

Elon Musk and the Excessive Adoration of Technology Visionaries

Elon Musk is one of the most admired men in America. He founded Tesla, SpaceX, and numerous other entrepreneurial ventures that have captured the public's hearts and imaginations. Who wouldn't get excited about spaceships and the possibility of colonizing Mars?

But people look to Musk for far more than just his technological vision. The internet is full of articles about Musk's career advice, recommended books, [fashion](#), and even [emotional intelligence](#).

Professor Benjamin Zeller goes so far as to [characterize](#) the fervor around technology visionaries such as Musk and the late Steve Jobs as religious. The "cult of Apple," for example, is a common cultural reference.

Should we be looking to tech visionaries for life advice and personal guidance? Perhaps in the whirlwind of excitement surrounding new ideas and CEOs tirelessly striving for greatness, society has given figures like Musk undue status. Here are a few points about tech CEOs, using Musk as an example, to help keep him and others in perspective.

1. They Are Not Authorities on Everything

Actor Alan Alda, known for his roles on *M*A*S*H* and *The West Wing*, had a notable moment of humility when he humorously [recalled](#) being asked to run for political office in the *Daily Mail*:

'I was asked to run a couple of times when M*A*S*H was so popular,' he says. 'They came to talk to me on the set and

said, “You should run for senator.” I thought, “How ridiculous! Why would I do that? I don’t know anything about it. I’m an actor, not a politician.”

Just as Alda has specific areas of expertise, so too does Musk – he knows how to build electric cars and run billion-dollar companies, but his [misguided ideas](#) to fix public transportation and fake news show that creativity alone is not enough to solve problems.

2. They Didn’t Do Everything on Their Own

Government money has been a boon to Musk. According to some [estimates](#), his companies have received around five *billion* dollars in government support. Even though most of the subsidies, credits, and loans are [not Tesla or SpaceX-specific](#), it cannot be denied that they have played a significant role in the meteoric rise of the companies.

Also, the engineers working for Musk have helped him more than he’s willing to admit. In Ashlee Vance’s bestselling [biography](#) of Musk, she writes that at SpaceX, the engineers “flew into a collective rage every time they caught Musk in the press claiming to have designed the Falcon rocket more or less by himself.” To be fair, Musk deserves credit for attracting and directing his talented employees, but don’t underestimate their massive contributions.

3. They Can Treat Employees Badly

In an [article](#) for *MIT Technology Review*, Amanda Schaffer points out that:

“Musk is known . . . for humiliating engineers and firing employees on a whim. In 2014, when his assistant, who had devoted her life to Tesla and SpaceX for 12 years, asked for a raise, he summarily let her go.”

Schaffer argues that the characterization of Musk and other individuals as unique forces driving modern history has “helped to corrode the culture of Silicon Valley . . . [and] excuse (or enable) some truly terrible behavior.”

Steve Jobs was also [well known](#) for instances of appalling behavior toward his employees.

4. They Propose Cool Ideas with Few Practical Benefits

Musk’s goal to ultimately colonize Mars comes to mind. Gregg Williams criticized the futuristic project in an [article](#) for *Wired*:

“Let’s be bold, let’s be ambitious, let’s reach for the heavens but . . . colonizing Mars should be significantly lower down the ‘to do’ list than taking robust and decisive action to ensure the long-term survival of Earth.”

Billionaire investor Richard Branson has expressed similar sentiments, [urging](#) Musk to redirect the Mars initiative’s significant resources to projects more immediately relevant to Earth.

Undoubtedly, Elon Musk is a revolutionary entrepreneur who has demonstrated what imagination and a relentless drive can accomplish. He also deserves praise for taking colossal risks to address what he thinks are humanity’s most concerning problems. But there’s no need to deify him or [anoint him as humanity’s savior](#). It’s important to recognize that while visionaries such as Musk are brilliant, they have personal and professional shortcomings like everyone else.

What’s your opinion of Elon Musk? Do you think he deserves all the praise he’s gotten, or do you think society should be more critical of his accomplishments?

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