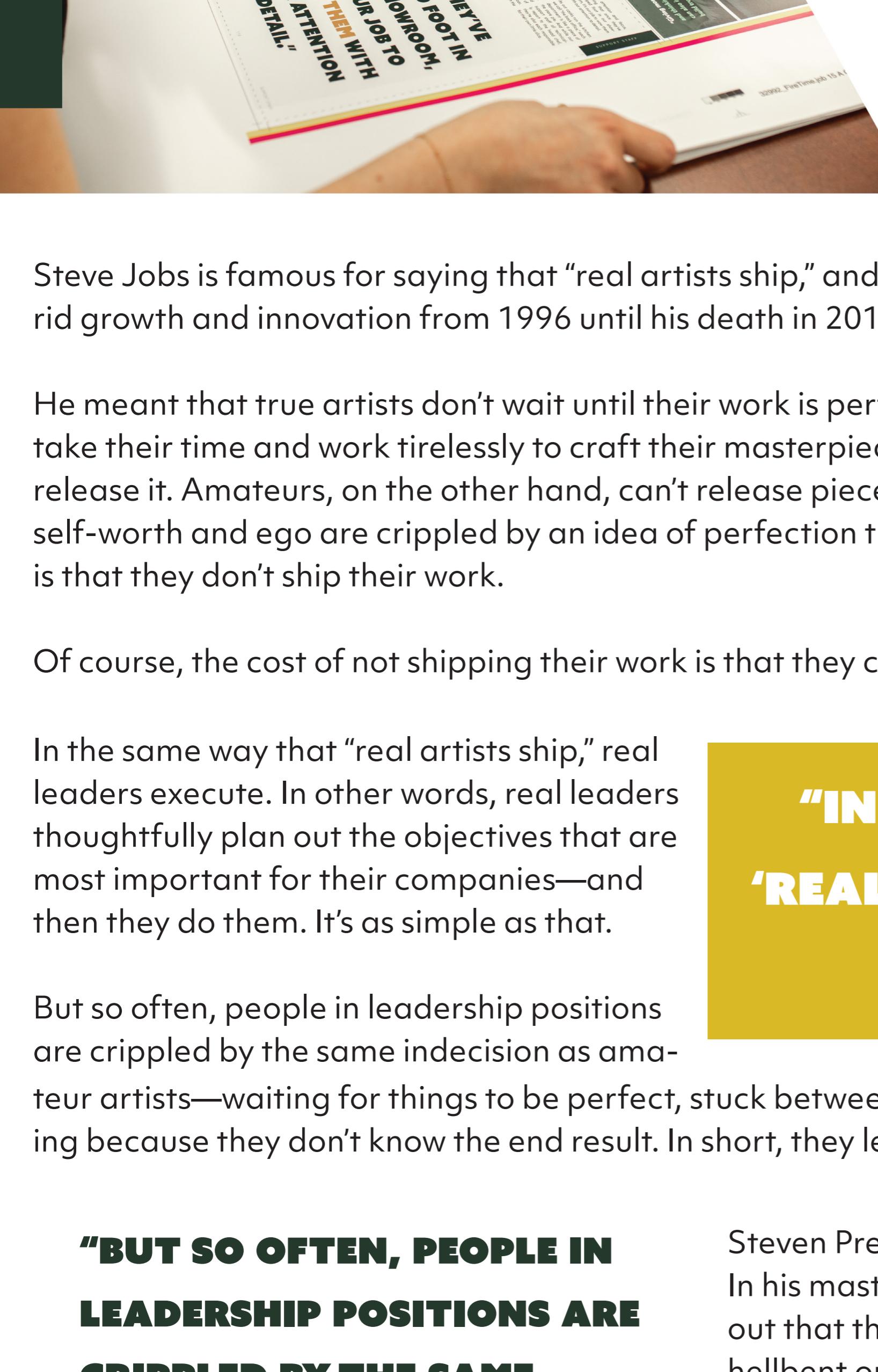


ARTISTS SHIP, LEADERS EXECUTE

By Tim Reed



Steve Jobs is famous for saying that "real artists ship," and that mentality fueled Apple's torrid growth and innovation from 1996 until his death in 2011.

He meant that true artists don't wait until their work is perfect to release it to the world. They take their time and work tirelessly to craft their masterpiece, but when the work is due, they release it. Amateurs, on the other hand, can't release pieces until everything is just right. Their self-worth and ego are crippled by an idea of perfection that's unattainable—and the result is that they don't ship their work.

Of course, the cost of not shipping their work is that they can't create their next masterpiece.

In the same way that "real artists ship," real leaders execute. In other words, real leaders thoughtfully plan out the objectives that are most important for their companies—and then they do them. It's as simple as that.

**"IN THE SAME WAY THAT
'REAL ARTISTS SHIP,' REAL
LEADERS EXECUTE."**

But so often, people in leadership positions are crippled by the same indecision as amateur artists—waiting for things to be perfect, stuck between warring priorities, and not moving because they don't know the end result. In short, they let fear control them.

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Steven Pressfield calls this fear "Resistance." In his masterpiece, *The War of Art*, he spells out that this Resistance is a spiritual force hellbent on stopping us from doing what matters most. Whether it's losing weight, running a business, or reconciling a broken relationship, the Resistance is always there to tell you why you can't—and shouldn't—do it.

In his words, "Resistance will tell you anything to keep you from doing your work. . . . If you take Resistance at its word, you deserve everything you get. Resistance is always lying and always full of [it]." Now, in the book, he uses a different word that ends in "it"—and I'll let you fill in the blanks on that—but he makes his point well. Resistance is always lying—so don't listen to it.

Think about the things that would be the most important to do in your business:

- Rally your team around a central vision.
- Start a cadence of regular, effective meetings.
- Hold your team accountable through a weekly scoreboard.
- Outsource your job to other people so you can do new things.
- Get your business in order so you can sell it two years from now.

All of these are crucial things that many people in leadership positions won't execute on—they won't ship the work—because something else always gets in the way.

So, how do real leaders execute? Simply put, they do these three things:

- 1. THEY UNDERSTAND WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT.**
- 2. THEY SHIP THE WORK WHEN IT'S DUE—NOT WHEN IT'S PERFECT.**
- 3. THEY CALIBRATE AND FINE-TUNE AS THEY GO.**

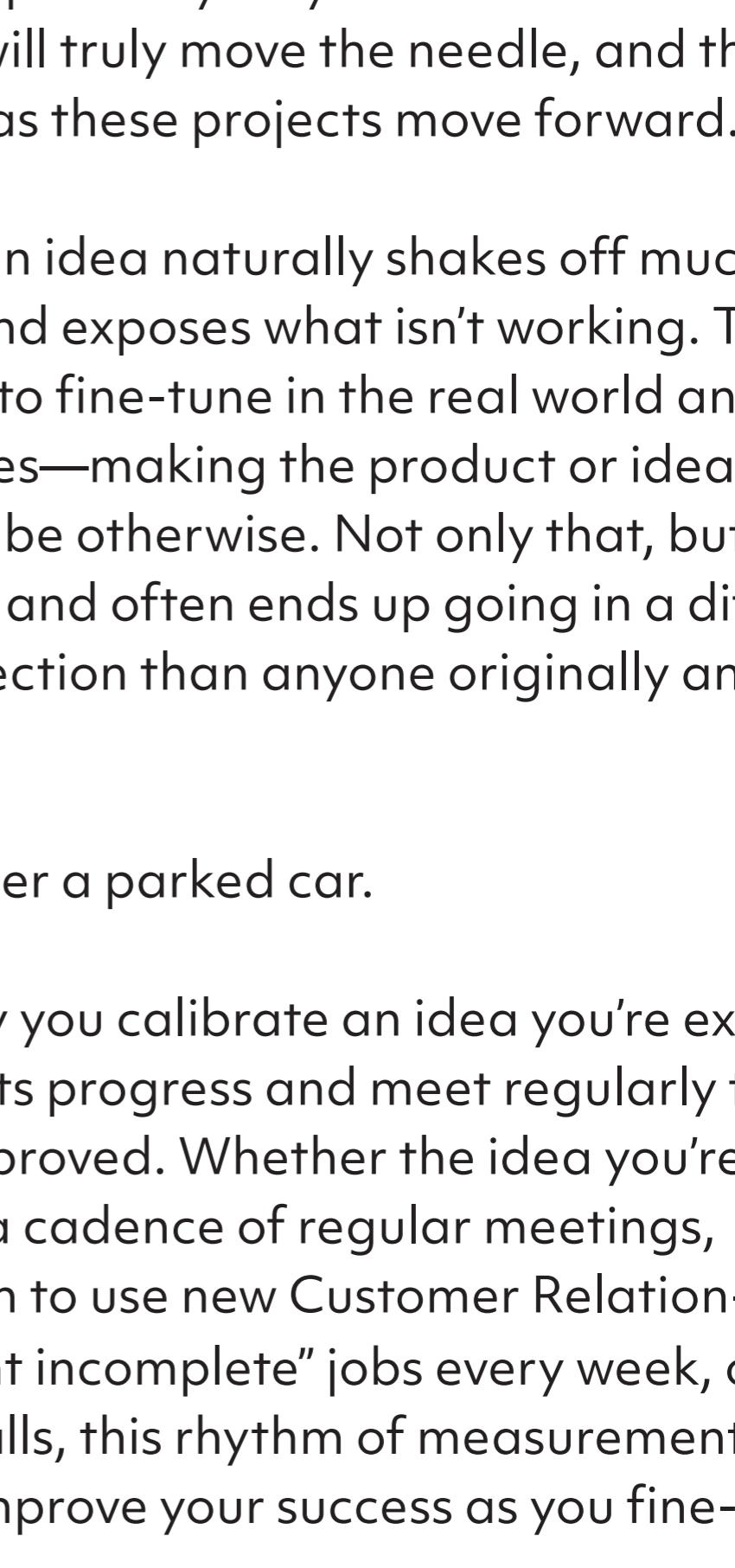
Leaders Understand What's Most Important

The sole job of leaders is to understand what's most important and shepherd their teams on their journeys toward it. And in order to decide what's most important, leaders decide what's not important—and then they let those fires burn.

In our industry, many people run around like chickens with their heads cut off. They jump from fire to fire with an ever-growing task list, neglecting what's really important to do whatever's in front of them.

Now, don't get me wrong: Some things need to get done in your business every day, and some fires are truly "all hands on deck" situations—but not many.

When we prioritize everything, we prioritize nothing, and we're held hostage to the winds of chaos that blow into our businesses on a daily basis.



To get in front of this, leaders must step out of the whirlwind to think about what's most important for their business. And this doesn't take as long as you think. Stepping out of the office for even just a few hours is all you need to start. This can result in codifying three to five priorities over the next few years that will transform your business if they're achieved. Once you have that list, document it and keep it in front of you at all times.

Understanding what's most important allows you to feel guilt-free as you let other things burn. After all, you only have so much time—so do what matters most.

Leaders Ship the Work When It's Due—Not When It's Perfect

Once you understand the three to five priorities that will move the needle for your business in the next few years, it's time to get to work—and then ship it.

As I work with businesses, I see countless owners and managers stressed out of their minds because they're doing the work of five people—all while their teams aren't being utilized. As someone in charge at a company, it's easy to be accountable to your team—solving every problem they bring to your desk—but it's worth asking how your team is accountable to you.

In most cases with retailers, I recommend starting with a weekly heartbeat report that measures key behaviors—along with the results you want to see from your team—and ensuring that all team members have the tools they need to do their work. The metrics are as follows:

Weekly Traffic Count: The number of people who came into our store this week looking at products that require a salesperson.

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Warranty Percentage: The percentage of jobs the previous week where the team went out for free.

When presented with these metrics, it's easy to pick them apart. You might ask, "What about margin?" Or maybe, "How do I track my door swings?" Or you might even say, "There are other metrics I'd like to see."

I'm used to hearing all of these responses, but here's the thing: If you wait until it's perfect, you'll never start.

So just start.

Whether it's running regular meetings, creating a scoreboard, training your team to manage their book of business, or delegating tasks you're used to doing yourself, you'll never ship the work if you're waiting for perfection.

To paraphrase Seth Godin: You don't have the meeting because it's perfect. You have the meeting because it's Tuesday.

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Leaders Calibrate and Fine-Tune as They Go

While it may be easy to criticize this mentality of executing before it's perfect, real leaders don't suffer from millions of half-baked ideas running rampant in their companies.

The reason for this is simple: They only execute on the few ideas that they believe will truly move the needle, and they calibrate and fine-tune as these projects move forward.

The forward motion of an idea naturally shakes off much of what's unnecessary and exposes what isn't working. This gives leaders the ability to fine-tune in the real world and not in their imagined ones—making the product or idea better than it could ever be otherwise. Not only that, but as the idea moves, it grows and often ends up going in a different—and better—direction than anyone originally anticipated.

Remember, you can't steer a parked car.

In your business, the way you calibrate an idea you're executing on is to measure its progress and meet regularly to discuss how it can be improved. Whether the idea you're executing on is running a cadence of regular meetings,

teaching your sales team to use new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software, measuring your "urgent incomplete" jobs every week, or

simply organizing your warehouse to set up smoother installs, this rhythm of measurement and meetings will rally your team together and radically improve your success as you fine-tune week after week.

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Conclusion

If you're a leader, your team—and your customers—need you to ship ideas that make things better. And that will never happen if you're unable to prioritize or you wait until it's perfect.

Remember, this is what amateurs do—not real leaders.

Leaders spend time thinking about what's most important—and they keep their teams laser-focused on it. They put everything they have into ideas and innovation, working relentlessly to make it as good as possible—and then they ship it. After that, they measure performance and meet with their teams to calibrate and fine-tune, using forward motion to make ideas better than they ever could have been otherwise.

Everyone fights Resistance the second they consider doing something meaningful—and amateurs cave. They let fear and insecurity drive them into what's easy and meaningless. But not so with the artist or leader.

Because real artists ship. And real leaders execute.

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Now, don't get me wrong: Some things need to get done in your business every day, and some fires are truly "all hands on deck" situations—but not many.

When we prioritize everything, we prioritize nothing, and we're held hostage to the winds of chaos that blow into our businesses on a daily basis.

To get in front of this, leaders must step out of the whirlwind to think about what's most important for their business. And this doesn't take as long as you think. Stepping out of the office for even just a few hours is all you need to start. This can result in codifying three to five priorities over the next few years that will transform your business if they're achieved. Once you have that list, document it and keep it in front of you at all times.

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