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Insanely Simple: The Obsession That Drives Apple's Success

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Ken Segall



Synopsis

To Steve Jobs, Simplicity was a religion. It was also a weapon. Simplicity isn't just a design principle at Apple - it's a value that permeates every level of the organization. The obsession with Simplicity is what separates Apple from other technology companies. It's what helped Apple recover from near death in 1997 to become the most valuable company on Earth in 2011. Thanks to Steve Jobs' uncompromising ways, you can see Simplicity in everything Apple does: the way it's structured, the way it innovates, and the way it speaks to its customers. It's by crushing the forces of Complexity that the company remains on its stellar trajectory. As ad agency creative director, Ken Segall played a key role in Apple's resurrection, helping to create such critical marketing campaigns as Think Different. By naming the iMac, he also laid the foundation for naming waves of i-products to come. Segall has a unique perspective, given his years of experience creating campaigns for other iconic tech companies, including IBM, Intel, and Dell. It was the stark contrast of Apple's ways that made Segall appreciate the power of Simplicity - and inspired him to help others benefit from it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As Hannibal Lector explains to Clarice Starling in *The Silence of the Lambs*, the Roman emperor and philosopher, Marcus Aurelius, endorsed the idea of focusing on the essence of a subject. The French later formulated the concept of the *précis*. Still later, Oliver Wendell Holmes observed, "I would not give a fig for simplicity on this side of complexity but I would give my life for simplicity on the other side of complexity." All this serves to create a context, a frame of reference, for Ken Segall's brilliant analysis of what drove Steve Jobs to create an insanely great company that

continues to produce insanely great products. As Segall explains, "Simplicity doesn't spring to life with the right combination of molecules, water, and sunlight. It needs a champion - someone who's willing to stand up for its principles and strong enough to resist the overtures of Simplicity's evil twin, Complexity. It needs someone who's willing to guide a process with both head and heart." These are among the passages, themes, and concepts that caught my eye throughout Segall's lively and eloquent narrative:

- o Standards Aren't for Bending (Pages 15-16)
- o Small Groups = Better [Collaborative] Relationships (35- 38)
- o The Perils of Proliferation (52-54)
- o Thinking Different vs. Thinking Crazy (74-77)
- o Simplicity's Unfair Advantage (93-95)
- o Never Underestimate the Power of a Word (123-125)
- o Death by Formality (132-135)
- o Technology with Feeling (138-140)
- o Ignoring the Naysayers: Inventing the Apple Store (180-184)

I have read all of the books written about Steve Jobs and Apple and reviewed most of them.

I picked up this book with high expectations, but once I read half-way through, I was impatiently waiting for the end, and was relieved when I finished it. Much of the book is unthinking adulation of Steve. I like and respect Steve as much as anyone, but I don't want read 200 pages of what comes off as a somewhat unthinking worship of the man. There's little new here for someone who has followed Steve's life, or read his stories, or read Walter Isaacson's book (which I recommend over this one any day). Speaking of which, there's none of the criticism of Steve that "Jobs" had, without which this book ends up sounding like one-sided fan worship, and not insightful at that, either. The book has a little too much of "us vs them" undertones for my taste, as if it's from an Apple fanboy blog like Daring Fireball or Marco. By all means, point out where other companies fail, but don't be so disdainful of other companies. Most of the chapters contain little substance and could just as well be expressed in a single page. The conclusion, where the author summarizes each chapter in half a page, is perhaps the most interesting part of the book. But even that was too long, to be honest. The other flaw with this book (and I read this criticism elsewhere) is that it chooses one theme -- simplicity -- and attributes all of Steve and Apple's successes to it, in the typical MBA style. This is a stretch. One could just as well credit any of the other gifts Steve had for this -- one could imagine books titled High Standards, Taste, An Eye For Detail, How to Inspire People, etc. Some of the author's conclusions are also open to debate with the passage of time and change of market conditions.

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