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## Steve Jobs' biggest contribution? He made us bolder

By ROGER MARTIN

*Because of his refusal to compromise, consumers are more demanding and companies are less willing to accept the status quo*

The world lost a unique leader this week when Steve Jobs died. Apple Inc., the company he co-founded and led for most of its existence, has changed the world and it is hard to argue that the changes were anything but for the better. We have intuitive computers with touch-screen interfaces and elegant personal devices for entertainment and communications, largely because Mr. Jobs willed it to be so. His devices make hundreds of millions of people around the world productive and happy simultaneously – not an easy trick to pull off. They are happy because Mr. Jobs made sure that his company felt what the user felt and anticipated what the user wanted but could not articulate. If it was that alone, Mr. Jobs would go down in history as a great man.

But I think the many spectacular products that Apple brought to market account for only a portion – and quite possibly the smallest portion – of Mr. Jobs' positive impact on the world. The bigger impact he had was on the thinking of both consumers and corporate leaders.

Through their experience of his products, consumers have been emboldened to both pressure and encourage companies to step up their game. Consumers are less likely to accept products that are only somewhat functional, or functional but drab, or functional only after a steep and painful learning curve. How many times do you hear the wistful lament: "Why can't this work like an Apple?" But consumers don't send only tough, demanding messages to producers. Because they pay a steep price premium for every Apple product they buy, they send a powerful message of encouragement: "Give us something awesome and we will be happy to pay up for it!"

Corporate leaders have been influenced by this consumer pressure. But over and above that, Mr. Jobs has provided vivid and compelling evidence that it is the job of corporate leaders to imagine what does not now exist but would be adored, and invest in bringing it to life. In a world in which corporate leaders increasingly let themselves be ruled by quarterly profits, quantitative customer research, competitor benchmarking and cost-reduction targets, Mr. Jobs demonstrated that you could become the most valuable company in the world by refusing to pay attention to any of these things. Rather, there was money to be made – lots of it – by investing in user experiences that were sublime but utterly untested and unproven.

Did they all work out swimmingly? Far from it. But those that worked paid multiple times over for those that didn't.

In the wake of Apple's resurrection, it has become much more difficult for corporate leaders to say to themselves, or their management team or their board of directors: "It is too risky to try something entirely new, even if we think we could do better if we went in a different direction." That doesn't mean that none of them say those things – plenty still do.

But in my travels around the global business world, I see executive after executive feeling uneasy about the status quo: They are more willing than ever to at least try to reinvent their industry. I attribute this almost singularly to Steve Jobs – and this has had a huge positive impact on the world. Because of his influence, I believe that countless billions of dollars will be invested in inventing the future rather than maintaining the status quo.

That said, it is still nerve-wracking for most. And, in this respect, Mr. Jobs was a polarizing character. The status quo always has a warm, embracing feel. We often stick to it for longer than we should because of that warmth. He was forever disrupting our world. It seemed never to be a satisfying, cozy place for him. After we had a chance to get used to each disruption – whether learning to use a computer mouse or an entirely new way to buy our music – we almost universally said: "Wow. This is a much better experience." So he did us all a favour, even though it might not have seemed so at first blush.

Mr. Jobs was famous inside his company for his bombast and his deprecation of what existed. Perhaps that is what drove him to disrupt our world – to make it better again and again. The ripples will continue to widen even after he is put to rest.

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