

Op-Ed: The Next Steve Jobs

Written by Lindsey Mask, Guest Contributor
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They say if you want to be like Steve Jobs you have to love what you do, think outside of the box, and work until you get it absolutely perfect. It was certainly a loss to the world when Steve Jobs passed away on October 5th of last year. And while we mourned the loss, we began to clamor about who might be the “next Steve Jobs.” I joined in the mental task of trying to figure out which country would win the unseen race. I started asking myself the same questions: would an American be beat to the golden throne as leading avant-garde visionary? Would the next Steve Jobs come from India or China? When asking yourself who the next Steve Jobs will be, do you imagine that person as a woman?

To answer the question we must first consider the realities. We could talk about the fact that in certain professions women continue to struggle to make an imprint. We have all heard the now timeless statistics: only 17 percent of women are represented in the U.S. Congress, only 18 percent are in executive roles, only three percent are in C-Suites, and when it comes to women in technology, science, and math, the parity is continuing to grow.

In fact, the National Center for Women and Information Technology found that in 2008 only 18 percent of college students graduating with computer science degrees were women, as compared to 37 percent in 1985. The Center went on to report that in the top 100 tech companies, only six percent of CEOs were women.

And yet, despite these low percentages, we can make the case that women are actually emerging, and in all areas. I tend to agree. As a relatively new female CEO of a women’s organization, I have personally witnessed, encouraged, and studied the successes of women. I

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have been in awe of the women who came before us and who created access points for others to enter behind them. I still recall at my group's "Women Leading the Future" conference last year when our keynote speaker, Pat Mitchell, described the early days of her career when she had to place her shoes outside of the restroom to serve as a warning to men because female restrooms didn't exist. I am grateful for these women. They surfaced a roadway for more women to earn higher degrees, like the 51 percent of women who now hold the majority of doctorate degrees. Things are certainly changing, but to what end? What is the underlying reality? Why is it that every time I thought about who the next Steve Jobs would be, I pictured a man?

Is it possible that this quest for gender parity isn't just about business policies and unfair practices? Maybe it isn't about access, how hard women work, or even education. Perhaps the real battle is within us—men and women. There is an underlying psychology at play, even if by accident, whereby we don't think to picture a woman in these roles.

It was Steve Jobs himself who said, "People don't know what they want until you show it to them". We can study facts, post reports, build commissions, start women's groups, and slice and dice the data, but what may be required is to consider what we may not realize. Women need to believe they are "meant to be" the next Steve Jobs. To not make this paradigm shift would be a loss to the world; even greater than losing Steve Jobs.

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