

**Forever Young**  
*A Call for Educators to Imagine, Design, Invent, and Lead*

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December 10, 2011

“In this volatile business of ours, we can ill afford to rest on our laurels, even to pause in retrospect. Times and conditions change so rapidly that we must keep our aim constantly on the future.” This quote by Walt Disney reflected his belief that his parks and other business endeavors would never be completed. At his core, the lead Imagineer knew that his work would continue as long as there was imagination left in the world.

Disney World celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> birthday on October 1<sup>st</sup>. Nobody would have ever guessed. Anybody who has been lucky enough to experience anything Disney will attest that its founder’s belief – the magic – lives on in the Magic Kingdom as well as throughout nearly every facet of the real world. Despite decades gone by, Disney remains forever young. It must be the pixie dust. Or maybe it’s something else.

In many ways, Steve Jobs embodied the spirit of Walt Disney. The i-Generation of products from Apple has revolutionized the ways in which we live, work, and entertain. Pause for a moment and think about life prior to October 2001.

On October 23, 2001, Apple Computer introduced the iPod. Few people then realized the impact that the portable music device would have on life as we knew it. Industry analysts concluded that the device appeared to be consumer friendly but suggested it had a relatively limited potential audience. In an article appearing in the New York Times on the iPod’s release date, a senior analyst for an e-commerce research group stated: “It’s a nice feature for Macintosh users. But to the rest of the Windows world, it doesn’t make any difference.” It is now fair to suggest that Jobs’ vision out-paced and out-scoped that of the analysts.

Six years later, in 2007, a smartphone with a touchscreen called the iPhone was unveiled. Then the laptop killer, the iPad, emerged only a year ago in 2010. Is the iPad really just a toddler?

Barely? It already seems like it has been here forever and it is difficult to imagine the world turning without it. Would we still have our four seasons if the Newton MessagePad100 still reigned?

Yes, while we were sleeping, the new tablet computer and everything “i” has changed our existence much in the same way Disney did and continues to do. Although Steve Jobs lost his battle to cancer on October 5<sup>th</sup>, like Disney, his work remains unfinished and is destined to remain forever young.

As would appear to have been inevitable, Jobs and Disney shared direct ties. In January 2006, Disney’s Chief Executive Robert A. Iger and the Walt Disney Co. agreed to purchase Pixar Animation Studios, where Jobs was chairman. Jobs in turn became the largest shareholder at Disney and assumed a seat on the company’s board of directors. In the Los Angeles Times article, “Steve Jobs Brought His Magic to Disney,” the ultimate impact of this merging of spirits was described as follows: “His (Jobs’) legacy can be seen in virtually every corner of Disney, from the budding resurgence of Walt Disney Animation Studios to the \$1-billion overhaul of Disney’s California Adventure and the expansion of its cruise line.” The article highlighted key contributions Jobs made to the Disney Company in the area of digital distribution, the art of branding, and the “less is more” mentality (*say “no” to 1,000 things and emphasize quality.*)

Jobs reinvigorated Disney to be, well, Disney again.

Countless business and leadership books, articles, blogs, etcetera have been written about Walt Disney and Steve Jobs and their respective magic. If not pixie dust, what could it be? I believe commitment to the following four actions begins to tell the story: *imagine, design, invent, and lead.*

**Imagine:** to form a mental picture or image of; to think; to conceive in the mind

**Design:** to create, fashion, execute, or construct a plan; to devise for a specific function or end

**Invent:** to produce or engineer by the use of ingenuity; to originate, as by experiment

**Lead:** to guide or direct to a course of action or thought; to inspire the conduct of

These actions are embedded in the bedrock of the Disney and Apple empires. Likewise, these actions should be embedded in the bedrock of our schools. If educators model and cultivate conditions to foster these actions, they will not only support their students but will also save their profession as they now know it.

If Walt Disney or Steve Jobs were educators today, what lessons might they be designing and teaching?

Or perhaps even more telling, if Walt Disney or Steve Jobs were one of your students (before they became “Walt Disney” and “Steve Jobs”), what lessons would have inspired them to become “them”?

As educators, in this volatile world of ours, are we keeping our aim constantly on the future? Would others say that K-12 education is forever young? Is anybody trying to identify our pixie dust?

It is time for educators to look closely at their product. The world needs something different. Educators need to be in the future business.

Are we revolutionizing the way students live, work, and entertain?

Show me an educator who imagines, designs, invents, and leads, and the answer will be a resounding yes.

Better yet, show me an educator who inspires students to imagine, design, invent, and lead, and the world will move. Seasons will turn.

If educators do not revolutionize the way students live, work, and entertain, someone or something else will.

Educators must take time to imagine the future; design experiences for students to support it; invent new fashions of teaching and learning to bring us closer to it; and lead the way to it.

In these times, educators must reinvigorate educators to be, well, educators again.

As both Disney and Jobs would remind us, it all started with a mouse.

The future will start with educators and education.