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Apple CEO who fired Steve Jobs: 'I wish I had hired him back'

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Apple CEO who fired Steve Jobs: 'I wish I had hired him

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John Sculley (right), Apple's former CEO who ousted Steve Jobs, said he wished he could have hired him back.

After an epic power struggle, former Apple CEO John Sculley pushed Steve Jobs out of the company he founded. Sculley wishes now he would have hired him back.

"I wish in hindsight I had reached back to Steve and told him, 'I want to help you come back to Apple,'" Sculley told CNNMoney. "I wish Apple had hired him back sooner rather than later."

Sculley himself was forced out of Apple ([AAPL](#), [Tech30](#)) in 1993 over a dispute about licensing Macintosh's software to other PC makers. The board was in favor of letting other computer makers use Apple's software, but Sculley was opposed.

After Sculley's ouster, Apple did end up licensing its software, which turned out to be a major mistake. By the time Apple hired Steve Jobs back in 1997, the company was posting giant losses.

Had Sculley mended his differences with Jobs sooner and brought him back to Apple during his tenure, he says the company wouldn't have been in such dire straits in the late 1990's.

"When Steve came back, the first thing he did was to cancel the licensing," Sculley said. "At that point, only Steve Jobs could have revived the business. There's no way I could have ever done the things Steve Jobs did."

Sculley reserved his biggest compliments for current Apple CEO Tim Cook, who Sculley says is "exactly the right guy" for the job.

"I say that without any reservation," said Sculley. "Tim is doing a brilliant job."

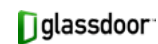
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Sculley said comparing Cook to former Microsoft ([MSFT](#), [Tech30](#)) CEO Steve Ballmer was unfair. Though both were former operations guys who replaced tech geniuses at the helm of their respective companies, Cook has been able to defer to Apple's deep bench of designers and engineers, while Ballmer a was notoriously stubborn leader.

"People have to get over the Steve Ballmer analogies; he ain't Steve Ballmer," Sculley said. "Tim is open minded with no ego, and he has recruited high-quality talent to fill the void that Jobs left."

He said the remarkable turnaround that Apple has made over the past decade hasn't left him feeling bitter. He says he only has "good feelings" for Apple, and he feels a sense of accomplishment that the company's marketing strategy that he helped pioneer hasn't changed much over the past 30 years.

Yet if Sculley were Apple CEO today, as opposed to three decades ago, one of his most famous accomplishments might never have happened.



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Sculley, the marketing genius behind "The Pepsi Challenge," was Apple CEO during the company's famous 1984 Super Bowl commercial. That one-minute commercial cost just \$650,000 according to Fred Goldberg, the advertising executive who managed Apple's account. This year, Super Bowl commercials approached \$5 million for a 30-second spot.

Would Sculley air the same Super Bowl commercial today if he were running Apple?

"No. The answer is no," Sculley said. "We're in a different era today. We know much more about our customers. So where do you find guys like me (if we're still alive)? We're using the marketing cloud tools available to us to build customer relationships."

Sculley is now a tech and marketing entrepreneur, investing in Internet companies, including analytics firm Zeta Interactive, shaving company 800Razors.com, and healthcare tech company MDLive.

In his [new book, *Moonshot!*](#), Sculley discusses strategies for startup founders to grow their companies into billion-dollar businesses.

His biggest advice to young entrepreneurs: Create a product that customers love. Customers are in



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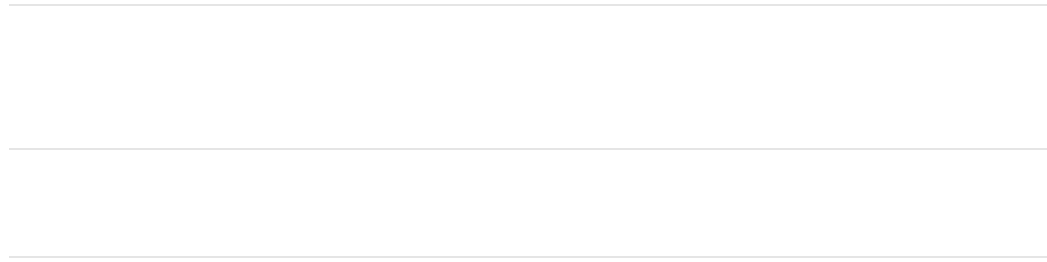
control now -- they're paying attention to other customers' experiences more than companies' advertisements.

"Business plans are almost obsolete these days," Sculley said. "There's nothing more powerful than customers that are happy."

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