

Reading the Mind of Steve Jobs

Jobs was a “Red Sky,” Wozniak a “Blue Earth”

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The "Steve Jobs as genius" narrative has a lot going for it: simplicity, drama, mystery, irony, and cult of personality.

But, while we're indulging in our post-mortem adoration of this semi-tragic hero, let's pause to ask: what might Apple – and Steve Jobs, for that matter – have been without the cast of complementary thinkers who formed the constellation around him and contributed immeasurably through their own unique ways of knowing?

Much has been said about Jobs' legendary vision, and his legendary temperament, but little has been reported about his distinctive pattern of "nonlinear" thinking.

Jobs' preferred thinking pattern, I believe, was what I call "Red Sky" – *right-brained* (i.e. intuitive), and *abstract* (or conceptual / philosophical / idealistic). This pattern, one of the four primary *Mindex* thinking style patterns I have devised, is not one we would normally associate with a high-tech, scientifically oriented person.

That's why Jobs needed Steve Wozniak, or someone like him, to bring his ideas down to earth and put wheels on them. Wozniak, I believe, was a "Blue Earth" thinker – *left-brained* (logical / analytical / structured), and *concrete* (focused on direct experience and tangible outcomes). They made a very successful combination, especially during Apple's founding and start-up phase.

Jobs-watchers, biographers, and historians seem to like to characterize him as the tyrannical genius, who did all the thinking, called all the shots, and hounded people to do things his way. That kind of narrative makes good legend-literature, but I believe it's oversimplified.

The fact is that a number of other remarkable thinkers contributed crucially to the Apple story, each adding something to the constellation of possibilities swirling around the two computer geeks, Jobs and Wozniak. Jobs, to his everlasting credit, supplied the obsessive motivational energy that animated the enterprise.

As early as 1977 "Jobs and Woz" recognized their lack of business acumen, and turned to a silicon valley engineering executive named Armas Clifford ("Mike") Markkula, who had retired at age 32 from Fairchild Semiconductor with a sackful of money. Markkula brought not only the seed capital, but the *thinking process* that turned the geek-shop into a billion-dollar business.

Markkula provided the "Blue Sky" thinking pattern – *left-brained* and *abstract* – that Jobs and Woz lacked. Blue Sky thinkers tend to be "architectural" visionaries who frame grand ideas in terms of the sequence and timing of events required to bring them to fruition. Jobs was the dreamer, Woz was the gifted bench-tinkerer, and Markkula was the planner.

Markkula continued to guide the firm much longer than he ever intended to, serving as chairman all the way from 1985 to 1997. In 1993 he reluctantly joined with CEO John Sculley in ousting Jobs from the firm. Eventually, he also helped force Sculley out.

Another less-known genius who provided a key part of the brain trust surrounding Jobs and Woz was Jef Raskin, a high-altitude "sky" thinker (Blue Sky and Red Sky patterns working in tandem). Raskin played a seminal role in the invention of the Macintosh computer, and reportedly introduced Jobs to the pioneers of the graphic interface at Xerox's Palo Alto research facility. As early as 1981, Raskin envisioned "computers for the millions," and conceived of various product incarnations that even foreshadowed today's iPad and other portable devices.

Throughout Apple's "Camelot" phase, other bright and talented thinkers of various patterns made crucial but largely unsung contributions. "Red Earth" whiz-kids (*right-brained* and *concrete*) crafted product styles and designs unheard of in the world of technological products. Many of their ideas set the standard for hardware and software products we use today.

Jobs' famously abrasive "personality" might be explained, at least in part, by the frustration he must have felt in trying to make himself understood by those around him. Typically left-brained, or "blue" thinkers, his associates may not have arranged their mental furniture the way he arranged his. Ideas and conclusions that seemed absolutely obvious to him may not have fit well with their idea-processing patterns - their "thinking styles."

Jobs could be quite affable and even charming on occasion, which weakens the claim some have made that he was afflicted with Asperger's Syndrome. I believe it's much more likely that he, like many Red Sky thinkers who find themselves in organizational environments, felt like the proverbial stranger in a strange land. When you're extremely bright, you've got lots of ideas, and your ideas tend to outrun your words, you can become acutely frustrated when people don't understand you.

None of this diminishes in the slightest the contributions Jobs made to the world of information products. But we know that history has a way of simplifying and streamlining the big stories. Historians, like journalists, tend to dislike stories with "too many heroes." They have a strong inclination to raise up one towering figure above others and to summarize the contributions of the rest.

About the Author:

Dr. Karl Albrecht is an executive management consultant, coach, futurist, lecturer, and author of more than 20 books on professional achievement, organizational performance, and business strategy. He is listed as one of the Top 100 Thought Leaders in business on the topic of leadership.

He is a recognized expert on cognitive styles and the development of advanced thinking skills. His books *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Success*, *Practical Intelligence: The Art and Science of Common Sense*, and his *Mindex Thinking Style Profile* are used in business and education.

The Mensa society presented him with its lifetime achievement award, for significant contributions by a member to the understanding of intelligence.

Originally a physicist, and having served as a military intelligence officer and business executive, he now consults, lectures, and writes about whatever he thinks would be fun.

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