

## What Would Steve Jobs Do....?

John W. Kenagy, MD

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The death of Steve Jobs has generated a multitude of media reports, articles, commentaries and, just recently, a new biography. It has been a very public outpouring of respect what Steve Jobs brought to the world. He really made a difference.

So, what would Steve Jobs have done in healthcare? If Steve Jobs was in healthcare right now, what would he do? Let's explore the possibilities.

I have watched Jobs and his various companies from afar for forty years and most intently as part of my research at Harvard Business School on those few organizations that adapt and thrive in complex, dynamic, unpredictable environments. Under Jobs, Apple certainly met those criteria.

For the last 13 years, I've been putting those lessons learned to practice by focusing on how to develop highly adaptive healthcare organizations. Based on that experience, this is what Steve Jobs would have done if he had worked in our industry.

First of all, he would have be inspired and energized to be working in healthcare. Daniel Pink in his book *Drive* talks about the three things that really lead people do amazing things. He starts with talking about Purpose.

People excel when the work toward a meaningful Purpose. Pink talks about Steve Jobs as both Purpose-driven and someone who could create a meaningful Purpose for an organization. I think Steve Jobs would be inspired by the Purpose-driven opportunities we have in 21<sup>st</sup> Century healthcare.

- We are blessed to work in one life's essential callings. We cure the sick. And we care when we can't cure. That's a very meaningful PURPOSE.
- Twentieth-century healthcare thrived on increasing quality and increasing cost. But now the times have changed. Thriving in 21<sup>st</sup> Century healthcare means doing something different - providing more and better care at continually lower cost.

Steve Jobs would be inspired by that opportunity. A vital industry that is 17% of the US economy struggling with an outdated business model – that's not a problem, that's a golden opportunity to do good and do well.

That's a great opportunity, but Jobs would stop there. It's an opportunity, but it's not the all-capital letters PURPOSE that would engage Jobs.

Daniel Pink describes Steve Job's personal PURPOSE as "wanting to make a ding in the universe." Not just nudge around the edge; not just try harder to make your numbers, not "be the best" – make a ding in the healthcare universe, that's why Steve Jobs would be inspired by healthcare today.

So what would Steve Jobs do next to make a "ding" in the healthcare universe? From what I've observed and from my research in successful adaptive leadership, Steve Job's would set a clear, meaningful direction for his organization.

"Know where you're going." That's the secret sauce of leadership in highly innovative companies. The neurophysiology of the human brain (see my last FYA column or the White Paper at [www.johnkenagy.com](http://www.johnkenagy.com)) leads us to repeat what's worked in the past, and be threatened by the unknown. In other words, when times get tough, our brains are perfectly designed to "try harder" what's worked in the past and something different, in particular, something ambiguously different if very threatening.

Great leaders, like Steve Jobs, make it clear where we are going. Instead of "try harder," they set a clear, simple, meaningful direction for those they lead that will take them to a new place. Steve Jobs would look at healthcare right now with this framework:

- Increasing quality by increasing cost is no longer a viable business model. Therefore, trying harder at what we know how to do is not the answer.
- Thriving in 21<sup>st</sup> Century healthcare means doing something different. How about providing more and better care at continually lower cost. That's different.

Then, I can see him thinking, "Hmmm, more and better care for continually less cost – that's very cool. That's something we don't know how to do now. It's not a best practice or a current technology. That's an innovation! If you can't buy it; somebody has to make it! That's what we are going to do."

More and better care for less cost – that would put a ding in the universe!

OK, so maybe that's "why" Steve Jobs would be inspired to be in healthcare. And maybe that's how he'd inspire people to make a difference. But "what" would Steve Jobs actually do? What would he do to thrive by creating more and better care at continually lower cost? We may not know what to do Steve Jobs would surely know what to do to fix healthcare, right?

Innovation research and experience deliver a surprising answer to that question – when he started, Steve Jobs would not know "what" to do either. There is no "what" because it hasn't been done – more care is not a best practice, it's not a technology you buy. The next step is discovering "how;" specifically, "how" will we discover "what" to do to provide more and better care at less cost.

Here’s an example of how Steve Jobs thinking is different. I was talking with Jeff Selberg, the COO of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) a few days ago. We were talking about innovation in healthcare and Steve Jobs name, not surprisingly, came up. Jeff had been reading the new Steve Jobs’ biography and commented that it made a big impression on him. Everybody wants to “connect the dots” to make healthcare better. As Jeff read the book, he discovered Jobs did not believe in connecting the dots because “nobody knows where the dots are. There aren’t any dots to connect.”

Perplexing – how can you do something if you can’t connect the dots! How does that make sense?

There are no dots for an innovation because it’s new. It doesn’t exist. Jobs knew success did not come connecting the dots; it came from *making the new dots*. You can’t connect the dots to design and implement the future. You have to make it.

The economist, John Kenneth Galbraith put it very well, “There are two kinds of people who predict the future; those who don’t know and those who don’t know they don’t know.” Jobs knew he did not know and that was key to his success.

First, know you don’t know. Then, apply this adage: It’s not just what you do that’s important; it’s what you do when you don’t know what to do that really makes a difference.

Steve Jobs was great at knowing “how” to discover “what” to do. That was an art he, increasingly, turned into a skill and then into a science throughout his life.

It’s also the new, hot topic in the business management literature but, in my experience, the business gurus and, particularly, the consultants are making way too complex or techno-magical. It’s not rocket science; it’s just a different set of choices and opportunities. It’s working on the right hand side of this graph:

<b>Innovation Questions</b>	<b>Current, Optimizing</b>	<b>Adaptive, Innovating</b>
1. How are innovations acquired or developed?	Current mindsets, methods, strategies and structures make, buy or copy innovations.	Charter new innovation incubators with a strategic purpose to discover very close to patients.
2. Where and how are innovation decisions made?	Gather and move data up to people in meetings who analyze, predict and implement.	Develop and coordinate, rapid, real-time decision-making close to patients and their needs.
3. What’s the method of innovation?	Gather data, meet, analyze, prioritize, implement; “connect the dots, thinking innovation”	Link information to action to results; rapid, discovery-based, “make the dots, action innovation”

Steve Jobs would work on the right hand side of this graph in healthcare. That would lead to “what” Steve Jobs would do in healthcare. Not surprisingly, it’s different than our current practices

Instead of pulling together healthcare experts, managers, consultants, lawyers, and policy makers to design Accountable Care Organizations (ACO’s), he’s start with the patient by creating more and better care at less cost and build his organization back from there. That’s truly accountable care.

Instead of having the government tell us what “Meaningful Use” for Information Technology is, he would develop simple, low cost technology that meaningfully provided more and better care for less cost. That’s truly meaningful use.

Instead of exhorting us to “try harder” at connecting the same old dots, he would rapidly, test, validate and improve the new dots we aren’t even thinking about now that would more and better care for continually less cost.

That’s what Steve Jobs would do in healthcare. That’s the way we will fix healthcare.

Dr. John Kenagy is a physician, healthcare executive, scholar, author, advisor, and, most importantly, a patient. His book *Designed to Adapt: Leading Healthcare in Challenging Times* was named 2011 Book of the Year in Healthcare Management. See [www.johnkenagy.com](http://www.johnkenagy.com) or contact him at [john@johnkenagy.com](mailto:john@johnkenagy.com) for more information.