

The Simple Genius of Jony Ive

52 MIN · YOUTUBE · [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/WATCH?V=AXYBYL-5-2U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXYBYL-5-2U)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXYBYL-5-2U>

SUMMARY

Johnny Ives, the renowned designer behind many of Apple's iconic products, emphasizes a design philosophy centered on simplicity and user experience. His journey from a curious child dismantling radios to becoming a pivotal figure at Apple showcases his relentless pursuit of excellence and innovation, often challenging conventional design norms.

- Ives believes in stripping away unnecessary elements in design, focusing on what is essential for functionality and user interaction.*
- His father, Mike Ives, significantly influenced his design education, fostering a nurturing environment that encouraged creativity and craftsmanship.*
- Ives' early fascination with the Mac sparked his passion for technology, leading him to appreciate the human connection in product design.*
- At Apple, he transformed the design process by prioritizing user experience over engineering constraints, collaborating closely with Steve Jobs.*
- The iMac's success marked a turning point for Apple, showcasing Ives' ability to create products that resonate emotionally with users.*
- Ives advocates for a design approach that starts with the ideal product vision, working backward to overcome manufacturing challenges.*
- His partnership with Jobs fostered a culture of innovation at Apple, emphasizing the importance of design in product development.*
- Throughout his career, Ives has maintained a commitment to simplicity, believing it to be the cornerstone of effective design.*

I just wanted a sound bite, but he launched into a passionate 20-minute description about his latest work. I could barely get a word in edge-wise. He couldn't help himself. Design is his passion. He began telling me how keeping things simple was the overall design philosophy for the machine. He said, "We wanted to get rid of anything other than what was absolutely essential, but you don't see that effort. We kept going back to the beginning again and again and again. Do we need this part? Can we get that part to perform the function of these other four parts? It became an exercise to reduce and reduce and reduce. But it makes it easier to build and easier for people to work with. In releasing new products, companies tended to add more bells and whistles, not take them away. But here, Johnny was saying the opposite. The purpose of this book is to answer the question, how did an English art school grad with dyslexia become the world's leading technology designer? In the pages that follow, we'll meet a brilliant but unassuming man obsessed with design, whose immense and influential insights have no doubt altered the pattern of your life. That is an excerpt from the book that I'm going to talk to you about today and the one I've read for the second time, which is called Johnny IV, the genius behind Apple's greatest products and it's written by Leander Kaney. I decided to reread this book. The first time I read this book was probably five years ago.

And I wanted to read this book because I think it perfectly follows what you and I discussed last week where we just talked about Steve Jobs's time at Next. And so last week's book and last week's episode ended when Jobs comes back to Apple. And when Jobs comes back to Apple, that is when he meets Johnny Ive. And here's this great quote from Steve Jobs about Johnny IV. He says he understands what we do at our core better than anyone. If I had a spiritual partner at Apple, it's Johnny. And Johnny's a great example of this maximum that repeats throughout these biographies that true interest is revealed early. And so this book says, "As a young boy, Johnny exhibited a curiosity about the workings of things.

He became fascinated by how objects were put together, carefully dismantling radios and cassette recorders, intrigued with how they were assembled and how the pieces fit together. Johnny's father, Mike, plays a massive role in Johnny's life. From a very young age, his father is encouraging his son's interest. And he would constantly have conversations about design. And one of the best things that could have ever happened for Johnny's future career is the fact that his dad was actually hired to develop the standards for design education throughout the UK. And so this book says, "Mike was among the most distinguished teachers plucked from daily teaching by the education ministry and given the grand title of her majesty's inspector. He assumed responsibility for monitoring the quality of teaching at schools in his district, focusing specifically on design and technology. Mike IV took what became to be called design technology to a new level, establishing a place for the discipline as part of a core curriculum in UK schools. Mike helped transform what was basically a goofoff class into a design tutorial and in doing so laid the groundwork for a generation of gifted British designers.

his son would be among them. And then what I really loved is this book talks about the relationship and then his approach to how he fathered and really raised his son. He was not a pushy stage dad. Mike's influence on his son's talent was purely nurturing. He was constantly talking to Jonathan about design. If they were walking down the street together, Mike might point out different types of street lamps in various locations and ask Jonathan why he thought they were different. They were constantly keeping up a conversation about made objects and how they could be made better. Mike was relentlessly good at his job. He was a very gentle character, very knowledgeable, very generous and courteous. He was a classic English gentleman. These traits of course have also been ascribed to Johnny. Now this is what Johnny said about his relationship and the influence that his father had. My father was a very good craftsman. He had an incredible gift in terms of how you can make something yourself. Mike gave Johnny unfettered access to his workshop. Johnny could do anything he wanted with his father's support. This is what Johnny said. I've always understood the beauty of things made by hand. I came to realize that what was really important was the care that was put into it. What I really despise is when I sense some carelessness in a product. Mike was a strong advocate for teaching empirically, making and testing, and of intuitive designing, get on and make it, and then refine as you go. He described the act of drawing and sketching and talking and discussing as critical in the creative process. He advocated risk-taking and acceptance of the notion that designers may not know it all. And so, Johnny is learning design and technology in the UK. There's a bunch of his professors and his colleagues that give quotes for this book. I pulled out a few that just give you an idea of how special he was from a young age. He had a different way of presenting ideas. His ideas were novel, innovative, and fresh.

He did things that other people were not doing. He takes big chances instead of an evolutionary approach to design. And if they had focus grouped his designs, they wouldn't have been a success. And I love the way that

Johnny frames this. He talks about it's a fact that you're just respecting the work. Not building a meto product and putting in lots of effort is a way to show that you respect the work. This is a direct quote from Johnny.

There was something special about respecting the work. The idea that it actually was important and if you didn't take the time to do it, why should anybody else? When he was designing, he was so clearly in love with what he was doing. He became so fixated. And keep in mind, at this time, he's designing things like pens, hairbrushes, things that we use and things that are known. And here's a description of it. But yet his designs were incredibly simple and elegant. They were usually rather surprising but made complete sense once you saw them. You wondered why we had never seen a product like that before.

And here's another example of how Johnny respects the work. His friend comes over to his apartment. It says when he arrived he was amazed to find that the apartment was filled with more than 100 foam model prototypes of Johnny's project. His design discipline on display. When most students might build half a dozen models, Johnny had built a hundred. I had never seen anything like this. The sheer focus to get it perfect. Building scores of models and prototypes would become another trademark in his career at Apple. Now, more than a decade before he meets Steve Jobs, he falls in love with the Mac. So, it says throughout his school years, he's demonstrated no affinity whatsoever for computers. Remember, he has dyslexia.

Convinced he was technically inept, he felt frustrated because computers were clearly becoming useful tools in many aspects of life. Then Johnny met the Mac. Johnny was astounded at how much easier to use the Mac was than anything else he tried. The care the machine's designers took to shape the whole user experience struck him. He felt an immediate connection to the machine and more important to the soul of the enterprise, meaning Apple. It was the first time he felt the humanity of a product. This is what he said. It was such a dramatic moment and I remember it so clearly. There was a real sense of the people who made it. I started to learn more about Apple, how it had been founded, about its values and its structure. The more I learned about this cheeky, almost rebellious company, the more it appealed to me as it unapologetically pointed to an alternative in a complacent and creatively bankrupt industry. Apple stood for something and had a reason for being that wasn't just about making money. I love that important insight there about great products. Great products, you know, and you can feel that there's a real human behind it.

Now, I'm going to fast forward. He has a job at basically like this design consultancy. And his boss makes a big big mistake here. David Oggovoy has this great line that if you pay peanuts, you get monkeys. And Johnny understands he's more talented than his peers. His boss understands that he's more talented than his peers. So he goes to him and asks for a raise and he gets turned down. And so it says his confidence grew rapidly and after just a few weeks he asked Gray for a substantial raise. He was talented and he felt he deserved it. And this is what Gray said. I had to balance the interests of the business. I had to have a very difficult discussion. I had to explain he was on a journey on a career path. There were others around. Everyone had various strengths and weaknesses. We had to balance the books in terms of making sure everyone got a fair opportunity. We had a rational discussion, but I think he felt he didn't get the best end of the deal. And shortly thereafter, Johnny quits, leaves, and starts his own design firm.

The name of this firm is going to be Tangerine. He is just 23 years old. He's going to be one of four partners at this firm. And so, it says Johnny worked on everything from power tools to combs and televisions to toilets. The work was consistent, but not especially challenging or prestigious. And they're just a young startup. They don't have a lot of resources, so they have to have a lot of hustle. I love this idea. To attract and keep clients, the Tangerine Designers worked to make the studio look busier than it was. They remembered a trick that RWG had used. That is where Johnny was previously working. When executives from a car company came to visit, the firm's designers drove their own cars into the studio and put sheets over them, saying that they were for a secret project. That trick worked, and RWG had gotten the job. Taking RWG's queue, if a client came to visit their offices, Johnny and his Tangerine partners made sure the studio was stacked with all the prototypes and foam models they'd created on earlier projects. When the client left, the models would be put back into storage.

Most of their jobs had small budgets, but characteristically, the designers gave it their full attention. And so, it goes back to the fact that they had a lack of resources. Everything was on like the sho string budget. It says the young business also had to be careful with its finances. We were sensible people, so we never really pushed the finances too much. If we had a small overdraft or didn't have enough money at the end of the each month to pay ourselves, we would take less and try to do things sensibly. Before we jump back into the story, I want to tell you about ramp and how ramp relates to a conversation I recently had with Rick Rubin. Rick Rubin said something interesting. He said, "Beware of the assumption that the way you work is the best way simply because it's the way you've done it before." And that is exactly what RAMP has done. They have completely reinvented what a corporate credit card for your business can be.

Today, Ramp helps your business control and automate spending. And they do this by creating an all-in-one platform that gives you corporate cards for every single one of your employees, expense management, accounting automation, and AI tools that flag waste, fraud, duplicate charges, policy violations, and more. Tomorrow, RAMP is full self-driving money for your business. The median company running on RAMP cuts their expenses by 5%. The median company running on ramp also grows their revenue by 16%. So when you're running your business on ramp and your competitors are not, you have a massive competitive advantage that compounds over time. Ramp is the only all-in-one platform designed to make your finance team faster and happier. Many of the top founders and CEOs I know run their business on RAMP.

I run my business on RAM, and you should, too. make history's greatest entrepreneurs proud by going to ramp.com today to learn how to help your business save time, save money, and grow revenue. That is ramp.com. And so, at this point in his life, he's refining his own design taste. He's also reading a lot, and he's studying the great designers that came before him. He said he was a voracious reader. He also studied the work of Eileen Gray, one of the 20th century's most influential furniture designers and architects.

Modern masters also fascinated Johnny. Among them Michelle Dukuchi, who tried to make high-tech objects easy to understand by making them gentle, humane, and a bit friendly. The amount of time that Johnny talks about this in the book, about making them friendly, about wanting to he talks a lot about the fact that the user should want to touch them, but this making them more human, making them more friendly is just this reoccurring theme throughout this biography. He was also fascinated by Der Rams, the legendary designer of

Brun.

Ram's design principles were implanted into us at design school. Johnny was completely interested in humanizing technology. What something should be was always the starting point for his designs. That's another thing that's going to be repeated over and over again. Don't think about if it's possible. Just say, "Hey, we're going to start at what it should be." He had the ability to remove or ignore how any product currently is or how any engineer might say it must be. Johnny always took an independent view.

He was constantly questioning how things should be. He hated ugly, black, and tacky electronics. He hated computers having names like ZX75. He hated technology as it was in the 1990s. He looked to find his own way. He also hated being a consultant, which is the nature of the business because he could pour his heart and soul into a design, think it's wonderful, present it to the company, the company says they hate it. And in many cases, he said the problem was that they would rip the heart and soul out of the designs. And he also didn't like running a business because he'd have to sell jobs. He'd have to sell himself, sell the firm. All he wanted to do was spend every single minute designing and making objects. He says, "We were spending up to 90% of our time selling our services. Johnny wanted to devote all of his time to designing great stuff. He loved to design, but found the concessions necessary to build the business difficult." And this is what Johnny said. I worked out what I was good at and what I was bad at. It became pretty clear what I wanted to do.

I was really only interested in design. I was neither interested nor good at building a business. And lucky for Johnny, around this time he meets Bob Brunner. And it is Bob Brunner who's going to recruit him to Apple. In fact, he tried to recruit Johnny multiple times. So they hire Tangerine to do some design work for Apple. And it says, "After the presentation, as we were packing up to go, Brerer pulled Johnny to one side to speak to him privately.

He told Johnny if he really wanted to create something radical, he should come to work for Apple full-time. It was more along the lines of me mentioning that the opportunity still exists and him saying, "That's pretty interesting. Let me think about it." Johnny did think about it and he went when he went back to London. He agonized over the decision. He had enjoyed working with Apple, but he wasn't sure if he wanted to leave both his homeland and his work at Tangerine. He also wasn't sure whether his wife would want to move to the states, but he liked the reason behind the project that he worked on at Apple. The project was called Juggernaut. And this is what Johnny said. The issues I encountered on Juggernaut were unlike anything I had dealt with before. The principal challenge was to give personality and meaning to a technology that at the time was still being treated as though it were anonymous. This interested me a lot. Also important was the fact that Apple offers a supportive environment.

It's the kind of place where a designer can focus less on day-to-day business and more on design as a craft. Finally, Johnny made the call. This is how he remembered it. Through some sort of reckless sense of faith, I got to yes. And so, at the age of 27, Johnny accepts a full-time position at Apple. And so the book describes this process where Johnny has to fix the design of this product that's not doing really well. It's called the Newton. It's something that the CEO of the time, John Skully, had come up with. And so I'm going to read a couple parts

from this section. But I think one of the most important ideas, and really the reason why I want to bring this to your attention is because something that Johnny does over and over again, his starting point on a design and creating a new product is always to start with what is the story of this product? And so he'll describe that to us in a minute. So it says, "The first Newton hadn't yet been released, but the design team already hated it. Thanks to a rushed production schedule, the first model had some serious flaws that Apple's executives and designers were eager to fix." To get a grip on the project, Johnny started with the design story. That is by asking himself, "What's the story of this product?" CEO Skullly called it a PDA, but for Johnny, that definition was just too slippery.

The problem with the first Newton was that it didn't relate to people's everyday lives. Johnny said it didn't offer a metaphor that users could grasp. So he said about fixing that. To most people a lid is just a lid. So the cover of the Newton. But Johnny gave it special attention. So this is another thing that recurs throughout Johnny's career. He spends a lot of time thinking about your first interaction with any kind of product. It's the first thing you see and the first thing you interact with. Before you can turn the product on, you must first open the lid. I wanted that moment to be special. Johnny was pushing himself to create something special. To do the best design, you have to live and breathe the product. It becomes like a love affair. The process is exhilarating and exhausting. So this executive of Apple sees the designs, the finished designs that Johnny has, and he's like, "Hey, you're going to win every single design award." And Johnny nearly did based on the work that he did on the Newton. Now, here's another interesting thing about him. the fact that he wants to spend all of his time designing. So much so that he wouldn't go to the award shows to pick up the awards. One of the things about Johnny that struck them was Johnny's dislike of awards or rather his dislike for receiving awards in public. Even early on, Johnny Ives stated that he was not going to go to these events. That was interesting behavior because it was really different. He hated going up on stage and receiving awards. Now, even though they're winning design awards, Johnny's still not happy. And this is going to be something that him and Steve Jobs are going to reverse. Remember this is Apple before Steve Jobs comes back.

Johnny was frustrated because although he had worked really hard on it, he had to make a lot of compromises because of the engineering elements. So at this point, engineers told designers what the product was going to be and then designers essentially had to put like a nice skin on it. Designers essentially work for engineers. At this point, Steve Jobs is going to reverse this. He had to make a lot of compromises because of the engineering elements. Afterwards at Apple, he went on to be in a position where he could not only influence engineering but also manage and control that process. So he becomes Brunner's second in command. Says Johnny IV was very serious about his work. He had a ferocious intensity about it. He was calm but very deep. He was very serious but also a really nice guy. He led in a quiet way. He inspired people to work for him. Within a couple of years, Johnny hired most of the rest of the team that would go on to make the iMac, the iPod, and the iPhone. And I love the way they thought about hiring new talent. It's like, hey, we have a very small but insanely talented group of A players. We have to be very, very, very careful who we let in here. So, when they look to recruit somebody else, this is what they look for. We wanted to be impressed with a designer to the point of intimidation.

I absolutely love that idea. It made me think of something I heard on Tim Ferris's podcast one time. So, this guy named Graham Duncan, who I know, who's also an investor, came on Tim's podcast and he talked about

obsession. It's almost a direct echo of what Johnny IV is saying right here. One question I like to ask, this is Graham Duncan speaking. One question I like to ask people is if you're hiring an analyst, what criteria are you looking for in the analyst? And people who've been managing money and managing people before begin to look for things in their analysts that make those analysts most valuable to them. And this guy said to me, what I'm looking for is a trace of fear in myself that this guy is coming for me, that he will replace me. And I think what he's capturing is that level of intensity, that obsessiveness that you see in a minority in any field because they found the game they want to play and they bring an intensity and an obsessiveness to it that over time they're just working so much harder.

It's like Wayne Gretzky finding hockey at age five. He's obsessed and he's just doing it over and over and over again. And there are people in the finance industry who are like this in any industry really. And there are people who are in the finance industry who are like this. They're just obsessed in a really distinctive way. Warren Buffett from a young age obsessed. So, I love that idea. We want to be impressed with a designer to the point of intimidation.

Going back to what Graham Duncan said, "What I'm looking for is a trace of fear in myself that this guy is coming for me." Let's go back to this idea of how Apple was set up at this time. And again, something that Johnny wanted to fix and that Steve Jobs and Johnny fixed together. At every step, they faced resistance from the engineers. There were layers and layers of middle managers and they did not understand this design-driven approach. They were accustomed to slapping a cheap metal skin on a product. They didn't really believe in what we were doing. And senior management of the company at the time didn't step in and they just move so slow. There's all these layers. In one case, there was four years between when the designer, this was Brunner, the the guy leading Johnny's boss. Brunner had written this conceptual brief. From the time he writes it to the time the product exists, four years elapses. And so there's this great quote by uh Jeff Bezos where he says, you know, if um if you're not moving fast, if you can't make decisions fast, you're just going to lose great people. Even if they agree with the mission, they're going to look around like, hey, I can't build anything. Why am I here? So Brunner winds up leaving. He says, I was, and he describes why, and I think this tells us a lot about the culture of Apple's time.

I was spending more and more time in management meetings where I would be there for eight hours and only really needed to be there for 30 minutes. You feel like you're atrophying, like you are literally wasting away. And this is really, really wild. It says Apple had become an experiment in extreme democracy. So this is what the designers are having to fight against. There had to be consensus on every decision involving all the interested parties. Steering committees would be set up to guide new products to market. You will not believe this. You will This is insane. And this is why they did this. A lot of people in Apple considered Steve Jobs's approach beforehand tyrannical and misguided. They didn't believe in funneling an entire project through one person. They believed doing so resulted in lopsided products that exhibited all the strengths and weaknesses of its creator. Instead, the steering committee that such like a dystopian even name for something. Instead, the steering committee approach brought every discipline involved in a project together. So engineering, software, marketing, product design, industrial design, manufacturing and required discussion and consensus at every stage of development. This makes me want to throw up. Product development by consensus proved extremely bureaucratic.

Yeah. No one. No Whenever a new product was proposed, three documents Oh my god. When Sorry. Whenever a new product was proposed, three documents had to be drawn up. a marketing requirement document, an engineering requirement document, and a user experience document. The three documents would then be sent upstairs to be reviewed by another committee of executives. And this is what Bob Brunner said about this process and the products that result from a process like this.

Johnny IV would no doubt agree with this. He says, "The businessman wants to create something for everyone, which leads to products that are middle of the road. It becomes about consensus. And that's why you rarely see the spark of genius. And Johnny is thinking about quitting as well. Only a few months after being put in charge of the design group, he was also thinking of quitting. This is what Johnny said about Apple. At the time, it was a company that certainly wasn't innovating. We lost our identity and looked to competition for leadership. And then Steve Jobs returns.

Before Johnny could quit, John Rubenstein, his new boss, talked him out of it. Just recruited as Apple's head of hardware, the same job he held working with Steve Jobs at Nex. You see how the last two episodes are now directly linked. Rubenstein gave Johnny a raise and told him going forward things are going to be very very different. We told Johnny that we were going to struggle to get through where the company was then and that once we turned the company around we were going to make history.

Those were the terms we used to keep him at Apple and also that henceforth design was going to be really valued at this company. Rubenstein's promise would be fulfilled. The era during which it took 3 years to get products out of the door ended. In the coming years, the rate at which new products and new ideas were adopted, many of them from Johnny's fertile brain would be nothing less than remarkable. And so then Johnny is sitting in the room when Steve comes and addresses the Apple employees. And Steve says, "Tell me what's wrong with this place." Before anyone could reply, he burst out, "It's the products. The products suck. There's no sex in them anymore." Johnny was in the room sitting towards the back. He wanted to quit. But as he sat there thinking about returning to England, Jobs said something that gave him pause. Jobs told the group that Apple would be returning to its roots. I remember very clearly Steve announcing that our goal is not just to make money, but to make great products. The decisions you make based on that philosophy are fundamentally different from the ones we had been making at Apple. When Jobs returned to Apple in 1997, the company had 40 products on the market. To appreciate the baffling nature of Apple's kitchen sink strategy at the time, consider the company's computer lineup. There were four main lines. The Quadra, the Power Mac, the Performer, and the PowerBook. Each of these was split into a dozen different models which were delineated from one another with confusing product names.

You won't even believe this. So, for example, the Perform 5200 CD. Then there was the Perform 5210 CD. the Perform 5215 CD and the Perform 5220 CD. And that was just computers. Apple had branched out into a wide-ranging product portfolio, selling everything from printers, scanners, and monitors to Newton handhelds. To Steve, this made no sense. And this is what Steve said. I started to ask people, why would I recommend a 3400 over a 4,400? Why should somebody jump up to a 6500 but not to 7,300? And after 3 weeks, I couldn't figure this out. and if I couldn't figure this out, how could our customers figure this out? And so at this point,

Steve's going through every single part of the company. Says he started a thorough product review. He set up in a large conference room and called in the product teams one at a time. The teams, often numbering 20 or 30 people, would present their products and take questions from Steve and the other executives. After several weeks during a big strategy meeting, Jobs had had enough. "Stop!" he screamed. "This is crazy." He then jumped up and went to the whiteboard. He drew a simple chart of Apple's annual revenues. The chart showed the sharp decline from 12 billion a year to 10 billion and then 7 billion.

Jobs explained that Apple could not be a profitable \$12 billion company or a profitable \$10 billion company, but it could be a profitable \$6 billion company. That meant radically simplifying Apple's product pipeline. Jobs erased the whiteboard and drew a very simple 2x two grid in its place. Across the top, he wrote consumer and professional. And down the side, he wrote portable and desktop. Welcome to Apple's new product strategy. Apple would only sell four machines. Two would be notebooks, the other two desktops.

Two machines aimed at pros, two machines aimed at consumers. It was a radical move, cutting the company to the bone. In a single stroke, Jobs doomed dozens of software projects and eliminated almost every product from Apple's hardware lineup. Over the next 18 months, more than 4,200 full-time staff were laid off. By 1998, Apple had shrunk to only 6,000 people, half the company had in 1995. But the balance sheet was brought under control.

And then in true Steve Jobs fashion, he's able to describe what he wants to do in a very simple metaphor. Says Jobs did not want to compete in the broader market for personal computers, which was dominated by companies making generic machines. These companies competed on price. Jobs figured that was a race to the bottom. Instead, he argued that there's no reason that well-designed, well-made computers couldn't command the same market share and margins as a luxury automobile. A BMW might get you where you're going in the same way as a Chevy that costs half the price, but there will always be those who will pay for the better ride in a sexier car.

Rather than competing with the commodity PC makers, why not make only first class products with high margins so that Apple could continue to develop even better first class products? The company could make much bigger profits from selling a \$3,000 machine rather than a \$500 machine, even if they sold fewer of them. Why not then just concentrate on making the best \$3,000 machines around? And there's other benefits to the strategy. Says fewer products meant less inventory, which would have an immediate effect on the bottom line. Jobs was able to save Apple over \$300 million in inventory in just one year and avoided having warehouses full of unsold machines.

And so the perspective that Steve had and the language that he used really appealed to Johnny says for jobs design amounted to more than just appearances. He said most people make the mistake of thinking design is what it looks like. People think it's this veneer that the designers are handed this box and told make it look good. That's not what we think design is. It's not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works. And so this is when Steve goes looking for his A team. Job's plan for switching up the teams at Apple upon his return was just as straightforward as his notions for simplifying the product portfolio. He would cut back so that his A

team, the company's best designers, engineers, programmers, and marketers could concentrate on making innovative products. And this is when he meets Johnny. So he's touring Apple's design studio. when he says he was bowled over by the creativity and rigor he saw. This studio was full of eye-catching mock-ups that the previous regime had been too timid to consider. Steve bonded with Johnny who would later say that he and Jobs saw eye to eye immediately. We were on the same wavelength. I suddenly understood why I loved the company. And then Johnny is describing the philosophy behind his designs and he was it was deliberately countered position to what was going on in the industry at the time. So it says Johnny explained his thinking this way. The computer industry is an industry that has become incredibly conservative from a design perspective. It is an industry where there's an obsession about product attributes that you can measure empirically. How fast is it? How big is the hard drive? How fast is the CD? That is very comfortable space to compete in because you can say eight is better than six. But Johnny offered a key insight.

It is also very inhuman and very cold. Because of the industry's obsession with attributes, there has been a tendency to ignore product attributes that are difficult to measure or talk about. In that sense, the industry has missed out on the more emotive, less tangible product attributes. But to me, that is why I bought an Apple computer in the first place. That is why I came to work for Apple. It's because I've always sensed that Apple had a desire to do more than the bare minimum. It wasn't just going to do what was functionally and empirically necessary. In their early products, I got a sense that care was taken even on details hard and soft that people may never discover. Before we get back into this, I want to tell you about Vanta. Vanta. Vanta. Vanta.

Vanta helps your company prove you're secure so more customers will use your product or service. Vanta is an AI powered security expert that scales with you. The more your business grows, the more complex your security needs get and that complexity can turn into chaos. Vanta tames that chaos for you. Vanta automates compliance, continuously monitors your controls, and gives you a single source of truth for compliance and risk. So whether you're a fast growing startup or an enterprise company, Vanta fits easily into your existing workflows. Vanta helps you build a company that your customers can trust. Many companies will not sign contracts unless you're certified, and this is causing you to lose out on sales. That is why the average Vanta customer reports a 526% return on investment after becoming a Vanta customer. Automate your compliance, security, and trust with Vanta. Go to vanta.com/founders and you can get \$1,000 off. That is vanta.com/founders.

And then one more thing I want to tell you about before you jump back into the story. I love this quote by Steve Jobs and you see it in this episode. He says, "A small team of A players can run circles around a giant team of B and C players. Given that you're well advised to go after the cream of the cream, you have to build a team that pursues the A players. That is exactly what Apple has done. Apple has built a \$180 billion public company with just a few hundred people because their ad platform converts ads into revenue for your business. Their advertising platform, Axon, can connect you with over a billion potential new customers. Axon allows you to capture undivided attention. Axon ads are full screen videos that are watched for an average of 35 seconds. That's retention that blows other ad platforms out of the water. You can launch in minutes. You set the goal and Axon achieves it.

There's no complex setup, no expertise needed. Johnny, I would love this. And Axon scales quickly. Other

businesses have seen immediate results, scale to hundreds of thousands of dollars of spend per day and increase their revenue by millions. So you want to get started quickly before all of your competitors are on Axon. And you can get started by going to axon.ai/founders. That is axon.ai/founders. And so this is when they start working on the iMac and they have to design something new, innovative, and successful and they have to do it fast because they're running out of money. So it says the iMac had to be on the market in a matter of months or Apple would go out of business. And this is when they reversed the process of how they build computers at Apple. Prior to the iMac, hardware engineering and mechanical engineering drove the design process.

They designed the size of the enclosure due to engineering constraints. And Johnny's team were tasked to develop skins to go around this enclosure. When Steve returned to Apple, he and Johnny turned this process on its head. And so it was Johnny's idea to put a handle on top of the first iMac. And he describes why. Again, he goes back to this humanizing technology. Make it friendly, make it approachable. He wants you to touch it. For Johnny, the handle on the iMacs was not really for carrying it around, but to build a bond with a consumer by encouraging them to touch it. It was an important but almost intangible innovation that would change the way people interacted with computers. Back then, people weren't comfortable with technology. Johnny explained, "If you're scared of something, then you won't touch it." I could see my mom being scared to touch this. So, I thought if there's a handle on it, it makes a relationship possible.

It's approachable. It's intuitive. It gives you permission to touch. It gives a sense of its difference to you. The idea also came with a downside. Unfortunately, manufacturing a recessed handle costs a lot of money. At the old Apple, I would have lost that argument. What was really great about Steve is that he saw it and said, "That's cool." He intuitively got it. He just knew that it was part of the iMac friendliness and playfulness. And this is one of the reasons our partnership was so valuable, why it worked so well. Remember, he was saying, "Hey, I had all these designs. I had no nobody in the Apple executive in the senior management would fight for me." Steve fights for him. And this is what Steve said when we took this to the engineers. They came up with 38 reasons they couldn't do it. And I said, "No, no, we're doing this." And they said, "Well, why?" And I said, "Because I'm the CEO and I think it can be done." And they did it. What Steve Jobs brought to the table was no compromise. He focused on what the product was supposed to be, just like Johnny. And the result is going to be a massive hit. So the iMac began shipping on August 15th, 1998.

Steve had bet the future of Apple on the machine. And during the summer leading up to its release, Apple spent \$100 million on advertising, \$100 million over the summer on one product. And before it goes on sale, the tech press, they're hugely negative. They're listing all the reasons that it's not going to sell. And the president of Comp USA, which was a huge retail at the time, said, "Actually, we're going to sell lots of them. This is the sexiest computer I've ever seen."

And the reaction from customers was unmistakable. It sold 278,000 units in the first 6 weeks and would sell 800,000 by the end of the year, making it the fastest selling computer in Apple history. The iMac was Johnny's coming out party, the first product that gained him public attention. Overnight, Johnny was celebrated as one of the world's most daring and original designers. And then I love this part of the book where it sets up what's going to come after. The creation of the iMac forged a bond between Jobs and Johnny that would evolve into

one of the most fruitful creative partnerships in the modern era. Between them, they changed Apple's engineering driven culture into a design-driven one. And this is what Johnny said. In a company that was born to innovate, the real risk is to play it safe. Steve has a clear vision of what it is going to take to get the company back to its roots. what it would take to get at the essence of Apple, what it takes to structure the company to be something that can design and make new things. And then Johnny tells a great story about how fast Steve made the decision and gave the final approval for all the different iMac colors. If you remember over 25 years ago, they started making these computers in all it's like a almost like a rainbow of colors. I think Steve Jobs referred to as like lifesavers like the candy. And the direct contrast is remember it goes back to before Steve came back. Apple was going to lose all his design talent because it's like hey I wrote this brief and it takes four years to get the product out the door. Steve wanted to make Apple into the world's fastest company. And so he drops by the studio.

Johnny shows him the colors and it says Johnny was amazed at the speed with which Jobs gave his approval for the new colors. Johnny says in most places that decision would have taken months. Steve did it in a half hour. And then they describe Apple's game plan at this time. The iMac launch and continuing development defined the game plan that Apple would use to such devastating effect with later products like the iPod. They created a breakthrough product, then quickly and relentlessly polished it with rapid new releases. And then simplicity flows through every single thing they do, even the way they communicate with each other. So now they want to develop a laptop. And the design brief was simple. It says, "Bring the iMac to laptops." And Johnny says, "We didn't do focus groups. We don't do focus groups because that is the job of the designer. It is unfair to ask people who don't have a sense of the opportunities of tomorrow from the context of today to design. And so as they're changing Apple from an engineering driven culture to a design one, there's a lot of turnover. So keep in mind Johnny is head of ID industrial design. And it says we more or less replaced the entire mechanical engineering group. A lot of old-timers quit. They couldn't take the pace. We reduced product development from 3 years to 9 months. We made Apple one of the fastest companies in tech. ID, which again is what Johnny's in charge of, has the final say on everything. Johnny's group was the most powerful voice in the company. The biggest thing that you had to understand about working with ID was that it was never an option to tell them no. Even if what they wanted to do seemed expensive, ridiculous, or even impossible, you had to make it happen.

You had to do whatever it took to get the job done. And so there's just a lot of great quotes from Johnny IV in this book. Here's one. The decisive factor is fanatical care beyond the obvious stuff. The obsessive attention to details that are often overlooked. And his entire team is like that. He says we're a pretty maniacal group of people. If we design a button, there might be 50 models of the home button or the volume switch. We look at the edge detail and ask how far out does it protrude? Does it have a shaft? Is it round? Is it metal? Is it plastic? The size, length, width, height, every single detail is very cleverly crafted. Here's another great quote by Johnny live. The thing is, it's very easy to be different, but very difficult to be better. And again, this is a great description of the role that Johnny's department played at Apple when Steve Jobs came back. It says ID was the heartbeat of the company. And then I thought the description of the environment they work in was really interesting. It's light. There's a lot of music. I think they have like 20 speakers throughout the design studio.

Says the space is messy and chaotic with boxes, parts, samples, bikes, and toys everywhere. The atmosphere feels light and fun. Someone might be skateboarding, doing jumps, or kicking around a soccer ball. Steve Jobs would

often turn up the music when he visited, but he did this for more than just sonic pleasures. When Steve came in, he wanted the conversation to be between him and the person he was talking to. In all these open spaces, if it's quiet, it's really easy to hear what people are talking about. When he came in, he would turn the music up so that his voice would carry directly to one person only. You really couldn't hear what he was saying.

Because he viewed the studio as Apple's ideas factory, he wanted no leaks. Apple's most secretive department is Johnny's group. Even Johnny was forbidden from telling his wife what he's working on. And then I thought this contrast between Apple's design group and Samsung's was fascinating. There's 16 odd designers focusing on refining and improving Apple's products and manufacturing processes. By comparison, Samsung has a thousand designers working in 34 research centers around the world.

Apple had 16 in one spot. And so in the book, it also talks about how Johnny manages, how he leads, says he's very protective of his design team. He will take the blame personally for any screw-ups. He would fall on his sword for the weakest part of the design. If something is not up to snuff, he would personally say it was his fault. He would never throw any of the other ID members under the bus. In fact, after Steve died, Johnny was giving this interview with Vanity Fair and there's a couple interesting things he said. One of the most interesting things he said was Steve Jobs view on exactly this. And this is what Johnny said. I remember asking Steve about this. I said it could be perceived that in his critique of a piece of work he was a little harsh and we had been putting our heart and soul into this and so I asked him could we not moderate the things we said a little and he said why and I said because I care about the team and Steve said this brutally brilliant insightful thing he said no Johnny you're just really vain you just want people to like you surprised at you I thought you held the work up as the most important not how you believe you were perceived by other people. And Johnny says, "And I was terribly cross because I knew he was right." And so there's actually one brutally brilliant insight that I found in the Steve Jobs biography written by Walter Isaacson. It said, "One of Job's talents was spotting markets that were filled with second rate products." And so this book that I have in front of me tells the story of building the iPod.

And that's exactly what they did. They targeted, they loved music obviously, but they targeted a market full of second rate products. says, "An MP3 player seemed a particularly obvious target, partly because the early devices they saw on the market function poorly. The products stank." And so there's an entire chapter that goes into the making of the iPod. There's a lot of interesting insights in there, but I thought this one sentence that describes Johnny's design for it is perfect. He says, "It seemed appropriate for the design effort to be to simplify, remove, and reduce." And they go into the fact that the iPod, like many of the things that they're making, they are customer number one. The north star is let's just build the products we want to use. It says it it was a product that we were looking forward to getting our hands on.

And there's all these endearing anecdotes in the book where it's like they see it for the first time. Like Jobs, the first time Jobs could play a song off an early iPod prototype, he goes, "Oh my god, this is going to be so cool." And then I want to point out the media's response to the iPod. Now, keep in mind with everything I'm about to read to you, Apple is going to sell 450 million iPods. and listen to how it was received. When Jobs first pulled the iPod from his jeans pocket, the reaction from the audience was muted. It didn't seem that exciting, especially when the audience learned of its price. \$499, nearly \$500 for an MP3 player, and one that only worked on the

Mac. Early reviewers were just as skeptical, with one saying that the iPod stood for idiots price our devices.

The iPod sold only modestly at first and didn't take off until 2 years later when it was made fully compatible with Windows. Still, the seeds of the iPod successes were sewn with the first device and Johnny was confident in the new product. Looking back on the process, Steve Jobs believed that the creation of the iPod was quintessential Apple. If there was ever a product, this is what Steve said. If there was ever a product that catalyzed Apple's reason for being, it's this. because it combines Apple's incredible technology base with Apple's legendary ease of use with Apple's awesome design. Those three things come together in this and it's like this is what we do. So if anybody was wondering why Apple's on the earth, I hold the iPod up as a good example.

And then we go back to people observing the way Johnny works and describing it. And there's some great insights on innovation here. It says innovation is rarely about a big idea. More usually, it's about a series of small ideas brought together in a new and better way. Johnny's fanatical drive for excellence is, I think, most evident in the stuff beyond the obvious. The stuff you perhaps don't notice that much, but which makes a difference to how you interact with the product, how you feel about it. Come on, this is beautiful.

Think about the way that Johnny was describing his early experience when he discovered the Mac. He was describing the work that went into that product in the same manner in which this person is describing the way that Johnny works. It is most evident in the stuff beyond the obvious, the stuff you perhaps don't notice that much, but which makes a difference to how you interact with the product and how you feel about it. That's incredible how this ties together. This is like these are like six chapters apart, these two ideas.

Actually, it's one idea. These two statements about a single idea are like six chapters apart in this book. That's beautiful. And then let's go back to the fact that Johnny says, "Hey, I'm telling the design story. I'm starting with what the product should be. I'm not thinking of any limitations." It's exactly the same thing that they said about Steve Jobs. Listen to what Johnny would say to suppliers because, okay, keep in mind, so I got to read one paragraph to you before this to understand how interesting it is the way that Johnny frames what he's trying to do to his suppliers. So the first paragraph is Apple's designers spend 10% of their time doing traditional industrial design. So that's coming up with ideas, drawing, making models, brainstorming.

They spend 90% of their time working with manufacturing and figuring how to implement their ideas. So when then Johnny will spend months away from his family in China trying to figure out how to manufacture these designs. And so something he said that I thought was really interesting says he told suppliers imagine because again he doesn't want any limitations. I don't want to say oh this is impossible we can't do this. We want to start from the ideal product. We're going to envision that and many times sketch it out. We're going to envision that product and we're going to work backwards from that. So he says to the suppliers, imagine I have a bucket of money in my hand. I will let you pull out as much as you want to make this happen. And this goes back to just how dedicated and hardworking he is.

He's telling the story. So he's in China at they're working with Foxcon to try to figure out how to produce a lot of these these designs. And there's I don't there was a 2003 outbreak of SARS. And so Johnny gets quarantined.

So he has to live in a dormitory at Foxcon for three months. And so Johnny and his team, they're flying back and forth from Certino to China. And then sometimes they're gone for weeks at a time and sometimes they have to stay there for months. Another great quote from Johnny that again he just repeats. He has a handful of core ideas he built his career off of just like many of history's greatest entrepreneurs do. He just repeats them over and over again. When we're in these early stages in a design, often we'll talk about the story for the product.

How many times has he repeated that already? We're talking about perception. We're talking about how you feel about the product, not in a physical sense, but in a perceptual sense. Remember what Johnny said that, hey, if you're trying to be an innovative company, the worst risk, the risk you have is thinking that you can actually play it safe. That is super dangerous. So, they're talking about the development of the iPhone before they could even do it. And I love this description of Apple at the time before they invented the iPhone. They were a successful computer company. They were a successful music company and they were about to enter a field that was dominated by giants. Apple had absolutely no name in the phone industry. They had no credibility. And then Johnny talks about just how difficult it was making iPhone that they almost gave up. Says it was clear that the prototype was still a disaster. It wasn't just buggy. It flat out didn't work. The phone dropped calls constantly. The battery stopped charging before it was full. Data and applications routinely became corrupted and unusual. The list of problems seemed endless. At the end of the demo, Job said, "We don't have a product yet."

Johnny said, "We nearly shelved the phone because we thought there were fundamental problems that we just couldn't solve." And then I want to jump ahead to the chapter on the iPad. I think there's something there's a very interesting insights here. So this is 2007 and at the time all these other companies are producing netbooks. And so it says netbooks accounted for about 20% of the laptop market, but Apple never seriously considered making one. Why? Because Steve said, "Netbooks aren't better than anything. They're just cheap laptops."

Johnny's response to this is going to lead to the iPad to focusing resources on developing the iPad, I should say. But I think that's a great prompt for your thinking. What is your product better then? Are you just making a cheap laptop? You can choose to make a cheap laptop or you can make an iPad. And so it says, Johnny proposed that the tablets in his lab could be Apple's answer to the netbook. Johnny suggested that a tablet was basically an inexpensive laptop without a keyboard.

Why is that so important? Again, refusing to make me too products. Both Steve and Johnny repeat that over and over again. Fast forward a few years. In by 2011, shipments of iPads rapidly overtook those of netbooks. 63 million iPads were sold versus 30 million netbooks. Think about it. A single product outsold an entire product category. And then more on just this beautiful partnership between Johnny IV and Steve Jobs. Johnny IV has more operational power than anyone else at Apple except me. There is no one who can tell him what to do or to butt out. That is the way I set it up. And then Johnny says, "These ideas that come from me and my team would have been completely irrelevant. They would have gone nowhere if Steve hadn't been there to push us, work with us, and drive through all the resistance to turn our ideas into products. The thing is, you could transplant me and this design group to another place, and we wouldn't work at all. And then you go back to that life-changing decision that Johnny I've made. I'm going to leave my design firm that I founded and London and

I'm going to move to California and work at Apple.

And he did that because his north star was I don't want to build a business. I just want to design. And I again I think this paragraph just he describes a scenario that if you're in it, you found your life's work. All I've ever wanted to do is design and make. It's what I love doing. It's great if you can find what you love to do. Finding it is one thing, but then to be able to practice that and be preoccupied with that is another.

And then Johnny repeats this idea that he believed in, that Steve believed in, that Steve said when he came back to Apple that caused Johnny to pause and not quit. This is what Johnny says. Our goal isn't to make money. Our goal absolutely Apple is not to make money. This may sound a little flippant, but it's the truth. Our goal and what gets us excited is to try to make great products. We trust that if we are successful, people will like them. And if we are operationally competent, we will make a profit. But we are very clear about our goal. And then the book ends right where it began with Johnny's religious dedication to simplicity.

Remember he said it seemed appropriate for the design effort to be to simplify, remove, and reduce. So this says the process of simplification is design 101, a mindset that every design student is taught in school, but not every student adopts it and it is rarely applied with the ruthless disciplined practiced by Johnny. If there's such a thing as a single secret to what Johnny IV does, it is to follow slavishly to the simplification philosophy.