Oral History of S. “Soma” Somasegar

Interviewed by **Mario Juarez** for the Microsoft Alumni Network

July 25, 2024

Preface

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with S. “Soma” Somasegar as conducted by Mario Juarez on July 25, 2024, at Microsoft Studios in Redmond, Washington. This interview is part of the Microsoft Alumni Network’s Microsoft Alumni Voices initiative. The goal of this project is to record the institutional history of Microsoft through the recollections of its former employees, so that the information may inform and inspire future generations.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word captured through video rather than written prose. The content reflects the recollections of the interviewee. The following transcript was edited by the Microsoft Alumni Network, which holds the copyright to this work.

Interview

Mario Juarez: I'm thrilled to have a chance to talk to you. When I had this opportunity, I was like, oh yes, I remember you so well and I remember the impact that you had. It was pretty profound. So let's begin at the beginning, which humble origins as virtually everybody that we talked to. Right. Tell me about your childhood. Tell me how you grew up, where are you from?

Soma Somasegar: So I grew up in the southern part of India in a town called Puducherry. And I was the first son, we had two siblings in our house and our parents, neither of them went to what I call college. And my dad was working in a hospital as a medical technician and my mom was a stay home mom and they made a decision early on in their lives after they got married, they decided that hey, putting

their kids through a great school and giving them education is the first priority for them. Just to give you a perspective, my dad was probably making about 100 rupees a month, 100 rupees. Today, it is $1.20. Back then it might have been $8 let's say. I don't know what it was, right.

And they decided to take 60 or another 100 rupees and say, this is for my son's school fees, uniform, books, and all that stuff. And the remaining 40 is how the whole family is going to live for the whole month. And that was pretty, what I call bold decision, very forward-looking decision and a progressive decision for two people who had neither of them gone to college and came from very humble backgrounds. But that decision I think was a gamechanger for me first and then later on when my younger brothers showed up. So that's how we grew up in India. Food was a secondary priority in our house because education was a first priority. And that to me, so I always say it's because of what my parents did, that whatever little I've done so far, it's a direct result of that.

Mario Juarez: Wow. That was an interesting time in India, wasn't it? Your parents weren't alone in that. That seemed like that whole culture made a profound shift that changed the course of Indian history. Is that a fair statement? And if so, tell me about it. How would you put it?

Soma Somasegar: I would say a couple of things. If you remember for a couple hundred years we were under the British rule. Right? In 1947 is when India got independence. And from '47 onwards, the country was all sort of focused on how do we rebuild ourselves as a nation and as a nation that's of some consequence in the world and hopefully never to be in a situation that we were in the last 100 years kind of thing. And so, one of the things that a lot of it is culture and heritage kind of thing, but one of the things that I think India realized is we need to educate our children. We need to educate our next-generation people. And in some sense, I would say there was a lot of focus on math and science. And the other

thing that was both, one of the few good influences of the British rule was the language proficiency. Most people in India, they can either manage with English or are pretty good with English. So that language proficiency combined with the focus on education, on math and science is why India is where it is today. And I sort of benefited from that because I was part of that revolution, so to speak.

Mario Juarez: Yeah, you were right on the cutting edge of it. So, tell me about your school years, give me your memories, what did you love about school? What were you good at?

Soma Somasegar: The thing I loved about school was first and foremost was friends, because that's where I got a chance to meet some amazing people kind of thing. And second is I think the fundamentals, whether it is language, whether it is science, whether it is math, whether it is anything else that you study kind of thing, history, geography, whatever you study kind of thing. Just getting solid fundamentals I think goes a long way in terms of what you can do for the rest of your life. And that's the thing that I remember back fondly and say, “Hey, I had that opportunity and I had the privilege and I took reasonable advantage of that.”

Mario Juarez: So, you weren't just the math or science, computers at that point there, you were broad, you had a broad range of interests and talents that you cultivated.

Soma Somasegar: In fact, at one point in time I thought I was going to focus on chemistry because I really loved chemistry in sort of middle school and high school. I thought I should go get a degree in chemistry, do research in chemistry, spend all of my life in chemistry kind of thing until I sort of figured out that, hey, maybe there is something called engineering here and maybe I could do something. And I started in electronics and then gradually veered towards computer science and then ended up at Microsoft.

Mario Juarez: It's kind of a long journey there. How was it that you then left India? What took you away?

Soma Somasegar: I'll tell you that that's a great story because I did not think about U.S. I did not know much about U.S. Remember, we are now talking about pre-internet, pre-phone, pre this, pre-that kind of thing where information comes through two ways. One is you read a book and you can get to know something about some other country or some other part of the world, or you watch movies that are made in the U.S. or they depict life in the U.S. and you sort of get a feel for was. Those are the two things. The third thing is if there is somebody who's come back after living in the U.S., you can talk to them. But the environment that I grew with, I really didn't know anybody that had gone to the U.S. let alone come back kind of thing. So, for me, whatever little I gleaned was in the movies and in books kind of thing.

So, it never really dawned on me that, hey, someday I will go to the U.S. or I should go to the U.S. kind of thing. So, I joined my undergrad and I joined a college called Indian Engineering College in Chennai in India, and that's actually the oldest engineering college in India. So, I joined that and then I built some friendships kind of thing, and one of my friends introduced me to the notion of, hey, we can go someday to the West to study. And he started thinking about Canada and the U.S. and I remember that there is a U.S. consulate in Chennai. So, I'm in my second year in engineering out of four years, second year. And he says one day, "Hey, why don't we go to the U.S. consulate? There is a fantastic library there. We can go read up about what U.S. is all about, what are the different colleges, what are the opportunities, should we consider it or not?"

And before we realize twice a week religiously in the afternoon after college is over, we would go to the U.S. consulate to go spend a few hours in the library. Within about six months somehow I had

this goal, desire, ambition, whatever you want to call it kind of thing that said, “Hey, after my engineering is done, I'm going to go to the U.S.” I can't tell you why, but I felt there was a lot of opportunities, and I should go experience that. And I also knew that we are coming from a family or a background where I can't afford education in the U.S. so somebody has to want to take care of my education. Only if that happens, I'm going to be able to come to the U.S. But the desire to come to the U.S. and to study here and experience what opportunities are available to you started taking roots in my undergrad when I was in my undergrad kind of thing. To make a short story, a long story short kind of thing. I finished my undergrad, applied to about nine different schools in the U.S. And it was interesting, I had a finite amount of resources that I said I'm going to spend on applications. So, I said five colleges that require no application fee, I'm going to apply and four colleges that require some nominal application fee, I'm going to apply. So, pick total online. And I applied and I told all of them that, “Hey, unless I get full financial aid or assistantship, I won't be able to come.” And so a lot of them said, “Hey, we'll give you admission but no money.” And I said, no, I can't come. So went away. Finally three schools were left and the three schools said, “Hey, let me give you admission but no money today. I will consider giving you money six months from now.” I said, I don't can't come for me to take a plane and come there day one, I need help. So I did not come when I finished my undergrad. I finished my undergrad in June of 1986, and usually September ‘86, the fall is when you usually come here. I could not come here that fall. So I then wrote back to the three schools that gave me that option that said, Hey, come on over after six months I said, I can't come until get this. Would you be open to reconsidering me for the next year? One of them came back and said like, Hey, we've reconsidered. We'll give you this, come in January. One of them said, come next September. And the third one said, no, you had to come here before we would give you that kind of thing. So I chose the one that gave me the option to come here in January. And the rest is history.

Mario Juarez: Which one was it?

Soma Somasegar: Louisiana State University.

Mario Juarez: Louisiana State University. And tell me about what that journey was like. So you land in New Orleans, is that correct?

Soma Somasegar: Yeah, New Orleans airport. But let me tell you a story that I actually feel both amused and embarrassed to say. Okay, so remember I don't know much about the U.S. All my knowledge is some books and some movies kind of thing. So, I get a letter from Louisiana State University that says, Hey, we've given you admission, we've given you financial aid, come on work kind of thing. And I look at the address and it says blah, blah, blah, blah. And then it says LA. And I say, "Hey, LA is exciting, man." I've seen L.A. in movies, I've seen cars, I've seen tall buildings. LA must be exciting. So, I really had that feeling when I left India. And the first thing is that's the first time I'm flying ever in a plane kind thing. So it's new. And I go from Chennai to Delhi first and then usually the flights out of India to the West all leave around midnight or early morning kind of thing.

And I'm a kind of guy who goes to bed those days at least. I used to go to bed at 9, 9:30 and then get up promptly early in the morning kind of thing. So, I'm traveling by myself, I go to the Delhi airport and I'm tired. I just lay on the seats and sleep off. And then around two o'clock some air hostess is coming in, waking me. I'm saying, "Hey, are you waiting for this flight because everybody else is gone. You're the only person in this sort of area. If so, they're closing the gate run." So, I literally ran and made the flight and then I flew to Frankfurt and then Frankfurt to Atlanta. I'm taking a flight from Atlanta to LA, or Louisiana, New Orleans. I take the flight, I'm sort of near landing. I look at it and say like, "Hey, where are the tall buildings? LA is supposed to have a lot of tall buildings. There's no tall buildings here."

And then I get down in the airport, I'm still sort of confused about and I really, I'm confused about why, and I said, maybe the airport is far away from the city. You are going to the city to see all these tall buildings kind of thing. I get down. And then the school had an Indian association, student association. So, they had sent somebody from that to pick me up from the airport. That guy comes and says, I said, "Hey, where are all the tall buildings? Isn't this L.A.?" And he really laughed. He started laughing and laughing and laughing. And only then I realized that hey, the city L.A. is different from state LA kind of thing. But that sort both shows you the naivety and the opportunity that sort of came in through providence or whatever reason kind of thing to get me to where I'm today.

Mario Juarez: The wonder of it. It must have just been a wondrous experience. Is that a word you would use? What words would you use?

Soma Somasegar: It's sort of unbelievable. All of this earth experience kind of thing for somebody who was born and brought up in southern India in a very, very humble background, to be able to come here and be able to even understand what is happening here, what the opportunities are, and know that you're getting a chance to be part of those opportunities and to do your best to have the kind of impact that you want to have that's out of the world experience.

Mario Juarez: So you learn about Creole food, you learn about football, obviously you learn about life in America and you learned computer science. Tell me briefly what that journey was like and I'm very interested in getting right up to the chapter that takes you to Microsoft. Got it. But we'll go to that in a second. Just tell me about what happened in the meantime.

Soma Somasegar: I would say the first week, just so you know, I really survived on cereals. Okay, morning, evening, night because I sort of am a vegetarian, so don't eat meat. Okay, I didn't know how to cook. I was really counting my cents and pennies and dollars. So, I didn't want to go spend money outside eating kind of thing and said like,

Hey, cereal seems like a good idea. Get some milk, get some cereals. It's not bad. Eat three times a day. It took me a week to realize that hey, you may not be able to survive that way in the long run. You need to do something beyond that.

But LSU, or Louisiana State University, was a fantastic environment in that it was sort of a very diverse global student population. So, you had people coming in from all parts of the world, people from the U.S. kind of thing. So, you were able to integrate well. And I sort of really enjoyed the education that I got in LSU because that's where I initially came into the electrical engineering department. I had done electronics engineering and undergrad, and then I started falling in love with computer science and LSU gave me the opportunity to both get a degree from electrical and computer engineering, but do enough coursework in computer science that I could have a career in computer science in software. So, I really had a great time. And the other thing that happened was I finished my master's in about 18 months and LSU had given me already a PhD, what should I say?

Admission. Okay. So, I was qualified to go onto the PhD program and LSU really want me to stay back. It so happened that I also got a PhD offer from State University of New York Buffalo and again with full financial assistance because I couldn't afford back then as well, and I had to decide between staying back at LSU or going to Buffalo. So, one thing I decided the summer that I was graduating in, everybody talks about getting a job. I can go do a PhD, should I try for a job? Should I study? What should I do? So, I literally went to two newspapers, San Jose Mercury News and Boston Globe. Those are the two newspapers that I looked at and said, Hey, what are all the technology companies that seem interesting? So, I scoured through those newspapers, back issues, current issues, every issue that I could find and said, Hey, let me identify a hundred companies that I'm going to apply.

And I applied that summer. This is now summer of 1988. Okay, I apply and I was thinking like, Hey, I apply today and next week I should get a job, right? I wait for two weeks, no response from any company and my timeline for deciding which school I should go for PhD was sort of imminent. So, I decided to go to State University of New York at Buffalo, not realizing what I was setting myself up for. You should understand Chennai, the weather is sort of hot, hotter, hottest. That's how the weather is during the year. Louisiana, fairly warm throughout the year, maybe a little chilly during winter, but fairly warm. So, I'm going into Buffalo and I go there in September. Okay? And September, actually Buffalo is not bad. It's reasonable. It's nice. It is. It's good weather. October comes in, I start wondering, what the hell am I doing here? And October end comes, I'm really in a bad situation. No car, not enough winter clothing and Buffalo, the way the system works in Buffalo is the campus is here. The graduate students for the most part are living here and it's about a half an hour bus commute, 30-minute bus commute, and then walk in both directions.

Now, by November 15, I'm saying, “Can I survive this? What am I doing here?” Okay. I really loved the school because the education is always good and interesting kind of thing. And I had sort of a great set of professors, and my professor told me one thing which I remember. He said, Hey someone, the only thing I want you to do is be a 4.0 student here. I really don't care how many courses you take or what courses you take, but I sort of brought you in and I've sort of gone and advocated for you and you better show up as a good student and the way to show up is get a 4.0. And I said, no, no, no. He said, you can do minimum of two courses. You don't need to do more than the first semester because a new place, why don't you just your, I said, no, I want to do four courses because I needed four courses to finish my requirements, and then it's all about dissertation.

So, I said, I'll do all four in one semester. He said, no, I really need you to understand you need to get a 4.0. Four courses doesn't matter to me. Two is good enough, so think hard about it. I said, no, no, no, I'll manage kind of thing. So, I'm doing four courses and it is winter. Okay? Now that October something interesting habit. So, when I applied to 100 companies, many companies came back and said, Hey, right now we are not hiring. Or Hey, do you have a green card? Are you a citizen? If you are a visa holder, we are not interested kind of thing. So, mostly nos. There are only two companies that wanted to have a conversation. The first one is IBM. IBM came and said, Hey, we have some openings in our West Coast office. Okay, would you be interested in that?

I said, absolutely. So, go through an interview, go through a couple interviews on the phone and the interviews all go well. And then this is now the final interview from IBM and IBM says, oh, by the way, we before to ask you earlier, we hope that you have a green card or you're a U.S. citizen. I said, no, no, no. I'm on a student visa, F1 visa. I need an H1 work visa to get here kind of thing. They said, oh, we are so sorry. Our policy currently is not to sponsor any visas kind of thing. We're sorry. So, IBM went away. At that point there's no other company. So, I come to Buffalo and then towards the end of September or early October, I get a call from my former roommate in LSU. Okay, he's still at LSU because he hadn't finished his masters.

He was taking six more months to finish. So, he called me one day and said, he said, Hey, I don't know this company, but there is some company called Microsoft that just called for you here because you had given them your LSU address or LSU phone number here. I don't know what to say. So, I said, Hey, let me talk to him next week when I talk to him and then I'll see if he's interested. I'll connect you both kind of thing. He said, what do you want me to do? I said, Hey, to be fair, at that time, if you're coming from a university, you are in love with Unix and DOS is this, yeah, some system, but not really for

the elite kind of thing. Okay? So, I said, Hey, but this is the first time other companies calling other than IBM. I said, let me at least have a conversation with them. So, I have a conversation with them and then the first thing they say is, hey, we want you to fly out to Seattle to interview with us. And this was the DOS group calling me for interviews.

By then, I'm starting to realize that winter in Buffalo is a little crazy kind of thing. I also had a friend in Seattle, meaning somebody who I went to undergrad with, and I said, there is a free trip for me to go see this person and sure, let me talk to Microsoft and see what happens kind of thing. So, I come here and that is the first time I'm ever interviewing for a job. So, I've never interviewed before other than the phone interviews with IBM. This is the first in-person interview. So, I come here and then from morning 8 till evening 6, it's every hour there's an interview. And the interviews those days were all like, hey, go to the whiteboard. I'll give you a problem, code it or solve it or do whatever it is. So, it is one after the other. I go through all the interviews and I actually think I've done well.

I'm am sort of optimistic. I'm positive. And then Microsoft says, Hey, we want to take you out for dinner. I say, I am excited even more. I go for dinner. And back then it was sort of common knowledge, at least for Microsoft. They're like, Hey, if you're going to get an offer, you'll get an offer end of the day, and if you don't hear, you don't get an offer end of the day chance why you're not getting an offer. So, I'm through dinner, I'm waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting. The dinner is over and everybody's saying goodbye and there's no talk about an offer. I was really disappointed, really unhappy because I thought I had done well. Okay, so I go back to Buffalo, one week goes by, no response, and I'm pinging the recruiter saying, Hey, any news? Because they haven't even said no, they haven't said yes, they haven't said no.

It's sort of in limbo land. And then two weeks later, the recruiter calls up and says, Hey, so the DOS group that you with, they've decided not to hire a fresher, they want somebody with more experience. But because you did well in the interviews, I thought, Hey, let me check with some of the teams. And there is a team called OS/2 team that seems interested in wanting to talk to you. Would you be interested? I don't know much about DOS, I dunno much about OS/2 I said to Microsoft. So, why Microsoft becomes an important thing. There are two things that I fell in love with when I came here the first time for interviews. The first is everybody talks about Microsoft's vision and mission and all that stuff. The notion that Microsoft was thinking about democratizing computing and thinking about, Hey, we really want to have a desktop on every desk in every home.

That just seemed like an amazing sort of vision. I really loved that. And the second thing is, every interviewer that I had, I thought they were incredibly smart, incredibly smart. I said like, man, if this is a company that is going to, and what I experienced today is just a subset of it, but if this is the flavor of the kind of people that are going to be in this company, I absolutely want to be a part of this company because I'm going to learn so much. All of these people seem to be way smarter than I, way more knowledgeable about software and how to build systems. I would love to be part of this environment so that I can learn more and I can thrive and do well. So, for those two reasons, I was really excited about Microsoft, not because I thought that, hey, OS/2 is going to turn into NT and it is going to turn into Windows and it's going to be this technology leader 50 years from now kind of thing, right?

No idea. All I know is small company, but amazing people and a phenomenal vision. So, I was really excited. So, when this recruiter told me, Hey, do you want to talk to the OS/2 team? I said, sure. She said, okay, why don't you come on over next week? I said, I can't come over next week, okay, I've already made one trip this

semester. I've taken four courses, and I have a commitment to my professor and myself that I'm going to do my very best to get good grades. I can't do another trip. If you want me to come out to Seattle, it has to be after the semester is over, but if you are okay with phone, I can spend as much time as you want on the phone. Okay? Thankfully, the OS/2 team said, okay, let's try the phone kind of thing.

So, actually the hiring manager who actually I ended up working for at Microsoft for the first 10 years of my career at Microsoft kind of thing. So, he calls me, he says, okay, we'll talk on a Saturday. I said, sure, we'll talk on Saturday. It was supposed to be a one-hour interview. It went for about three and a half hours. Moshe Dunie, who was a VP for Windows for a long time for many years kind of thing. So, he was the hiring manager, and he called me and I said, sure, we'll talk. And it ended up being a three-and-a-half-hour conversation after that, still no response, don't know whether I'm getting a job or don't get a job. And then another two weeks go by and then finally Microsoft says, Hey, the OS/2 team is on board with it. Moshe wants to hire you. They're ready to make an offer. I said, come on over, let's make an offer. So, the offer comes through. I signed the offer and this happened I think sometime in the November timeframe. And so, I signed the offer. Now the H-1B [visa] processing has to start, but I'm excited. I knew that the winter problems that I'm going through is going to go away, but I had another personal dilemma, which is coming from an Indian culture, you really value education, and you want to finish what you start. I was like, no, man, I'm in this PhD program and my professor is telling me that in three years he can, he's almost guaranteeing that I'll graduate, and he has enough connections that I can get a great job with Bell Labs, which was still a very premier organization back then kind of thing. Should I do that, or should I go to Microsoft? What should I do?

I finally chose Microsoft. In hindsight, it doesn't seem like a hard decision, but back then it was a hard decision. In fact, I remember writing a letter to my parents because back then there was like no, once a month I would pick up the phone and talk to them, and then you write letters every week kind of thing. So, I wrote a letter to my parents and specifically told my parents, Hey, what a job offer from Microsoft. I'm leaning towards taking that, but if you tell me do not take it, I will not take it. Now is your chance. I'm giving you the option. Tell me if you have a strong point of view one way or the other. Now, thankfully, they came back and said, Hey, you should do what your heart says is the right thing to do. And so it was fine, but I gave them that option and they gave that.

So, I said, okay, now the problem is we start H-1B processing for Microsoft, and this is getting a visa, this is getting a visa kind of thing. And January 1st comes, or January 2nd, the semester is starting. I would decide, do I enroll in Buffalo? Do I not enroll in Buffalo? And I don't have my H-1B yet, and there's always the rest that if H-1B doesn't come, I'm sort of in limbo land and if I'm not in school, then I'm really, but if I commit to school, I didn't want to break my commitment halfway through. So, I made a decision to say, Hey, I'm going to ask for an extension for one week with the school, and if within that week I don't get my H-1B, I'm going to go back to school and say Microsoft, I have to wait till a later date kind of thing. Three days later I call the H-1B, and then two more days later, I actually was in Seattle, and there was another interesting story. So Microsoft says, Hey, we will move you, right? I said, oh yeah, great. Okay. And moving means we'll pack whatever you have and we'll send it over here and then we'll give you a ticket to fly out here. I say, fine. So, we agree for a moving date kind of thing. And out comes one of these humongous trucks. Okay?

And I literally have, if I pack everything that I have one suitcase and two boxes. And I said, I felt bad with this huge truck and these things. So, I said, Hey, I bought, what do you call this mattress for

$10? I said, maybe let me take that to Seattle because there is a lot of space that I feel really bad not having anything. So, I throw that mattress in. I did use that mattress for 10 more years. That's a different thing. And my wife, if you talk to her, she'll give you an earful about how I was those days kind of thing. But that's all I had. So, I didn't have too much. And then I moved here, and January 23rd, 1989, is when I started the OS/2 team, and it's been a fabulous journey since then.

Mario Juarez: These are great stories and I love the energy. I think everybody has early memories of their first experience with Microsoft, and I think as the years go by, we sort of regard those in a new light of how special and how lucky we were. Talk to me about your first impressions, which building? What was your first building?

Soma Somasegar: Building 2.

Mario Juarez: Building 2. Okay. So, you walk into Building 2. Is there a moment that sticks in your mind that's crystallized in your mind about those first early experiences, your first impressions, the first characters that you met? What comes to mind?

Soma Somasegar: I would say two things. The first thing I would say is if you ask me how was my first impressions of Microsoft, I think the notion that, hey, this is an amazingly smart group of people, was just validated from the get go. I was really thrilled about that from day one kind of thing. And that stuck in my mind for a long time. It'll always be how I thought about Microsoft. The thing that I wasn't super excited about was the project that I was working on, And part of it was clear even back then that hey, there is so much friction in what we call the joint development project that Microsoft had with IBM on OS/2. It just felt like it wasn't an amazing environment.

So, the first year I was a software design engineer in test in OS/2 and focused on memory management and then file systems, so sort of kernel related areas in OS/2, that's what I was doing. And so for a

year, I think we tried our best. Microsoft put in a full faith effort, a full-fledged effort to make this OS/2 work, and we were working on two different versions of OS/2 in parallel. We were working on OS/2 1.2, 1.3, something like that to fix some bugs in the previous version while at the same time working on the next big version of OS/2 that we call OS/2 2.0.

Within six months of me joining Microsoft, there's more talks internally that like, Hey, this is not a right path. We need to figure out what our path is going to be, where we control more of our own destiny as far as operating systems go. So those conversations started happening and we were all sort of wondering like, hey, when is the second shoe going to drop? What is going to happen? Are we going to have a job? Is something else going to happen? So, there's a lot of little bit of confusion and chaos in the team then, okay.

I would say we decided towards the end of that year, towards the end of '89, early 1990, that, hey, two things we decided, one I wasn't aware of at the time, which is Microsoft greenlit, the NT project, which then became Windows NT and then Windows. Okay. Because in parallel, what Microsoft had done towards the end of 1988, early 1989, Microsoft had hired a group of people, Dave Cutler and probably about 10 more people or 10 to 12 more people from DEC West. They were part of the government corporation for a long time. They had moved to Seattle to set up DEC West, and Microsoft hired those people, and they were sort of sitting in a corridor.

It was fascinating because they're some of the best programmer software people that I've come across in my life, and for a year they did not write software. So, what did they do? They really designed NT, what became known as NT later on, and they wrote a spec. So, they wrote literally a thousand pages of documentation for what this product could be and should be, assuming Microsoft let's us build it. In fact, I used to joke for a long time, there was the first,

best, and last spec that we wrote because after that it was all amending. But the discipline that Dave and his team had to really write down what we were going to build was hugely valuable for us during the project. So, end of '88, Microsoft decides to green light NT. Microsoft decides that like, Hey, we need to gently figure out how to divorce our pathways with IBM on this joint development project.

It still took a couple more months to execute on that. Then, in March, 1990, I get a call from Moshe because I was working in his organization, a couple other people between me and him, but he sends me a message saying, Hey, I'm sorry to tell you that I need you to go to a different team. Okay. I said, okay. I said, maybe this is part of what we were, and I don't know which team, so which team is this? He said, there is a new team that we are forming to work on a new operating system, and we think you'll be good for that team goal. I was a little sad because I was, and all the people that I was working with, it's going to be different. But when I heard there was this new project, I was really, really, really excited. Again, not knowing what the future is going to be kind of thing. So, I was one of the first people to get drafted to be part of the NT project, and this was in 1990 March, and then it took us three and a half more years before we shipped the first version of NT.

Mario Juarez: What was your role?

Soma Somasegar: My role changed considerably during that period. I moved from OS/2 to NT, same role, which is software design engineer and test in the kernel. Again, working on file systems in NT. I was starting with file systems and then to other parts of the kernel, and then I became a test lead, and then I became a test manager by the time we shipped the product.

Mario Juarez: So, you were tests on through? Kind of unsung heroes. I remember when I used to write the Micro News, and we always had fun, the letter writers, and there was always this competition within the dev

world about testers, are they getting their credit? And it was always a fun time. And of course those were the days when, talk to me about how it actually felt to be into something. Most of the world had no idea about NT at all. It would be four years before anybody even heard of it, and another four years before it really got credibility, before it became successful. As the actual standard around which most of the computing for a whole generation was built, what did it feel like inside, and who were the memorable characters and what were the memorable dynamics at play?

Soma Somasegar: I think that's a fascinating story. First of all, there were numerous people. If I were to start recalling like, Hey, memorable people and impactful people, I would start with Dave Cutler. I would go down the list with Lou Perazzoli. I would go down the list with Mark Lucovsky, Steve Wood, Darryl Havens, Jim Allchin, Dave Thompson, David Treadwell, just a lot of people, quite a lineup. Ted Kaehler, Rob Short, right? Just a lot of memorable people.

Mario Juarez: The list kind of goes on.

Mario Juarez: What do they all have in common? Talk to me about the people that were there, what made them work?

Soma Somasegar: They were all amazingly passionate about birthing that first product, and we knew it was like, Hey, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity to build something from scratch to really show the world what is possible. And remember, until then, most of the operating systems for personal computers were 16-bit. We were going to build a 32-bit operating system. We were going to build a portable operating system that can go to different hardware architectures, and we were building it from scratch.

Mario Juarez: And those were audacious goals.

Soma Somasegar: Huge, huge. And in fact, I remember Dave Cutler used to say this because it was a tough project, it was a long project. It took way

longer than we expected. There was a period of a year and a half where I was at work seven days a week nonstop. So, it was a long tough project. And I think Dave would always say, "These are the good old days. Just remember that." Okay. And I think that he was right on the money there.

Mario Juarez: You said there was passion, people were passionate. That's an easy term. People throw that term out. How did it translate into human behaviors or maybe memorable experiences? You gave one. You were there seven days a week. When you say it was passionate, give me some examples of what that felt like and looked like and what people were doing.

Soma Somasegar: Sometimes I would call, particularly in today's environment, I would say it's unhealthy sometimes, but the number of people who slept under their desk because they were working so late into the night, and they were tired, and they just wanted to sleep and they wanted to get up early in the morning and start working again. That's sort of a data point on how passionate people were. In fact, I remember I had specifically told my team, my admin, like, Hey, I need you to get a sofa and put it right outside my office. The reason is because I don't get enough sleep at night. I'm going to take a couple hours of sleep in the afternoon, and I don't have time to go home and come back, so I'm just going to sleep here.

Mario Juarez: In the hallway?

Soma Somasegar: In the hallway.

But my point is, and part of it is sort of like, I don't want to say it was necessarily an age-driven kind of thing, but there are a lot of what I call 20-somethings and early 30-somethings in the team. If you remember, the average age of a Microsoft employee back in those days was mid- to high-20s. So, people had the flexibility, the freedom, the passion and the energy to do what I call superhuman or unnatural things to be able to get such a project, a product of

that magnitude coming together and getting it done kind of thing. And that's the thing that I remember the most about my first five years at Microsoft.

Mario Juarez: What drove this? I mean, in retrospect, there was a lot of wealth created as somebody who was there at the time. My sense was that no one expected that there was other things at play that drove, in your experience, what drove that level of commitment and work and energy and sacrifice and pain?

Soma Somasegar: I think you needed to have bought into the vision that now you really are enabling democratization of computing for the world. You really have to believe in, Hey, you are going to be a key part of putting a desktop on every desk in every home. So first you are bought into that vision. Then you had to believe that, hey, this opportunity that you have, particularly if you're interested in systems level programming, you don't get too many opportunities to build a system of this magnitude of this in a caliber with such a group of people. It's just unheard of, right? And you are given this privileged opportunity. Do you want to take advantage of it or not? I'm sure some people self-selected not, and that's okay, too. It's not like everybody needed to get there, but the people that were part of it, it's sort of everybody feeding off each other in terms of the energy, in terms of the passion, in terms of what doing, what it takes to have to ship this product and get it in customer's hands kind of thing. So, it's that collective thing that sort of came together

And it was really a family. The NT group back then felt like a family, not that we always liked each other or we agreed with each other, or we didn't fight with each other kind of thing, but it felt like, hey, we are one trying to birth this incredible product that's going to have an impact way beyond what we can imagine.

Mario Juarez: Did you feel privileged? Tell me about...

Soma Somasegar: I'll give you one example, and I can't tell an NT story without telling this. So, one of the early things—because I was on the testing side of the house—one of the early things we decided was, hey, this is a system that we are building for the world. So, we needed to have high levels of reliability. So, we decided that we are going to stress the system and ensure that it doesn't break. So, I sort of designed what was back then known as the stress test program for NT. Remember, these are the days where debuggers were still early. It's almost like you had to get the system up and running enough to be able to do interesting things. So, there's no way to automatically debug or remote debugging and all that stuff. So, what we did was create software where you or anybody else on the team, before you go home, what we would ask you is, hey, run this script or run this program, and it'll automatically set up a bunch of stress tests in your system, and it'll run overnight.

And then before you come into work, the next day or morning, I have to come to see a machine. Is it still running or did it crash or did it encounter an error? And if so, how do I capture enough information so that a developer when they come in can look at it and say like, Hey, how do I solve this problem? And all this needs to happen before you come into work. So that's why for a year and a half, I would literally come into work at 5:30, 6 in the morning and do the rounds of all the 100, 200, 300 offices. And then teams were only growing kind of thing. A number of people are growing, go into all these offices, and then I would put a yellow sticky. If your system had a crash, I would put a yellow sticky saying, please do not reboot until so-and-so comes and looks at it.

So, I would walk around with a yellow sticky pad and literally do that and sort of get as much data as I can to be able to go to the 9 o'clock daily bug meeting that we used to have at NT to be able to report like, hey, last night, so many machines ran this and so many crashed and so many had this problem and so many this and so many that kind of thing, just to give a health of the system on a

daily basis. Every day we used to do this. And then over a period of time, I got help, some more people joined me, so I didn't have to go individually to all the offices. And then once we had a remote debugging facility, we were able to do some of it automated kind of thing. So it was nice, but for a year there I did that. Right?

Mario Juarez: I remember the yellow stickies. I remember those yellow stickies. That actually became a pretty common thing. And of course, now you look back and you think, which world were we in? It's funny, we spent all this time talking about NT, and yet if you go to your Wikipedia page — and you have a Wikipedia page — It's really all about Visual Studio.

Soma Somasegar: Developers.

Mario Juarez: The developer division, TechNet and MSDN, and all of that. So let's do a quick pass over all of that stuff and give me the very abridged version about how you ended up over there.

Soma Somasegar: Sure. So, as I mentioned, I was in NT right from day one. Went through shipping NT 3.1, NT 3.5, 3.51, 4.0, and then NT 5, which became Windows 2000, and then Windows XP, and then Windows Server 2003. So, we had just shipped or was about to ship 2003 when I get a call from Eric. Okay. Eric and I had sort of gotten to know each other reasonably well. Eric was Bill's TA for a while. So, during that time, every review that you have with Bill, you would sort of pick Eric's brains about, hey, what is Bill looking for? How do you do this? So, I built a good rapport with Eric.

Mario Juarez: It was like Bill's alter ego. It was like Bill, this other side of Bill.

Soma Somasegar: And Eric had left Bill's TA role and had come on over to run what was known as DPED, Developer and Platform Evangelism Division. But I had kept in touch with Eric kind of thing, and this was towards the end of 2003. Eric had just gotten the Server and Tools job and he called me and said, hey, can I talk to you? I said, sure. He said, I

want you to come and run the Developer Division. I said, Eric, I've been only in operating systems. I really don't... I haven't sort of gone up the stack. Am I the right guy for this? He said, no, no, no. Don't worry about it. I just need you. And he made it simple. He said, we are working on the next version of Visual Studio, Visual Studio 2005. It ended up being 2005 because that's when we shipped it.

I just want you to come help ship that. I know you know how to ship software. You've done a bunch of that with NT and Windows kind of thing. I just need your help in shipping. Don't worry about anything else. I said, okay, fine. Right. And Eric has got a lot of pluses and minuses like anybody else kind of thing. But he's amazing when it comes to one-on-one, and particularly when it comes to recruiting. So, I sort of said, okay, but my manager then was Brian Valentine in Windows. So, I had to go talk to Brian and Brian and Eric spoke, and all of us spoke, and all of us agreed this is the right thing. I should tell you in that context. So, Jim Walsh at the time calls me and says, what is this? I hear you might be going to the Developer Division.

Why are you doing this? I said, tell me, Jim, tell me what you mean by this. And Jim said, hey, the Developer Division is a funny place. Super smart people, super smart people, and they build some great technologies, great products kind of thing. But they also have the, hey, I might easily reject foreign body syndrome, so I really care about you, Soma. What I don't want to see happen is 12 months from now you coming back, crying in my office saying, Jim, I made a mistake. Please find me something else. So, I'm just trying to save you that pain. Do you really want to go try to integrate yourself into that? And he said, Exchange... come run Exchange, or there are other things, other businesses. Remember Developer Division has never been about revenues only.

It's about developer mind share, developer usage, developer satisfaction, and then revenues. Whereas Exchange, it's all about revenues. You can build a multi-billion-dollar business here. That's a great opportunity. Why don't you consider that kind of thing? I did consider briefly, but Eric was Eric. And I also liked the fact that hey, developers are really the cornerstone for Microsoft. It's sort of the center of the universe. We've always been a platform company and by definition that means you need developers excited about what we are building, and if they're not there, you're not going to be there. So, to me, getting a chance to be at what I call the center of the universe for Microsoft and be able to work on tools and technologies and services that is going to be helpful for the developer community felt like an amazing mission.

As much as it was never going to be a $10 billion business kind of thing, I felt like it's got enough revenue and enough goodness here that let me go try it. And I told Jim, I don't know whether I'm going to be graded that or not, so I appreciate you telling me that, but I want to give it a try. And Jim was good enough to say, yep, go try it. I just want to make sure that you go in with your eyes wide open kind of thing. So, December 2003. So, when we shipped Windows over 2003, I left Windows and went over to run the Developer Division.

Mario Juarez: And you inherited a thousand crazy empires, a thousand warring factions and a competitor and Sun and Java that looked like it was insurmountable.

Soma Somasegar: And I think the thing is, with the ever-changing platform priorities at Microsoft, you had to decide how you are responsible and do the right things, both from a developer perspective and from a Microsoft platform perspective. And so it was really being at the center of a lot of these things, and that was exciting to me.

Mario Juarez: Talk about and put the lens on here about thinking about Microsoft's current situation and some of the parallel challenges

that exist in creating order out of chaos, creating a vision out of ambiguity and a thousand opportunities, how did you manage that? What were the standards or the North Stars that you followed to decision making that enabled success to emerge?

Soma Somasegar: That's a great question. Okay. It's a great question and it's a very nuanced, and I can talk hours on this. Okay, so let me try to keep it brief.

In our quest to compete effectively against Java, we had come out with .NET Framework and sometimes in the history of Microsoft. Microsoft has done this where we get so enamored by something, everything revolves around that. For a little while, .NET became like that. In fact, products started naming themselves Visual Studio.NET, SQL Server.NET, something else.NET. And everybody fell in love with .NET. But it so happened that the server world fell in love with .NET and .NET was incredibly helpful in building up on scaling our server business. The client world did not fall in love with .NET. It's one of those things where if you have a developer story, you better walk the walk. Your developers better be excited about this, then you can go tell the rest of the world why they should also be excited about it. We never could get there with .NET. We got the world exicted about .NET. We could not get Windows exited about .NET. Windows did not build on .NET for a long time. Of course, things changed over a period of time. So, we were in this tough situation where for a while what we were building for external developers was different than what our internal developers wanted from us. And we had to decide, hey, are we going to focus only on external developers? Are we going to focus only on internal developers? And how do we bridge the chasm between the two?

And meanwhile, Windows itself was thinking about like, hey, what is the role of HTML5 in my platform? What is the role for .NET in my platform? What is the role for WIN 32 APIs in my platform? What is the go-forward strategy? And there is Windows, there is Windows

Phone, and then there is Windows Server, and there's always Windows embedded in other things. And to the extent that there wasn't platform cohesivity or cohesion across these different platforms, we were sort of in the middle trying to bridge whatever gaps were there. And if this person says, I'm excited about HTML5 and this person says I'm excited about something else, then we are like, Hey, how do we manage it? So we had to sort of navigate through how do we support our platform strategy? How do we support what our external developers want, and how can we do both in the most optimal way? That was the struggle and the opportunity that we had for a long time.

Mario Juarez: What were the keys to success in getting through that?

Soma Somasegar: Being really clear about what we are focusing on at any point in time and telling at least the internal stakeholders that, hey, this is what we can do and this is what we are doing. And somehow get to a place where, hey, we have a well understood two-way partnership with all the different platform teams while knowing that, hey, the customers who are buying our products, we are listening to them too. So, it's all about getting all those inputs, being clear about what the priorities are and what you can do, and then setting expectations appropriately.

Mario Juarez: Yeah, but you had to make a lot of hard calls there. Yeah, I mean, it must've been a thousand moments of broken hearts and smashed paper cups.

Soma Somasegar: Sure. I'll give you an example. We had to make a call from what I call when we moved to .NET. VB was a classic example. Visual Basic. Visual Basic until then was VB 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 kind of thing. Immensely successful because this was all about democratizing programming. The transition from VB 6 to VB.NET was more complicated than what VB developers wanted. We were able to successfully get a lot of them over to VB.NET, but some of them we could not. But that was a conscious, in fact, the decision that one of the earliest

decisions that I made was reaffirming that VB.NET and VB 6 are not going to be compatible. So, this notion of somehow, someday they'll become compatible, let's forget about it. And I still remember the kinds of love mails or hate mails, whatever you want to call them, that I got from a subset of the VB 6 community, and these are all real people with real jobs and real careers and real families saying like, hey, I'm 50 years old. All I know in my life is VB okay, and this is what is fueling my income, my family being able to run. You are now telling me that I need to learn something new. I don't have the capability to learn something new. Now what do you want me to do? Don't hurt me.

So you get all these kinds of mails and you have to decide, hey, what is possible? Where can you help provide a bridge? And where is it? Hey, the technology shift is so dramatic that people will have to figure out how to cross the chasm and some of them will be left behind. So, you have to make some of these tough trade-offs, and that is part of the game.

Mario Juarez: Right now in Microsoft. There are probably 50 different corners of the company that are getting those kinds of mails from the people whose livelihoods are being disrupted by AI, by the final stages of digital transformation. Talk a little bit about how those lessons resonate and what is common between that level and that brand of experience, that visceral experience that you had with what the company is going through today. As we break paradigms and we go into a new generation of computing, what message do you have for the people that are in those positions, not even just at Microsoft, but around the world.

Soma Somasegar: In some sense. There is a saying, the problems are the same, it's just the environment. The kinds of people are different; problems are the same. So, from that perspective, like, hey, what we went through 15 years ago, the nature of the problems are same, because when you see a platform shift, the first thing you need to

do is really understand that there is a tremendous amount of value that you're going from the platform shift. That value is not there? Then don't waste time. So, you have to be convinced, and your customers have to be convinced that there is immense value with AI. I think a lot of the world is there. Not everybody in the world is there. A lot of the world is there. A lot of the technology companies are definitely there. They see an amazing amount of value that they could deliver to their customers taking advantage of the AI platform way.

So first you need to believe in that, and you need to really, really believe in that and have a point of view on why you can deliver that value. Once you have that, then you have to decide, hey, what does that transition look like for existing people as they go from a pre AI world to a AI world? Okay, and how do you make the transition as seamless as possible? Those are two things that you should think about and they go hand in hand. It can't be, I'll think only about the first and not about the second, or it's not, I'll think only about second and not the first because that's when things go haywire. As long as you think about them holistically and both think about what is the value that you're delivering and that you're going to do your very best to make the transition as seamless as possible, then you have a winning form in hand.

Mario Juarez: What is the high order bid? What is the top-line consideration?

Soma Somasegar: In my mind, it's the value. And the reason is this because the world is going to get there with or without you. And I don't say this lightly. We could have built a product, and we could have continued building products that kept the VB six crowd super-duper happy until they were not happy, because we are sort of holding ourselves back in terms of the kinds of innovation that is possible. So, if you really want to, hey, for the person who's excited about saying, I need Windows server in my house or in my data center, I don't want cloud computing, they are not excited about Windows Azure

or Microsoft Azure. They are like, hey, I need Windows Server 25. Where is that? Right? And at some point in time, you'll have to say for the greater goodness of everybody else that hey, if you really want to get into the future of computing, you have to come into cloud computing, whether it's public cloud or private cloud.

We can then debate, but that shift is happening and it's going to happen with or without you. And if Microsoft doesn't get there, somebody else will get there. So sooner or later you want to lose. So, you have to optimize for where the world is going. What is the value that the world can get and is expecting, and are you going to be in a premier position to be able to deliver that value? That's the first priority. Second order is you've got an existing set of people, you've got hundreds of millions, billions of people that are using your product, your software. You need to pay some attention, a lot of attention to them and how you are going to bring them from where they are to where the world is going. Sometimes you're going to do it very well. Sometimes you're going to be able to do a reasonable job. Sometimes you're not going to be able to do that. But be open, be honest, and try your best.

Mario Juarez: Fantastic. So we have about 10 more minutes here.

Soma Somasegar: So there is one topic I want to talk about.

Mario Juarez: Great. Let's talk about it next.

Soma Somasegar: So, the thing you talk about legacy and this and that, I would say one thing that I'm really, really proud of what I did at Microsoft is the work that I did to enable distributed development. I set up the India Development Center. I was managing the China, India, Israel kind of thing. And that was not my day job, that was my night job. It was never my day job. It was always my night job. But I think that has been a wonderful muscle for the company. And today everybody is talking about remote this, remote that blah blah kind

of thing. But this go back to the '90s, the world was different kind thing, right? And I feel like a part of me is always going to be that.

Mario Juarez: Excellent. Let's talk about it. Okay, let's just dive into that. You leave India as a bit of an anomaly. One who left and went away. You come back, and you're playing a principal role in what was really a grand renaissance, a reinvention of Indian culture and certainly the Indian economy by virtue of the arrival, not just of sales offices in India, but actually companies like Microsoft leveraging this vast pool of talent that existed there. Give us the overview of your role in that, what it was like for you. What happened? What you did.

Soma Somasegar: I joined Microsoft in 1989. Okay. So by the time 1994 showed up, I'd been in the company for about five years, and I was starting to feel that hey, and by then I had known enough about the company. I knew enough about the people I had started interacting with the top leadership team in the company, including Bill. So, I had a good understanding of the company and our aspirations and what is possible kind of thing. But one thing that I wasn't comfortable with was our thinking and our culture back then that said, hey, if I can see you, I trust you. If I can't see you, I don't trust you. I don't know who you are. I don't know how to work with you, you and I, and it showed up in Microsoft in that, hey, we had at the time eight buildings or whatever it was, and if you're in one of those buildings, then we know how to work with you.

But if you're outside that building, we don't work. And the theory was, hey, we are such an amazing company that no matter where you are in the world, if you are super smart and we want you at Microsoft, you would love to come to Redmond, and we can get you here. And I felt that, hey, that is fine for now, but if we really sort of get to some level of scale, that model is not going to work. We need to go to where people are. Some people can come to where we are, some people will not come. But if our goal really is to say, hey, the top 2% of the world that are software capable, the

right set of people kind of thing, we want them to be at Microsoft. This notion of everybody will come to Redmond is just not going to scale.

It's not going to work. And given that I'm from India, we're always little biased about, hey, India has got so many computer science people that are coming out and people who are proficient with the language, why not go there? And some people can come here and I'm okay with that, but not everybody's going to want to come here. Why don't we tap into those people? So, I remember in 1995, I started talking to my first my manager, and then whenever I get a chance with Bill, we'll talk about this a little bit, and the response always is, yeah, yeah, yeah, that's interesting. Right now we've got other priorities. We'll think about that later. We'll think about it. Okay, fast forward to 1997, March. Bill goes to India.

That is Bill's first-ever visit to India. There was another guy at Microsoft, one of my friends Sanjay, he had moved from the U.S. back to India to run the Indian subsidiary for Microsoft, the sales subsidiary for Microsoft. So he, as part of his sort of tour of duty there, he wanted Bill to come there to sort of see why India could be a great market, and also to get some goodness going from that. So, Bill finally in 1997 decided that he's going to go to India. He goes there for a week, he comes back and then he quickly writes a note saying, I just came back from India. I'm so impressed that they've got so many smart people. My first reaction is, which world are you living in? Kind of thing. But then he quickly came back and said, hey, what I really mean is I know that all the Indian employees that we have here are super smart people. So, I knew that there are smart people, but I just didn't expect them in such quantities.

So very impressed. I took that as an opportunity to say, hey, Bill has opened the door a little, let's go push on. Hey, should we set up a R&D center in India? It took a few more months of talking back and forth working, and Paul Maritz was back then in the company, and

Paul Maritz was in my chain kind of thing, so through Paul and Bill. So, finally Bill said, okay, you've been bugging me enough on this. I'll give you the permission to go start a R&D center and I'll give you 20 headcount.

I don't know what you're going to do. Go learn for a year and then we will see what to do with it, right? Maybe it's a good experiment, maybe it's a bad experiment, it'll fail. Maybe it won't happen. I don't know, but I'll give you permission to go hire up to 20 people. And I wasn't sure what we would do there. I had to, before I ask everybody else, I said, let me identify one project that is happening in my world that maybe could be a project that I do out of India, and then I can go ask somebody else for a second project. So, the very first project that I had picked was something called Services for Unix. And then over a period of time when the client also, if you're a Unix developer or you're used to Unix servers or Linux servers, how can you interoperate with the Windows server? So, we want to build a set of services, right? I said, this is a reasonably standalone project requires some automotive unique knowledge. We can find people in India. Let's go try that route. So, all sudden in February 1998, I go there for the inauguration. I had gone there before to find the location to sort of hire the first set of people, and we had about 15 people in the office.

Mario Juarez: Is this in Hyderabad?

Soma Somasegar: This is in Hyderabad. Okay. You fast forward today we got about 15,000 people fast going to 20,000 people and just the amount of growth, the kind of products they're working on for Microsoft, the impact they're having on Microsoft is just been phenomenal. So, I feel really, really proud of what I was able to do there and it has been a long journey. It's not like an overnight success kind of thing, but today, what Microsoft is doing in terms of tapping into people around the world, not just here, whether it is India, because at one point in time I was managing the R & D center in India, in China, in

Israel, in Vancouver, in Boston, in the Valley. Pretty much a lot of the distributor development work we were doing, just being able to open the eyes of the company to say, hey, there is another way to get access to the best talent. Let's build this muscle and discipline for what it means to have teams in different parts of the geography, different time zones, and still be able to work collaboratively, what is working, what is not working, and get it to a level of scale and success that is integral today to Microsoft success. I feel extremely good about my role and journey in that

Mario Juarez: You have a number of legacies that you could point to in the company. Is that legacy the one that you're most proud of? Reflect back to me about that.

Soma Somasegar: If you talk about legacy, there are two things that I say I'm sort of proud of and excited about, and I hope that people think about it when they think about me. One is the distributed development or what we did in terms of opening Microsoft's ability to go after and get the best people from around the world and know that we have a development model that works and makes it effective and successful for us kind of thing. The second thing, and this is what I also learned while I was at Microsoft, which is it takes a village to do anything. There's nothing, almost nothing you want to do by yourself. So, you need to learn how to take bets on people, how to enable people, how to empower people, and how to create an environment where people can do their very best. If you can do that, then you're going to be a successful leader. If you can't do that, you're going to be a successful individual, not necessarily a leader, and you fast forward to today. Today, I'm sort of outside Microsoft. I'm a venture capitalist by day and by night I have few other things that I'm doing, but I'm a venture capitalist.

That's what I do day in and day out. I have to take a bet on like, hey, is this the entrepreneur I want to bet my next 10 years, next 15 years with resources and time? And if I do a good job there, I'm

going to be an amazing venture capitalist. If not, I'm going to be a lousy venture capitalist. So, to me, whether you're working in a company or whether you're outside doing a startup or whether you're an investor, it's all about ensuring that you know how to make bets on the right people at the right point in time, and more importantly, once you take the bet, you create an environment for them to do their very best.

Mario Juarez: Let's upscale to the company level 50 years in. When you look at those early years and you think about the company's impact, it's hard to say the question about what's Microsoft legacy because it's still unfolding, but how do you think about legacy with regard to what Microsoft has done in the world?

Soma Somasegar: When you ask me about the company and where we are or the journey that we've been through the last 50 years and where we are today and more importantly where we can go ahead, let me start with a story, and this happened around 1995 or '96. Okay? I had gone on vacation with my family. We were in London at the time and we were going to get on London Eye and back then, today actually, I don't know whether there's still a lot of demand for people to go on the Ferris wheel or not. Back then it was relatively new, a lot of interest, blah, blah, and I think we were standing in line to go get on the ride. I was telling my wife this at the time because my wife, me and our two young kids were there.

I was telling my wife that, and I dunno why I thought that, but I said, hey, if you look at all these people that are standing in line, the thing that is sort of dawning on me is I don't know if every one of them has been directly touched, but I can guarantee you if you talk to them, either them or one of their immediate family members are likely to have been touched positively by Microsoft because they're a Windows user and we are just shipped Windows 95, and if you're a student, you are, chances are you're using a PC. If you're an office-going person, chance are you're using a PC, right? So, either

somebody here, and I can't tell you how many industries or how many companies can have that kind of impact. In fact, the only other company that I could at least back then think of was a beverage company like Coke.

They could have touched pretty much everybody here, one sip or one bottle or many bottles or whatever it is. But if you think about it from a technology ...from it sort of really impacting a person's life positively, whether it is for work or for education or staying in touch with friends and family or fun or whatever it is, Microsoft is there. That's the company that I'm a part of, so you tell me why are you working so hard? Why are you doing this? It's that kind of impact. And you fast forward to today, the first thing that comes to my mind is Microsoft is still as much, if not a bigger technology leader today, than 40 years ago, than 30 years ago, than 20 years ago, than 10 years ago, and that's a very, very amazing and privileged position for the company and we have to celebrate that and we have to understand that.

And then we have to think about, hey, how can we build the platform or how do we leverage the platform that we have for the next 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 500 years? I think... what I hope that people both celebrate and reflect upon as we look into the future, because technology is going to change fast, and we've seen that even during our lifetimes and very rarely people are going to continue staying at the leading edge of it, and we have proven, and there have been some misses along the way, but we've proven that we have the wherewithal to be able to tie through these in a platform shifts, these technology innovation changes and still be at the forefront and let's continue to remember that as we look ahead at the next change and the change after that and the change after that kind of thing.

Mario Juarez: Beautiful. One last question and then we'll go. Think back to that frozen kid walking into Building 2.

Soma Somasegar: Okay.

Mario Juarez: Imagine who you were, where your mindset was, and now there's a new Building 2 over on the new campus and there's probably some other disoriented promising young person who's feeling out of their depth, feeling out of their context. What would you say to that person? What advice do you give to somebody at Microsoft or in the technology world at large? What are your words of wisdom?

Soma Somasegar: I think the first thing I would say is really understand what the company is trying to do, what the company's vision is for the next 50 years, and make sure that you are truly excited about it. If so, then do your best while you are here to advance technology, to advance products, to advance what we deliver to customers that is going to accrue value to that vision and see how best you're going to be able to do that. To me, it always comes down to if you can do the best that you can align with the mission and the problem statement that you're deeply excited about, that's all you can ask for.

Mario Juarez: Wonderful. Anything else?

Soma Somasegar: I feel like it was fine. Thank you, sir. But do you feel like you got everything you wanted?

Mario Juarez: Absolutely. It feels very, very good and really, and I can't tell you how much we appreciate it. I can tell you how honored I feel very honored to be able to even have this conversation.

Soma Somasegar: Oh, no. Great. No, thank you. Thank you for doing this. So yeah,

Mario Juarez: You're so welcome..

Soma Somasegar: Good seeing you.

Mario Juarez: You too. And congratulations on the new ventures. I read about Madrona and how you're doing out there,

Soma Somasegar: Thanks. It seems like the fun thing is I think a lot of Microsoft people outside, they've been doing well at Microsoft, but when they leave, a lot of them have continued doing amazing things. It's just fantastic to see what a vibrant and broad alumni community we have.

Mario Juarez: And how broad that lens of passion goes. And you see people doing things in areas and you're like, wow. And I think everybody takes a little bit of Microsoft with them. Thank you so much for your time. We appreciate you.