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# The Key Lesson Every Founder Can Learn from Steve Jobs—And Why Many Get It Wrong

## Description

In a compelling essay, venture capitalist Paul Graham posits Steve Jobs as a quintessential embodiment of what he terms “founder mode.” Yet, one might ponder: was Jobs indeed the sole architect qualified to navigate the tumultuous waters of decision-making at [Apple](#)? A plethora of [high-caliber startup founders and established business magnates](#) appear to concur with this notion, particularly following their engagement with Graham's essay, “[Founder Mode](#).”

What precisely constitutes founder mode? As Graham asserts, the concept eludes straightforward definition, primarily because it has not been rigorously scrutinized within the canon of business literature. His thesis vigorously contests the conventional wisdom that encourages founders of scaling startups to “hire competent individuals and grant them autonomy.”

Brian Chesky, co-founder of Airbnb, recounted at a Y Combinator event his dismal experience with this prescriptive approach. While Graham refrains from delineating the extent of the ensuing debacle, he notes that numerous successful Y Combinator founders echoed Chesky's sentiment of regret. The prevailing narrative suggests dissatisfaction with managerial hires, yet one must interrogate the possibility that such founders simply made poor choices in leadership recruitment.

Is the ascent to entrepreneurial success tantamount to acquiring expertise in management selection? I contend it is not. Graham's overlooking of this critical inquiry speaks volumes. It appears that, in the minds of proponents of founder mode, the acumen of successful founders renders them infallible in all matters, excluding, it seems, hiring errors.

## Jobs hired John Sculley.

Tethering this discussion back to Steve Jobs, we recall that he infamously recruited John Sculley from PepsiCo in 1983, seductively posing the question: “Do you want to sell sugared water for the rest of your life, or do you want to change the world?” This decision stemmed not from a VC's directive but, rather, from Jobs's recognition of Sculley's marketing prowess. The subsequent power struggle, however, ultimately led to Jobs's ousting and a temporary decline at Apple.

Jobs's reflections on this miscalculation underscore a pivotal lesson regarding the merit of hiring decisions. Conversely, his collaboration with Tim Cook later epitomizes the transformative potential of astute hiring, illustrating the dichotomy between effective and ineffective managerial choices.



Thus, while Graham seeks to exalt the merits of founder mode, one cannot overlook the salient lesson that success often hinges not merely on a founder's vision, but also on the capacity to cultivate a diverse array of talent and perspectives. Indeed, Jobs himself articulated the wisdom of engaging exceptional individuals and fostering their autonomy. "It doesn't make sense to hire smart people and then tell them what to do," he asserted, illuminating a far superior paradigm than the one Graham advocates.

As a closing note, for those seeking daily inspiration or motivational guidance, I invite you to explore a unique opportunity that connects with my readers through self-care challenges. You can find further details about this initiative and join the conversation [here](#).

## Vocabulary List:

1. **quintessential** /ˌkwɪn.tɪˈsen.ʃəl/ (adjective): Representing the most perfect or typical example of a quality or class.
2. **plethora** /ˈplɛθ.ə.rə/ (noun): A large or excessive amount of something.
3. **eludes** /ɪˈluː.dz/ (verb): To escape or avoid typically in a skillful or clever way.
4. **dichotomy** /daɪˈkɒt.ə.mi/ (noun): A division or contrast between two things that are represented as being opposed or entirely different.
5. **interrogate** /ɪnˈtɛr.ə.ɡeɪt/ (verb): To ask questions of someone often in a thorough or aggressive manner.
6. **autonomy** /ɔːˈtɒn.ə.mi/ (noun): The right or condition of self-governance; independence.

## Vocabulary quizzes

### Multiple Choice ( Select the Correct answer for each question. )

1. Which of the following words means to become aware or conscious of something?

- Option: Allegiance
- Option: Nuanced
- Option: Perceives
- Option: Culminating

2. What term describes a state where opposing forces are balanced?

- Option: Illustrious
- Option: Synergy
- Option: Equilibrium
- Option: Empowerment

3. What word refers to the perseverance and passion for long-term goals?

- Option: Articulated



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- Option: Catalyst  
Option: Grit  
Option: Prowess
4. Which term describes the combined power of a group that is greater than the sum of individual efforts?  
Option: Ascend  
Option: Synergy  
Option: Empowerment  
Option: Retention
5. What word is used to describe a typical example or pattern of something?  
Option: Grit  
Option: Paradigm  
Option: Potency  
Option: Gravitas
6. What term refers to the process of giving power or authority to individuals?  
Option: Indelible  
Option: Niche  
Option: Empowerment  
Option: Catalyst
7. Which word describes a division or contrast between two things that are represented as being opposed or entirely different?  
Option: Autonomy  
Option: Prowess  
Option: Dichotomy  
Option: Ascend
8. What term means to rise or move upward?  
Option: Plethora  
Option: Culminating  
Option: Ascend  
Option: Gravitas
9. What word refers to outstanding or superior skill or ability?  
Option: Synergy  
Option: Prowess  
Option: Allegiance  
Option: Niche
10. Which term means that cannot be forgotten or removed?  
Option: Indelible



- Option: Potency
- Option: Gravitas
- Option: Perceives

**Gap-Fill ( Fill in the blanks with the correct word from the vocabulary list. )**

11. Learning a new language can be a \_\_\_\_\_ for cultural understanding.
12. The \_\_\_\_\_ scientist won numerous awards for groundbreaking research.
13. The philosopher's words were filled with such \_\_\_\_\_ that they left a lasting impact on the audience.
14. Employees who are given \_\_\_\_\_ in their work often show greater creativity and motivation.
15. Her elegant style is the \_\_\_\_\_ representation of timeless fashion.
16. The marathon was the \_\_\_\_\_ event of the running season.
17. The boutique focuses on serving a specific \_\_\_\_\_ market of luxury goods.
18. The medicine's \_\_\_\_\_ was evident in how quickly it relieved the symptoms.
19. The leader spoke with such \_\_\_\_\_ that all those present were captivated by his words.
20. Regular practice is essential for memory \_\_\_\_\_ when learning new skills.

**Matching Sentences ( Match each definition to the correct word from the vocabulary list. )**

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| 21. The phrase "time is money" can the importance of efficiency in daily life. |
| 22. The enthusiastic tech promoted the benefits of the latest gadgets.         |
| 23. His comments were largely in the grand scheme of the discussion.           |



24. The successful collaboration of the team showed the power of in achieving goals.
25. She her ideas clearly during the presentation leaving no room for misunderstandings.
26. The solution to the puzzle still me despite numerous attempts to solve it.
27. The novel's characters were so well-developed with personalities that readers were captivated.
28. The inspiring movie served as a for her to pursue her long-held dreams.
29. The mentor's advice left an mark on the young entrepreneur guiding her future decisions.
30. The soldiers pledged their to their country ready to defend it at all costs.

## Answer

**Multiple Choice:** 1. Perceives 2. Equilibrium 3. Grit 4. Synergy 5. Paradigm 6. Empowerment 7. Dichotomy 8. Ascend 9. Prowess 10. Indelible

**Gap-Fill:** 11. catalyst 12. illustrious 13. profundity 14. autonomy 15. quintessential 16. culminating 17. niche 18. potency 19. gravitas 20. retention

**Matching sentence:** 1. encapsulate 2. evangelist 3. inconsequential 4. synergy 5. articulated 6. eludes 7. nuanced 8. catalyst 9. indelible 10. allegiance

## CATEGORY

1. Business - LEVEL6

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