

Oral History of Sanjay Parthasarathy

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 Sanjay Parthasarathy as conducted by Becky Monk on August 8, 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: All right, so Sanjay, tell me who you are and what you did at Microsoft.

Sanjay Parthasarathy: I'm Sanjay Parthasarathy and I started Microsoft in 1990, August 6th, 1990. And I started as a product manager in multimedia systems, which eventually became part of Windows 3.1. And after doing that for a couple of years, I went off and became a group product manager in advanced consumer technology. Now, that was when we were trying to do interactive TV. And that technology ended up being part of Internet Explorer. So I became a product unit manager for commerce and security, I think. Product team in the IE group. And then a little bit after that, I went off to India to be regional director of the Indian or South Asian subsidiaries. And from

there I came back to work for Steve Ballmer as general manager of customer systems. Did that for a couple of years and then became corporate vice president for the platform strategy... No. Developer and platform group, which owned the .NET platform. And after doing that for about seven years, I went off and started a new division called Startup Business Accelerator. And that was my last role at Microsoft.

Becky Monk: Wow. Such a varied career. I want to back up and talk about how you got to Microsoft. So let's start with where you were born and where you grew up.

Sanjay Parthasarathy: So I was born in Chennai in India. I grew up... I mean, I did my first 21 years there. I went to college there, engineering college in Chennai. And from there I went to grad school at MIT for an engineering degree. And then right after that I went to MIT Sloan School for a business degree. And I got to Microsoft directly from MIT Sloan.

Becky Monk: Wow. So let's talk a little bit more about your time in India and growing up there. What was your family like? What was life like?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: Life was easy. I had a certain amount of privilege, and so I could do what I wanted. I played a lot of cricket. I mean, I used to play cricket in the professional league. I played for college, played for school. One of the dreams I had was to play for the country, but academics got in the way sometimes. And so I ended up at MIT that way.

Becky Monk: And how did you end up deciding that technology was the future for you?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: I didn't. It was a long and winding road to ending up in the tech industry and figuring out what I wanted to do. I was a mechanical engineer and my engineering degree at MIT was also in mechanical engineering. But I realized that I still hadn't found what I

really wanted to do. And so when I got to MIT Sloan, I did a research internship. I was an RA, as they used to call it, a research assistant for a project that was to test whether people would buy cars without ever talking to a salesperson. So I built the first prototype of a system that used video and used... There wasn't an internet in those days, but MIT had an internal network. So built a system where people could just log into a computer and walk around a car with the video, ask questions of the computer, and it would give you answers like a salesperson would. Except without the pressure of talking to a salesperson. And so that was when I realized I wanted to get into technology and into software technology.

Becky Monk: And so you got the business degree, you got the mechanical engineering degree, and Microsoft comes knocking. Was it a recruiting event?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: No, they didn't come knocking. I applied. And I didn't get asked to do an interview. So at the end of the day, the recruiters, the interviewers were... Every Thursday at Sloan, we used to have a party, a beer party. It was called a Consumption Function. So I went up to the bar to get a beer, and I ran into two of the folks who had come down to interview my colleagues, and we got chatting. And they asked me what I was doing, and I told them about this project I was doing about selling cars online. And they said, "Can we see it?" So I took them up to my lab and showed them that, and they said, "Why didn't you apply to Microsoft?" And I said, "I did. You guys probably didn't think I was good enough." And anyway, so long story short, they had me fly out to Microsoft and it was my first job.

Becky Monk: So the chance encounter at the Consumption Function is what led you to that interview.

Sanjay Parthasarathy: That's right.

Becky Monk: So when you flew out and you had the interview, who did you interview with?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: When I came up for the interview, I think there was about 12 people all lining up to take shots at me. In fact, the two gentlemen at the bar that I met, I owe them a lot. And one was Richard Tait and the other one was John Nielson. And Richard was my as-appropriate [interview] at the end of that day. January 6th of 1990. And I remember a couple of people. Linda Archer was there. There was Keith Logan. I don't know if he's still at Microsoft. But it started at seven and ended at midnight or something like that. So it was pretty intense in those days.

Becky Monk: How did you find Microsoft? What is it that they said that made you say, "Oh, yeah. I definitely want to be here." I know you applied, but what was the selling point for you?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: It was the only company that made me an offer. I was a foreign student at MIT, and opportunities for foreign students weren't plentiful at those times. I mean, you were on F-1 Visa, the company had to decide that you were worth a H-1B or whatever it was at that time, and a green card. Microsoft's the only one that decided that that was worthwhile.

Becky Monk: Wow. So that experience just had to be, I mean, nerve-wracking trying to find the job that would go through all the hoops, the governmental hoops too.

Sanjay Parthasarathy: Yeah. And the other thing was, I mean, as a West Coast company in those days, I know they made about eight offers to my graduating class at Sloan. It was about 200 people, eight offers. And only two of us accepted. And Microsoft wasn't a well-known name at that time, certainly on the East Coast. I mean, it was IBM and Lotus and some of these other companies that were better known at that time. And so Richard Barth and I were the only two that took

the risk to come West Coast. I didn't take a risk, because that was the only offer I had.

Becky Monk: Okay. You landed here. Your first job, tell me what you did with your first role here.

Sanjay Parthasarathy: So my first job at Microsoft was as a product manager. I think it was associate product manager in the multimedia division. This was the time when computers didn't have audio and video at all. And there's a big push at Microsoft to get CD-ROMs into personal computers. And so there were three of us, Richard Bray, Hugh Chang and myself, who were brought on board to try to get third parties, software developers to write to multimedia systems, to include audio and video into their program. So I had gaming companies and educational software companies as the target to go convince to adopt Windows. And they were all on Microsoft, MS-DOS, Microsoft DOS. But writing to Windows was a big deal at that time. So I got to go to Lucasfilm and LucasArts and Entertainment, basically a lot of time in the Valley, Sierra On-Line, MicroProse, these are all game software companies in those days, and try to convince them to move over to Windows.

Becky Monk: What was that pitch like?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: The pitch was like, "Please, please, you have to do this." Because I mean, in those days, the companies that were writing DOS games, MS-DOS games, got all the performance they wanted. In Windows you had to go through a GDI, graphical interface, and it was slower than they needed and so on. So it took a lot of begging and pleading and relationship building. And over time, they all moved of course.

Becky Monk: Yeah. Was there that promise of the next generation or this was the way of the future, or was it just, "This is what we're doing, please, please come with us."

Sanjay Parthasarathy: No, I mean, platforms take a while to shift. And I think when... I think the program, Multimedia Systems started in 1988 or '89. I wasn't here at that time, so I don't know exactly the precise date. It was all started, but by the time Windows 95 came around, everybody's writing Windows games. I mean, the Windows 32 API was just fine. But it takes a few years. And my entire career on the product side at Microsoft has been around platforms. You just have to kind of be patient, right? If you've got the right thing and you listen to the developer community and you engage with the developer community, three to five years, you'll get there.

Becky Monk: Nice. So three to five years in. What were people experiencing with the multimedia products when consumers were going and booting up the computer? What were they able to do at that time?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: So I mean, when I first got here at MIT, we were doing character-based interfaces. I mean, it was Lotus 1, 2, 3 on a character interface. And when I got here and started using Windows 3.0, and a mouse, it was just supernatural. I was programming on a Mac. The car buying experience was on a Macintosh. And so to me, this made all the sense in the world, Windows 3.0. Right? And the Mac of course had a little bit of audio on video. So the CD-ROM was a big shift. And so it started to reach out to more normal people on the street. That was the thing that the graphical user interface did. And with Windows 35, it was really, truly a consumer launch. I remember watching the launch, I think it was Jay Leno doing the launch with our folks. And it was the first time consumers went, "Oh, yeah. I think I need that." So that was the big shift with Windows 95.

Becky Monk: Yeah, that's the time when I said, "Oh, this is what a computer can do." From the purely non-techie side of things. I was like, "Wow. Magic." What was the next move for you within the company?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: So two years, once multimedia systems, the audio, video part got included in Windows 3.1. I think the Windows group kind of ran

with it. And so it was at that time, I think it was sometime in 1991, '92, I went off and spent some time at the NAB show. It was the National Association of Broadcasters. And they were introducing something called the cable modem. And the cable modem... Until then, I mean, you could do dial-up and there was AOL and some of these other online services. But cable modem was revolutionary in those days because what you had on a CD-ROM, you could deliver online. And that was why I went to the NAB show. I came back and I wrote this memo about how cable modems are the future and broadband is the future. Now, of course, Bill and Paul Allen at that time probably already knew all about it, but I remember being breathless about this new technology, the broadband technology. Wrote a memo, sent it to about 300 people in the company, maybe even more than that.

That may have been the reason that after that you couldn't send mail to the whole company. But anyway, I sent it out and it was such a fabulous thing, I thought at that time, that I sent it out to everybody at the company that I could get their email address for. And Bill asked me to come talk to him and Paul about what I had seen at the NAB show. So I got to go up to the boardroom and talk to them about the future of cable modem and broadband. And then when they created a group under Nathan Myhrvold called advanced consumer technology, I ended up joining that because that was where we were going to build an interactive TV system using broadband. And the cable providers and the phone companies were all very interested in making interactive TV happen. Which didn't happen for another 20 years. So we were a little early on that one.

Becky Monk:

Well, I mean, you had the car idea before Carvana, right? You've got this going on. Tell me, put me in the boardroom with you and Bill and Paul. What was that conversation like? Were they like, "Yeah, we know." Or were they excited? Was it confrontational? What was that like?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: No, it was pretty relaxed. I mean, it was the first time I was in the boardroom. I don't really remember it because it was probably just completely overawed. Maybe it may have been 30 minutes, an hour. But it was just, "What did you see? What do you think?" That kind of conversation. I mean, nothing, no kind of pressure at all. It was just a casual conversation.

Becky Monk: Cool. Very cool. All right, so you are working with Nathan's group and you are working on this cutting-edge technology. What was it that just really excited you about all of that innovation?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: I love platforms. I love new technology. I love bringing new things to market. And it was just a free for all. I mean, nobody knew what was going to happen or where this would all end up. And it was just a beautiful place in time at Microsoft. And then the internet wave hit. And there was this amazing memo that gets talked about so much, The Internet Tidal Wave, that Bill wrote. But a lot of it was the work that we were doing in advanced consumer technology. So for example, we were building a system called Tiger, which is a way to stripe video across multiple hard drives. And that ended up becoming the core technology for Windows media and the Windows Media Player. Will Poole and Mike Beckerman. I think they ended up taking that piece of technology and building that Windows Media Player out of that. But that was what I totally enjoyed. Creating new things, creating new markets, and letting them loose.

Becky Monk: What was it like to see those come to fruition? Like you said, the TV piece didn't come right away, but we didn't see the video streaming right away. What was it like to see those things come to life and really be implemented?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: I mean, it's a glass half empty, glass half full. Because we were too early on one thing, but at the same time, we were ready for the next thing. That was the time Netscape was going full force with the internet browser. And a lot of the technology that we did

in advanced consumer technology ended up getting used in Internet Explorer. So it was a kind of a mixed feeling that our original vision didn't happen. But at the same time, it got us ready because of the work we did on commerce and security and video and broadband. All of these got used in IE. So that was good to see. But by that time, I'd actually already landed in India.

Becky Monk: All right. I'm going to just stop just for a second, because I want to get to India, but I know Nancy will come back and say, "Remember to try to phrase the question in there."

Sanjay Parthasarathy: Sure.

Becky Monk: So we'll try to do some of that. All right. So you were in the middle of all this exciting work. What made you decide that you wanted to be part of India, the market, opening a new market?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: Yeah. India was always on my mind. I grew up there. I'd always wanted to go back and do something there. And in 1989, again at MIT Sloan, I wrote a paper about... For one of my international classes, I think, I wrote a paper about the software industry in India. And how India could be a player in the software market. Now why I thought that, I don't know, but maybe it was just I needed to write a paper for school, but I ended up meeting some of the seminal software companies in India. I just sent them a note and they said, "Yeah, come meet." That's how I met Nandan Nilekani at Infosys. I met with half a dozen of the premier software and hardware companies. And ended up writing this note that was always in the back of my mind. And in 1995, right after Windows 95 launched, I was looking for, "Okay, what else can I do to help?"

So I went to Orlando. I said, "Orlando, I want to go to India." And he said, "Why?" And I said, "Because I think the market is ready for software and I want to help." He said, "We already got a GM in India." And I said, "I know, but I want to go." So Orlando and I ended up spending a fair amount of time creating a new role, which

was the regional director role, which would include India. It would include the countries around India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh and so on. And we ended up writing a memo together, which was called Engines of Growth. This was something that he already had in his head and he'd been talking to Steve Ballmer about, but I ended up actually writing that memo with him. Engines for Growth. And finally in April of 1996, I landed in India.

Becky Monk: So for everybody who wasn't there, doesn't know, why was Southeast Asia, South Asia, why was that the market that you thought we needed to be in? Because we had subs in all sorts of places.

Sanjay Parthasarathy: Yeah. I mean, the reason South Asia was, and India in particular was interesting, is because I knew how much activity there was. It wasn't the big market. I mean at that time, Microsoft may have been a few billion dollars in revenue, and I think the OEM business in India at that time was somewhere in the 5 to 10 million dollar range. Microsoft had a distributorship, it didn't have a subsidiary.

So I think it was only in 1995 that it created subsidiary. There were about 12 people, 12 employees in Microsoft in India. And so to me it just felt like a combination of some place that I knew, some place that I had sensed that things were happening. And I wanted to, after five years in the product side of things, I really did want to go out and experience the close to the customer, being in the field, and no one was going to get me to go run the French subsidiary or anything like that. So I picked something that I felt that I knew, that I could convince people, that would give me a chance to go back and make a difference. And that's how it worked out.

Becky Monk: Yeah. When Scott Oki was here, he talked about how the importance of having people who were from that area be in charge in those areas. How do you think that helped you really build that out?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: Yeah, I was comfortable there. I mean, I grew up there, so I was super comfortable. I knew people already because I talked to them for the paper I did. I was reasonably well plugged into the government. It was a big issue, because not that many people were paying for software in India in those days, and a lot of the strategy and policy was based on legal copies of Windows. So I did know people in the government. And to me, Orlando had kind of a very convincing bait. He said, "Maybe we can get Bill to visit India." And it wasn't done deal when I decided to go there, but that was always one of those carrots. I'm like, "Yes, we need to get him there, because I do think it will make a big difference."

Becky Monk: So I know that did come to fruition. Tell me how you did get Bill to come, and then what was the experience like? Because I've heard amazing stories.

Sanjay Parthasarathy: Convincing Bill to come to India was in large part Orlando Ayala's work... My wife by the way, I had been married for about three years at that time, she was a resident physician here. So, every six weeks I wanted to come back... And coming back was a good thing because it helped me kind of work with the product teams and try to convince them to invest resources in building products for India, for example. But Orlando was doing a lot of the heavy lifting in Redmond to get Bill to make a commitment to come out there. So eventually we got him to agree to come out in 1996, March. I think he was there from March 7th to March 9th of 1996, three days. We ended up setting up about 45 meetings for those three days. We'd have meetings in parallel, right?

We'd have one company, let's say TCS in one room in Mumbai. He'd kick it off, spend 30 minutes with them, and another meeting would be going on and he'd pop in there and do another 30 minutes. And so we did about 45 meetings. You can do the math. That was a lot of meetings there. But there was just a level of excitement that compared to Michael Jackson. Now, Michael Jackson had just been

in India, in Delhi the year before. And I mean, you know Michael Jackson in those days, it was just frenzy, it was crazy. And it was the same way with Bill. And in fact, I think they stayed in the same room, not together, but one after the other. And somehow the sheets from that room went on sale after he left. So it was crazy. And it was not just kind of the regular people on the street who all knew that Bill was there, but it was everybody in government, everybody in business.

And we did a couple of these very large events and they were completely sold out. Every major politician wanted to come listen to the future of technology and meet with Bill Gates. It was just crazy chaotic. But in the end, I think we'd coined the term that actually caught people's imagination. India can be a software superpower. And at that time, if you think about it, 1997 was only 50 years from independence. India was really looking for ways to make its mark in the world. And I think software superpower just caught people's imagination. And that was in 1996, 1997, and then you had the year 2000, Y2K come, happen. And that was the beginning I think of India and software and technology. So yeah, it was good to be there at the beginning.

Becky Monk: Yeah. Okay. I have to ask, how does Bill Gates become a rock star? How does he get rock star status? Where does that come from?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: Well, I mean, Bill was a technology rock star. And his visit to India just made him a pop star, if you know what I mean. He was just everywhere. It was the biggest thing in India that year, I think. So I mean, he was bigger than Michael Jackson. I think, in India there's a few things that... I always say there's A, B, C and D of India. A is for astrology, B is for Bollywood, C is for cricket, and D is for discounts. And then at that... The E part was also very important. Education. And technology and software in particular I think tapped into the E piece of it. Lots of young people all aspiring to kind of make a life, make a living, be part of the future, be part of the

middle class. And I think the education part has always been there. I think the technology part really gave them a way to think about them imagining themselves as part of the future.

Becky Monk: Okay. So you are in... Which city was the first sub in?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: So the subsidiary was in New Delhi. And by the time... And by the way, I was only there for 21 months. And the team grew from about 12 people, maybe it was around 12 to 20, some contractors. By the time I left to come back here, it was over a 100 people. And we had offices in Mumbai, in Bangalore, in Hyderabad. We had subsidiaries, not subsidiaries, we had offices in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. It just went crazy. And I think in that one and a little over one year, 21 months, I think the revenue went, and again, don't quote me on this necessarily, but it went from about 10 million to about 40 million, give or take. So it grew quite rapidly.

Becky Monk: Right. Well, and that's what I was going to get at. You went from opening one office in one city to being all over, and also convincing people in Redmond that this was the place that they could do software development. They could do other types of things, where a lot of the other subsidiaries were sales. A lot of sales. So how did sharing that load, how did you convince people that this was the right place for sharing that load, for having developers?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: Well, there was a really significant meeting between Bill Gates and Chandrababu Naidu, who was the chief minister of Andhra state, Hyderabad. And I remember that meeting, it was at the United States consulate in Delhi, and everybody wanted to meet with Bill. So Naidu also got a chance to meet with Bill, but there was one big difference. He showed up with the laptop with PowerPoint and made a presentation to Bill at the US consulate on why Microsoft needed to be in Hyderabad.

And he said he would find the land, do whatever's needed. And I remember after that, a week after that, going to Hyderabad and

looking at a couple of pieces of land. One of which ended up becoming the first IDC, the India Development Center. And so it was that meeting I think that got Bill over the edge. Because Chandrababu Naidu's enthusiasm, his support, he's using PowerPoint, all played into convincing Bill. And soon after Bill got Jim Allchin to visit India. And I hosted Jim for a couple of days. And then after that, Jim sent Moshe Dunie to India and they finally ended up telling Soma to find a place to actually get the IDC going.

Becky Monk: Incredible, incredible. It's amazing what has to happen to get things, the ball really rolling, but you did. You got the ball rolling, you said revenue grew incredible amounts in a very short amount of time. But then it was time to come back to Redmond. What brought you back to Redmond besides your wife and family?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: So our daughter was born in November of 1997. And I remember she was supposed to be born in December, but she came a month early. I happened to be in Sri Lanka at that time. And so I missed her birth. And I was on the phone. She's always early on everything, my daughter is. But at that time, having had a first child, I did want to kind of come back and be part of that whole experience. And Steve was very helpful, very accommodating. He said, "I've got this new position, GM of customer systems." At that time, Microsoft.com was the largest site on the web. I think Netscape and Microsoft.com were one and two or two and one. And he said, "Would you like to come do that?" And I said, "Yeah, makes sense. Let's do it."

Becky Monk: All right. So what did that role entail for you?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: So it was the first time I had... There was some IT. So IT for the sales and marketing groups as well as Microsoft.com, which was the way customers were building, starting the relationship with Microsoft. And it was... Again, in those days it was complete chaos. Microsoft.com was growing rapidly. I think there were a million pages at that time. Anybody and everybody could publish on the

website. It was up less than 50% of the time. And so it needed some radical surgery. And Tim Sinclair who was running it, was very, very good at trying to figure out or figuring out what needed to be done. And he needed help just having the focus and having the support he needed to kind of just get it done. Because it would take about six months to a year to re-architect it. Which is what we did. And pretty soon it was a 99.5% availability.

Brad Chase still gave me a lot of crap all the time, but we got it there. So it was a lot of... It was intense. And then there was the Y2K issue. And so there's a lot of intensity. The IT part was probably... Running sales and marketing IT was probably my most challenging job at Microsoft. It was challenging, because on one side you have Microsoft.com was running a 100 miles an hour. And on the IT side, everybody was very, very, very methodical and careful. And it was slow by Microsoft standards, the way things were evolving. Obviously for good reason. But having done a lot of the kind of new technologies, rapid growth, rapid development, this was very challenging, because you had to be very thoughtful and careful and slow and deliberate. And most challenging job I've ever had.

Becky Monk: Did you ever get the slow, methodical people to slow up or speed up?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: I'm not sure I was good enough for that. I mean, that was the biggest lesson I learned, which is how do you combine speed with patience? And they're very two different parts of the brain, parts of your emotional makeup, I think. And I'll admit, I wasn't ready for it. But that experience certainly added to my next experience by quite a bit.

Becky Monk: What was your biggest lesson from that?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: The very different mindsets in a company. And what works for a sales team, the rah-rah approach, doesn't work for the developers, and certainly doesn't work for IT people. And if you

don't get that right, you just create this conflict that becomes hard on people.

Becky Monk: Yeah. All right. You've worn out your welcome. What was next?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: So while I was doing Microsoft.com, I realized that when you have a million pages and growing 50% in terms of the site content every month. And the traffic's growing by a 100% every couple of months, that you really needed an approach that was scalable across multiple content producers, multiple publishers, multiple kind of servers and infrastructure, if you will. And that was the beginning of what was a set of technologies, XML, SOAP interfaces, APIs. And we latched onto that at Microsoft.com. And I became an evangelist for abstracting the internet websites using these technologies, XML and SOAP. And I think at that time folks like J. Allard on internet information server and Ben Slivka on the IE side of things were also thinking about these technologies. And there was a lot of work going on at that time on a technology that it will eventually become .NET.

And also at that same time, Sun was kicking our ass. They were the dot in .com. And I think Windows 32, the APIs were losing market share rapidly. I think Sun was about 70% of the internet infrastructure. And there was this need to do something interesting and big. And so Bill and Steve and others wanted to create this new division that focused on taking all of our next-gen technology to market. And that was the beginning of my next job, which was called the platform strategy group, and then became the .NET platform group, and then became developer and platform group. So we started with five people, did something called... Did an event called Forum 2000 where we launched .NET. And that group eventually grew to about 1500 people and a billion dollars in revenue.

Becky Monk: You've had really good experience of building companies quickly or companies within companies quickly. What are kind of the secrets to doing that?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: Luck. Being there at the right time. A large part of it is just that. Being there when Windows was growing graphical and multimedia. India being at the right time roughly. .NET. But also wanting to be part of something at the beginning. So that was the fire inside, but also finding the right timing had a lot to do with it. And I think a lot of it had to do with Microsoft kind of just tolerating people who wanted to make a difference or do something different or do something interesting. A lot of Microsoft success comes from finding the right people who had the energy and the interest and the passion to do something that needed to get done, and giving people the freedom and the flexibility to do that. I still laugh at the whole India experience. Because there's no reason to get a completely untested person out in the field other than just saying, "Okay, let's take a risk. Let's take a risk on Sanjay." They already had a plan and it was just the right place, right time.

Becky Monk: I feel like there was a lot of those bets that happened.

Sanjay Parthasarathy: Yeah.

Becky Monk: Was there one in particular that you're really glad you were there at the beginning for?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: All of those three things? Windows 3.0... Four things. The internet, being part of that, then India, and then .NET. All unbelievable, all unbelievable experiences.

Becky Monk: What was your proudest moment?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: My proudest moments at Microsoft I'd say are two things. One is my stint in India, and the second is the .NET work in developer and platform group. I think Bill's trip to India changed

the trajectory of one aspect of the country. I feel really good about that even today. And then the other one was .NET. I think that was my first kind of \$1 billion target, but it was also beating Sun. That was important. It was the energy of having a team in 70-plus countries. That was big-boy stuff.

Becky Monk: So let's talk a little about Microsoft culture. Because you were there fairly early in the company. What strikes you most about the Microsoft culture when you were there?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: What strikes me most about Microsoft's culture is how bottom-up it is. I think it's unique in the technology industry. People think Microsoft was run top-down. It was not. It was a functioning anarchy. I mean, Bill is given credit for being the big brain and thinking everything through, but he also knew very well that the best way to get stuff done was to get a lot of ideas bottom-up. You could find three of everything. It was very, very bottom-up, with a lot of adult supervision, of course, right? Sometimes. But contrast it with Oracle or some of the companies that I've since experienced their style, very top-down, very regimented, very control-driven, very process-driven. And this is the secret of Microsoft. It is not top-down, it's bottom-up. You don't get many places like that.

Becky Monk: And I love that the way you put that. I feel like... John Ludwig was just here and he was talking about thousands of speedboats, not a big freight liner turning, but thousands of speedboats going toward a common goal. What was the guiding principle for all of these amazing ideas that were coming up?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: There are two things I learned from Microsoft that I think I still practice every day. One is fiscal discipline, financial discipline. And when you're in a subsidiary, you are taught financial discipline. I mean, it's kind of like a math camp. You'd have these reviews with 30 slides and you're supposed to know every number on every page and how it connects to every other number on every page.

And you'd have basically a math camp in your quarterly business reviews. So that was good discipline. The other discipline is writing stuff down. Writing it down so people know what the goal is, what the vision is, what some of the ideas are and what's important. The Internet Tidal Wave memo, right? Basically galvanized the entire company onto one page, one objective. And so that's how you... At some point you have all of these ground-up ideas, a functioning anarchy, and then you have something that pulls it all together.

And no matter who you are, where you are in the company, you do it. You do what that memo says. And so in India we wrote... Orlando and I wrote this memo called Engines of Growth. That brought everybody together. There was a .NET thing like that. Every year for mid-year review and before the sales launch we were all supposed to write... The leaders of the business, we're all supposed to write these memos that would tell everybody else what they were doing. Got a little chaotic, there were too many memos, was too detailed. But aside from that, it at least gave people a sense of everything that was going on, bringing it all together. And writing memos is still my way of telling a story, setting a vision, bringing people together, getting focused.

Becky Monk: I love that. I love that. Yeah. I was looking at the Tidal Wave memo. And just amazed at the vision. Because of course now I'm looking at it in hindsight and everything came true. But it was nascent. That wasn't existent then.

Sanjay Parthasarathy: And before that, there was Information at Your Fingertips. There was another famous one by Nathan called Internet Roadkill. There are tons of these things. Or Roadkill on the Information Superhighway. That's what it was, not Internet Roadkill.

Becky Monk: Wow. So really that putting things down and stating that vision and then having everybody steer all their thousands of little ships toward the vision.

Sanjay Parthasarathy: That's right.

Becky Monk: How did you celebrate your victories? There are all sorts of great stories. Like you talked about the Jay Leno event, but how did you and your team celebrate victories?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: For me, the best way to celebrate victories is to throw the best party. In the developer and platform group we had the best parties. At the annual sales meetings we had the best parties. We had the best parties in the sense they were creative. One was in a Harley Davidson factory for example. And the prize for the top three best employees in that division was a Harley Davidson motorbike. Now, nobody actually took one of those prizes because even though they got them, I think their families forbade them from taking home. But it definitely caused the sensation. And we had a Kiss... At that factory we had a Kiss, kind of one of those replica bands doing a show. And the previous year we had a bhangra party along with Hells Bells who was an AC/DC... So we would celebrate.

Becky Monk: Are there pictures of you in makeup?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: There's videos of me doing... In strange costumes, yes.

Becky Monk: Nice. Okay. We've got to see them.

Sanjay Parthasarathy: They were wild, but totally legal.

Becky Monk: Yeah, sure. Sure. Don't worry. You've got some of the other stories too.

Sanjay Parthasarathy: Yeah.

Becky Monk: All right, so tell me a little bit about... Microsoft has a great reputation for technology, also a good reputation for social impact.

Sanjay Parthasarathy: Yeah.

Becky Monk: I don't know if this is true for you, but did you participate in the giving campaign? Did that have any impact on you or was that just sort of, "No, that's over there. That's..."

Sanjay Parthasarathy: No, I'll give you a couple of examples where I think it had huge impact. After Bill's trip, he decided to donate about... God. \$5 million to an organization called BVB, or Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, which educates poor kids and in particular educates them on technology around the country in India. This very amazing politician from Mumbai, his name was Murli Deora, ended up convincing Bill to do this. And I think it actually had an amazing impact on technology education, all of India. Not just in the privileged colleges, private colleges, and elite academic institutions, but even in kind of the, I'll call it public institutions. Where kids could go learn about technology and they'd have computers for them to work on and play with. That kind of stuff where you can have amazing social impact was really part of everything that we did. And part of the culture that actually existed at Microsoft is, okay, business is important, but you can't just run a business at the top for the benefit of the very top. You have to kind of make sure that it trickles down. Not just trickles down, it gets to people who need it.

Becky Monk: How did that impact you personally, the way you give or the way you interact in those situations?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: I mean, I do come from a family of privilege. And it's always been a part... And as did Bill. And it's always been a part of how as a family we do business. I mean, we take care of not just business, but we take care of people who work for us and we take care of people that can benefit broadly in the world, because ultimately I think this is my learning after almost 60 years of life and 30 years in this industry, technology needs to go hand in hand with empathy. Technology by itself creates tech bros. We don't need more tech bros. Technology plus empathy is a meaningful mission and I think it's going to get even more important, because with new

technologies like artificial intelligence, we have to have more empathy along with more technology. In India, one of the biggest issues around Microsoft when we went big was what would it do for jobs?

How many people would it put out of work? And having grown up in India, that was obvious to us who are in the Microsoft subsidiary in India, that we had to balance a private business's objectives along with the country's needs. And when you had an issue like software piracy or legal software, you had to consider both paths. And Microsoft in India would not have been successful if it was all about technology, technology, technology, and didn't include empathy. Things like helping the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan with technology in their schools, for example. And that kind of combination has always been part of Microsoft, but it's even more necessary. Technology plus empathy is even more necessary now with artificial intelligence.

Becky Monk: Let's talk a little bit about AI. Let's talk a little bit about the future of innovation. How do you, looking at Microsoft today, where do you think it is in the current evolution in AI?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: I think of all the technology companies that are pursuing AI, Microsoft is probably the most empathetic. And I think a large part of that is due to Satya. I think he's found the right balance between technology and empathy. And there's so many opportunities with AI. A lot of what you see in the public sphere about AI is fear. And this actually used to be true when with the early computers, with the early personal computers. So it's not anything different. I mean, it was true with nuclear technology, it's true with any new technology. So it's not unusual to AI. But I think AI has this potential to impact day-to-day lives in a negative or positive way. And so right now it's all about fear of AI. And I think ultimately people are going to experience the joy of AI, but we've got to find the right balance between those two emotions.

Becky Monk: Yeah, I like how you... Every time there's a new revolution, new evolution, there's that fear and overcoming and not knowing and change. Definitely. All right, what have we not talked about because we went fast through your career, but I'd like to get to what in your opinion makes Microsoft unforgettable, an unforgettable place to work?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: To me, what makes Microsoft unforgettable is the people. You want an expert on something, there's an expert on something at Microsoft somewhere. I had a person on our team, Robert Hess, who did the best demos, built the best demos, but he was also a mixologist. So he's written a book on how to mix cocktails, right? There was another amazing person that I worked with, Jaron Lanier. He knew how to play 150 stringed instruments. More than that maybe. So there are people here that are just quite amazing and not just technology amazing, but all walks of life amazing. You want an expert on anything, you can find an expert on that thing at Microsoft. And that made Microsoft, I think unique because it brought that balance to work. And it brought people, their full selves to work. And that was always a lot of fun.

Becky Monk: I feel like you were there 24 hours a day, so you had to bring your full selves to work. But it is amazing, right? People are not one dimensional.

Sanjay Parthasarathy: And the private offices allowed them to be more than one-dimensional. I mean, just, wasn't that amazing to have your own office and you could bring in a 100 of your 150 instruments, and you could play at any time. I like that, because I think it was a more complete team, individuals that were brilliant in a lot of different ways.

Becky Monk: Yeah, I love that. Let's talk a little bit about what do you think Microsoft's legacy is? What do you think is... People will think about the first 50 years of Microsoft, 50 years from now, a 100 years from now?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: I think Microsoft may be the first true platform company. And what I mean by a platform is there's an ecosystem around it. There are a lot of people building things on a platform. And there are a lot of people using the results of what the ecosystem has built. It really, I think was the first true platform company. And since then everybody wants to be a platform company. It was the first company that did APIs, it did apps, it worked with OEMs, it worked with systems integrators, worked with everybody in the software ecosystem. I think it is a unique and the first of a unique set of companies. Platforms are hard. Microsoft was the first and best platform company.

Becky Monk: Nice. I'm like, "Score." What is it that you want people to remember about you and your time at Microsoft?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: I think the thing that I would love to be remembered about was, he blazed some crazy trails and did different things, took a lot of risk, failed on many, made a difference on a few. And was a pioneer, was a trailblazer. Was just different.

Becky Monk: Love that. When you wrapped up your time at Microsoft, you also kind of came full circle more recently, and you are now the owner of a cricket team. Your cricket is back in your life. Tell me what you're doing today.

Sanjay Parthasarathy: So yes, cricket is back in my life. As I said, I grew up playing cricket a lot. And a couple of years ago had the opportunity to become a co-owner of the Pacific Northwest professional cricket team, the Seattle Orcas. And so for the last 18 months, close to two years, I've been the co-owner and operating partner of the Seattle Orcas professional cricket team. And it's been amazing. It's applying the business side of things, the cricket side of things, the creative part of me, which... The designs for the jerseys, the design of the logo, the colors, all of those. I've been spending way too much time and brought me a lot of joy.

Becky Monk: Great. Is there a good lesson that you would like to leave people with about the people who are coming into the technology industry today, that you could say, "My years of experience, these are some things you should think about and do."

Sanjay Parthasarathy: You can be successful in the technology industry in lots of different ways. And there's no one recipe really for being successful, other than focus on your strengths. I mean, we all know what we're good at, what we really want to do. What brings joy. I think focusing on your strengths is probably the best way to succeed in the technology industry because it's hard. It's a lot of risk. You might as well enjoy it.

Becky Monk: Yeah, it'll be much easier. Okay, so you lit up when you started talking about the fun you're having with the Orcas. What is that startup mentality? Because we didn't talk about your time at the Accelerator. And I kind of want to do that while we're doing this. You basically started Microsoft Accelerator. What was it about starting that organization within what was now a big company?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: Yeah, so there is a startup culture at Microsoft that isn't well recognized. I talked a lot about how for everything, anything, there's always three versions or three implementations of it. There are a lot of great ideas, for example, in Microsoft Research or even in the product teams. People are doing skunk works, if you will. And one of the ideas with the startup business accelerator was to capture some of these bottom-up ideas for products, and to try to build an incubator or an accelerator to kind of chaperone it into the products or product division. So that was the intent with the startup business accelerator, and I don't know where that ended up. Because I left Microsoft about a year and a half and two years into that particular initiative.

Becky Monk: Got it. What were you hoping to do? Is it spin out new ideas, spin out companies?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: No, the idea was to actually spin out ideas into the product divisions, if you will. I think spinning out companies is a completely different proposition, but how do you get this pipeline from research or from the grassroots, from the bottom of the pyramid in some cases into the product divisions.

Becky Monk: Fantastic. Okay. So how do you take that startup mentality and what you've learned and use that with the Orcas?

Sanjay Parthasarathy: Well, I mean the Seattle Orcas is a startup. I mean, we've got some seed funding and we've got to make it successful. And so one of the first things you do is to kind of create a 5, 10-year vision for the team and for the league, because cricket is a new sport in the US. And so we kind of embodied that in what we call FLICK, F-L-I-C-K. It happens to be a particular shot in cricket, but it's also our operating principles. F stands for fans are number one. So what we do really has to have the fans at the center. L is to spread the love of cricket in the United States. We first want to do this in the Seattle area, Pacific Northwest, but we've got to do the things to make the sport successful in the US and spread the love. So that's the L.

I is we want to be inclusive. I mean, a lot of sports are targeted at 30, 40-year-old males, but we want this to be inclusive of families, of kids, of women. I mean, we want this to be a very inclusive kind of approach in everything that we do. C is compete to win. Ultimately sports is about winning, but we do want to do it the right way and compete. And we want to compete to win all the time. And K is to keep it fun. We want it to be a party. We want people, even if they're not interested in the sport, the technicalities of it, to really go away saying, "I had a lot of fun." So that was one of the things that we did to kind of have a set of operating principles. And in year one we did quite well. We ended the regular season at the top of the table and we were runners-up at the end of the playoffs.

Becky Monk: Awesome. Congrats. That's awesome and a great way to wrap this up. Thank you so much for your time.