

Professor shows reputation is a measure of your mystique

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The late Apple CEO Steve Jobs (left) appears with Microsoft's Bill Gates. A study by UCLA Anderson associate professor Maia Young found that the more people saw Jobs as having mystique, the more he was also seen as a visionary in other business tasks farther afield from technology and design.

In a perfect world, we'd solely be concerned with who we really are. But how others see us has a direct effect on our lives and careers, according to studies done by UCLA Anderson associate professor Maia Young. She studies organizational behavior, and some of that research involves your reputation as a leader, as someone who knows how to get things done.

In a paper co-authored by professor Michael Morris of Columbia University Business School and assistant professor Vicki Scherwin of California State University, Long Beach, Young writes: "Successful business people are often attributed somewhat mystical talents, such as the ability to mesmerize an audience or envision the future. We suggest that this mystique ... arises from the intuitive logic that psychologists and anthropologists call magical thinking."

The late Apple CEO Steve Jobs got things done. Some would say, Jobs just had "it." In her research, Young looked at what having "it" means. While Jobs was still CEO, she showed pictures of him and his bio to test subjects. She asked whether Jobs was gifted. How did he make things happen? Young found he certainly benefitted from magical thinking. "The more people saw Jobs as having mystique," Young said, "the more he was also seen as a visionary in other business tasks that are farther afield from technology and design, like being good at picking stocks, predicting interest rates and GDP growth."

In another study, Young presented two very similar performance evaluations to her subjects. In both, the performance outlook was held constant; both evaluations described employees that had successfully completed the same marketing task. What differed was the explanation for that success.

"In one of the evaluations, the employee achieved through diligence, a mundane reason for success," Young said. "In the other, the employee

achieved through mysterious means. He just had a way of making things happen and had a knack with marketing."

How the evaluators viewed these two employees is significant. The latter employee was described as being more talented, more intuitive and more visionary than the employee who succeeded merely because he or she was organized and hard-working.

However, while cultivating an air of mystery relates to one being considered visionary, the same people were also seen as being less calm, less dependable and less thorough. Still, employees cultivating an air of mystery were seen as more curious and creative.

One way to acquire mystique at work might be to keep your strategies close to the vest and be "more private and quiet" about your methods, as Young advised. "However, the down side of this for organizations is that this individual strategy makes it hard for others to learn how to be similarly successful." Talented leaders, said Young, "have to manage the interpretation of their success." While it's a given that one wants to be thought of as highly effective, it's actually better for your path to success to remain a bit of a mystery.

Provided by University of California, Los Angeles

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