

Oral History of Akhtar Badshah

Interviewed by **Becky Monk** for the Microsoft Alumni Network

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Preface

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Akhtar Badshah as conducted by Becky Monk on July 19, 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

Becky Monk: As we get started, what I'm going to just have you do is tell me your name, where you live and what you're doing today. And then after that we're going to go into a 30-second overview of what you did at Microsoft.

Akhtar Badshah: Great. Yeah. So, I'm Akhtar Badshah, I live in Kirkland and at this point I am a faculty member at the University of Washington, and I also run a consulting firm that focuses on Purpose and Purpose Mindset.

Beck Monk: Wonderful. And what did you do? What was your role at Microsoft?

Akhtar Badshah: So my role at Microsoft was to say, “No.” That was my role. I was hired to as the Senior Director for Community Affairs, which was the philanthropic division at Microsoft. And it was great. I got to give away money, but I quickly realized that that is really not what my role was. My role was to work with the community and explain to them who we could support, and who we could not support. So at the end of the day, my role became to say “No,” and to say it in a way that we actually did not lose connection with these individuals and entities because every single one that was actually looking for support from the organization, from the company, were just doing some awesome work. It was just that it meant to have not fitted within our priorities and the issues that the company wanted to tackle through its philanthropic dollars.

Beck Monk: Right. So let's kind of level set. You joined the company in 2004, is that right?

Akhtar Badshah: Correct. I joined the company in 2004.

Beck Monk: Right. And when you started, what was Microsoft's Philanthropy program? Its Corporate Affairs program? What was that like?

Akhtar Badshah: So the Corporate Affairs and Philanthropy program, when I joined, was quite disparate. It was very much spread out. Individual subsidiaries, making local decisions on where the support should go. And here, in Redmond, it was very much the Puget Sound focus, and then other decisions were made by GMs in different subsidiaries around the world. So that's how it had got set up because this was the center, this was the gravity, this was where everything was happening and where we had the most number of employees. So the focus was very much here.

Beck Monk: The program really got started many years earlier because of Bill's mom, because of Mary?

Akhtar Badshah: Correct.

Beck Monk: So can you tell me what was the size of the impact, but at the time you joined, what was encompassed? Was there an employee giving program? What did that look like?

Akhtar Badshah: So the multiple questions in there, so let me kind of tease it out, right. One is the question of the role, Mary Gates, Bill Gates' mother played in encouraging Bill and the employees to show up effectively in the community. And Mary Gates was instrumental in getting the employee matching, not the matching, but the employee payroll deduction started for United Way of King County. At that time, in 1983 when this was started, \$17,000 were raised by employees agreeing to have money taken out from their paycheck on a monthly basis or a bi-monthly basis. That became the genesis of the program.

Fast forward to 1986, when Bill Neukom joins the company as the Chief Legal Officer, and he basically asked Bill Gates and Jon Shirley, who was the president of the company, that he not only wanted to have LCA, which is the legal office, the legal affairs, but to also have a program that was focused on government affairs, industry affairs, corporate affairs, and community affairs. And you can understand why government affairs, industry affairs, corporate affairs because that's who our customers were. We were increasingly servicing government agencies. We were part of an industry that was growing, which was the software industry corporate affairs, but community affairs was a complete outlier.

And his rationale was that we have 18, 20 year olds, young, incredibly talented individuals here using technology to bring about substantial change who are spending 18, 20 hours on campus. But at some point they will, this will become their home, this is where they will grow, this is where they will establish roots, this is where they will get married, this is where they will have family, and there has to be a way by which they get connected to the community in which they're going to be part of. And community affairs and the

employee matching program became a way by which they could get exposed into the community. And that became the genesis of the program. Yeah.

Beck Monk: Now when you started, they added the Volunteer Matching, a year after you started.

Akhtar Badshah: Correct. So now when you look at, just back to the genesis as a company introduces employees to get engaged and my conversations with Bill, he was very frustrated with it because he felt that people would actually show up and donate to organizations like Planned Parenthood and other community-based organizations, instead money was going to the Alma Maters because the Universities are actually very good at raising money. And for employees it was actually very easy to just say yes. It took a concerted effort for over years for the program to get deeply rooted into the community. So when I joined, that was already there, but what was not there was us trying to really understand how our employees are showing up with these organizations besides writing a check. We knew people were volunteering, but there was no mechanism for anybody to actually tell us what they were doing.

So what would be the incentive for us to actually increase more people showing up in the community? And that's when we developed the employee matching— the Dollars for Doers program—where time was matched with Microsoft support. And we went to Lisa Brummel, and Lisa was the head of HR at that time, and she immediately said, yes, let's go for it. And that became then the way to track, but also then collect the impact that we were having because now our employees were out there. At the end of the day, a company is nothing without its employees and it's the employees who show up and get seen in the community. And this became a way by not just Microsoft, wearing Microsoft T-shirts and being seen at a grocery store, at a car store, but in the community.

- Beck Monk: I love that. Why was that important to the business? Why was that important to the leadership of Microsoft?
- Akhtar Badshah: And hopefully when you are interviewing Bill Neukom, you might go a little deeper into this, but I believe that it was less about the business where you can actually see that there is a direct financial benefit for the company. But it was more about how is the company showing up in the community that it is going to be rooted in? And the only way you can show up in the community and be rooted in the community is if your employees are showing up and are rooted in the community. And for young people who are coming out of college, who are going to be working 20 hours on Coke and pizza and living here on campus, how do you get them to connect to the community? And that was the driver that if you can get people out and connect to the community, then we as a players become richer. And if we all become richer, then the company as a whole benefits because then more people want to come here, more people want to join the company, and the company is now able to attract even more people and better talent than it could.
- Beck Monk: Yeah, okay. So attracting talent takes me back to how did a kid from Mumbai who went to school to be an architect ended up at Microsoft?
- Akhtar Badshah: Yeah, that's a great question. I don't know because I mean, my goal was to be an architect and I went to MIT, studied architecture, was asked to teach architecture, taught architecture for 10 years, and colleagues at the World Bank in the UN said you're wasting your time teaching. Why don't you come and help us with this new organization called the Mega Cities Project that we are launching. And at that time, my wife had just got hired at Microsoft because she was smarter than me and did computer science and she was hired in the New York office and this was a New York-based job that made it possible for me to move and take on this role so that I could trail my wife.

Beck Monk: Fantastic.

Akhtar Badshah: And she moved here [to Redmond] in 1998. So, I moved and then I got another nonprofit which was focused on bridging the digital divide, which is what put me in connection with Microsoft. And then I was then asked to lead there.

Beck Monk: Well, you've literally written the book on Microsoft's philanthropy with your book, *A Purpose Mindset*. So tell me a little bit about what philanthropy has meant to you personally and how Microsoft's philanthropy has influenced your personal giving, your personal philanthropic ideas.

Akhtar Badshah: Yeah, so I wrote the book on Microsoft and how Microsoft shows up, and I have the book here so that you can see. And part of the reason was that when my wife was working at Microsoft on the East Coast, I would get exposed to the Microsoft Employee Giving Campaign in the month of October. And I always wondered, why are these crazy people running around trying to raise money for things around the world? It was not a concept that I understood. And when I came here, we had the earthquake in India in Burj in 2000, and I started raising money for that earthquake.

My wife was involved, some of the other folks were involved, and we saw lines of people walking into my wife's office filling out the giving form because there was nothing online at that time and donating money and people were donating large sums of money. And we raised in this small little town over a million dollars. And I was shocked at the generosity of how a company, which is to a large extent cutthroat in its business approach, had created this other DNA where people were immediately responding to something. I had a woman walk up the stairs in my office in downtown and said, you're helping your countryman, here's \$5. The janitor in my son's school gave him a hundred dollars. So there was something about generosity and empathy, which to me was very interesting. And that started shaping how we wanted to show up,

but that also shaped me and how the company should show up with the nonprofit community following the lead of employees with empathy and concern and not with "we have our technology, we have our resources, take it or leave it." So that to me is what is so fascinating about what got introduced by Bill, Bill Neukom, Jon Shirley very early on with the Employee Matching Gifts program, that it inculcated the building of a DNA, that even though people were extremely competitive on the business side, that competitiveness was layered with empathy and compassion for the global community in which we all became part of.

Beck Monk: Did that competitiveness spill over into the GIVE Campaigns with folks trying to outdo each other races?

Akhtar Badshah: Oh yes.

Beck Monk: Talk to me a little bit about that.

Akhtar Badshah: Oh yes, Microsoft, so the early part was all about competition. The October Giving Campaign was this month where employees could solicit funding for their causes for their nonprofits that they wanted to support. And every division and every VP was competing and there was a thermometer that actually showed what everybody was raising. And the competition was that the person with the highest then got dunked into Lake Bill and there was all these crazy competitions where people were getting hit with paint balls. People were doing all sorts of things, giving away a ride with somebody on the plane, play basketball with Steve Ballmer, visit Bill's house. And all of that was done to encourage people to actually show up and give.

Now there was a time where that worked, but then you had the 2000's where the world was a very different place, the company's growth was in a very different place, the stock was very much in a different place, and we had to figure out how to temper that down without tempering down the ability for people to actually give. It

was getting to a point where people felt forced that they were asked to participate, versus they were being encouraged to participate. So we had to come up with different ways and the employee Dollars for Doers program was one way to kind of do that. What is fascinating is that every single year Microsoft's giving has continued to increase, and that is astounding in any environment with recessions, even the recessions, we had a senior executive leading our campaign and they would always come and tell us, I need to have a goal, so give me a goal. And I remember Somasegar saying, I'll join only if you put a goal as we are going to cross a hundred million. And I was saying, I really don't want to put that as a goal, but I had to and we did cross a hundred million because now it's over \$250 million or \$270 million. So the scale is enormous because I think we've created the environment in which people truly believe that they should be showing up for the community.

Beck Monk: What do you think keeps this going year after year after year after year?

Akhtar Badshah: I think now it's just an expectation. It's been an expectation for employees. It is also a phenomenal engine that has been created by the philanthropy team and the employee giving team. We have loaned executives that come in and volunteer their time for four months to run it as a campaign. We have vice president appointed leads, every VP has a lead that actually helps motivate and nudge people to give. So there is this huge infrastructure that gets built out and it is there and people actually see it as something that is of pride to be asked to be a V-Pal or to be a loan executive or to be able to serve in this capacity. And that's what makes it, I mean, there is this quote, I interviewed some of our employees in the book and one of the ladies said that this is what amplifies my purpose and acts as a renewable source of energy. So even at times when my work may be tedious, I felt fall back on this. And that to me is really the secret sauce.

Beck Monk: I love that. The secret sauce. Is it something, can you tell me how this is not prevalent, right? In the tech world when Microsoft started this and during the time you were there having a corporate giving program wasn't prevalent in the tech company or in the tech industry, was it?

Akhtar Badshah: Well, I mean also Microsoft was a early starter of a tech company, but Intel, Cisco have had programs which was somewhat different. Of course, IBM had a major program on employee giving and early on people were watching what others were doing. Boeing here had a very robust program, but we also realized that we were not Boeing. We were very different. Boeing was very much saying, here are some organizations that we are listening for you to donate and we'll match. Microsoft leadership felt that they were not able to tell anybody where to give and people should give wherever they wanted to give and we should match that, which was very new, which was very new. And anybody starting out there, I would recommend don't do that because it's just a challenge to build the infrastructure to donate to any organization of your choice. But at Microsoft, early on it was very different environment, still small groups of people giving, and over time it became much more robust so you could build up the infrastructure and now the infrastructure exists, the backend technology support that is needed for such a large amount of money to actually flow out.

Beck Monk: How was Microsoft's giving campaign, its corporate philanthropy programs, how were they innovative?

Akhtar Badshah: So there were a number of ways in which they were innovative.

One is just the scale and the size. At very early on it was decided that it was \$10,000. Now, Bill kind of took that bet where he was at times saying, are we going to give away all our money? Whatever everybody started giving away \$10,000. But he understood that not everybody would do it, but that number would be a motivator and that there would be a small group of people that would actually

meet that, but the majority would not, but it would be an inspirational number. So that became an innovation, the October giving campaign and running it as a month long campaign with the infrastructure that got built around it was innovative. I mean, when you look at the amount of stuff that employees were able to do, the cat calendar, dog calendar, cookbooks, vintage cars, 5K run and walk, poker tournaments, it just this enormous amount of ideas that came out from employees, big sales and trees and all sorts of things.

So it was driven by employees to encourage this work. What was also innovative was that by having it to any nonprofit of their choice, we did not become a gating factor. Now we could be a gating factor where we were directly the philanthropies, the community of affairs team was directly giving money. You could be a gating factor, but you could immediately point out to say, you cannot get money from us, but if you can find employees to support you and you participate in that engine, you can actually get a lot of money match. And there were so many nonprofit organizations doing that all the time. So that was the innovation and those nonprofits that understood that have succeeded in tapping into this Microsoft reservoir of good.

Beck Monk: If we go back at the beginning, you've talked about your job was to say no, when you were at the company, how did you manage the flood of people that were realizing Microsoft was potentially sort of their corporate bank, that they could come and ask for cash that had to have grown exponentially while you were there?

Akhtar Badshah: Oh yes. I mean, the number of nonprofit organizations requesting for resources from Microsoft grew exponentially in the early 2000s. Microsoft was "The Evil Empire." The first day that I joined Microsoft, I had already committed to be a keynote speaker at an IT4D development conference at Berkeley. And I asked my boss, Pamela [Passman], should I go? And she said, yeah, go. We are

sponsoring the conference. So go, now go and say you're running Microsoft Philanthropy. So, I went and John Gage, who is the head of one of Chief Scientists at Sun Microsystems introduced me and he said, our friend Akhtar Badshah who's gone over to "The Evil Empire," that was my first introduction into this community. So yes, we were being viewed with suspicion that same day I was then on live television and the reporter basically asked me, what is the difference between you and the drug pusher? I was saying, "What the heck?" And he is saying, basically, you're giving away your software, and you are putting software and training people on your software because you want them hooked onto your software. And that's the environment in which we came from.

Beck Monk: And that was because of DOJ [Department of Justice anti-trust lawsuit]?

Akhtar Badshah: It was the DOJ. There was a prominent Linux movement that was driven by the nonprofit sector. Microsoft was not engaged in the nonprofit sector at the way in which we started becoming active. So these were all factors, but today we are one of the most beloved companies in the nonprofit sector. And that was because we decided to show up. We showed up to where they were in the way they wanted us to show up with the support they wanted us to give. And we had to be very clear that even though we are Microsoft, there is always going to be limitations in terms of financial resources. So what can we offer to you? And a company has multiple things to offer. It has its acumen, which is its products, it has its people, which is its knowledge. People have time, talent and treasure. Companies have cash, but companies can also become an advocate for an issue because they have great media presence.

So if you can combine all of that and give it to an organization, then that becomes far more empowering. And I'll just give you one example. There is an organization called the Global Give Back Circle. It's an organization that focuses on young girls and getting them

into the IT field and keeping them in college. And one of the things they do is that they actually do mentorship with women. So these girls can learn from these women how to stay on a career path and get inspired to be on a career path. They work in low-income communities, impoverished environments. They have this program which they started in Kenya, now they are in multiple other countries. And they came to us for support. And I said, look, I'm not sure we can write you a check, but we can actually get you exposed to our employees.

And that's what we did. And we got them in front of some of our women leaders. They found it to be a great, now there are 700 Microsoft women employees that give their time to this organization just on online mentoring. And with that money, that is getting matched, they build multiple schools in communities. So it's just this reframing, what is the value. The value now is that these high powered women, some of these started off as being just PMs 10 years ago, are now CVPs and they are able to write larger checks. They actually go out and visit these communities as part of their personal philanthropy. They can bring other people with them. So it's just understanding that and that's the innovation that people need to understand.

Beck Monk: I love that. I love that. When you think about your contributions, what are you most proud of?

Akhtar Badshah: I think one of the things that I'm most proud of are a couple of things that I learned to say "No" and got a hug from people. And that's important because it meant that the relationship with that organization continued and it changed the way we as a team behaved with somebody that was walking into our door. It was about respect, it was about acceptance, it was understanding them first. So that's what I'm most proud of. Second, I think by bringing in the Dollars for Doers program and matching our employees time, we have accelerated our contribution and how employees show up.

And third is that we did bring a program that was disparate into a more consistent program around the use of technology to empower people in the underserved communities. I was asked again, why are you not doing water? Why are you doing technology? Why are you not focused on aids? Why are you just doing technology? And my answer was that this is our core competence.

Coca-Cola should do things on water. They consume water, they have a hundred scientists that actually know what to do with water or more, whereas I don't. I know about technology, I can bring in that value into communities with people and knowledge. So it's not just a computer sitting there, but it's people behind that computer that can actually bring value. So for people. So that's the understanding where we were able to shift this localized giving into things that was unlimited potential. YouthSpark teams is a program that got in our employees to go out and mentor in classrooms to teach computer science. Now with the focus on using AI and AI skilling in communities around the world so people can actually effectively use technology as it is growing. So that's where we think, I thought, we should be, rather than somebody comes in and says, okay, this is great, let's fund it. So that shift brought stability to the program and it was then you could actually even have a reason to say no.

Beck Monk: You mentioned YouthSpark. What was YouthSpark and why was that important?

Akhtar Badshah: So when we first started Unlimited Potential, we kind of said let the subs decide which sector to serve. So some focused on women's empowerment, some focused on the elderly, some focused on disabled, some focused on youths. And that worked for a while because again, technology was scaling up, it was not ubiquitous. And then 5, 6, 7 years later you discover that things have changed. It's no longer a desktop that we were taking [unknown] into

communities. Everybody has a laptop now. People have things in their pocket. So how do we change and what is needed? And what we understood is that if we focused on youth, now you can actually use the technology to get three outcomes. One, you can get them proficient in using technology so that they could learn more and become much more effective in what they have learned. Two, it might actually open up doors for them for employment because now they have a skill that they can take into the workforce. And we are working with the underserved communities and we are working with nonprofit organizations. We are working with under-resourced communities. And third, it might actually inspire people to become entrepreneurs and they would become job creators. So that's became the logic say that we would actually get people to go for further studies. We would get people to get into jobs and we'll get a small group of people to actually create jobs. They're going to become entrepreneurs. And that became the logic to create a program around youth.

Beck Monk: Do you have an example of what that looked like with one student?

Akhtar Badshah: Yeah. We funded a organization in India called Anudip Foundation was started by Dipak and Radha Basu. Dipak used to be at Cisco. And he was actually the one that had helped start Empower, which is this technology organization that is providing technology support to nonprofit organizations. And he was basically training people, girls in West Bengal, in really rural communities to learn technology and to get into jobs and they would help them get into jobs. This girl came here as part of one of the conferences that we had done to showcase our impact, and she was now an expert on SharePoint.

She was working with clients in the implementation of SharePoint. She could barely speak English, but she was doing SharePoint work on the other organizations that we had funded in Guatemala. All of the animation, the digital animation for the film Narnia was done in Guatemala through kids who had gotten trained on some of the

technologies that we had put in there. So now you extend it to that today, these same girls are part of this company that Radha Basu started called iMerit, which is doing high-end AI work for companies like Google, Microsoft, Uber. And these girls and boys that I got trained in this are running writing these codes. So now you suddenly see how much life has changed, their earning income has changed. So that to me, and that happened everywhere, whether it was South Africa, whether it was in refugee camps in Gaza or in Africa, communities in China, whether it was with women, I was working with women who in the Philippines that had got rescued from slave trade and there were court cases going against the abductors so they could not even be out in the public. So, they had to be in safe locations, and they were being trained to use technology so they could still earn a living by designing websites, by designing other things. And that became the livelihood. So, this impact of what we were doing from a human perspective went beyond just, oh, we trained hundreds of millions of people, but transformation that was happening at the lowest level. People that were coming out of harrowing experiences where technology was becoming their savior and giving them a lifeline.

Beck Monk: When you look back on that, I know that Microsoft employees have sort of an unlimited limitless idea of what they can do, but did you ever think walking into a job like this that you would be able to have that kind of impact on people who were rescued from the slave trade?

Akhtar Badshah: I seriously had no idea. I had absolutely zero idea. I am an idiot. I don't know technology. My kids laugh at me when I could barely run a machine. I would shout all the time, hey, what has gone down? And somebody would come running and help me set it up again. So for me, this was not my field. What I learned going into the nonprofit sector was understanding human relations. And I had an intuitive way of understanding the impact this technology will have on people. And by marrying the two together, we were able to

bring out some creative approaches and also safeguard on crazy ideas that people had as to what these people could do.

I mean, these are not environments in which there is 24/7 electricity. These environments don't have internet connectivity all the time. These are people living in environments that get flooded out or get hit with terrible weather situations. So you had to manage those expectations to what we could and cannot do. But I had no idea that with this support we would set up 70,000 community technology learning centers in 103 countries. The person who had the inclination that I could actually be could do this was the chair of my board of the nonprofit that I was running before I joined Microsoft, was Paul Maritz, who used to be the number three guy at Microsoft and say, go work there, that will help you scale then what you're doing here. That I never understood. These guys from the technology field understood the power of the company and how much impact we could have if only people that had the ability to connect the dots could be brought in and that's what we did.

Beck Monk: How does that make you feel looking back on that kind of impact?

Akhtar Badshah: I think, I'm not sure that it's really that much of a personal thing, right? To me it is the collective company, and its resources, and its leadership, saying go make this possible. It is the company, whether it is, I mean, Satya Nadella called me and said, hey, there is this guy Kent Wang that is doing this steel stuff. Why is he in my organization? He should be with you. Why are you not dealing with this? And I said, I don't want to get into computer science and classroom. And he said, why not? So we got sent to us today, hundreds of schools in this country, thousands of schools in this country, tons of kids are benefiting from hundreds and hundreds of not just Microsoft employees, but the tech sector employees going into classrooms and teaching kids.

That's his vision. I just said, go do it. And then we kind of intuitively understood that, okay, we got to go do it, but then also I'm not

going to say no to Satya at that time, even though he was not the CEO of the company. And I said, okay, what do you need? I said, I need his account and I need some money. I said, fine, I'll give you that. So I also want to be very careful that it wasn't as if I was dreaming of all of these things out of my head. This was people, Jeff Raikes, Brad Smith, Pamela Passman, so Lisa Brummel understanding that yeah, there will be a financial impact, but this will be huge for the company. So let's go make it. They didn't make us write a business plan. There was no business plan to this. Okay, let's try it out, see what happens. So this ability for the company at the highest level to take risks and to move into spaces and to see things around the curve, motivated us, gave us the opportunity to go and execute. And that to me is a collective effort that actually got us to where we are.

Beck Monk:

So I know from where we are today to what has come out of Microsoft in the philanthropic sector. Can you talk a little bit about, I know you have pride in this, you seeing the alumni who take it forward and are in the sector. Can you talk a little bit about the breadth of that?

Akhtar Badshah:

Yeah. So what has been the overall impact of Microsoft in the community? Again, I mean the whole purpose of writing this book was not about purpose mindset. I was trying to understand that there is a untold story of Microsoft's impact in the community outside of its technology. Everybody knows Microsoft's technology story, but this untold story is that there are thousands of people who are Microsoft employees and alumns [sic] who are still out there changing the world, and they're not just changing the world by doing philanthropy, they're changing the world because they've gone on and become educators. They've gone on and become politicians. They've gone on into the music and arts field. They've gone out and taken on new challenging stuff where they've come up with something brand new and become artists. So it's that and that license that people were given while at Microsoft to explore

these things. The giving campaign just became the catalyst for people to explore a lot of new things and get engaged. So people can continue to do that while at Microsoft and others have continued to do that, leaving Microsoft. And that's the story of the company, not just this technology, but the impact its people have had on the world at large.

Beck Monk: When you are telling Microsoft's story, and we talked a little bit earlier about this, but when you were talk a little bit about presenting and presenting Microsoft's community affairs and philanthropy at the different conferences.

Akhtar Badshah: I mean to me, the best way I was able to showcase is having a person with me that was directly touched and impacted by what we did. Their voice was far more important than my voice. I mean, I might just say the party line, which is the corporate line, but having people with us at conferences, at events, and giving them the stage to share, getting our employees to share, we could moderate that conversation. Now, people who were there could actually see that it's not Microsoft, the company, but it's Microsoft, the company, and it's people that are making the change and that added the human element.

Otherwise people can just say, oh, it's the company. But it's not some blocks from somewhere just going around doing things. It's people in the company that do things and it's people that benefit communities are made out of people. So it's not about showcasing, oh, look how much more the weed grew because of AI, but it is about the impact on the farmer, and the family of the farmer, because of our technology that allowed them to use it effectively so that they could grow meat, meat more and sell more and make more money, and therefore they can send their kids to school. How do you do that in the most effective way is I think the important piece here.

Beck Monk: So we were at a point where we wanted to talk a little bit about an example of bringing folks up on stage and really showcasing what philanthropy, what community fairs could do in front of all those employees. What did that look like?

Akhtar Badshah: Yeah, so I'll give you a couple of examples.

One, we held an event here at the 30th anniversary of our Giving, the philanthropy, and we brought in community members on campus and help them tell the story of impact to the leadership here and invited the press and others to actually talk about that. That to me is extremely powerful. At the Clinton Global Initiative, I talked about the Global Give Back Circle. There were two girls from Kenya who were flown in and they were on main stage talking about how this has transformed their lives. That to me is far more powerful and we were encouraging people in every subsidiary to do that.

That if you have a place to showcase them, tell their story as something that we have enabled rather than just this is what Microsoft has done. And it's hard. I mean, we also want to get press out of this and want to get recognition. We want to be able to say that Microsoft did it and getting press is always tough because it's hard to get good press. It's always easy to get negative press. So making sure that it was their story that people were covering allowed us to show up in a way that was far more effective and meaningful.

Beck Monk: Great. When you look back and you think about that young man who walked in here in 2004, what advice would you give to him today?

Akhtar Badshah: So first of all, I was not that young when I walked in the doors.

There are a couple of things that I'll say. When I walked in, many of my friends who are now Senior Executives, including our CEO, took

a bet that I would not last for more than six months because I was coming from the nonprofit sector. I was always the rabble rouser. I was always the one that was challenging the status quo. I said, you're just going to go and say something stupid and people are going to get mad at you. But Mary Snapp, who's our CVP, she in my interview had told me, and I will say, it wasn't advice, but she had told me that, look, you are going to carry the neon light on your head saying Microsoft and money anywhere you go. That is why people are going to talk to you. They're not going to talk to you because you're Akhtar Badshah so, how are you going to manage that? So what became very interesting for me to very quickly realize that Microsoft has multiple resources and if you could get Microsoft to show up with these multiple resources, then you would actually be fine. Because if you were just showing up to give money.

It is going to be very hard. Which is where it became very quick for me to understand that my job was to say no without getting fired and without upsetting somebody else. So how do you understand that? Yeah, you may be the face, but at the end of the day your role is very different. And that was understanding that I was no longer at a nonprofit seeking money. I was at a for-profit making money and then investing into the community. So that took a little time to get my head around, but eventually I did.

Beck Monk: So if you could sort of sum that advice up for that not so young man, how would you do that? How would you set that up? In a couple of words.

Akhtar Badshah: Companies are driven by very different motivations and understanding all of the values a company can bring into the community is what you should be looking at and that's what you should be thriving for. And if you can get that, then you will succeed. So in our case, the employees, our products, our resources, our advocacy, you package all of that together, then you are bringing the company as a company, not just writing a check.

That to me was a big shift in my head. And then taking that out in the community and getting the community to understand that was the next battle.

Beck Monk: That's great. I like the way you've said that. What do you want your legacy to be?

Akhtar Badshah: Everybody asks questions about legacy. I mean, nobody gives a crap about anybody's legacy. So I think focusing on legacy is not what you should be doing. It's not- who cares? Well, what you should be really focused on is how are you showing up every single day? Bill Gates Senior wrote a book, a tiny book called "Showing Up for Life." In that he basically said every single day you wake up, show up for life. And showing up for life essentially means that you're not just showing up for yourself, but you're showing up for your family, you're showing up for your community, you're showing up with your faith, and you're showing up at work. And if you can bring all of that together, then I think you are contributing rather than extracting. That's what everybody should strive for. So it's not about what somebody else will say about you, it's not what is going to be written on your tombstone or whatever it is because you're gone. So you don't know. But it is on a daily basis, are you actually showing up? And it's hard because you're not going to show up every day in that way, but the more you do, the more content you become, the more meaning you get with anything that you're doing and then you move towards fulfillment.

Beck Monk: So let me ask this. If Microsoft has a legacy in regard to its philanthropy, its social impact, what do you think that is going to be?

Akhtar Badshah: I think Microsoft's impact has been that it has motivated hundreds of thousands of people to show up in their community in the way they want to show up. And in doing so, you have people that are monitoring enormous number of hours at food banks. There are people who are working in homeless shelters. There are people who

are sitting on the backend and fixing somebody's technology. There are people who are climbing Mount Kilimanjaro or any place to raise money for a youth organization. There are people that are actually looking at systems change, whether it's setting up the Gates Foundation, Obama Philanthropies or Raikes or Scott Oki or Jon Shirley. So it's people who are at that level to people like Tasin [Shadid] and others who are out there in their own countries supporting you to thrive or working in Nigeria to get you to thrive. Or creating a university in Ghana for the first time, an African university that is world-class. So that has come about because of how Microsoft empowered its employees and not just created technology. That to me is the story.

Beck Monk: I love that. I love that so much. We've talked about so much what haven't. The one thing I didn't ask was just to give me your impressions of the culture at Microsoft. What did you love about working there and what were your impressions of just the overall culture?

Akhtar Badshah: Part of it was I was very lucky to some extent that I was in this tiny little bubble doing my own thing. So I didn't have to, what I hear from my wife and others who are the amount of fights they had and this shouting matches and getting shouted at by Bill and Steve and I didn't have to go through any of that, but I think every company, if it has to succeed, has to be competitive. Microsoft was hyper-competitive. But what we are also seeing and what Satya has done that he has also tapped into the emotional intelligence of employees and brought that into the forefront. So as much as it is competitive, it is also toggling between competitiveness and also being empathetic and generous. So on one side, I would say, the company is driven by a growth mindset, but it has also created a space where people have been able to apply and cultivate their purpose mindset, which goes beyond just looking at growth, which in many cases is for the self. Self, could be the company or self could be the individual. Purpose and Purpose Mindset introduces

the trinity of the self, the organization and the community. And the more Microsoft does to get to that point, it'll actually be far more compelling an entity to be and the change that it will make in the world, not just through its technology, but through its people and how people show up with their time, their talent and their resources and their treasure.

Beck Monk: What, is there anything that we haven't hit on today that you really want to talk about that is part of your time at Microsoft?

Akhtar Badshah: So I would rather talk a little bit about my time post-Microsoft, because we are all on a journey. So there is so many things you learned and what eventually I learned is a company can play a very important role in opening up avenues and opportunities for individuals to show up with their humanity.

And our Giving Campaign was one fulcrum, one lever to do that. But if every organization found those levers, whatever they may be, where people can apply their purpose, it's not just giving back, but it is how are you effectively showing up in everything you do, whether it's at your work, whether it's for yourself, whether it's for your family, whether it's for your community. Now you're shifting the way the narrative of humanity and its ability to continue to survive and thrive. That's what I learned from Microsoft and that's what I now continue to do through my work around Purpose and Purpose Mindset is to get people to become extremely comfortable with who you are and bring yourself completely in everything you do. Microsoft was able to encourage that in its employees through its employee giving campaign and that to me is phenomenal.

Beck Monk: And you are doing that now, not just for, you're doing that for individuals, you're doing it for other companies, you're doing it for organizations around the world.

Akhtar Badshah: Correct, yeah. So we are running these workshops and retreats for individuals to help them discover their, articulate their purpose and

show up in the most effective way possible. We've been working with organizations, we've done over a hundred different organizations, companies, nonprofits, startups, educational institutes, government agencies, all over the world. People have actually crafted their purpose statements in Japanese and Arabic and Chinese and Spanish and French and English and it's fun. It's a lot of fun.

Beck Monk: It is so great. What you're doing. I've been in your workshops and I've learned so much from that. I really have. What do you think the future is going to look like with Microsoft Philanthropy, with what people are doing? Where do you think we're headed?

Akhtar Badshah: So I think, philanthropy is just a way, I think what Microsoft has done is it's shifted, its DNA. A DNA which is incorporating purpose, even if not as a primary driver, but as a secondary driver, for all individuals in the company. And it then percolates down to the family, it percolates down to the kids, it percolates down into the community, and now you are actually creating a movement by which people are understanding that yes, there is work and it is competitive and you have to earn money so that you can live and you can survive. But to really thrive, you've got to bring the community along with you and that investment in the community, the collective. is what is eventually going to be lasting. And that to me is how everybody should view their role in any organization, and in everything that they do.

Beck Monk: Fantastic. Alright, those were all my questions for you. For the folks who are loosening on the other side of the wall, how are we doing? Do we need to ask anything else? Is there anything that we need to redo

Beck Monk: Thank you.

Akhtar Badshah: This is great. This is perfect.