

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/an-amazing-act-of-leadership>

Venture capitalist John Lilly reflects on his time at Apple during trying economic times and shares a story of bold leadership by the late Steve Jobs.



Transcript

So then I went to Apple where I had been as an intern, I learned how to play with technology and I was in a part of Apple that we were looking at education and we were looking at playfulness, we were looking at children.. And that was fun.. Because I started learning about how to tackle big problems with small solutions.. It was when Steve came back.. And the happy thing for me is that Steve really didn't like my group very much and so he started firing everyone, which caused my group to die and a lot of people that I cared about to leave and it helped me leave to start my own company.. And I was kind of grateful for that, but there's some interesting Steve Jobs stories.. And the one I'll tell you is that he came back at a time when the market cap of Apple was about - approximately equal to the cash we had on hand.. And nobody remembers this, and this sounds ridiculous, it was the time when Microsoft was dominant, Sun was incredible, Sun - looked like Sun was going to buy Apple.. I know none of you remember this, but it looked like Apple was dead.. And Steve came back, because Apple acquired NeXT and then he took over and nobody believed in it..

And I remember this town hall in a room for ATG, the Advanced Technology Group and we were about this size and Steve was up on stage.. And in the press the day before, the press asked Michael Dell who started Dell computer, what Apple should do.. He was like 'well shit, I think they should give the money back to the shareholders and shut the thing down.' So, obviously it's got some poignancy now given the things that Dell's going through and how Apple has done since then.. So Steve gave this big talk on how he was going to reinvent Apple.. And somebody asked him 'like, what do you think about what Michael Dell said?' And then Steve paused, and he was like 'well fuck Michael Dell.' You know.. No joke.. He said 'fuck that guy.' And so he said 'you know what we are going to do, we're going to reinvent the company.' Yeah I'm sorry I know it's broadcast out and - you know, I am who I am.. Eight second delay or something, we should pause and give me an eight second delay because it's going to happen again.. Anyway, so Steve said 'you know what, we're going to build a great company.. We're going to reinvent the world..

And anybody who believes me, like let's get moving.. If you don't believe that will happen then get the hell out.' And this was an amazing act of leadership because it was so clear who was in and who was out.. And I'll tell you, people in the room would have followed Steve everywhere and anywhere, just about anywhere.. Now it turns out me and my friends left and we're happy with that decision although economically it probably would have been better to stick around.. We've all done okay.. But what an act of leadership by a guy who nobody believed in at the time, nobody believed it..