succeed after Rev. Moon, much like Apple, it should inspire the original joy and delight of being alive as God's children — a joy people have almost forgotten. Like Apple introducing a game-

changing new product, the message of our movement should also be seen as game-changing. Consumers want Apple products because they are by far the best. People should agree that our Movement has by far the best clarity and understanding of life's true meaning and purpose, and possesses something no one else can give to the world.

Dr. Mark P. Barry is Lecturer in Management at UTS/Barrytown College and Managing Editor of the Applied Unificationism Blog. He uses an Apple MacBook Pro laptop and a Google Nexus 4 smartphone.

For more discussion of this subject, watch "Are Apple's Best Days Ahead?" on YouTube, hosted on March 4th by the Churchill Club. Meanwhile, Apple introduced today iOS 7.1 to fix the bugs introduced last September as well as add improvements.