

Why Steve Jobs Never Forgave John Sculley for ‘Firing’ Him

By Max Chang, May 21, 2015



John Sculley, Apple’s CEO from 1983 to 1993, is a man Steve Jobs blamed for one of the most “devastating” periods of his life — when he was fired from Apple.

Here is how Jobs described what happened in his 2005 commencement speech at Stanford University:

“We had just released our finest creation – the Macintosh – a year earlier, and I had just turned 30. And then I got fired. How can you get fired from a company you started? Well, as Apple grew, we hired someone who I thought was very talented to run the company with me, and for the first year or so, things went well. But then our visions of the future began to diverge and eventually we had a falling out. When we did, our Board of Directors sided with him. And so, at 30, I was out... and very publicly out. What had been the focus of my entire adult life was gone, and it was devastating.”

Jobs also called getting booted out of his own company a blessing that led him to “enter one of the most creative periods” of his life.

But today, Sculley tells a different story, the kind that might include a “jk” and a smiley face emoji — Steve Jobs was sort of never, really actually fired, technically speaking.

Sculley explained at the Engage 2015 Conference in Prague:

“Steve was never fired. He took a sabbatical and was still chairman of the board. He was down, no one pushed him, but he was off the Mac, which was his deal – he never forgave me for that.

“He started NeXt and was sued by the board for hiring Apple engineers, but he was never fired by Apple.”

So Jobs, having been fired from his own company (but jk not really =), according to Sculley), went off to start NeXt only to get sued by his old company’s board for \$5 million for poaching his own employees, and the suit was dismissed before the trial. Jobs famously remarked, “It is hard to think that a \$2 billion company with 4,300-plus people couldn’t compete with six people in blue jeans.”

Of course, NeXt was acquired by Apple in 1997 by then-CEO Gil Amelio, who was fired a few months later and replaced by Jobs.

Sculley has since admitted on multiple occasions that the decision to manipulate the board against Steve Jobs was a mistake.

“I look back and think what a mistake on my part. Corporate America was secular and there just wasn’t the passion you see today where there is such respect for founders. To remove a founder, even if he was never fired, was a mistake.”

Of course, any story of manipulation wouldn’t be complete without a little hypocrisy — Sculley also hired former Apple employees for his latest venture, Obi Mobiles, a company that produces affordable Android phones for the developing world.

I imagine the ghost of Steve Jobs is totally rolling his eyes right now.

h/t: Business Insider Image via Softpedia