

# Oral History of Michelle September

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

October 10, 2024

## Preface

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Allison Watson as conducted by Becky Monk on October 10, 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: Allison, thank you so much for doing this today. I want to start the same way we start with everybody. I just need to tell everybody your name and the years you worked at Microsoft.

Allison Watson: Hi everyone. I'm Allison Watson and I am so honored to have worked at Microsoft from November of 1993 to end of the year of 2019—26 Amazing years—and it could have been my best years of my life.

Becky Monk: Thank you. Will you tell everybody in kind of 30 seconds the arc of your career, what you did and the titles?

Allison Watson: I had an amazing career journey at Microsoft. I'm one of the few people that started really as an entry level salesperson and spent my first almost decade in sales and marketing in our U.S. subsidiary. Then I had the unbelievable opportunity to run the Worldwide Partner Program for eight years at the Redmond headquarters. And finally, the last 10 years of my career, I had the opportunity to rejoin the U.S. subsidiary. I was the U.S. CMO and at the end the U.S. SMC leader and I became a corporate vice president in 2013.

Becky Monk: Fantastic. Thank you for that. Now I want to go way back to the beginning. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

Allison Watson: I was born in Washington DC, but I grew up in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, which is quite an unusual place to grow up.

Becky Monk: Okay, so how did you end up from DC to Oklahoma City?

Allison Watson: Well, I moved from Washington DC to Oklahoma City when I was only five years old. My parents had decided to pursue careers in law and medicine, and they thought Oklahoma City was a great place to raise a family.

Becky Monk: Well, so I can tell you still have a little Oklahoma in your voice. Tell me what it was like growing up in Oklahoma City.

Allison Watson: Well, growing up in Oklahoma City was an unusual place to grow up. We were kind of city kids, but Oklahoma has a lot of farm country, so we are out on farms. We rode horses, we jumped on hay bales and really our sports were all about being outdoors with cowboys and vegetable gardens. It was quite a fun place to grow up.

Becky Monk: I'm from the Midwest as well, so I get it. What made you decide that you wanted to go into, you went to college and you went to college for economics. What made you decide to take that path?

Allison Watson: I proudly attended Stanford University and ended up majoring in economics after I changed my mind from pre-med. After graduating, at the time the job market was pretty tough to get into, but I lived in the Silicon Valley area and we were at the very beginning of the PC networking industry and there's a little company there that had just gone public that no one had ever heard of at the time called Oracle and they came to campus and recruited a whole bunch of us that year and I was lucky to be on that recruited team.

Becky Monk: It was really early in the PC revolution. What really made you go, "Yeah, the tech industry. That's a place I want to be."

Allison Watson: Well, in 1987 when Oracle came to recruit at Stanford University where I went to undergrad, a whole bunch of my friends joined the team and I was interviewing for more traditional jobs like Proctor and Gamble or Gallo Wines or other kind of sales and marketing activities. But all my friends said, "Hey, we're having so much fun over at Oracle." So, they sort of said, "Why don't you come join us, Allison," and I knocked on the door over there and ended up on my first, I would call it direct marketing job at Oracle. Little did I know that's what it was called, but we did a lot of seminar marketing, we recruited a lot of people to join the Oracle database, and I learned how to sell databases in 1987. At that time, people didn't even know if they were.

Becky Monk: I mean that's got to be a big challenge because you're really selling the unknown to a lot of people. So, what were the biggest, selling points, what were some of the sales pitches that you were able to do to be a success?

Allison Watson: Well, I have a funny story. When I was at Oracle and I was moving from a marketing role into a sales role, I was interviewed by a very famous person in the tech industry, Tom Siebel, and he said, well Allison, what do you think? Why do you think you can sell databases? And I said, well, my mother is a lawyer, and she doesn't

use any form of technology. And I went and described to her how she could have all the legal cases available to her if they were just in a SQL Database and instead of having to go and do research in libraries and look through card files, mom could have this automatic way to ask simple questions of a database and be able to return all of the information she was researching for. I guess it was good enough for Tom Siebel. It started my career in sales. It made a huge impact for the rest of my life.

Becky Monk: Yes, absolutely. Okay. You stayed at Oracle for a couple of years and then you went back to school. Why back to school and where did you go?

Allison Watson: I enrolled and got my master's in business administration because I thought it was really important to go from just really starting to learn the basics of sales in this important technology industry that was really at just the very beginning and then combine that with actual business experience and business knowledge. So, I had a great two years at San Diego State University and frankly it made a big difference for me throughout my career because those tools and techniques I learned in business school, I reused again and again and again at Microsoft.

Becky Monk: So, how did you end up getting the job at Microsoft?

Allison Watson: I have a great story. I moved to Richmond, Virginia, and when I got to Richmond, Virginia, I was looking for a job and I said, well, I know how to sell databases, and they said, gosh, we don't even know what databases are. We have mainframes and we have minicomputers, but databases on PCs are not a thing here in Virginia. So, I worked for a small technology reseller. At the time, Microsoft didn't have any full-time employees in Richmond, Virginia. About a year and a half later, I got a call in November of 1993 from a manager who said, there's a couple of gals who work in Richmond, Virginia and they've just been hired full-time for Microsoft. They looked up your phone number in the White pages,

if anybody remembers what White Pages were, they looked up your phone number. I hope it's okay if I call you. I was interested to see if you'd like to join our team because we're now opening a full-time office in Richmond, Virginia. I'm super proud of that. The gals that looked me up in the White pages are still at Microsoft, Janelle Ree and Marty Stevens Hartke, and it is so fun to recall the story of the White Pages lookup and the phone call to me that started the beginning of my amazing career at Microsoft.

Becky Monk: Well, I love that. Okay, so what was it though when those two ladies reached out to you? What was it about Microsoft that made you say, yeah, I want to go work at this company? Because 1993, it still wasn't a big, big name.

Allison Watson: When I came to Richmond, Virginia and people said they didn't know what a PC database was. Well, I knew everything about PCs, and I knew how to sell networking, and Microsoft was this company that had just released something called Windows NT Server. We didn't even have Office yet. We were still on Windows for Work Groups, and boy, I thought that was an unbelievable opportunity in the market and I was pretty good at selling it and I thought, wow, this is an incredible opportunity to get back with the fun energy of high-tech companies and to go call on big companies and tell 'em, wow, this is something that can really change how you function with your business. So, Microsoft was really appealing even though I didn't even know that much about it at the time.

Becky Monk: Okay. So, you land at the brand-new offices in the DC Metro Area. What were the challenges of selling and in those early positions that you had there on the East coast?

Allison Watson: So, when I started at Microsoft in Richmond, Virginia, it was pretty funny back then. We opened an office, and we had paper marketing materials. We had to request our paper marketing materials from Washington, and they would get mailed to us and then we'd have to open the boxes and stick 'em in all the slots so that we'd be able

to have our marketing materials and if we needed any sodas or things, we had to go to the grocery store and come stock 'em in our own dorm size refrigerator. So, we had a very small family culture when we started in Richmond, Virginia, which is really hard to believe, but one of the challenges we had was we really didn't know where customers were.

Yeah, so when we were on the East Coast in Richmond, Virginia, and starting to sell Microsoft, Microsoft really wasn't well known in 1993. However, I had a lot of confidence with Microsoft SQL Server, which is in its infancy, and I really had a lot of confidence about the value of a PC-based database system. So, I went to the library, I looked up company names, I cold called everywhere there was to cold call and found people that had jobs that wanted to use computers that were cheaper than mainframes and many computers. And I will tell you that frankly, our initial value proposition for PCs versus many computers and mainframes was, wow, you could get into it for a lot less money, tell you how you can start to make dreams about databases and networks in your company. That all changed of course, because I was there for the Windows 95 launch.

Well, that was the first time that Microsoft really got on the map, and we showed up. We rented a big room at a hotel. We had 2,500 people show up for the Windows 95 launch. We stood on stage, and we talked about how great Windows and Microsoft was at the time. And once that happened, people started to really take our phone calls. I think it helped because there were all the magazine covers with Bill Gates on them, and you combine that with the energy and the excitement about PCs in the world, and you put that together, and suddenly we could start making phone calls and people would take our calls. That's how we did it.

Becky Monk:

I feel like almost everyone talks about Windows 95 as the big turning point. Why do you think that was?

Allison Watson: When I look back at Windows 95 and the turning point that it created, I think it was this really important point where PCs became actually available, people started to believe in them, and now there was a way to get access to using them in a friendly way. We had this thing we called WYSIWYG, which meant what you see is what you get, and that wasn't how computers were before Windows 95, so it made a big impact. I had come from Stanford University, and we had the first Apple computers. Well, Apple computers were so easy, it just was second nature for me, and when I got and tried to show people in the broader world, wow, you can get a PC at a reasonable price with Windows on it and look at all the things you can do, people just lit up. They got so excited about it.

Becky Monk: I love that. I love that. Okay, so it's 1998 and you get a promotion. You become GM of Sales and Marketing for the whole Mid-Atlantic District. What was that like and what was really involved in that role?

Allison Watson: In 1998, I was promoted the general manager of the U.S. Mid-Atlantic District, and that role back then included our Small-Medium Business, our Enterprise Business, our Consumer and Retail Business, which included games and any other hardware equipment that we sold. And we had Microsoft Consulting Services. So, it was a fairly large diverse and broad organization. I was really honored to have that role to be the lead in the Washington DC Metro Area and to have over 300 people working for me across all the different organizations.

Becky Monk: Your responsibility grew quite quickly for you. You're now in charge of 300 folks. What was that like for you?

Allison Watson: Well, my first couple years at Microsoft, we were growing rapidly. I was employee number 15,000 when I started in Richmond, Virginia, and we were a small district sales office in the big Mid-Atlantic district. So I moved up to Washington DC when I became the general manager and we had employees all the way up into

Pennsylvania and we still had that Richmond office included in the area. It was so exciting how fast we were growing, and we segmented our business. We created our SMB business for the very first time. At that time, we created an Industry Business that at the time we called ADCU [America's Developer and Customer Unit], and we created and grew Microsoft Consulting Services because we knew that that would be the first place that customers that were large would start to trust us if we could show them how we can implement the technology for them. So, we grew really, really fast and the opportunity to get into management, to move to hire and recruit people was phenomenal. And let me tell you, I learned a lot That was not easy to do that that quickly.

Becky Monk: It was a very, very quick rise for you. An even quicker rise maybe was in 2002. You were named the Corporate VP of the Worldwide Partner Group, and so that meant a move to Redmond. It also meant a whole other kind of world for you. Let's start with what was the Partner Group?

Allison Watson: Well, let me talk about coming to Redmond. I came to Redmond in 2002 actually to work for Kevin Johnson. I was doing an interim role for him because it was a strategy role for me to grow my experience so that I could land into a more senior management position. And I had this most amazing experience during that first year there where I got to work with Jeff Ranks and his entire Microsoft Office team and we created the first solution sales specialist role. We called it the business productivity advisor. I'm super proud of the work we did at that time, and it was really fun to work with Jeff and his team to really make an impact that frankly is still very important at Microsoft today. It was from that role from my experience working with Jeff Rakes and Kevin Johnson and Orlando Ayla that the three of them knocked on my door one day and they said, we've been talking together with Steve—Steve Ballmer—and we need someone to come over and work in our Worldwide Partner Group.



Would you be willing to take it on? I thought about it and I said, no one wants to work in the Worldwide Partner Group. That's not a great place to go. I said, but frankly, I had some pretty amazing people knocking on the door asking me if I'd like to do it. I couldn't turn 'em down. So, I said, sure I'll give it a try. And six months later I showed up at our partner conference that we didn't call Worldwide Partner Conference at the time, and I showed up to 1,500 to 2,000 really upset partners because at the time Microsoft didn't have a great relationship with partners. So, the first thing I did was say, "Hey, call me." I knew that our culture at Microsoft was you could reach out and talk to anybody you wanted at any time. I felt like I needed to do the same for our external audience. So, at the beginning I said, here's my email address, here's my phone number, reach out to me and I'll listen. And that started the beginning of a journey that I'm very proud of, and I think many still today will remember the journey we went on starting in 2002 with a Worldwide Partner Group, and it really changed the trajectory for Microsoft and its partners that still exist today.

Becky Monk: Great. I want to go back. You said something about nobody really wanted to go, it wasn't really seen as a great place to be at the time. Why was it not? Why was that not the ideal career track?

Allison Watson: At the time I joined the Worldwide Partner Group, we were coming out of a period where we had just launched all of these big things. We'd launched Windows, we'd launched Microsoft Office, we'd launched Windows NT and SQL Server, and Microsoft really thought, wow, we are great. But right about 2002 was a time where we started to struggle with our image in the marketplace, both our image around how our pricing practices operated. We had image issues about customer satisfaction, we had image issues with partner satisfaction. So it was a real gut-wrenching time inside Microsoft and we were feeling, if you will, vulnerable at so many different points across the country, across the company that working in the Partner Group where you had all these people who

were just not that happy to work with Microsoft and then having to wrangle people internally at Microsoft to support the sort of unhappy partners. It just wasn't a place that people thought, I can't wait to help the partners out. And so that's what the partners felt from us, and it had created not a great vibe at the time leading into it. I don't really know what caused all that, but it was a broad set of issues at the time during this kind of tough period from Microsoft.

Becky Monk: Yeah. So, what was it about you, do you think that Orlando and Jeff and Steve and those guys originally came to you and said, yeah, Allison's the person to go in and get this straightened out?

Allison Watson: When Steve and Orlando Ayala and Jeff Rakes, Kevin Johnson tapped on my shoulder, I wondered why they thought I was the person to head over to the partner group. And I think there's a combination of timing and luck. But I had little experience outside the U.S. field, but very quickly I met all kinds of engineering executives. I was able to work with the engineering executives inside the company. I was able to work with the marketing folks inside the company. I was able to bring an honest perspective from the customer and the partner point of view. Yet, I was also able, I think, to really articulate ways that we could make a difference, make a change if we just tried. And I think it was that attitude of "hey, we got this; we can figure it out" that Bill and Steve and Orlando and Jeff said, I think she can do it.

Becky Monk: Well, I know that you overhauled the system, and you renamed it to be the Microsoft Partner Network. Talk me through, and the folks who are listening to this who maybe don't know, what the Microsoft Partner Network is. Tell us what that is and why it's vital to the Microsoft company.

Allison Watson: Well, starting in 2002, we knew we had an image problem in the marketplace with partners. So after listening to thousands of partner input points, whether that be emails they sent us, we went to our partner meetings, we started to form partner advisory

councils, and we just put microphones out in front of our partners sometimes in very large audiences, and we said, tell us what we can do to be better. And they gave us loads and loads and loads of feedback. Once we took all of that feedback and put it together, we said, we need to come out as a new Microsoft, we need to come out and rebrand and re-talk about what makes us special, and we need to do it with a lens that says, you partners are what's important. It's you who matter the most for our company you are that are in front of our customers.

Remember, I had worked for a Microsoft partner before I joined Microsoft, so I had that sort of idea of how it felt to be a partner directly representing Microsoft to our end customers. So, we pulled all that data together and we decided to rebrand the actual program we were in, we called it the Microsoft Partner Worldwide Partner Team. We decided to rebrand the actual system that our partners affiliated with, and we started out with the Microsoft Partner Network, and we later changed that to the Worldwide Partner Program. We came out with new certifications. We gave it a whole fresh new look and feel, and we went big with the voice of the partner. So we started out by saying, hey, my team and I got together and we said, hey, partners, we're hearing you. We filmed a really fun video using the Grease movie as a way to say, we know that you're upset with us and we're going to listen to you one by one.

And then we launched our new program a year later and we put the voice of the partner in front. We started bringing them to our audiences, in front of our audiences. We interviewed them, we let them tell their stories. We started filming their videos, talking about their businesses. We started to talk about how partners needed to be profitable in order to be successful. And we knew that our job was to help them be profitable. And once we really started talking about how partners' companies' profitability was important to Microsoft, not just Microsoft's profitability, but the businesses of

our partners and their profitability, then they started to really get excited. But if I were to say one thing that added to that was that we realized that we not only needed to win their minds by making them and talking to them about profitability, but we also really needed to win their hearts. So, we just started doing anything we could to make it fun to involve partners in everything we could do. We made partner advisory councils a really, really big deal, and we involved all executives with them. We got our executives on stage and open Q&As in front of all the partners, and we grew the partner conference to thousands and thousands of people reaching over 160 countries over an eight-year period.

Becky Monk: Well, I was going to ask about the partner conferences because they're kind of legendary. Talk about how those were put on because they were in different areas each year, and so what was the strategy behind the partner conferences?

Allison Watson: Well, so we really thought the partner conference was a very important way to energize our partner channel, not a sales meeting, which has had many names over the years. Not unlike how the sales meeting for Microsoft always was this point of really invigorating our sales force, we said, "why don't we do the same thing for our partners?" So, my team and I had the idea that we should bring all of the elements, the special elements from the internal sales meeting to our external partners because frankly, they were simply an extension of our sales force. So, each year in April, we got together, we wrote a big manager memo that went out to the world that says, what are we going to do this year? How are we going to excite our partner channel? And then we figured out where could we go in the U.S. We couldn't go internationally at the time for our big annual event, but where could we go in the U.S. that would be the city that partners from around the world be interested to go to?

And when they came, they would think, wow, I really understand more about the United States. I really understand more about

Microsoft. So, we picked cities that were fun to go to. We went to Denver, we went to Houston, we went to Boston, we went to Minneapolis, we went to Atlanta, we went to LA and we really tried to energize and create not only an informative meeting, but a really fun meeting. And in doing so, partners got to see all interesting cities across the United States. I forgot Washington DC. That was a fun year, and they got to come together and learn. We created networking events so partners would meet with other partners, and we created what we called it P2P. If a partner can meet with another partner, maybe they could help grow their business even faster than if they were on their own. And oh my God, we just had so much fun trying to figure out how to make them multiply.

Becky Monk: Can you talk a little bit about the turnaround? Because the program, when you left the program in 2010, it had grown exponentially. It was just a totally different program. Can you talk about that transformation?

Allison Watson: In the eight years that I had the honor to run the Microsoft Partner Program, we transformed the business for Microsoft. I think we had somewhere in the neighborhood of maybe 1,500 to 2,000 partners when I took it over. And by the time we finished in 2010, we were proud to have 600,000 partner organizations from over 160 countries represented in our Partner Program. And so that's just a measure of scale, and that scale was phenomenal. We learned how to publish our Partner Program in over 32 languages, which at the time was actually quite hard to do. We created segments for our Partner Programs. We said, Hey, we really need Small Business Partners. We need CPAs who want to come on and become a really great partner for us for reaching out to Small Businesses.

We created our ISV Channel and tried to really figure out how our ISV Channel could work with our systems integrator and solution partner and reseller channel. So, we created quite a bit of infrastructure to allow any kind of company out there in the world.

And we had one framework, one framework that we repeated that I believe is still used today. Every time we looked at our program or anything we could do for partners, we said, how do we enable plan, enable, create, demand, sell service, and retain anything that we did in a program? So what's our plan and how can we help our partners plan? How do we enable them and train them and make them good at what we need them to do? How do we help create demand for our partners so that they can be successful? How can we enable them through sales techniques? How do we allow them to do better services and more importantly, how do we retain them and allow them to retain their customers? I think that framework was super successful for us. It was in every one of the management and sales memos I wrote over that period, and I get feedback from folks today that they still use that framework as a reminder to be full lifecycle with all those partners. So we keep 'em coming back and we keep 'em telling friends to create new businesses all around.

Becky Monk: That's amazing, amazing how you did that, and I understand that that's when your tenure in Worldwide Partners was done. You kind of swapped jobs and took a lot of what you were doing with that structure and the relationships and the commitments and those processes and over to become chief marketing officer and COO for the U.S. So, what was that shift like? What was that new role like and what was it that you loved about that position?

Allison Watson: So in 2010 when I moved over to the U.S. subsidiaries, the U.S. CMO, there was this real opportunity to bring everything that I loved about the Partner Channel and really embed it deeply into the sales force. At the time, the Partner Team and the Sales Teams were not totally integrated inside the subsidiaries. So, I walked in, and it seemed very logical that our salespeople only go so far. They're going to need a partner at every angle, whether it's a Small-Medium Business or an Enterprise Business or a Consulting opportunity. So, we worked really hard to create, if you will, workflow and processes so that we could connect our sales efforts,

our marketing efforts, and our partner efforts to results with revenue. Of course, at the time we started working really hard to have scorecards, lots and lots of scorecards to measure our progress. I went through my first six months, and we didn't get to the end with our scorecards exactly where I wanted them. Well, I come from a history of beating all of our expectations each year. So I had to figure out what are we going to do differently to make sure we're going to hit all these scorecard goals if we're going to be the top sub year after year.

Becky Monk: You spent nine years in this role. What are you most proud of in that particular role?

Allison Watson: So in the last section of my career at Microsoft, when I was in the U.S. sub, there's a couple things I'm super proud of. First of all, I was proud we achieved our goals and were district of the year multiple times when I was the U.S. CMO, and that was always a big highlight that meant we were delivering from Microsoft. There was this old saying, as the U.S. sub got sick, Microsoft would get the flu. And so we always had to deliver for the good of the company and that just accelerated for the company. But I was really proud of how we met those goals. We hired great. We had a little mantra, not unlike the Partner mantra that I had in the Partner Group. We said, "who will do what by when and how will we know?" And that simple phrase, "who will do what by when and how will we know/" was very empowering because it allowed us to create programs, create goals to figure out if our goals, if our programs were being implemented across our sales force.

And as a result, we kept winning and getting recognized and winning as a great sales team, not only internally at Microsoft, but with our customers and partners externally. But if I were to highlight something I'm incredibly proud of was that I got to create our first U.S.-wide tele-sales organization, which later became our worldwide tele-sales organization. And that I was involved in creating the new

SMB sales organization. That is how we go to market today. I drew back from my roots all the way back to Oracle in 1987 when I was in a fabulous sales organization and I worked with some great people, Steve Balmer and others, Kevin Turner, and we said, Hey, we've got to put this together. We've got to invest. We've got to make it a big deal. And it's a great way for not only us to add to our sales force, but also bring in hundreds and hundreds of early in career talent so that we can make Microsoft a vibrant place to grow your career, just like I had that experience.

Becky Monk: So, talk a little bit more about setting that up and growing it that wasn't based out of Redmond. Where was that based?

Allison Watson: So when we first got agreement to start our U.S.-wide tele-sales organization, we actually based it largely in Redmond. We kind of created two organizations, one in Redmond and one in Fargo, North Dakota, so that we could test where we could hire people, where we could get young people to move, where they could have great cost of living, how can we attract the most diverse set of talent to our new sales force over time? When we decided to make it global, we headquartered our U.S. organization in Fargo, North Dakota, and then later we added Dallas and then we added sites around the world, whether it be in Ireland, all of the countries around the world added worldwide tele-sales as well. But I really kind of had that very first initial run of it in the U.S.

Becky Monk: What were the challenges of setting up that type of an organization within an already a big organization?

Allison Watson: Well, when we set up the first US-wide and then led to worldwide tele-sales, one of the things that made it really hard was we didn't have a way to electronically move information successfully. So we didn't have a really great internal, if you will, CRM business setup. So we got really behind our Dynamics product line. We figured out how to enable our marketing pipeline to come into our Dynamics product so that we could get electronic information. It sounds kind



of simple, but when you don't have people talking to people and you're just using the electronic workflow, we really had to figure out how could we get the right information to the right people. And then we also had to bring the Partner Network, into the system. So, we were trying to move information quickly around so we could reach out to as many possible customers as possible.

So, we did a lot of interesting things. We created the very beginning of our social marketing business. We created the social command center in the U.S. subsidiary so that we could start to market out in the, if you will, the social field. And we bring that data in and we would take the information and feed it into our tele-sales organization through Dynamics. We had to figure out how to get information inside our telesis sales systems out to our sellers, and we had to get it out to our partner account managers, and we frankly had to get data back out to our worldwide support and services organization as well. So, we had a pretty fun time building workflows, building technology, and a lot of energetic people making a big difference. I would call it the foundation of AI work, frankly. We were trying to use AI, this was quite a few years ago now, trying to use AI to even figure out how to make our flows work better across all those organizations.

Becky Monk: Well, that's one of the things I love. In every single area of Microsoft there was innovation. You had to build the processes, you had to create the technology to enable you to do things better because it wasn't there yet, and now it's standard throughout the world. So, did you think of yourself and the people in marketing and sales innovators?

Allison Watson: It's interesting. One of the things I loved about working at Microsoft is I always described myself externally when I said, what did I love working about Microsoft is we create. So I was in the sales and marketing department, but we created, and at every step of the way from my first six months on the job all the way to the last six

months, we had this original value at Microsoft called Microsoft Takes Big, Bold Goals, and We Like Big Challenges. And frankly, we did. Every year we thought, oh my God, how are we ever going to get this done? And so we sat down. Smart people would get in the room together. We'd think about how to get it done, and we create something new to get it done. We innovated with people. We innovated with process. We innovated with technology. We loved it so much that we loved to show it off to customers. We'd run a day in the life of working at Microsoft for our customers. And our major theme was how we as a sales and marketing organization could innovate inside our own company to make the overall company better. It was a major theme, and we loved it. It's what made working at Microsoft so awesome.

Becky Monk: I love that, and I feel that with every person I talk to. We've only got about 15 minutes left, but I want to make sure we talk about culture. I want to make sure we talk a little bit about social impact, but is there anything else about your personal career journey that you want to touch on?

Allison Watson: Yeah, one of the things I'm incredibly proud of is having been a female, a woman at Microsoft. When I was hired, I had a woman manager, Suki Kunst, and my second manager was Diane Gregg. She was an amazing leader. They were both amazing leaders and sponsors for me. I also had Brian Campbell, I can't leave him out, but these women made a huge impact for me early on, and they really set an interesting bar for me about how I could make an impact as a female leader at Microsoft. So, I started in a frontline sales organization. I was the 13th female and very honored to be announced as a corporate vice president. And I believe I've hired over 1,500 women and men into Microsoft, and I'm so proud of everyone I've hired and the impact that they've been able to make, the leadership that I tried to strive to show how important it could be to be a great leader at Microsoft and to pave the way as a

female at Microsoft, to pave the way as a single mom at Microsoft, and just to make the impact and say, Hey, you can do it.

And there's so many people out there, so many women in particular inside and outside the company today that are continuing to make that impact and continuing to lead the way.

Becky Monk: I think there's always folks who wonder, especially in the early days. You mentioned the folks that you did work with, the women that you did work with, but there weren't that many when you look at the overall company. So what was that like culturally for you to be one of few?

Allison Watson: There weren't as many women around at Microsoft, certainly at the executive level in my early days, and I'd grown up, my mother was an attorney, she was the only female attorney in her organization. It didn't really seem any different to be a woman or a man, and we all seem to be about the same. So frankly, culturally, as I came into Microsoft, it was just how business was. But it was lovely to see Microsoft recognize the impact that a broad and diverse set of people, whether that be geographically diverse, whether that be racially diverse, whether that be gender diverse, whether that be socially diverse. Microsoft made that recognition. And once we made that recognition, I got to be such a big part of helping grow and change the culture to really welcome in all, all kinds of people with all kinds of insights and learnings and different cultures to make an impact. And frankly, we started to realize if we can be reflective of the people and the customers on the exterior in a more productive way, then internally we will be more successful. And I think that really has played true for Microsoft.

Becky Monk: I feel like that is something that has evolved over the years, and thank you for your part in that. Let's talk a little bit about the Giving Campaign. I don't know how much that resonated with you, but I know that you were an executive co-sponsor during your time, and so I am assuming it had a little bit of resonance with you. So, can

you talk a little about why you were an executive co-sponsor? Because that's an additive role. It's not like you took a break from your regular job. This is on top of that. So, what was that and why did you get involved?

Allison Watson: I think the Giving Campaign is one of the most magical things that Microsoft does. From the very first day I knew about it, I thought, how can I give my time and how can I give my money to make an impact out in the world? So, when I had the opportunity to become the chair of the Giving Campaign with Soma Somasegar, we had the best time. We said, "you know what? We want to make this the biggest campaign ever. We want to get the most resources we can raised for the most number of organizations." But we had a second goal. We wanted to have the highest participation ever across the employee base in Microsoft history. And so that's the goal we set. That's the goal we achieved. And personally in our organization, we were in the top five producing organizations year after year after year, meaning the most employees in my organization were participating in a Giving Campaign every year.

You know what? We made it like any other goal. We had a blast. We found organizations. We let employees from our organization find any organization they were interested in. They could volunteer their time, their effort. We let them bring ideas about how we could bring those organizations into Microsoft so we could learn about them. And we set up all kinds of fun activities. Every year, the group and I went out to an organization locally in the Seattle area, and as an entire group, we took a day and we did a project to give back to one of the local organizations. And so, I frankly loved every October at Microsoft and the Giving Campaign. I love the fact that we have the ability to support it through the Microsoft Alumni [Network], and it's one of the things I think of fondly when I think of the impact that Microsoft has had into organizations across the world, makes a big impact.

Becky Monk: It really does. Let's talk a little bit about Legacy. Let's talk a little bit about Microsoft's legacy. Because we're celebrating the first 50 years, 50 years from now, what do you think will be a Microsoft's legacy?

Allison Watson: So if I'm to look forward 50 years and wonder about Microsoft's legacy, frankly, I think this is a really good question for Bill, because he could think that far in advance. I always thought it would be better if I could tell you what I think would happen in three years. So frankly, the legacy we have is this concept at the very beginning of my career was there'd be such a thing as a computer on every desk in every home. So, is there going to be a legacy where the computers are so integrated into our daily life that they accelerate and make us better humans, and that computers enable things that are hard to do and make them easier, and that computers enable us to have incredible, fulfilling, successful lives? I think the impact that computers will have in the healthcare business is and to imagine what might happen.

Becky Monk: If you think about what you know today, what kind of advice would you give to yourself when you started the company back in the early '90s?

Allison Watson: Well, lemme think about that. One of the things that made Microsoft great both then and now is that we had this culture of being competitive. And when I started, it was all about competing to win in the marketplace. We stood on stage and we said, how do we protect the Windows Paradise? And then we stood on stage again and we yelled, Sundown, Sundown. And a few years later we said, wow, we really need to win the hearts and minds of our customers and our partners. And later in my career, we decided that if we competed to be the best that we could be every day, that not only would we be successful, those around us would be successful, and those that we were impacting would be successful. So, the one thing that I would tell everyone today or tell myself when I started

was if I competed to be the best I could be, and I inspired those around me to compete to be the best they could be, there is no stopping what we dream of.

Becky Monk: That's fantastic advice. Microsoft is turning 50, what do you think is the secret sauce? What do you think is the secret to that kind of longevity for a company?

Allison Watson: Wow. I am so excited for the next 50 years of Microsoft. We've had longevity, frankly, because of our people. And as long as we have amazing people coming in that front door who want to do amazing things in the market, whether it was the leadership of Bill, the leadership of Steve, or the leadership that we're currently seeing from Satya or all of the other hundreds and hundreds of leaders, it's all about our people. And that's the thing. That's our secret sauce. It's us.

Becky Monk: Yeah, it's fantastic. Let's wrap up with what are some examples that you have of how you innovate inside the company?

Allison Watson: Well, one of the things I always loved is anytime you're around Steve Ballmer, he was so infectious with his energy and we had meetings and preparation for different things he was going to do with me. And we'd go in, he'd say, Allison, let's Gedanken. Gedanken means thought experiment. So, thank God we had the worldwide web and we could look up what the heck does the word Gedanken mean? But Steve would have us run thought experiments. And so to this day, I always say, whenever I need to figure something out, I don't know what to think about. I dunno what all the potential options are. I said, I think I'll run a Gedanken. So I think that's what's made us successful. We have lots of Gedanken.

Becky Monk: Oh my gosh, I love that. I've never heard of that, but I love it. Ok, I think that's a wrap. Thank you for taking this time and sharing such great stories.

Allison Watson: Thank you.