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## Steve Jobs [review] / Isaacson, Walter

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## STEVE JOBS

*By Walter Isaacson*  
*New York, NY: Simon and Schuster*  
*(2011)*  
*Hardcover, 656 pages*

*Reviewed by SHAWN COLLINS*

The title of this 656-page biography is simple and yet conjures up a wide array of images depending on the person reading it: *Steve Jobs*. As a household name, Steve Jobs the person, the legend, means different things to different people. He is well known as the successful leader of Apple, Inc. But his style of leadership is the area of contention between those who ardently follow his success and those who, while not denying his success, point out his failures.

The book is based on revealing interviews Walter Isaacson conducted over a two-year period with Steve Jobs and those who knew and worked with him. In a sense, Isaacson used the “Rashomon effect” to bring together the recollections of different observers to produce different but equally plausible accounts of Jobs. Isaacson describes Jobs as a complex man who disdained material objects, yet made objects people desired through the company he started and was dedicated to, Apple, Inc. In fact, if one word could describe him, it would be “innovative.” Matching innovation with leadership is a key to success, but sometimes Jobs seemed to disdain the business aspect. It was something he had to do in order to do what he truly loved—innovate.

Steve Jobs was dying, and he knew it. Jobs asked Walter Isaacson on several occasions to write his biography—he wanted people to know the real Steve Jobs and understand what his legacy was. The book moves

along by starting with Jobs’ early life and the things that shaped his early childhood. As Jobs’ career progresses, so do the pages. Interspersed are chapters about Jobs as a human.

Intersecting creativity and technology, and getting others to understand that vision, required a special individual. It took someone inspiring. Steve Jobs took inspiration to a new level. He inspired people to accomplish things and meet deadlines nobody thought were possible. He somehow seemed to know what was possible. He then pushed people to make possible what, in their minds own minds, was impossible. His employees referred to this as his “reality distortion field.”

How does one learn from Isaacson’s description of Steve Jobs? Jobs was hugely successful in his life, but had some bumps in the road. He was ousted from the very company he founded. But here is one of the take-home lessons from Isaacson’s book: learn from your mistakes. When Jobs returned from exile to Apple he had learned from his mistakes. Then there is the value of inspiration. Jobs knew how to inspire his employees through his “reality distortion field.” But he had difficulties dealing with those who did not see things his way. There was a dichotomy in Jobs’ leadership style: he was a brilliant innovator, bringing people and products together, but sometimes in unconventional and sometimes controversial ways.

Can Christian leaders learn from Jobs’ example? Jobs lived with the reality of his dying, which drove him to reflect on his life and seek to clarify his legacy. Christian leaders will probably be pained to learn of Jobs’ tortured search for enlightenment. Yet his experience points to a key leadership question: “What is our legacy? How do I want to be remem-

bered as a leader? Is the vision I inspire worth giving my best to? Isaacson in the end presents a one-of-a-kind man, a transformational and charismatic leader who inspired while struggling with his own shadows.

Jobs had “a premonition that he would not live a long life” and “felt a sense of urgency about all he wanted to get done” (p. 262). Steve Jobs’ last words were reportedly “oh wow, oh wow, oh wow.” We’ll never know to what he was referring. Walter Isaacson gives us a rich glimpse of this complex personality, his intriguing thought processes, and the controversial leadership style of one of the most influential leaders of our time. While Christian leaders may have difficulties dealing with some of Jobs’ biases against organized religion, they will find this book helpful in reading some of the currents that have shaped our generation.

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## MEETING THE ETHICAL CHALLENGES OF LEADERSHIP: CASTING LIGHT OR SHADOW

By Craig E. Johnson  
Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage (2012),  
4th edition  
Paperback, 536 pages

Reviewed by DUANE M. COVRIG

Now in its fourth edition, *Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership* has become one of the best-selling ethical leadership texts used in colleges and universities today. It blends together an overview of ethics, ethical decision-making, moral leadership processes, and group and organizational dynamics into one

reader-friendly source. It has case studies, illustrations from films and popular culture, and succinct reviews of the best in scholarship and research on ethics in organizations. I consider it the single best resource for anyone wanting to improve their understanding and practice of ethics. It is especially focused on professional life in organizations and leadership, but also has insight for some personal ethics.

I have used previous editions of this text since 1999 in teaching appropriate professional ethics and moral leadership to teachers and educational leaders; more recently I have seen it useful for my students in business and health care.

The author, Craig Johnson, is a professor and administrator at George Fox University, a Christian university in Oregon that has Quaker roots. The Quaker influence is evident in his use of Parker Palmer and the focus on peace and global justice. Beyond that, however, the use of Christian theology and ideas is limited and more peripheral. Instead, he dives into and uses scholarship and research from business, philosophy and the social sciences. This fact makes the book useful for Christian leaders who may have read biblical and theological ethics but have not explored other areas of ethics.

While Johnson draws a lot from his first chosen area of research, communication, he is also very effective at reviewing research on morality in group processes and organizational dynamics and in bringing these implications to an understanding of moral leadership.

Each chapter has some activities and useful reflection and application sections. Practicing administrators will appreciate Johnson’s brevity and ability to move past philosophical hair-splitting in applying ethical principles to real contemporary issues.