

Nadine McCarthy on Jack Dorsey

Jack Dorsey is a highly successful entrepreneur and leader within the tech community. He was the co-founder and former CEO of Twitter, and additionally is the co-founder and CEO of Square. As the current chairman of Twitter, Jack currently balances two formal roles across both companies, spending eight to ten hours at each company every day.

Jack is an extremely interesting individual, with a range of external passions that include technology, botany and fashion. He is obsessed with the goal of transforming systems and networks within communities and has the long-term career ambition to serve as the Mayor of New York City. He met with Mayor Bloomberg to discuss his ambition and received the advice to “earn a ton of money first”. It seems that Jack is on his way there!

I found two aspects of Jack’s biography particularly interesting. Firstly, he manages a fantastically heavy workload today and I wanted to study his life to better understand how he manages the different commitments in his life. Secondly, he was able to come back from a devastating career blow when he was removed as CEO of Twitter early on in his career, and I was interested in better understanding what lessons he learnt from this difficult situation.

Managing a Heavy Workload:

Jack manages the heavy commitments in his life in three ways. Firstly, he has an unusual ability to remain focused on the task at hand. Secondly, he breaks up large tasks and identifies areas of overlap by creating themes for each day. This to me was analogous to the Total Leadership philosophy of trying to identify areas of overlap across our different domains. Finally, he has a clear leadership vision and a deep understanding of his goals and motivations. He is driven by a meaningful sense of purpose and sees himself as a craftsman rather than entrepreneur – building a service rather than a company.

Learning from Failure:

Jack has spent a lot of time reflecting on what went wrong at Twitter and realized that he wasn’t strong in his convictions and additionally did a poor job explaining where he wanted to go and communicating his vision to bring other people on board. During several of our classes we have discussed the need to tell stories to communicate our vision and this is a great example of someone learning the lesson the hard way. As Square’s CEO, he bends over backward to be explicit, to communicate and to guide. He hosts a “town square” company meeting every Friday, where he talks about aspirations and values. He additionally organizes trips to visit “beautiful things” to help his staff better understand why he considers design so important.

An interesting little known fact about Jack Dorsey is that he has a black nine-inch tattoo, in the shape of a thick S running down his left forearm. The tattoo is said to represent an integral – it symbolizes integrating everything in his life. One way in which he is able to do this is through making full use of technology and his first task of the day is to text his mother. In addition, it appears that he has developed a significant overlap in his community, work and personal spheres with contacts that frequently cross all three areas. Finally, Jack lives right by both offices, which presumably also allows him to maximize free time outside of the work through a short commute.

There are a number of lessons from Jack that I will be applying in my own life going forward. Firstly, he is skilled at identifying and acting on areas of overlap across domains as well as within domains. I really like the idea of applying different themes to each day, and will think about how to best do it going forward. It gives the day a broad sense of purpose, and would allow me to tackle seemingly different activities with a single and unified mindset.

Secondly, I was inspired by Jack's ability to bounce back and learn from his mistakes. Fighting back after a public failure must not have been easy, but he was able to follow his passion and use it to create a company that essentially applies a parallel solution to a different category.

Finally, Jack is driven by a deeper sense of purpose and has a long-term vision to give back to the community that I truly admire. His lesson about the need to communicate our vision to others really brought to life the impact this can have and this is something that I will be paying special attention to going forward.

References:

- 1) U tube interviews
- 2) Vanity Fair article
- 3) Fortune magazine