

“Think Different” *but not too different*

By Todd Fiorentino

I was reading one of my marketing books, which has become almost a daily routine, and the author was making the point that “innovator” has become such an over-used word that it’s become almost empty and devoid of meaning. Then I started thinking about the news that Steve Jobs was dead and I felt almost obligated to write something about the man who gave us Apple (dare I say, the ultimate innovator?).

The announcement didn’t seem to deserve almost two weeks of coverage in the news cycle, in my mind, but it was certainly *news*. I never bought Apple products aside from the early Apple II C computer. The brand was expensive and I didn’t want to shell out thousands of dollars for a system that would be practically obsolete in six months. I didn’t need the Mercedes of computing; I was always happy with the equivalent of a Honda or Toyota. Plus, any company with that level of market concentration and domination didn’t deserve my money.

It’s apparent that we can add CEO worship to the likes of celebrity worship (our society goes bananas for celebs and CEO’s!) religiously following their every tweet and move. There was an Internet picture of a stack of Apple computers, piled up at the curb, and the caption simply read, “Thanks Steve Jobs.” Finally something to balance all of the gushing praise—I mean, we like his products so by extension he was a great man? That’s quite a leap.

We shouldn’t forget the environmental (and social) impact of these computers. Chip manufacturing involves chemicals, plastics and metals (lead, mercury, etc.)—all of which have byproducts and must be disposed of eventually. And socially, we know that computing has done a number on our bodies, led us to neglect our children in favor of our “smart” phone and has given us a generation that struggles in social situations while being more comfortable at the terminal.

I agree that Steve Jobs was a leader, however, and his “think different” campaign certainly resonated with many people. But the real heavy lifting was likely done by programmers, technologists and engineers at Apple probably at the low to mid level. Steve Jobs didn’t know how to program.

Still, I appreciate his “think different” message as I think we need that in our political discourse and other realms, too. Certainly going off to India to find himself is not so “different;” when Americans shoot off to India for spiritual guidance it seems almost cliché’ at this point. That’s been going on since the 60’s. It’s not quite the Bohemian endeavor that it used to be; actually, you probably need to be pretty well funded to go off and travel internationally.

When I think about my own field of massage therapy, the “think different” idea has great meaning. Our educational system teaches us to regurgitate facts, events, information on historical figures and so on. But it generally doesn’t ask us to invent. Rather, it says, ‘go and study this inventor.’ Tests ask for answers found directly in the textbook (but we abhor copying?!). And many people are stuck in the rut of being acted on by information rather than creating something new for one’s self.

In bodywork and massage, there has been a great proliferation of modalities. It seems that everyone just takes their last name and adds it to the word “massage” to signal—they’ve created a new modality. In truth, it is confusing, and probably overdone. Yet, I do commend therapists for going outside of the canon and curriculum to experiment and come up with novel solutions for clients. There is still much to discover in massage. Sometimes we discover things by accident. Sometimes we endeavor to discover new things. Either way, it’s important that our field keeps growing and evolving.

Deane Juhan wrote an interesting article in *Massage & Bodywork Magazine*

(<http://www.messageandbodywork.com/Articles/FebMar2007/medicalmassage.html>) about how the move toward medical massage could become a negative for the profession. Many of our clients came to us because they were disillusioned with the standard physical medicine approach. Perhaps they wanted prevention, hands-on solutions or just someone to listen to their problems in-depth. Regardless, massage therapists filled that niche’.

How will we ensure that our profession keeps growing? There are so many conditions and ailments that could be treated successfully with massage. However, the insurance companies and state governments want to funnel a vast group of therapists into one jar and enforce a set of standards. On the plus side, more people will have access because it will be covered. On the down side, certain experimental modalities will get brushed to the side—modalities that may have held the key to a given problem.

Technology is the cause and the cure in so many cases. I appreciate Steve Jobs’ message to try new things, experiment and take a new approach. Create the demand and so on. Standardization and uniformity is good to a point, but it also assumes that we have all the answers, which we don’t. The question I’m left with is: How can our profession grow, evolve and find novel solutions to conditions and ailments when academia, government and insurance companies keep telling us to do it the old way?