

# Zen Lawyer

CHAPTER 13



“I sat in a f---ing garage with Wozniak and invented the future because artists lead and hacks ask for a show of hands,” Steve Jobs says in the movie “Steve Jobs.”

This latest movie about Jobs was based on a biography by Walter Issacson. In the book, Jobs explains his vision of beauty and quality and what it means to be an artist. “A great carpenter isn’t going to use lousy wood for the back of a cabinet, even though nobody’s going to see it.... You’ll know it’s there, so you’re going to use a beautiful piece of wood on the back. For you to sleep well at night, the aesthetic, the quality, has to be carried all the way through.”

In the Zen Story, “Time To Learn,” a young and earnest Zen student approached his teacher and asked, “If I work hard, how long will it take for me to find Zen.”

“Ten years,” the Master replied.

The student then said, “But what if I work very hard and really apply myself? How long then?”

“Twenty years.”

“But what if I work very, very hard and really, really apply myself? How long then?”

“Thirty years.”

“I do not understand,” said the disappointed student. “Each time that I say I really want to find Zen, that I will work harder and apply myself, you say it will take me longer. Why do you say that?”

“When you have one eye on the goal,” The Master replied, “you only have one eye on the path.”

Lawyers can be artists. Like all artists, lawyers are bound by rules. We serve the rule of law and we serve our community.

One of Jobs’ talents was his ability to blend art and engineering. Lawyers blend art and logic. Without art, logic can be boring and even inhumane. With art, logic can be exciting and improve the human condition.

Robert Pirsig, who wrote “Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance,” said that art is, “Anything you can do with quality.”

So what is quality? Pirsig, a former professor of philosophy,

refuses to define it, but we recognize it when it exists. Quality is achieved by focusing on the path.

Serving the rule of law and the community is a path. Winning a case is just a goal. Quality resides in the integrity of a position or an argument, not the result. The ends do not justify the means, the means are the end.

One of the ironies of Zen is that with both eyes on the path you arrive at the goal more surely and quickly. Along the way you will be criticized, as all artists are, but you will know you used beautiful wood all the way through.

When I was a young novelist, my editor advised me never to sacrifice truth in pursuit of plot. Hacks do that, he said. This was good life advice. Hacks sacrifice the truth, they use lousy wood, they are annoyances rather than artists.

Jobs did not set a goal to manufacture a digital music player that would sell over 300 million units. He just loved music and wanted a music player that could fit in his pocket and hold an insane number of songs, something “cool” and “beautiful.” The iPod served us well.



*As a Zen Lawyer, be an artist.  
Devote yourself to quality.  
And keep both eyes on the  
path.*

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