



Making Things Better

**FIX WHAT'S
BROKEN.**
BEFORE IT BREAKS YOU.

Timeless Lessons From Steve Jobs
on Fixing What's Broken

By Ben Klaiber

Sample Chapter

This excerpt from Making Things Better showcases the practical, documented approach that makes this book different.

Metal Detectors, Not Magic

In September 1995, while Apple was floundering, Steve Jobs told Fortune magazine: "You know, I've got a plan that could rescue Apple. I can't say any more than that it's the perfect product and the perfect strategy for Apple. But nobody there will listen to me."

Notice what he did not say.

He did not say "I have a vision."

He did not say "I see the future."

He said "I have a plan."

A plan is not magic. It is logic, sequence, and trade-off. It is knowing where the landmines are and how to avoid them.

Yet many still insist Steve's success was supernatural. Some kind of fluke of genius, impossible to replicate. This belief does more than mislead. It disempowers.

It turns leaders into spectators, waiting for a messiah instead of sharpening their own tools.

The truth is simpler and far more useful: Steve did not predict the future. He designed it. And he left a trail of evidence so clear, it's like he handed us the map.

The Minefield Test

Imagine a field where people keep stepping on landmines. Explosions happen daily. Everyone agrees: "Stay out. It's too dangerous."

Then one person walks across, calmly and repeatedly, for years.

At first, people call him lucky. But after a decade, they should ask: How?

That's Apple's story in digital music. Before iTunes, the field was littered with failed players, broken stores, and angry consumers. Illegal downloads offered unlimited songs, no limits on burning or sharing - better than any record store on the planet.

Everyone else saw an impossible problem: how do you compete with free?

Steve saw something different. He saw the landmines everyone else kept hitting:

Variable pricing that punished loyal fans. Buy one hit song for 99 cents, another for \$1.99. Albums priced higher than their individual tracks combined. Customers felt manipulated.

DRM that treated buyers like thieves. Buy a song, but you can't play it on this device. Or that one. Or burn it to CD more than twice. Paying customers got a worse experience than pirates.

Subscription models that felt like renting, not owning. Pay forever or lose everything. Stop the subscription and your entire library disappears.

Steve's solution wasn't magical. It was surgical:

Any song. Ninety-nine cents. You own it. No restrictions.

He knew what people actually wanted: not to steal, but to own music easily, affordably, and without shame. As he later told Time Magazine: "In essence, we would make a deal with people. If they would pay a fair price, we would give them a better product, and they would stop being pirates."

And he kept that deal sacred. When record labels pushed to raise prices, Steve refused: "If we go back and raise prices now, we will be violating that implicit deal. And they would never buy anything from iTunes again. Users would say, 'I knew it all along that the music companies were gonna screw me, and now they're screwing me.'"

That wasn't idealism. It was integrity as strategy.

When Everyone Else Hit the Mines

Meanwhile, Microsoft launched the Zune with everything the music industry demanded:

Songs you thought you owned, but could only play with an active subscription.

Wi-Fi sharing that took so long "the girl's gotten up and left."

Albums that withheld hit songs to force CD sales.

No burning. No real ownership. Just friction.

Steve's verdict was devastatingly human: "You're much better off taking one of your earbuds out and putting it in her ear. Then you're connected with about two feet of headphone cable."

The Zune wasn't killed by Apple. It was killed by ignoring how people actually live.

The Real Tool: Vigilance, Not Vision

Steve did not wave a wand. He used a metal detector.

He listened - "so intently," as Jony Ive said.

He questioned - "Is this good enough?"

He protected fragile ideas from committee logic.

He said no, not to be difficult, but to preserve focus.

And when engineers said "We can't do that. It's impossible," he did not retreat. He said: "No, no, we're doing this. Because I'm the CEO, and I think it can be done."

That moment - overriding objections with one decision - wasn't arrogance. It was accountability.

Because someone has to decide. Someone has to say: This is the path. Follow me.

What This Looks Like When You Apply It

I see this pattern constantly in my work. A leader will ask: "What's the best CRM?" or "Which collaboration tool should we use?"

But those aren't the real questions. The real questions are:

"What's broken in our current process that makes this feel impossible? What's causing the friction?"

"What decisions are being made in shadow systems because the official tools don't serve the people doing the work? Where are the spreadsheets, email chains, and hallway conversations happening because your 'official system' is unusable?"

"What standards have we abandoned that turned 'make it excellent' into 'ship something and clean up the mess later'? When did you stop asking 'is this good enough?' and start accepting 'it's done'?"

Steve didn't save Apple by following a playbook. He saved it by reclaiming a standard and letting that standard guide every trade-off.

You Don't Need Magic. You Need a Metal Detector.

Here's what that actually means in practice:

Listen to what people are actually doing, not what they say they're doing. Watch how your team works around the system. Those workarounds are your landmines.

Question whether "industry standard" is actually serving anyone. Just because everyone else does it that way doesn't mean it's right. The Zune followed industry demands. iTunes followed human needs.

Protect the solutions that work, even when they're unpopular. When Steve refused to raise iTunes prices, the music industry was furious. He held the line because he knew raising prices would break the deal with customers.

Say no to preserve yes. Every "maybe" dilutes your focus. Every "let's try both approaches" splits your energy. Steve killed 70% of Apple's products not because they were bad, but because they distracted from what mattered.

Take accountability for the decision. Someone has to decide. If you're the leader, that someone is you. Not the committee. Not consensus. You.

The Map Is Already There

Steve didn't have supernatural insight. He had discipline.

He looked at a field everyone else called "impossible" and asked: "Where are the landmines? How did everyone else step on them? How do I walk a different path?"

Then he walked that path with absolute commitment. No compromises. No hedging. No "let's try it both ways and see what happens."

That's not magic. That's method.

And it works whether you're launching a digital music store or fixing a broken workflow in Toledo, Ohio.

The question isn't whether you can see the future. The question is: Are you willing to use the metal detector?

Are you willing to look honestly at where people are struggling? To question what everyone else accepts? To hold a standard even when it's inconvenient?

Because the landmines are already visible. You just have to be willing to look.

The rest of this book shows you how to look - and more importantly, what to do once you see them.

Read the Complete Book

This chapter is from Making Things Better: Timeless Lessons From Steve Jobs on Fixing What's Broken

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