

Jobs and his celebrity: A love-hate relationship

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In this Sept. 5, 2007, file photo, Apple CEO Steve Jobs introduces the Apple Nano in San Francisco. Apple on Wednesday, Oct. 5, 2011 said Jobs has died. He was 56. (AP Photo/Paul Sakuma, File)

(AP) -- It was the 1980s, relatively early in his career, and Steve Jobs was traveling in Japan. In a hotel lobby, a gaggle of girls came up and asked for his autograph.

Jay Elliot was an Apple executive at the time, traveling with Jobs. "I was thinking, wow, how many CEOs have girls coming up and asking them

for autographs?" Elliot says now.

Over the next few decades, Jobs' fame only increased, of course, and exponentially.

By the time he died on Wednesday, after years of [medical problems](#), Jobs had appeared on some 100 magazine covers and had numerous books written about him, not to mention an off-Broadway play, an HBO movie, even a "South Park" episode. He wasn't the first celebrity CEO, and he won't be the last. But he may have been the first in modern times to transcend the business world and become a veritable pop culture icon.

And yet Jobs, who seemingly enjoyed the access his celebrity brought, also appeared deeply conflicted about his fame, zealously guarding the smallest details of his private life. And though he appeared smiling on countless magazine covers, he had a prickly relationship with the media and those who sought to write about him.

"Steve had a love-hate relationship with his own fame," says Alan Deutschman, author of "The Second Coming of Steve Jobs," an unauthorized biography. "He wanted it both ways. He clearly enjoyed the celebrity and the access it gave him, but he wanted total control over his image."

And he largely got it. "Steve was masterful," Deutschman says. "No one has come close to Steve in his ability to control and manipulate the media and get what he wants."

Where does Jobs fit in the pantheon of celebrity CEOs? Analysts struggle to find apt comparisons in the business world.

"He's on another plane," says Robert Sutton, a professor of [management science](#) at Stanford University. "He reached a level in the public

consciousness that's beyond that of anyone in modern times. I mean, my mother doesn't know the name of (former General Electric CEO) Jack Welch."

Sutton and others find that they have to reach back into history for comparisons: to Henry Ford, for example, who revolutionized transportation with the Model T automobile, or to Thomas Edison, the master inventor who similarly transformed the way we live. Or to Walt Disney, with his vast influence in entertainment.

It's Edison's name that pops up the most often, partly because he wasn't only a visionary but, as Sutton says, "He could really sell. He was very good at his external image."

Like Jobs, whose name is well known to children as young as 6 or 7 (even if they're too young to read business magazines or, let's hope, to see that edgy "South Park" episode), Edison was emulated by young children of his time, says Jeffrey Sonnenfeld, a professor at the Yale School of Management.

Sonnenfeld, who studies business leaders, compares Jobs - and his fame - to other "folk heroes" who've emerged in various fields at times of great change in our history, be it politics, culture, or, in this case, technology.

"What heroes do is personify complex change," Sonnenfeld says. "It's a shorthand that we use. It reduces things to the level of an individual." Jobs' ability to channel technology into products people didn't even know they wanted - but then had to have - is "almost unfathomable," he says.

Unfathomable, uncanny, otherworldly - such adjectives have frequently been used to describe Jobs. But there's another side to it all. Can being a celebrity be detrimental to one's performance as a CEO?

"It's a huge problem when the boss becomes the brand," Sonnenfeld says. "The upside is, it gives the brand human terms. The downside is that none of us are immortal. These branded bosses often start to believe in their own immortality."

Sonnenfeld, like some others, believes that Jobs should have stepped down as CEO earlier than he did because of his health.

On the other hand, one could argue that no rules or generalizations apply to Jobs and Apple. Sutton, at Stanford, wrote years ago that there was evidence that the more famous CEOs were distracted by all that public scrutiny, to the detriment of their companies. But, he says, "Jobs clearly doesn't fit into that category."

Compounding Jobs' astonishing fame was the early age at which he achieved it. He spent virtually his entire career in the public eye, co-founding Apple at age 21. His first magazine cover came just five years later, at 26, on Inc. magazine, with the headline: "This man has changed business forever." Four months later he was on the cover of Time.

One of the covers he wanted most, though, was one he didn't get. A front-runner for Time's 1982 Man of the Year, Jobs instead lost out to a machine - the computer. An accompanying article about him included descriptions of him as a sometimes fearsome boss, and the fact that he had a daughter, Lisa, by a former girlfriend, whom he had not acknowledged and was not supporting. (He later acknowledged Lisa, and she became part of his family.)

"Steve was incensed," says Deutschman, the author, who also teaches journalism at the University of Nevada, Reno. "Ever since then he has been extremely controlling of everything - except for small, handfed amounts of carefully managed information."

Of course, that only led to huge curiosity about Jobs, compounding his fame. "He wasn't flaunting it like Donald Trump," says Scott Galloway, a professor of marketing at the NYU Stern School. "He didn't do Architectural Digest. Do you even know what his wife looks like?" Indeed, Laurene Powell Jobs, whom Steve married in 1991, was rarely photographed with him, their children even less so.

Yet Jobs also showed early on how he enjoyed his fame.

At the 1999 Macworld Expo, he was the star of the show, coming out in his trademark black mock turtle, jeans and sneakers, hands clasped together as if in prayer, giving a pep talk about "the resurgence of Apple." But actually it wasn't Jobs at all - it was actor Noah Wyle, of "ER" fame, who had played Jobs in the HBO movie "Pirates of Silicon Valley."

Then the real Jobs, who had asked Wyle to make the appearance, came onstage, jokingly telling the actor his imitation was all wrong, all to the delight of the crowd. It ended with Jobs asking Wyle for a part on "ER."

As a celebrity himself, Jobs had easy access to other celebrities. Before his marriage, he was said to have dated Joan Baez, and, at one point, Diane Keaton.

Yet there were times that Jobs did appear to eschew his fame.

Deutschman describes an incident where Jobs was helping a woman who had fallen on the street in Palo Alto, Calif., not far from Apple's headquarters in Cupertino. Her reaction: "Oh my God, it's [Steve Jobs!](#)" Deutschman says the incident left Jobs deeply upset.

However Jobs may have felt about his fame, there's no question that one key element of it was his struggle with - and triumph over - adversity.

It was a truly American story in many ways: First, achieving success despite humble beginnings. Then failure - getting pushed out of his own company. And finally, a return to grace, first at Pixar, then by returning to Apple for a string of huge successes that continue to this day.

"Our heroes are only truly heroic if they suffer crushing defeat - then come back from it," Sonnenfeld says. And again, the comparisons to Edison, Ford, Disney apply: Each suffered failures before their ultimate triumphs.

There was also, of course, Jobs' illness in his later years - a final bout with adversity. In keeping with his penchant for secrecy, few details were shared. However, his determination to keep working - even as he appeared increasingly and alarmingly thin - buoyed many, Galloway says.

"Everyone in America over 30 has had their life touched by illness in some way," he says. "This humanized him. You just felt for the guy. It was hard not to pull for him."

After years of opposing attempts by writers to capture his life - not only declining to cooperate in biographies but actively discouraging them - Jobs finally agreed in 2011. Simon & Schuster announced in April that Walter Isaacson, who'd written biographies of Ben Franklin and Albert Einstein, would come out with "iSteve: The Book of Jobs" in early 2012. (The release date was later moved up to November.)

As one small measure of the intense interest in Jobs, news of his first authorized biography was the top story on blogs that week - a rare occurrence for a technology story - and the second top story on Twitter that week, according to the Pew Research Center.

"There are very few business people who've been cultural heroes, icons,

heroic figures to ordinary people - and we desperately want these heroes," Deutschman says.

"We needed Steve's story."

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