

Apple

Jobs's job

SAN FRANCISCO

Who are the candidates to be the technology firm's next leader?

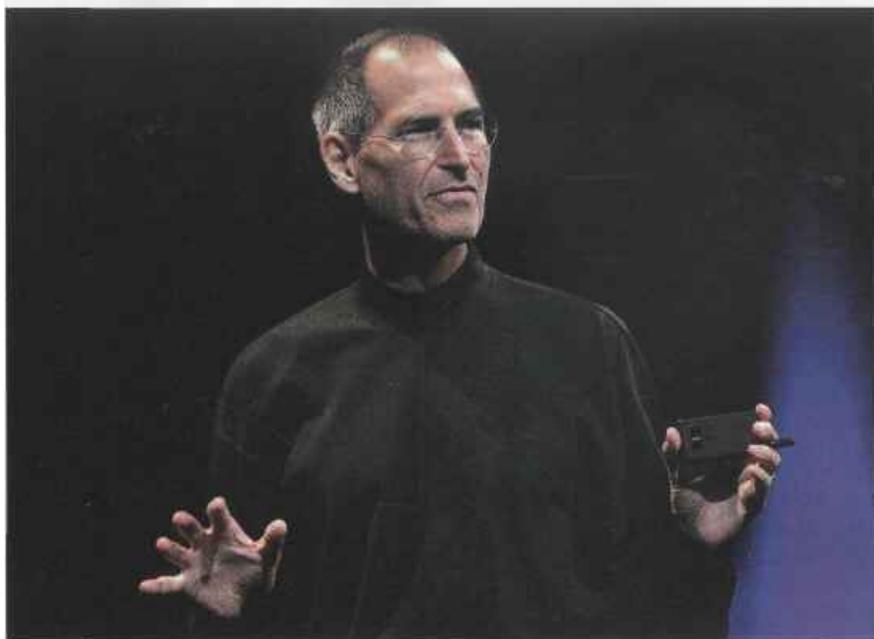
THE fuss began in June when Steve Jobs, the boss of Apple, came on stage in San Francisco to make one of the theatrical product announcements for which he is known. His trademark black mock-turtleneck was drooping from a fleshless frame, and his neck and cheeks were hollow. In hushed tones, the audience began wondering whether his pancreatic cancer—which he was treated for in 2004—had returned. The firm blamed a "common bug", but Apple's shares moved on various rumours. On July 21st its finance chief insisted that Mr Jobs's health was a "private matter", worrying investors. A few days later Mr Jobs called a reporter at the New York Times to explain that his condition was not life-threatening, but he did so "off the record", so no details are public even now.

Mr Jobs is arguably unique in the extent to which his identity and fate are intertwined with those of his company. Imagining Apple without Steve Jobs, or Mr Jobs without Apple, is difficult—as his exile from the company between 1985 and 1997 made plain. Only Warren Buffett, whose investment skill made Berkshire Hathaway what it is, has a comparable importance to his firm's shareholders. But Mr Buffett acknowledges as much. When he had some benign polyps removed from his colon, he volunteered the details in a press release. He also publicly clarified his succession plan. Mr Jobs has done neither.

So who might succeed him? Tim Bajarin, an analyst who has followed Apple for decades, thinks that Mr Jobs has bred such a strong culture within Apple that there is "nobody on the outside who could even come close" to taking the reins successfully. He also believes that Mr Jobs has recently groomed "the strongest team he's ever had", making it even more likely that the next boss will come from this group.

One possibility is Timothy Cook, who joined Apple from Compaq, another computer-maker, and is now chief operating officer. An Alabaman with a gentlemanly drawl, Mr Cook would be a very different manager from Mr Jobs. Mr Jobs is notorious for his temper tantrums and his ad hominem attacks on people who annoy him; Mr Cook prefers to dole out feedback discreetly. A cycling enthusiast, he is a picture of health. And he turned Apple from one of the least efficient manufacturers in the 1990s into one of the most efficient today.

Another choice would be Scott Forstall, a software wizard who has recently risen



Focused on the next iPhone, not the next chief executive

within Apple to take charge of the iPhone, the handset that is Apple's hottest product and perhaps its future. Mr Forstall came with Mr Jobs from NeXT, the computer company that Mr Jobs started during his exile from Apple and which made the operating system on which all of Apple's computers and handsets are now based.

Less likely, despite his important role within Apple, is Jonathan Ive, a soft-spoken British designer who is Apple's deputy guru (second to Mr Jobs himself) in matters of beauty, elegance and style. Apple is at heart a design company. The most stinging accusation Mr Jobs has hurled at Microsoft, his arch rival, is that "they have no

taste." Mr Ive is the only person whose taste he seems to trust. But Mr Ive is a creative type, shy and self-effacing, and uncomfortable with managerial power.

There are other options. Bertrand Serlet is a humorous genius with a thick French accent who is in charge of Apple's operating system, but he might seem to have too much of the mad scientist about him. Phil Schiller is the marketing boss and a familiar face because he usually assists the boss on stage in product demonstrations. But he occasionally looks like Mr Jobs's courtjester in this role, and the mere fact that Mr Jobs grants him such exposure may indicate that he is not the chosen one. •

