



CEO COACHING
international

Apple Computer Pioneer David Sun Says, "Be a Sponge"

Steve Sanduski: In Mark Moses' first book called Make Big Happen, he shared the five things that the CEOs of the top performing companies spent the most of their time focusing on. One of those five things was learning. He said top CEOs are lifelong learners and in today's show, we talk about this idea of being a sponge and learning something new every day and why that is absolutely critical to being a top performing CEO.

Steve Sanduski: Hello everybody and welcome back to the CEO coaching international podcast. I'm your host Steve Sanduski and my guest today is David Sun. David has 30 years of experience penetrating international markets in the technology industry, including introducing Compaq computer, which is now part of Hewlett Packard, into China. He also established Apple computer in Hong Kong and he founded a company that became the fifth largest reseller of Apple products worldwide. David is also an investor, he's an entrepreneur and he's a global leader in technology, marketing, strategic planning, manufacturing and corporate structure. He is also a longtime member of YPO and a coach here at CEO coaching international. With that, please enjoy my conversation with CEO coaching internationals David Sun.

Steve Sanduski: David, welcome to the show.

David Sun: Hey Steve. I'm excited to be on.

Steve Sanduski: Yeah, well it's great to have you here. You're a coach here at CEO coaching international and as you and I were chatting here before we went live is, you have an amazing background and so this is going to be a really fascinating conversation about some of the different experiences that you've had, what you've learned over that time. I think where I'd like to start here is, as you think about your career, as you think about your success as an entrepreneur, as a CEO, is there a word or a phrase that you would use that would basically summarize how you think about your success and career as an entrepreneur and a CEO?

David Sun: Yes. I actually always tell people that every day when I wake up, I want to be a sponge. I want to learn everything from everyone, from everything that I touch and see around me every morning.

Steve Sanduski: Who were some of the people that, as you think about over time, who are some of the people that you feel you've learned the most from?

David Sun: That would almost have to be Steve Jobs from Apple, because in my early days, I really had the fortunate opportunity to actually meet him and work with him in some of the projects. His dedication and attention to detail is beyond belief. He also very, very consistent in his pursuit of excellence. He started to look at things from outside the box is what that term becomes popular in the business world.

Steve Sanduski: What was your connection to Steve back in the day?

David Sun: I happened to be Apple's early day reseller and our company actually became the fifth largest reseller in the world in those days.

Steve Sanduski: This might sound like kind of a weird question, but since you've got a connection to Steve Jobs, I want to ask you this. He passed away in 2011. If he came back to life today and was looking at Apple computer, what do you think he would think about the Apple computer of today?

David Sun: Well, I think first of all, he'd be very proud of what Apple has achieved so far. But on the other hand, there are always some pet project that he's been working on before he passed away. One of which is an Apple TV. It's not quite like a normal TV that everybody think about. It's more of a medium for major communication hub. I think that project is probably being put on hold right now. I think he would be very anxious to get that going.

Steve Sanduski: Maybe a second question here, same idea. He comes back to life today. Obviously a lot has happened in the technology world between 2011 and today. What do you think might've been a little different if he had been alive from 2011 until today? Do you think he would have been shaping the technology in industry differently than the way it's actually evolved to today?

David Sun: I think he's certainly would accelerate the process, because he's a pretty focused person. He always get the projects done correctly. Also remember, he's really the creator of some products or services that we do not even know that we need yet. That's really his model. He always creates something that none of us realize we have such a need at this moment, but he's already making it.

Steve Sanduski: As you look back and you think about all the different success that you've had over the decades in your career as an entrepreneur and a CEO, let's talk about some of the things that you've done and some of the lessons that you've learned. Again with this idea of being a sponge. As you think about, what are

some of the key learnings from all your years as an entrepreneur and a CEO? What would be a first one here that you'd like to start with that we can talk about?

David Sun: Well, I think the very first one I'm really interested is really what I'm doing. I'm being a coach right now, because that is one thing I missed. I guess in those days, CEO coaching is not quite even popular. In hindsight, if I had a good coach like we have right now, looking at all the colleagues that I work with, what a difference they will make in our business in terms of avoiding a lot of the blind spots and also missing the obstacles and also grow revenues and bottom line exponentially. That would be the first one.

David Sun: The other thing is, I had my own three Cs and core values, which most people not necessarily think about. Mine is obviously, I am very much into commitment, which is what Apple has demonstrated to me. The other one is consistency. The third one, certainly not the least one is compassion. All the little three Cs are so important. I know there are many core values that people talk about in business, but if you really think deep enough, many of them are actually intertwined into the three Cs that I'm talking about.

Steve Sanduski: Let's go into each of those a little bit here. The first one you talked about, coaching. You're a coach here at CEO coaching international. But let's go back to when you were an entrepreneur or CEO, you're running your companies. What were you doing back in those days to essentially maybe act like a coach? What are some of the principles or some of the characteristics or some of the leadership traits and activities that you were implementing back in those days that you're maybe carrying over to what you're doing today as a coach?

David Sun: Well, I think for one thing is, we're always looking to expand, grow the business, looking at all the possible markets to be in and how do we get in. In a sense, we are kind of visionary and that's a very important thing is to coach. The good coach would teach you how to become a visionary. Apple is a great, has a great visionary in Steve Jobs, obviously.

David Sun: The other thing is putting in the structures so where we grow, we can have also grown the right leaders to take over our positions. People don't realize how important it is to build a strong team around you. That's how you become a great company. Without the team members, nothing can be really done correctly by one person.

Steve Sanduski: You mentioned this idea of visionary and I think you said that you could train people to become a visionary. If that's what you said, I'd love for you to expand on that. How can you train somebody or teach somebody to be more visionary? Is that even possible?

David Sun: It depends, obviously. But when I say, not necessarily train people become visionary, but certainly when you try to work together with your team to look at

the bigger picture, to look at the future, to plan for the future. Also to plan for the environmental changes that you're going to be encountering. That's becoming somewhat of a visionary for the company. Not everybody will become the true visionary, obviously, but at least get your team leaders all become able to see much bigger picture from different angle from outside the box, which is very important.

Steve Sanduski: Do you have an example of how you were in the visionary role in the companies that you were running or starting your companies? Do you have an example that might bring that to life a little bit in terms of how you cast your vision, how far out into the future you think? What are some of the variables that you look at in your industry or outside of your industry to help you think strategically and visionarily, if that's a word, about where you want your company to go.

David Sun: Yes. I think, for one thing we started pretty small. I started with one little store, by myself. Then pretty soon, we actually of course expanded into multiple store locations, but more important than that is, we actually started getting to education market, the corporate American market, the service industry, the support, the networking, the software, the entire product solution as we call it back then, in terms of supporting all of our customer base in totally different markets and also blanket all of that efficiency and productivity to the customers where they can truly enjoy the product.

David Sun: Starting from a very simple hardware piece, expanding to the entire solution.

Steve Sanduski: Did that just happen organically or did you intentionally sit down, either yourself or with some of your other people on your leadership team and really try and envision what you want that future or where the future was heading or where you wanted the future to go with your business? Was it a super intentional vision?

David Sun: Yes. I think the answer is both, because organically, obviously it happens, but I think at the same time, we did plan for some of, if not a lot of the expansion plans in terms of some of which includes acquisitions obviously. Some of them are really growing in the corporate American market for example, we have to do such a good job with the few that we have the accounts with. Eventually we became supplier to virtually almost all of them, so that from their recommendation to their competitors or their colleagues, we expanded our business fairly quickly.

Steve Sanduski: Then as it relates to kind of this coaching hat that you were putting on as you were building your businesses, you also mentioned putting the structure in place to build the team. How did you think about the people in your organization? What's your leadership thinking as it relates to building the people within the organization?

David Sun: Well, I think people is the key. You know, good people to be put in the right place, to be in the right spot is very important. People that don't make those benchmark eventually probably have to lose basically the team. We built that from ground zero on up. We recruit, we obviously do a lot of training internally as well. We really have to observe each level in terms of the team players can meet our goals and our standard. Otherwise he or she would not be part of the team.

Steve Sanduski: As you were hiring people over the years, were there certain traits or characteristics or personality styles or backgrounds that you would typically look for in people that turned out to be really successful in your businesses?

David Sun: Yes. Again, I look for the three Cs I talked about. It's very important that they are committed and they should love the thing that they work on every day. Because if we don't have compassion at work, it's kind of hard to come to work. Certainly not 100%. I think that's very important. Consistency is important because we need everybody to be 100% there. Also sometimes I think most of the failure that you see in businesses come from people who are giving up too early. You have to stay the course. That's really kind of the guidance from the coach or from the leader of the company or the leadership team of the company.

Steve Sanduski: You're touching here on these core values. You mentioned your three Cs, which are commitment, consistency and compassion. You're looking for those kinds of traits in people that you hire. Do you have a way to screen for that in the beginning? How do you determine during the hiring process that this is someone who is committed, this is someone who is consistent and they're not going to give up right before the finish line and that this is someone who exhibits compassion? How do you screen for that?

David Sun: Actually, that's a great question. Back in the 80s, we probably don't have a lot of methodology or statistics programs to do that. Today we do. There are all kinds of behavioral assessments that you can put on, including the famous TTI insight. Testing, we actually do use at the CEO coaching international. But back in those days, you're absolutely right. We don't have to like this, so we're really kind of based on our own experiences and also based on our observation during our interview process. In some cases where some really well written questions that we can assess these people how they respond. It's never 100%, but certainly it's better to do that than not to do it, because it's important to hire the right people. To remove the wrong person takes a lot more time and effort and cost.

Steve Sanduski: We've talked about the people. One of the key things certainly in building an organization. What would be another key thing as it relates to this idea of be a sponge and learn from everybody? What are some other things that you've learned over your career?

David Sun: Well, I certainly highly recommend that we ... With today's internet, I guess it's very easy to go listen or read podcast seminars, books, eBooks, and there are so

many good leadership, successful stories and books out there so we can learn from. There's so many of them. I highly recommend all the time that we should immerse ourselves into learning every day, which is what I try to promote. It's everything that we learn from can be applied. Even, as always, a book from a long time ago in China I studied as a child, it's called The Art of War by Sun Tzu. I'm sure anybody that heard the name of the book, they think it's only a war strategy book. But as you can see, most businessmen have already read it and they've applied that book's theory into the actual world of business. That book has been written back in 500 BC.

Steve Sanduski: The Art of War book. We'll link to that in the show notes, but what is something that sticks in your mind from that book? What's one of the principles that you read from that book that you're still applying today?

David Sun: There's so many. I studied that book in Chinese actually. The book has been translated now, but the one thing that's very, very obvious to everyone, but when you read it, you start thinking deeper. It makes a lot of sense is knowing your enemy as well as you know yourself. Sun Tzu says that you will never have to worry a thousand battles, you're going to win them up. That's actually a very strong statement if you think about it.

David Sun: What he is saying is, basically in today's business world, knowledge, data is very important, because if you have all of that, marketplace, your competitors, that will make your business much more successful and you can achieve your goal much easier.

Steve Sanduski: Who do we think of as the enemy? How would you frame that?

David Sun: In business, it's very simple. Let's say, whatever business you're in in the industry, who's your leading competitor, or who is your potential competitor, if you don't have a major one? You try to learn what other people are thinking or how they're behaving, how they're going to behave, that helps you to prepare your company in terms of your growth, your market penetration, your strategy, your procedures, your whole process, so that you are now anticipating, if you have a competitor, if you don't, you anticipate that you probably eventually will have one. It just better prepares itself to really go win the battle in the marketplace.

Steve Sanduski: Let me take a contrary angle to that, just for the sake of arguing here. Some people would say, "I don't pay a lot of attention to my competitors, because I want to focus on my business. I want to focus on what my particular strength is, my particular competitive advantage, and I want to control what I can control, which is what I do. I can't control what my competitor does, so I'm going to, for the most part, focus on my business." How does that square with this idea of really trying to understand your enemy, quote the competition here? Is there any conflict or can those two work together somehow?

David Sun: Well, I think in your example, I can also counter that with, for example, if for some reason we keep doing the same process over and over again for a long, long time, maybe your competition or potential competition has already figured out a new way, it is through technology or not, to do it differently and much more efficiently. Quickly outcompete you very, very easily so that that's one of the reasons what, since we were talking about, is always keep yourself alert of knowing what's around you. Knowing your enemy is just not a necessary particular group. It could be also knowing your environment. Right?

David Sun: Really, the sense is, you cannot be sitting in a tunnel and only looking at your own problems and solving it and be happy.

Steve Sanduski: Yeah. Maybe it kind of gets back to this idea that Andy Grove talked about years ago. This idea of only the paranoid survive. This idea of always keep yourself alert-

David Sun: Correct.

Steve Sanduski: I think, yeah, it really fits nicely into that idea that we can't get complacent obviously. Things are just changing so quickly here. We've always got to be alert. We've got to understand the competition, be a little bit paranoid and that'll certainly keep us on our toes.

David Sun: Yes, definitely.

Steve Sanduski: Anything else from The Art of War book?

David Sun: Yeah, I mean just to talk a little bit on what we just talked about. For example, with the market disrupters like Uber or any kind of Airbnb. I mean, that just changes the whole industry of that specific market. People that never thought about those will never realize that competition can come and come very quickly and very strongly without notice.

Steve Sanduski: What else do we have here in terms of things that you've learned over the years? We've talked a little bit about people, we've talked about this idea of coaching. We've talked about the core values. We've talked about some of the things that you've learned from the books, like The Art of War, which you read in Chinese, which is super impressive.

Steve Sanduski: What other things would you want to share with us here today?

David Sun: I think there's a couple. One is that, oftentimes I see a lot of people have this fear of change. You know, we talked a little bit about that earlier. That actual fear of change could probably hinder the growth and also hinder the visionary part of their business where they actually can see change coming that will actually be better for the company and also for the market. A lot of people have this fear of change and that will become a major issue. They're afraid to take

risks, they're afraid to make any modifications to the way they've been doing the business for a long, long time, is what we talked about.

David Sun: Another one will be inspiring the people around you. I think it's so important that every day we just think about who we can inspire that who works around you, because more of the less, the end result is, you need a really strong leadership team that you can trust and we can motivate them and inspire them to do the performance that you need to achieve the goal. Inspiring people around us is very, very important.

David Sun: Of course, to get the right people first is important. But even if you have the right people, you need to constantly inspire them.

Steve Sanduski: Let's talk about those a little bit more. The first one here is fear of change. Oftentimes people might get stuck in their ways. The devil we know might be better than the unknown here. Kind of getting back to this, why people fear change. How do you as the leader, how do you help people overcome their fear of change?

David Sun: Well, I think as the leader, we need to certainly lead them by example first of all. Secondly, you will need to soften the blow in the sense that we kind of support them all the way so that they don't have to bear the fear factor probably on their own, so we bear as a team, so that makes it a little easier. But we're treading the water very carefully, of course. We're not asking everybody to jump into a fire necessarily, but certainly if you don't take risks, as we all know, we don't make changes and there's no real progress in a lot of cases.

Steve Sanduski: Yeah and I think an additional way to really think about that too is that, as a leader, when we're trying to get people to change, oftentimes we resort to using logic or maybe economic motivators to let people know why the change is important. But I think one of the key things that we often miss is making that emotional appeal, because oftentimes people are not going to be swayed by logic, but they are going to be swayed by emotion.

David Sun: Correct.

Steve Sanduski: If you can tell a compelling story that is going to connect with people both from a logical standpoint as well as an emotional standpoint, I think that's oftentimes where we can make that connection there and then that's when people are going to buy into the change because they can feel it emotionally, not just logically.

David Sun: Correct, yeah.

Steve Sanduski: All right. You also talked about inspiring the people around you. What are some things that you've done in the past to help inspire your team?

David Sun: Well, I think as a leader, if we can show our team members, and define the goals that we try to achieve very clearly so that everybody knows that we're all marching with the same tune, try to achieve to the same level, and once that's achieved, we celebrate together. That kind of a team camaraderie is very important and people need to understand that you are part of the team. Stop being selfish, only doing your own work and not care about the people around you. You have to inspire and also being a good leader, you also have to constantly show them and motivate them. What is the right thing to do in terms of their own objectives and missions.

David Sun: I think motivating constantly and guiding them to do the right thing and reminding them what the corporate mission and goals are all the time.

Steve Sanduski: This idea of being the sponge, so this is something that you are modeling yourself of course. At this stage of your career, what is it that you're trying to absorb? What are some of the things that are most capturing your attention right now in terms of things that you want to continue to learn or new things you want to learn about?

David Sun: You know, that is actually a very good question. I am actually extremely interested in effective communicators, because as I mentioned, we're always in the learning mode, but what I have observed is, certainly at CEO coaching international here and meeting all the other coaches and I'm seeing how effective and how well they can communicate. I'm learning that daily. That's very important, because to be a good communicator is how you can get other people to really understand what you're trying to say and what you're trying to present, as well as you are also observing other people and learning from them.

David Sun: Being an effective communicator is a big agenda item on my mind daily and I'm improving my personal way of listening, expressing myself in order to get a better outcome. This is a never-ending learning process.

Steve Sanduski: I think that's true for all of us. We can all be better communicators. Along those lines though, what's an example of something that you have learned here recently about how to be a more effective communicator? Maybe it's from something you learned from one of the other coaches here at CEO coaching international or elsewhere.

David Sun: Yes. I think what I've observed is, sometimes we're so quick to just put out whatever's on our mind, want to say something or answer in some way, is to really take a few seconds to think about before we say it, because there are oftentimes different way of saying the same thing, but the end result is like 180 degree different. We all know that.

David Sun: I think the best example is how we communicate with our spouses, because many times we will always regret what we said because if we would have said the same thing in a different way, the end result will be totally different. We've

all been through that. It's not a new idea, but by thinking about it, it is something that we should learn well and be more conscious about it. Really the bottom line is, just don't say whatever's on your mind immediately. Think about it.

Steve Sanduski: That's right.

David Sun: In the Chinese way, we also have a saying for that. Think about it three seconds before you say it.

Steve Sanduski: I think that applies to emails too. Sometimes we're angry or mad about something and we fire off an email and we send it and then we immediately like, "Oh shoot. I wish I would have thought about that first." Sometimes it's best to let it simmer for a little bit before you actually hit the send button.

David Sun: Correct. Yeah.

Steve Sanduski: Great. All right. Well as we get ready to wrap up here, just a couple more things I want to go through. But one question though is, is there anything else that you want to add or share here that we haven't talked about yet?

David Sun: I think we've covered most of the things. We're always trying to be, again just be observant. That's actually the prelude to be a sponge, because you have to observe everything around you and also every person around you. I'm always observant, so people that I meet, even for a very short time, I try to observe their background, I tried to learn from them. I try to see if there is things that they know that I don't know.

David Sun: But one thing that's important to remember, even as sponges, really we want to learn all the good things, all the positive things and it really kind of discard or get away from all the negative or the bad things. Being a sponge is don't absorb everything. It's important to siphon it through and what's really beneficial to us, to our family, to our business, basically to our culture, and our world. I think it's important to filter it.

Steve Sanduski: Yeah. The sponge needs to filter, which actually leads me to another question here, which is, you're observing, you're learning, you're absorbing, you're the sponge. What is the mechanism that you use to actually capture these things that you're learning, as opposed to, "I learned something and now it's in my head." But how do you capture that? Do you write it down? Do you store it online somewhere so that you can refer back so the things that you're learning, is there a way that you can memorialize that so that down the road you can recall it, you can pull it out, you can read it so that you don't just, it's just something that is in your head that is very easy to forget about.

David Sun: That's a great question. You know, with today's technology, we all have cell phones that are so powerful, basically than a computer and I used to sell by

1,000, at least. You can put it in a little quick note. You can voice record it. You can do whatever. I just put in the keywords so that I remember. That kind of brings back the memory. I don't have to write down the whole detail. It doesn't matter what situation I come into or somebody I had met, I just put down some key words that I will somehow bring back the memory.

Steve Sanduski: Excellent. All right, great. Well let's just finish up here. One thing is you're a coach here at CEO coaching international. What is it about the company that made you want to become a coach here?

David Sun: Yes, because I actually am very proud to be now a partner of the CEO coaching international, because to be able to work with some of the world's most successful CEOs who actually have been successful on their own and now coming together to bring other CEOs and their company to the next level. I'm really ready to contribute my personal experience and knowledge to do just that and hopefully make great happen together.

Steve Sanduski: We've been talking about this idea of being a sponge, about learning, about being a coach. What do you hope to achieve now that you're officially a coach? What do you hope to achieve in working with your clients?

David Sun: Well, my personal goal is, I want to expand and of course we have over 200 clients right now worldwide. Also we have like 20 coaches, roughly. I want to expand the company internationally even more and really kind of bring this concept of, really there is a correct way to do up a company and make it from a good company to a great company with the right procedures and the right dedication. Also the right person to actually make sure to stay the course, to achieve that level. That's really what we do as CEO coaching international. Also that helps all of us to avoid pitfalls and blind spots that most of us are not realizing that they are there and that's why a coach, a good coach will identify those things for you and work with you to avoid them.

Steve Sanduski: Let's just wrap up here with some rapid fire questions. These are designed for some short answers. Since we've been talking about learning, a good question here would be, what is something that you're reading right now? What's a book or article that you're reading right now?

David Sun: Well, I'm actually reading The Art of War again in English, because I read it in Chinese as a child, so I'm trying to ... Because that thing I had read a long, long time ago, but it still brings back a lot of the wonderful, identify in the strategy that we need today.

Steve Sanduski: Excellent. Okay. Then how about a new skill that you are trying to develop? I know you mentioned this idea of communication being a more effective communicator, but is there something else also that, a new skill that you're trying to develop?

David Sun: I think I'm also trying to be a better listener. I think I'm learning that sometimes we all tend to want to say too much too quickly, but just be quiet and listen because other people have a lot to contribute. Sometimes by us rushing to get out whatever's on our mind too quickly, we actually miss the opportunity to listen to the other side, which is very important.

Steve Sanduski: Great. Well, I think we'll go ahead and we'll wrap it up right there. David, I really appreciate you being on the podcast here for CEO coaching international, and congratulations on the amazing career that you have had and the great work that you're doing here at CEO coaching. Great show, so I appreciate you being on.

David Sun: Thank you, Steve. Thank you for having me.

To inquire about our coaching services and programs, please call **1-866-622-9583**.



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