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## THE SATURDAY ESSAY

# The Job After Steve Jobs: Tim Cook and Apple

From the moment he became CEO of Apple, Tim Cook found himself in the shadow of his boss

*By Yukari Iwatani Kane*

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Shortly after Tim Cook succeeded Steve Jobs as CEO of Apple in August 2011, he told a confidant that he got up every morning reminding himself just to do the right thing—and not to think about what Steve would have done.

But Jobs's ghost loomed everywhere after he died from pancreatic cancer two months later. Obituaries of Apple's visionary founder blanketed the front pages of newspapers and websites. TV stations ran lengthy segments glorifying the changes he brought to the world.

In New York, publisher Simon & Schuster rushed out Walter Isaacson's biography of Jobs a month early—with a sleek, Apple-esque cover featuring a photo blessed by the late CEO. Apple chose the same image as the tribute photo on its home page. The photo was so quintessentially Jobsian that his friends and colleagues marveled at how he still seemed to be orchestrating the narrative from beyond the grave.

Even the ritual remembrances unfolded as though Jobs had staged them himself. A memorial service on a Sunday evening at Stanford University was organized by his longtime event planner, and the guest list read like a Who's Who of notables in Jobs's life: Bill Gates, Larry Page, Rupert Murdoch and the Clinton family, among others. Joan Baez, Jobs's onetime girlfriend, sang "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." Bono performed Bob Dylan's "Every Grain of Sand." Yo-Yo Ma brought his cello and played Bach—a personal request from Jobs before his death. Jobs was gone but not gone. Somehow he had transcended death to obsess over the launch of one last product: his own legacy.

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Tim Cook, whom Jobs had personally picked as Apple's new CEO, was at the service, but attendees gave the former chief operating officer little thought. Even as he took control of Apple's empire, Cook couldn't escape his boss's shadow. How could anyone compete

with a visionary so brilliant that not even death could make him go away?

The genius trap had long been set for Jobs's successor. Apple had been defined by him for more than a decade. Design, product development, marketing strategies and executive appointments—all hinged on his tastes. Apple's accomplishments weren't Jobs's alone, but he had taken credit for most of them, which further fed his legend. One employee even owned a car with the vanity plate "WWSJD": What Would Steve Jobs Do?

The next CEO didn't have the quasi-religious authority that Jobs had radiated. Cook's every decision would be examined by current and former employees and executives, investors, the media and Apple's consumers. He would also have to contend with the sky-high expectations that Jobs had conditioned the public to have for Apple.

Cook was a seasoned businessman and arguably a better manager than Jobs. He was

organized, prepared and more realistic about the burdens of running a company of Apple's size. But no one could beat Jobs at being Jobs—especially Cook, his polar opposite.



Tim Cook and Steve Jobs at an Apple news conference in 2007 CORBIS

If Jobs was the star, Cook was the stage manager. If Jobs was idealistic, Cook was practical. But without Jobs, Cook had no counterweight to his dogged pragmatism. Who would provide the creative sparks?

The succession was complicated by the fact that no one knew who Cook really was. The new CEO was a mystery. Some colleagues called him a blank slate. As far as anyone could tell, Cook had no close friends, never socialized and rarely talked about his personal life.

The quiet, self-contained Cook grew up as the second of three brothers. In his early years, the family lived in Pensacola, Fla.; his father worked as a shipyard foreman, and his mother was a homemaker. They later moved to Robertsdale, Ala., a small, predominantly white town near

the Gulf of Mexico that was quiet, stable and safe. In high school, he was voted "most studious." He represented his town at Boys State, an American Legion mock legislature program, and won an essay contest organized by the Alabama Rural Electric Association on the topic of "Rural Electric Cooperatives—Challengers of Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow." Outside of class, Cook was appointed the business manager of the yearbook because he was meticulous and good with numbers.

Cook began his career at IBM after graduating from Auburn University with a degree in industrial engineering. Later he added an M.B.A. from Duke. After 12 years, he moved to a small Colorado computer reseller called Intelligent Electronics Inc., where he nearly doubled the firm's revenues. He was plucked by Compaq and moved to Houston. One day a headhunter called: Apple was looking for a senior vice president of world-wide operations. "Why don't you come and meet Steve Jobs?" the recruiter asked.

Cook joined Apple's executive team in the spring of 1998, while the company was in the throes of restructuring and desperate for a capable executive who could make Apple's manufacturing process more efficient. Unlike his predecessors, who sat with the operations team, Cook asked for a small office cater-cornered to Jobs's on the executive floor. It was a shrewd strategy—staying close to the boss to be attuned to his thinking.

From the start of his Apple tenure, Cook set colossally high expectations. He wanted the best price, the best delivery, the best yield, the best everything. "I want you to act like we are a \$20 billion company," he told the procurement team—even though Apple then had only about \$6 billion in annual revenues and was barely eking out a profit. They were playing in a new league now.

To some, Cook was a machine; to others, he was riveting. He could strike terror in the hearts of his subordinates, but he could also motivate them to toil from dawn to midnight for just a word of praise.

Those who interacted only passingly with Cook saw him as a gentle Southerner with an aura reminiscent of Mister Rogers. But he wasn't approachable. Over the years,

colleagues had tried to engage him in personal conversations, with little success. He worked out at a different gym than the one on Apple's campus and didn't fraternize outside of work.

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#### THE SATURDAY ESSAY

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Years earlier, when Apple was about to ship its movie-editing software, iMovie, Jobs wanted his executives to test it out by making home movies. Cook made his about house hunting and how little one got for one's money in the late 1990s in Palo Alto real estate. While amusing, the movie revealed nothing about him.

Apple under Jobs was a roller coaster, but Cook's operations fief was orderly and disciplined. Cook knew every detail in every step of the operations processes. Weekly

operations meetings could last five to six hours as he ground through every single item. His subordinates soon learned to plan for meetings with him as if they were cramming for an exam. Even a small miss of a couple of hundred units was examined closely. "Your numbers," one planner recalled him saying flatly, "make me want to jump out that window over there."

Cook had made a particular point of tackling Apple's monstrous inventory, which he considered fundamentally evil. He called himself the "Attila the Hun of inventory."

Meetings with Cook could be terrifying. He exuded a Zenlike calm and didn't waste words. "Talk about your numbers. Put your spreadsheet up," he'd say as he nursed a Mountain Dew. (Some staffers wondered why he wasn't bouncing off the walls from the caffeine.) When Cook turned the spotlight on someone, he hammered them with questions until he was satisfied. "Why is that?" "What do you mean?" "I don't understand. Why are you not making it clear?" He was known to ask the same exact question 10 times in a row.

Cook also knew the power of silence. He could do more with a pause than Jobs ever could with an epithet. When someone was unable to answer a question, Cook would sit without a word while people stared at the table and shifted in their seats. The silence would be so intense and uncomfortable that everyone in the room wanted to back away. Unperturbed, Cook didn't move a finger as he focused his eyes on his squirming target. Sometimes he would take an energy bar from his pocket while he waited for an answer, and the hush would be broken only by the crackling of the wrapper.

Even in Apple's unrelenting culture, Cook's meetings stood out as harsh. On one occasion, a manager from another group who was sitting in was shocked to hear Cook tell an underling, "That number is wrong. Get out of here."

Cook's quarterly reviews were especially torturous because Cook would grind through the minutiae as he categorized what worked and what didn't, using yellow Post-its. His managers crossed their fingers in the hopes of emerging unscathed. "We're safe as long as we're not at the back of the pack," they would say to each other.

Cook demonstrated the same level of austerity and discipline in his life as he did in his work. He woke up at 4:30 or 5 a.m. and hit the gym several times a week. He ate protein bars throughout the day and had simple meals like chicken and rice for lunch.

His stamina was inhuman. He could fly to Asia, spend three days there, fly back, land at 7 a.m. at the airport and be in the office by 8:30, interrogating someone about some numbers.

Cook was also relentlessly frugal. For many years, he lived in a rental unit in a dingy ranch-style building with no air conditioning. He said it reminded him of his humble roots. When he finally purchased a house, it was a modest 2,400-square-foot home, built on a half-lot with a single parking spot. His first sports car was a used Porsche Boxster,

an entry-level sports car that enthusiasts called the "poor man's Porsche."

Even his hobbies were hard-core: cycling and rock climbing. During vacations, he never ventured far. Among his favorite spots were Yosemite and Utah's Zion National Park.

Cook placed Robert F. Kennedy and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. among his heroes, and photos of both men hung in his office. In a statement that hinted at how Cook viewed his relationship with Jobs, he said that he admired the way RFK had been comfortable standing in his brother's shadow. The martyred senator embodied everything that Cook strove to be—hardworking, principled and charitable.

As tough as Cook was reputed to be, he was also generous. He gave away the frequent-flier miles that he racked up as Christmas gifts, and he volunteered at a soup kitchen during the Thanksgiving holidays. He had also participated in an annual two-day cycling event across Georgia to raise money for multiple sclerosis; Cook had been a supporter since being misdiagnosed with the disease years before. "The doctor said, 'Mr. Cook, you've either had a stroke, or you have MS,'" Cook told the Auburn alumni magazine. He didn't have either. His symptoms had been produced from "lugging a lot of incredibly heavy luggage around."

In August 2011, a few months before Jobs died, Cook sent his first email as CEO to employees. "I want you to be confident that Apple is not going to change," he wrote. "Steve built a company and culture that is unlike any other in the world and we are going to stay true to that—it is in our DNA." He added, "I am confident our best years lie ahead of us and that together we will continue to make Apple the magical place that it is." He signed the memo simply, "Tim."

After Jobs's death, Apple's employees rallied around Cook. But privately, many were anxious. Employees in departments that had heretofore had little to do with Cook worried about how their jobs might change. The operations team, familiar with his tough management style, worried about life becoming even more intense.

In his first days as CEO, Cook made two key moves. First, he promoted Eddy Cue, Apple's enormously popular vice president for Internet services. Cue had been Jobs's guy, managing the iTunes group and eventually all of Apple's Internet services. He was Jobs's deal maker as well, negotiating with music labels, movie studios, book publishers and media companies. When Cook finally made him senior vice president, it generated goodwill inside and outside the company—and turned an important Jobs loyalist into a key Cook ally.

Cook's second decision was to start a charity program, matching donations of up to \$10,000, dollar for dollar annually. This too was widely embraced: The lack of an Apple corporate-matching program had long been a sore point for many employees. Jobs had considered matching programs particularly ineffective because the contributions would never amount to enough to make a difference. Some of his friends believed that Jobs would have taken up some causes once he had more time, but Jobs used to say that he was contributing to society more meaningfully by building a good company and creating jobs. Cook believed firmly in charity. "My objective—one day—is to totally help others," he said. "To me, that's real success, when you can say, 'I don't need it anymore. I'm going to do something else.'"

The moves signaled a shift to a more benevolent regime. Though still shuttered to the outside eye, Apple felt more open internally. The new CEO communicated with employees more frequently via emails and town-hall meetings. Unlike Jobs, who always ate lunch with the design guru Jonathan Ive, Cook went to the cafeteria and introduced himself to employees he didn't know, asking if he could join them. Without Jobs breathing down their necks, the atmosphere was more relaxed. Cook was a more traditional CEO who infused Apple with a healthier work environment.

Cook proved a methodical and efficient CEO. Unlike Jobs, who seemed to operate on gut, Cook demanded hard numbers on projected cost and profits. Whereas Jobs had reveled in divisiveness, Cook valued collegiality and teamwork. Cook was also more visible and transparent with investors.

Not everyone was so enamored. The changes Cook made were perceived as signs of increasing stodginess. The yearning for more subversive days was also palpable. Skeptics soon began expressing doubts about Apple's future, especially after the rocky launch of Siri, its virtual personal-assistant feature.

"Without the arrival of a new charismatic leader, it will move from being a great company to being a good company," George Colony, the CEO of technology research firm Forrester Research, wrote in a blog. "Like Sony, Polaroid, Apple circa 1985, and Disney, Apple will coast and then decelerate."

Above it all, the specter of Steve Jobs still hovered—somewhere beyond reproach and accountability, beyond the tangle of human fallibility. His successors remained stuck here on Earth.

*Ms. Kane is a former reporter for The Wall Street Journal. This piece is adapted from her new book "Haunted Empire: Apple After Steve Jobs," which will be published on March 18 by HarperBusiness, an imprint of HarperCollins.*

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