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Brains Vs … Something Shiny?

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Misoverestimated Leaders

Boredom sometimes leads us to do strange things. Perhaps that is why a younger version of myself sat in front of the television watching a presidential speech that night. "You teach a child to read, and he or her will be able to pass a literacy test" the President said as he explained his new bill ("The Misunderestimated President"). My jaw dropped. Here was someone who didn't seem to have a strong grasp of the English language, and *he* was going to fix the educational system? I watched for a little longer, but when I heard, "Rarely is the question asked: Is our children learning?" the mind-numbing nature of his speech forced me to change the channel ("The Misunderestimated President").

To his credit, Bush was probably much more intelligent than he appeared. After all, convincing a nation that a double Ivy League graduate born in Connecticut was no more than a dull, slow-speaking southerner is an impressive feat. While the failure of many of his policies does indicate that he might not have been the most knowledgeable on the areas he chose to reform, he was certainly a skilled showman.

As I look around the global stage and throughout history, I notice that Bush is not alone in this. Almost all of the world leaders are also focused mainly on putting on a show for their people. The very existence of political science seems to prove this. By busying themselves with studies in winning peoples' hearts, these future politicians are much too busy to learn about the professions they will eventually come to regulate. For better or for worse, this just seems to be the way things are.

Still, when I see the shortcomings of these charismatic leaders, I can't help but wonder whether we might be better off with someone else at the wheel. Would not a Professor of Education know how best to reform education? Who else would hold the secrets to fixing healthcare if not a doctor? All in all, would it be better to have intellectuals leading us rather than the usual showmen?

Thinking Small

Since I could not find the answer to this question elsewhere, the burden of its solution fell to me. While it seems that the obvious choice would be for me to pick a country with a charismatic leader and compare it to a country with an intellectual leader, doing so wouldn't give me very good results. So many things; from geography, to economy, to the culture within a country all change the way it operates. Distinguishing the leader's impact from these extraneous variables would be a headache that I would rather avoid. No, for me to get clear, reliable results, I would have to think smaller. As I ponder where I might find these two types of leaders piloting two similar groups, my inner nerd shouts out my answer. It has to be Apple and Microsoft.

While I'm sure that everyone knows of these technology giants with their iconic leaders; Steve Jobs and Bill Gates, the reason why they are such a perfect choice might not be entirely clear. So as not to bore you, my valued reader, with a history lesson, I'll go through the important parts quickly. The truncated history according to me goes something like this…

In the 70s, Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak founded Apple Computer. Shortly after, Bill Gates and Paul Allen founded Microsoft. They both started their companies in small garage based operations and expanded them into big multinational corporations. Once they made it big, Steve

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Wozniak, who was the computer expert of the Apple duo, resigned. An eerily similar thing occurred when businessman Paul Allen, walked away from Microsoft. From then on, Apple would be led by the Charismatic Steve Jobs, and Microsoft by the Programmer Bill Gates.

Let's Have a Good, Clean Fight.

To determine which style is ultimately more effective, I have to somehow compare these two companies. Contrary to the entire premise behind Mac V Pc, two complex things cannot be compared outright with a single result; they need to be weighed based upon important factors. With this in mind, I decide to grade the companies on a set of traits that are indicative of good leadership. Just like boxing, the side with the most points at the end of the match will be crowned the winner. There will be no participation prize in this contest; the loser will just have to be content with their multi-billion dollar corporation and inferior style of leading. I'm getting ahead of myself. First, I wonder, what are the important factors for determining leader quality? For an answer to this, I turn to the biggest book that that I could find with leadership in its name; the *Encyclopedia of Leadership*.

After searching through several volumes, I finally find what I'm looking for... or rather, I find that what I was looking for didn't exist. In an enclosed section on what helps to create a good leader I was dismayed to learn that, even amongst field experts, there was no clear set of qualities that good leaders possessed (Day 842). Unwilling to give up on my quest for the truth, I decide to set my own criteria. I think long and hard about what makes countries and companies great. Finally, I arrive upon the conclusion that, in the business world, three criteria that reign supreme; net worth, employee happiness, and innovation. Let the games begin.

Apple: 0 Microsoft: 0

Round 1: Cold Hard Ca$h

As far as Wall Street is concerned, the little red and green numbers that they see are the only important part of a company. While this may not be entirely true, the monetary success of a company is rather important. As such, a good leader should strive to increase their company's value as much as possible.

I sift through pages upon pages of stock and trade records to no avail. Looking at trade volume, stock price, and dividend records may not have given me a straightforward answer as to which company was more valuable, but it did teach me an important lesson; I am not cut out to be a trader. I was about to give up when I stumbled across a news story from 2010. This one story was run in multiple newspapers at the time, but *USA Today* captured the essence in the very first sentence; "Apple's share price hit a milestone on Wednesday -- pushing the company's market capitalization higher than Microsoft's for the first time" (Byron). While this would appear to point in Apple's favor here, it does quite the opposite. By 2010, Jobs and Gates had already been leading their companies for more than 30 years and for that whole time, Apple had never managed to come out on top. It was only in Jobs' last year of life, at which point he had already begun to appoint others to assist and eventually take over his company that they finally managed to out value Microsoft.

Putting aside the little spike towards the end, Microsoft got its lead quickly and held it for a long while. The bell rings to end the first round. After little deliberation, it is clear; when it comes to profits, Microsoft is the winner.

Apple: 0 Microsoft: 1

Round 2: Where do You See Yourself in 10 Years?

The next topic came to me amidst a daydream about two fictional shoe companies. The first was a little-old shop in the middle of a little-old Dutch town where a little-old man carves wooden shoes with a smile on his face. The second is my impression of an overseas sweatshop, where a large half-man half-daemon with fire in his eyes cracks a whip over scarred little child workers as they sew

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together cheap sneakers. While this may show just what falling asleep in front of the television can do to your imagination, it does raise another important point. Worker happiness makes a huge difference.

Being that I'm a straightforward sort of guy, I decide that the best way to find out what the employees think of their jobs is to ask them. This is met with no success. Due to the fear of corporate espionage, all employees of these companies are forced to sign strict Non-Disclosure Agreements. These agreements essentially say that speaking about any internal working of the company will result in a swift and painful flogging by their legal departments. To make matters worse, these agreements are usually effective for a period of at least 5 years. Needless to say I don't imagine I'll be able to find a legitimate interview.

I then broaden my search to see if I can find a more anonymous method of obtaining employee opinions. My search lands me on a job review website called Glassdoor. When I turn to Apple and Microsoft's pages, I see thousands of reviews of the companies and an overall rating to go with them. Going strictly from the numbers, Apple won with a rating of 3.9 to Microsoft's 3.6 on the 5 point scale that was used (Glassdoor). As I scan through the reviews, I get a pretty good idea why. The Microsoft reviews mention things like great benefits, cool technology, ect… but almost every review has one big complaint; Microsoft is too machine like. Working these leaves many of them feeling like nameless cogs in a big machine. On Apple's review board, a user going by the alias Senior Technical Advisor summarizes what the other Apple employees rave about, "Apple treats its employees like human beings" (Glassdoor).

Such a simple courtesy, but to Apple employees, it makes all the difference. The round ends and Apple comes out on top.

<div align="center">Apple: 1 Microsoft: 1</div>

Round 3: Can They be as Creative as this Title?

With the scores ties up, we head to the final category. While very few people remember the name of the man who invented Penicillin, there is no doubt that the world was made better by its existence. Granted neither of these companies has created anything truly life-saving, at least not yet, but novel new ideas that revolutionize the world we live in and change the course of history itself are worth recognition. As such, the company that is the most innovative shall win the final point.

Though they began as computer companies, Apple and Microsoft have expanded into so much more. Their product lines now stretch from computers out into entertainment and much even telephones. Both companies have expanded in this way but alas, Apple is constantly one step ahead. Sorry Microsoft, your Zune and Windows Phone were just too late.

Just as I am about to declare Apple the winner, a point made in an issue of Engineering & Technology catches my eye. "Very few of [Apple's] successful products have been the first-to-market. The iPod was by no means the first MP3 player" (Furfli 34). This makes me stop dead and think. Did Apple really create anything that had never been done before? The graphical user interface, which created the personal computer genre, was made by Xerox before the first Apple computer… and the PalmPilot was a "smartphone" long before the term "smartphone" existed. Come to think of it, even the iPad was nothing more than a tablet computer with a touch screen, and neither of these was new.

So the most innovative is… neither of them. I'm surprised that, with all this hype around these companies, they don't appear to have a truly original creation between the two of them. The final round comes to an end without either side making a solid hit in the realm of creativity. The score remains tied.

<div align="center">Apple: 1 Microsoft: 1</div>

<div align="center">90</div>

Bonus Round

I scan the internet again in an effort to break the tie. What I find is an article by the excessively well-credentialed Harvard Law Professor Jonathan Zittrain. He makes the case that, though Jobs is hailed as a great visionary, Apple is actually an enemy of innovation. After many pages condemning Apple's app review process, he gives this coup de grâce; "if Wikipedia required an incumbent gatekeeper's approval or permission to get started, it might have failed to receive it" (20). I'm shocked. Wikipedia is one of the biggest things in free information, so the thought that it could have never existed if it needed to pass Apple's review process was mind boggling. This makes me wonder just how many brilliant startups have met there end at the hands of Apple. I shudder to think. While Microsoft may not be exceptionally creative in itself, at least it doesn't go to such lengths to stifle the creativity of others.

The final bell rings and this match comes to an end. In a bizarre twist of events, Apple dealt itself a knockout punch in the battle for creativity. Microsoft has won.

Apple: 1 Microsoft: 2

We Have Our Winner… What Now?

In the end, Microsoft beats out Apple 2 to 1. Microsoft's victory here shows that, by my criteria, Bill Gates' intellectual approach outperformed Steve Jobs' charisma. Winner aside, the final score isn't entirely one-sided. This means that neither style is entirely without a benefit. Likewise, neither of them is completely flawless.

By extrapolating these ideas to the world as a whole, we begin to see things in a different light. Yes, most politicians are clearly charismatic instead of intellectual, no, this might not be bad. Even if the intellectual approach could solve some of our country's problems, would it really be worth sacrificing the quality of life that charismatic leadership brings? When you look towards your stern old math teacher, will you still wish he was more fun? Or do you appreciate the efficiency his style brings? What about you? The next time you are given a position of power; will you stop to consider which style you wish to embrace? If you choose wisely, you may find that events unfold in your favor.

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