

Steve Jobs

*If you are reading this, Steve Jobs will have influenced your life. In this short reflection, **Peter Heslam** gets to the core of the Apple founder's impact, sparked by the major movie Steve Jobs.*

Social scientists often talk about history in abstract terms. They talk, for instance, about processes, developments, and factors of production. When writing economic history, many of them make no mention of actual businesses, let alone the innovators who founded and led them. At the heart of a Christian social vision, however, lies the human person and this film is a powerful reminder of the astounding potential of a fallen yet creative human being to change the world. It is, indeed, a measure of the depth and breadth of his impact that the life of a technology geek should be thought a fitting subject for a mainstream movie with a star-studded cast.

One thing in particular accounts for that impact: Jobs' perception, foresight and vision in anticipating, and seeking to fulfil, people's needs and desires. This was not the result of the superior market research and technology consultancy; he disdained such services because he sought to generate new markets and products: 'You've got to start with the customer experience and

work back to the technology, not the other way around'.

This reverse progression is made difficult by the fact that most potential customers find it hard to articulate their needs and desires - either because they cannot imagine solutions or because they are looking for them in the wrong place. The generation that initially dismissed personal computers, mobile phones and emails as unnecessary is now the generation that cannot live without them. As Henry Ford is attributed with saying: 'If I'd asked customers what they wanted, they would've said "a faster horse"'. Steve Jobs, arguably Ford's successor as the world's greatest entrepreneur, put it even more succinctly: 'A lot of times, people don't know what they want until you show it to them'. He used ice hockey to make his point: 'I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it has been.'

As the movie graphically illustrates, Jobs was no saint. He was often arrogant, impolite and mercurial, even towards his closest colleagues. Following complaints about his 'Management by

Frightening' technique, the board ousted him from the leadership of his company and kept him in exile until it felt the company's fortunes were more secure with him back within the fold.

But the art of anticipating people's wants and needs before they know they have them, or whilst they are looking in the wrong place to satisfy them, belongs to the role of the seer. It is reflected in the lives of the great prophets, pastors, leaders and teachers of history. They are revered as visionaries because they saw people's needs and desires with greater clarity than did the people themselves and re-directed their search for gratification.


All who seek to follow such leaders in the arena of *ultimate* needs and desires can find inspiration in Jobs' understanding of the human psyche. While his products can easily be criticised for encouraging individualism, hedonism and social disintegration, they also reflect the complexity, simplicity and beauty that comes when human beings anticipate, serve and redirect the needs and wants of others. 



Photo: AP