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Narrator: Billy Anders
Date: August 6, 2002
Interviewed By: Jessah Foulk
Place: Microsoft

JESSAH FOULK: Today is August 6, 2002. This is Jessah Foulk interviewing Billy Anders at Microsoft.

Before we begin, if you could again say your name and your title, and the company where you work.

BILLY ANDERS: OK, my name's Billy Anders. I work for Microsoft Corporation in Redmond, and I'm a senior consultant.

JF: Now we'll begin with some background questions. Can you tell me about where you were born and a little bit about your interests as a kid?

BA: OK, technically, I was born here in Bellevue, Washington. But I left when I was two years old, something like that, so I don't recall any of that. So if you're asking me where I'm *from*, I'm really from Oakland, California. That's where I grew up.

And, you said, "interests"? Well, my interests right now, other than computers and technology, I guess, would include snowboarding.... I do like to travel, unless I'm traveling a lot with my job. Then, at that period, I don't like to travel. Sightseeing. I do a little bit of hiking. Ride motorcycles. That's pretty much it right now.

JF: How about as a kid?

BA: As a kid. So, I was a four-letter guy in high school, so I played a lot of sports. It was pretty much sports, sports and computers at some point.

JF: What did your parents do for a living?

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

BA: My father is a – was a regional director at IBM. So he is the person who influenced me to get into the PC industry, actually, early on. And my mother is a pharmaceutical representative. I think that's the corporation.

JF: I'd like to hear about your education, just growing up through high school.

BA: Up through high school, really there's no specialty at that point. It's just, you know, whatever the curriculum is. When I went to college, I went in with aspirations of being a lawyer. So I went into the political science track.

While going through political science, I met a lot of attorneys and people that were in pre-law and in law school, and had effectively lost interest in what they were doing. And I always had an interest in computers, but I didn't really want to sit behind a computer every day for the rest of my life. And so I was a little lost, honestly, as to what I was going to do once I graduated. That's pretty much it.

JF: You said that your dad worked at IBM, and that's what began your interest in technology. Can you kind of expand on that?

BA: Absolutely, absolutely. My dad was a regional director at IBM and this is mid-/late [19]70s, early [19]80s. And during that time, I think I recall him saying, "I think these things are going to catch on." He was talking about the PC. And this is before Windows was out, anything like that.

Although he and my mother were divorced, he and I still had a close relationship, so he always bought me computers. I had old Texas Instrument computers, and Commodores. Then when the PC came out, he bought me one of those.

And it was interesting, because at that time, computers really didn't have games on them or anything like that. So as a kid, if you had a computer and if you had any interest in it, you were effectively programming it. And so that's where the love of computers kind of came in, you know, how you just – you know, here's this tool – go build something with it, effectively, [is] how it works; as opposed to somebody on an Atari 2600 game console, where they can sit down and play Pacman and whatnot. For me, if you wanted to *play*

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

Pacman, you pretty much had to *write* Pacman, or find somebody who had already written it.

JF: What kind of computers – or, what kinds of computers were you working with then?

BA: Well, early on, I worked with Commodore computers, I worked with Apple computers, the 2+ and the 2E and the 2C. I had a Commodore VIC 28 and a Commodore 64.

A friend of mine had a TI-99a, I remember that. For some reason, I remember that computer. And we played on that a little bit. And then I got into PCs, and at that time, he got into Macintoshes. So we both just took different routes, you know, but we pretty much ended up at the same place.

JF: Did you have any type of technology education in high school?

BA: Well, in high school – well, actually, take that back – in junior high, let's start there, I was already programming in C and Pascal. And ... if I recall correctly, I was in a typing class. ... It's a funny thing, a lot of programmers aren't great typists. You would think, touching the keyboard all the time, [that we would be] ... But we're actually – all of us are pretty poor typists, because you're not typing words in the normal sense.

And I was taking a typing class and wasn't an exceptional typist then either. But the teacher really liked me, because we had one computer in the class and all the rest were really manual typewriters. And no one literally knew how to do anything with a computer. It was just there, kind of donated to the school. And I did things on it. I had no idea what I was doing, but things that evidently wowed her. And so that became my station. So the whole time in class, everybody was on these manual typewriters and me, I'm on the computer, you know, doing whatever I want to do, effectively. I became somewhat of a teacher's pet, which sounds really bad.

So that was my at-school training on a computer. So effectively, for two of the three years of junior high school, you know, in that class, an hour a day, I got to pretty much program whatever I wanted on a different platform than

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

what I had at home. So that was kind of a cool experience. But again, it wasn't formalized training.

And in my last year of junior high, she recommended me to the – whoever the principal reports to – the superintendent of principals or whatever, of the schools, and said, "We have this really bright guy, and I think he could probably teach other students in an after-hours course type thing."

So what happened – I was, at the time, the only and the first teacher student, student teacher, I guess it is, for after-hours learning. I effectively was teaching – it wasn't even computer programming. It was word processing and simple computer type things. And it led to Oakland, I think, receiving a few more computers for the school, because I know I was teaching on one, that one computer we had. It was the top, you know, for half a semester, something like that. But I was able to teach people how to just use a computer, the very basics of it and whatnot. So that was kind of cool.

That was that. That wasn't training, but it was an experience with the computer in a formal setting. Where I had to have a curriculum, to a certain degree and whatnot. Didn't necessarily enjoy that aspect of it, but it was fun, kind of being looked at as a leader, especially considering I was in the ninth grade.

In high school, I took another course that we had at school. But the thing is, I was, you know – I'm definitely not bragging, but I was a little advanced at that time for the teachers that were teaching computer programming. Because they weren't computer programmers themselves. Oftentimes it was the woodshop teacher that had a manual or something like that. And so, you know, I'd take another course, and it was basic programming. And I'd already know the language, but I took it because it was an easy A or something like that.

It was fun. It was fun to take. So I took the course. I'm pretty sure I got a pretty easy grade out of it. But I didn't get any formal training until I went to summer school at the junior college in Alameda, California. And there, I got into a couple of classes where they – you score yourself out of the class. You kind of get in the class, and since I was so young compared to the other people that were in the classes, they didn't want to – they didn't trust my

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

mother – because all mothers kind of brag on their sons – to let me just go to the level 3 class.

So they put me in the first class. I was kind of antsy, you know. I'm answering questions way beyond what the teacher was asking. Got out of the first two courses. Then the third course was actually something of decent difficulty, so therefore, that was the right course for me to be in. And that was, whatever, the third-year college course or something like that.
[laughing]

So that was kind of nice. That was my first real formal training. Everything up to that point had been whatever kind of magazines and whatever kind of books that were out. Again, books [about computers] were not as prevalent as they are now. Now, you go into Barnes & Noble, they have a whole section dedicated. Then, I honestly don't know where I was getting books from.

And I didn't learn a lot of the theoretical concepts behind programming. I learned kind of the blue-collar programming aspects, you know, I-can-get-work-done programming. But if somebody were to talk about design patterns or object-oriented design principles or any of those types of things, I would have had a blank look on my face as to what they were.

And honestly, I didn't learn those until I got to college and took a –

JF: I'm sorry, where did you go to college?

BA: Well, I went to school in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. It's a school called Southern University. A little bit about Southern, Southern is the world's largest historically Black college. So we have – I should probably know this, but say, 11,000 students at Southern and it's probably 99 percent Black. So we probably have twenty-five others walking around, you know. [laughing] And we have a pretty nice law school and a pretty nice nursing school as well.

So, I went to Southern. And that's kind of a funny story in itself, because after graduating from high school, I was kind of a knucklehead. I didn't want to go to school anymore. I was just kind of tired of school, and just thought I could go get me a regular job, and just do that and be just happy.

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

And I did that. I was scanning groceries at – Safeway or Albertson's? – Safeway, I guess. First I was a bagger and then I was scanning groceries. I thought, hey, I'm making a little money. I'm doing OK, I'm fine. And then – and went to junior college, but I wasn't showing up for junior college. I was just, you know, in junior college, nobody's really monitoring you at all. And since you're now an adult, nobody's sending a report card home or anything, so if you want to fail or flunk out, it's your business. Just pay your hundred bucks or whatever it is and it's just fine.

So I was going to junior college near Oakland, I can't recall where it is exactly. And again, not really going to class. And my mother was just more-or-less fed up, because she has a degree from University of Washington, and before that, she attended some university as well in Baton Rouge. She thought I had a lot more in me than what I was actually putting to good use.

And she effectively shipped me to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She said, "You're going to school." And I was like "OK, I'm already going to school, though."

"You're going *away* to school. You're going to a *real* college," you know.

Not to say that community colleges aren't real, but for me, it wasn't real enough. It wasn't something I took seriously enough.

So effectively, a year and a half later, after me just kind of hanging out after high school, she shipped me to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. My mother said, "*You will go to school.*"

And she shipped me off to school and that was the best thing in the world, to this day, for my life and whatnot. Not just because I'm here at Microsoft working, but there's nothing like working – there's nothing like being in an environment where everybody's kind of striving for better things. And the fact that I was at a totally Black college, I'd never honestly been around that many positive African-Americans.

I'm from East Oakland and ... East Oakland is pretty rough. But if you grew up there, it's not rough to you, it's just the way it is and no big deal. And so

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

it's kind of easy to fall into that. And it's kind of easy to fall into some of the different kinds of stereotypes that different cultures have about other cultures.

And when you go there, and everybody's working for their degree and trying to do the smart thing and all that, it's really nice. And, you know, yeah, we party and have fun as well. It was just really good for me to see that and to be a part of that.

JF: What year did you start there?

BA: [19]89. Yeah, I started in [19]89. So, I graduated from high school in [19]88. I started Southern in [19]89.

So, let's see ... went to Southern. Again, it was great. The best thing for me. Went for a political science degree, as I said earlier. I thought I was going to go into law school. Let's see ... what else? What else is there?

I was shipped out there. Hated it the first half a semester, until I learned that Southern had like an 8-to-1, 10-to-1 girl/boy ratio, which makes things a lot easier. [laughing] Makes things a lot easier.

Met a lot of people, not just from California, but from all over the world, for that matter. Definitely from all over the country. So that was cool to meet a lot of those friends and whatnot.

Still had my computers, but they weren't the center of my world. It was something I kind of had at home to do my homework on, and I went to the university's lab – the computer center – to use theirs if I needed whatever, like Internet connectivity and whatnot. Because that was during the time where everyone didn't have an Internet connection at home. Definitely didn't have broadband. So it was, you know, I used it then.

Pledged Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, so I'm a member of that fraternity. That was another *great* experience.

I don't know. What else do you want to talk about?

JF: Well, what did you do when you graduated?

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

BA: So, when I graduated ... right after I graduated, I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do. I'd had decent grades – good grades, actually – but I had a political science degree and I was not interested in going into law, or going into law school. But I also wasn't terribly interested in pushing papers around in like a government bureaucracy.

So the one thing I knew I had that I was still, to my knowledge, pretty good at was computers. Again, I hadn't done a great deal of formal training, like a CS [computer science] major or something like that. But I'd taken a couple classes at Southern and done actually very well for what I had taken. When I had taken something, I'd do well at it.

And so my dad lived at that time in Spokane, Washington and owned what was soon-to-be [a great restaurant], at least he thought so, but it ended up not going anywhere. But it was effectively a restaurant with a hotel being built, and they had effectively a computer system that ran everything, you know. Nothing major. But he needed someone to help set it up, configure it, maintain it, whatnot. And although that wasn't the most lucrative job, it was a good way to get me to Washington from Louisiana.

So I moved up there, worked at my dad's hotel which, at the time, was called the Mars Hotel, and helped set up their SQUIRRELSystem. So if you ever go to a restaurant and they have a flat-paneled, touch-screen computer, that might be a SQUIRREL System. And it's running OS/2. That's pretty much it.

Running OS/2, and you go in, there's really no programming. It's all configuration. And I helped add a couple more terminals. Again, not major stuff.

And I did that for about three months. And it wasn't terribly challenging. My dad – let's just say he doesn't pay very well. And in addition, he probably doesn't pay very well, but he definitely doesn't pay his *son* very well. [laughing] Especially doing a start-up business. So, yeah, we definitely had to do something different about that.

So I moved from Spokane after two and a half months or so to the Seattle area, and got a job working at a start-up company called Lion that my dad

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

knew the CEO or whatnot, you know. And again – although my dad loves me, he really does – at the time, he downplayed my skills. So they put me in just the lowliest of levels, which is OK ... a little bit, actually. [laughing] But they had me basically building computers. And although I could do that, that probably wasn't the best use of what I knew at the time.

And so got in, I was building computers, making computer builder's money, which isn't very much. I was like one step up front the guy working at CompUSA servicing computers, you know, effectively. Working late hours and whatnot.

I did that for a couple months. And they had a couple programming tasks on their UNIX systems, SCL UNIX, that they needed done. And the CTO was really the only guy who could do that. He was just swamped doing all the other things, whatnot. And so he was basically saying, "Billy, you said you know how to program. Can you handle this?"

And honestly, it was like ... C-Shell and Bourne shell scripting stuff. It wasn't terribly hard but I hadn't done it on that platform yet. But it wasn't, you know, a big deal. So what should have took three days probably took me three days or something like that, because I wasn't familiar. But *he* wasn't going to know that.

So I put in the hours, did that. He was impressed. "*Oh, wow.*" So, again, they stopped having me be the computer set-up guy and let me move to that role. Brought in someone else and that was his job, and that person had to report to me. So that was kind of cool, you know, to actually be a manager so early on. At least I thought it would be cool.

I got bored with that after six months, because it was a small company, and I really was more of a PC person in the Windows environment. That's what I felt most comfortable with. And they were Microsoft bigots to some degree, so they only used Microsoft when they had to, like on the desktop. None of the servers would have NT and now Windows 2000.

So, I interviewed at Microsoft for a contract position.

JF: What year?

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

BA: This was [19]97. January of [19]97. And got the job with the group that I'm actually still with. So I interviewed for just a developer position. "Whatever you guys need done, I can do it."

This was a little bit before Microsoft took notice of the Internet. And I had been working with the Internet for quite some time, just in college. And at a start-up company in Mercer Island, I was working with – it was an Internet start-up company that's actually still in existence, which is pretty cool.
[laughing]

And so I was very familiar with Internet protocols and Internet programming, you know. Especially from a crude environment, it was nice to work on the Microsoft platform, which is little bit more elegant, programming-wise. So it's easier, effectively.

And got the job just doing basic scripting and things like that. So this was before active server pages, that technology, came out from Microsoft, which is Microsoft's previous server – Web server – programming, model API.

And so I did that for a while. I was one of the few people in the group that could do it, so that was kind of nice. If you actually reach for what you can do, nobody can take that away from you.

I started to exercise my other programming skills and got into that. They noticed that I was comfortable with customers, so I started doing more consulting-type things. And then a year and a half later, I was offered a position in the company and accepted. That was [19]97.

JF: And so when you were hired for a full-time job here at Microsoft, what was your job description?

BA: It was – well, the job description. The title was associate consultant. The description? I don't know how we would describe what we do. Effectively we are ... solutions developers and designers for hire. So if a company – only a large company – wanted to implement an application, a solution, or solve a business problem, and they were open to using Microsoft software, that's where we come in.

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

You wouldn't call MCS – Microsoft Consulting Solutions – in if you wanted to implement a simple job solution. Although we have people that are competent in that job, that's not what we do. We are here to help pool through Microsoft products. So we go in, we show you what you can do using our platform and our technologies, and at the same time, we have a customer who's happy that he doesn't have to buy the software in order to roll things out. And so that's our goal. So I don't know how you would necessarily describe it other than that. We go in and we build things.

Some groups are focused on infrastructure, is what we call it. So Boeing may say, "We need to roll out 100,000 seats of Exchange," which is our mail server product, or messaging product, whereby somebody has to go in, somebody has to set up fifty servers and do that type of stuff. Install the software and whatnot.

That's not what my particular group does. We are application developers, so we code. We're programmers who happen to be – we're "customer-facing programmers," that's what we are, effectively. So we'll go out and we'll scope – that's what we call it when we engage with the customer – and say, "Hey we have this grand vision of all these things we'd like to do."

"Scoping" is when we actually bring it down and say, "OK, you have these twenty things you want to do over a five-year time span. Here's what we can do in the first six months, here's what we can do in the next six months," and on and on and on.

Because if you were to write an application and not release it in five years, it wouldn't be what they needed in five years. That's just kind of how things work. So you do the things in a phased approach, you know.

JF: Can I have some examples, maybe, of different companies you've worked with and their problems that you've solved?

BA: OK. So ... Nordstrom, and what became nordstrom.com when they spun that off. Their business problem was simply that they wanted an Internet presence, but they wanted to maintain Nordstrom's high level of customer service, you know, to the best they could. I mean, the Internet is a

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

little impersonal, but they wanted to make sure that people understood that “You can still return stuff to our stores,” [or] “Click here if you want to talk to somebody right now.”

Nordstrom had people actually sitting back there waiting for people to click there, to answer the phone. Yeah. Personal shoppers online. So if you really can’t find something, you can just say, “My personal shopper, I’m looking for a blue dress for a wedding in a size x,” and that person will literally send you a list of dresses that seem to fit your taste and whatnot. All with no extra charge.

So, the business problem was that they wanted an Internet presence, but they didn’t want to lose their brand identity. So, I was part of the team that helped build nordstrom.com and the second follow-on was nordstromshoes.com. We built those sites.

And it’s funny, when I talk about building commerce sites to my mother, she’s proud of me, but she doesn’t have a true appreciation of what it is. But she’ll say to her friends, “Oh, yeah, my son built the Nordstrom home page.”

And, thinking that it’s kind of – And I’m like “No, there’s a whole lot more goin’ on there. There’s a lot to make so you can see the catalog, you can select something, I can take your credit card, and miraculously, a box shows up at your door.”

It’s funny to me, but at the same time, it’s “No, I want you to understand this.” [laughing] But it’s not important.

JF: I’m sorry, before you go on, could you tell me about that process? You say you have all these different elements. How do you decide what needs to get done, and how it’s done, and all that?

BA: How do you decide ... Well, there’s kind of methodologies or, I guess, process flows you follow. So you know you have to present the catalog. You have to give the customer – or, the viewer, and hopefully they’ll be a customer – a way in which you select the product that they’re interested in. And you have to present them with sort of real-time information as to what you have in the inventory.

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

They select the items that they want. There's always a shopping cart or shopping basket-type process, which is simply saving it to a database and just kind of keying it off of a unique identity assigned to that user. Or mostly, it's a GUID – global unique i.d. – for that user.

And after they're done, they go through the checkout process, again utilizing the database. And again, there's normally background processes on the server that actually kind of go to the database and say, "What are the new orders?" Extracts 'em from the database ...

The difficult part normally comes in when you're interacting with legacy systems. So, Nordstrom's has been around for, you know, I don't want to guesstimate, but just a number of years, way prior to us building a commerce site. So they have existing processes and systems that are already doing things to support their business for their retail stores, and doing it to support their catalog business as well.

And so you can't just go in and say, "Oh, yeah, you should rip all that out and try SQL server or BizTalk Server," you know. They'll ask you to leave. [laughing] So you have to integrate with them.

And that's always difficult, because back-end systems oftentimes are a lot less flexible than a new system. And a new system, if someone says, "Hey, build me something new, Billy," I can do whatever you want. I mean, it's just software, is how I look at it.

But if I say, "I need you to talk to this existing system," you know, I can't expect you to go and change that old system so that I can talk to it. So whatever *it* uses, I must conform to it. So you have to build, you know, adapters to a certain degree, so that you can communicate. You don't have to change *your* end of how *you* work with *your* business processes, but at the same time, when you're communicating with that system, you have to have kind of a translator.

And Microsoft has products for that. BizTalk Server comes to mind. You can say, "I'm sending you this XML document and you need to send it to him as

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

EDI,” and it’ll transform it for you. But that was prior to BizTalk, so I had to basically build that [my]self when I was interfacing with Nordstrom’s system.

So, you have to conform. And it’s actually a fun process, because you’ve learned all these new, cool things you can do in technology, and then somebody says, “Oh, you have to ...” do something like really crude, like really old, you know. Dump out a comma-delimited text file and then FTP it onto this server over here, and then it’ll pick it up, and if it doesn’t like it, it’ll drop a message and another directory.

I mean, this is something like, “Wow, why don’t they use XML Web Services?” And, you know, it’s because, the system’s been around for thirty years, that’s why. [laughing]

That’s it. And so once we were able to plug into the existing system at Nordstrom, they were able to – If they already were sending packages, like they were with the catalog system they had, then you’re able to not have to build that yourself. You can kind of say, “Oh, you already do that? So I can give you what you need in the right format, and you already know how to do that. I’m just playing in your environment.”

So that’s how we’re able to do that in those cases. With CompUSA, they had a catalog environment already, so we could plug in there as well. Do the same thing with CDW. I think for Software Spectrum, we had to create a new one. I can’t recall.

Again, that’s something that you can help with from a technology perspective, but there’re other players involved. So if UPS has to pick up boxes – well, I don’t know how to pick up a box, put it on a brown truck and put it on a brown plane and whatnot. So UPS comes in and helps with doing that part. And if taking orders back or something like that, maybe that’s the United States Postal Service, and maybe an agreement has to be made there.

Or building a warehouse, a physical warehouse. MCS doesn’t build warehouses, so if they need that to be done, then someone has to come in and get that infrastructure in place and whatnot. We’ll do anything that they need from a technology perspective. And, you know, we tell them what they’ll need in the warehouse, but we’re not gonna come in with girders and things

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

like that.

JF: So the process that you did with Microsoft – I’m sorry, with Nordstrom – is this basically the same thing that you would do with anybody, or is it more personalized?

BA: Well, it’s the same thing that I would probably do with most engagements that are very similar to that. I mean, I’m working with the Best Buy Corporation right now and the process where you go about engaging with the customer is normally the same. So in the case of Nordstrom, it was Dan Nordstrom and Steve Ballmer, who is Microsoft’s CEO – their sons, if I remember correctly, are on the same basketball team. And so that’s how that project came about.

So it literally, if I can paraphrase Steve, it’s “How come you guys aren’t using our stuff at your stores?” or whatever. Dan may have said, “We want to, but no one’s called us.”

You know, it could have been something as general as that. And next thing you know, you get ... not a mandate, because that sounds harsh, but you get influence from the top saying, “Go talk to them.” And that was how that one started.

But oftentimes, it’s the sales force at Microsoft seeing a customer that may potentially have a need. Or maybe they’re already using Microsoft software, but there’s a new area where it can also help out in. And the sales force brings in MCS to ... not *pitch*, because I don’t sell in the traditional sense. I mean, if someone said how much does something cost at Microsoft, like in the case of a box SKU, I really don’t know. I just don’t.

But they’ll bring me in to kind of demonstrate what the capabilities of our technologies are. And so that’s how we come in. But the salespeople sell, I just more or less say “This is what we can do.”

And they oftentimes appreciate it when people in my role come in and speak. Because I do more than demonstrate. “Let me point to some other solutions that I’ve built as well.”

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

But what I was getting ready to talk about was Best Buy. And Best Buy wants to establish a “presence” as they say it, on their desktop computers that they sell. So they want to be able to touch their customers more effectively, you know, so to be able to target information to them.

So in the case of their PCs, if you buy a PC from Best Buy, they would love to be able to personalize it, and install a piece of software, so that if you’re at home and in six months after you’ve bought a VCR, they can kind of send you a little pop-up notification saying, “Hey, Jessah, it’s been six months since you bought that JVC VCR. It might be time for you to get the heads cleaned on it,” or something like that.

And so that’s an application that we’re building right now for them. And it’s actually a very small application, from a size perspective. But for them to be able to effectively touch their customers, in a way in which their customers may want to be touched – yeah, as opposed to spam. I can touch a million people by sending spam. Or that “The warranty is due to expire on that TV you bought two years ago. Would you like to extend it?” You know.

Things that say, “Oh, this is truly for me,” as opposed to spam where they just say, “Here’s a list of people. I’m gonna send this out, and hopefully I can get a touch rate of 1 percent,” you know. And somebody’s happy at that point, you know, being able to send out targeted information. Or, “Your credit card payment was due at Best Buy,” and whatnot.

And also give some utility to it, so if we ever have to get your computer fixed, if they have information about your computer, when you come in and say, “Oh, I’m gonna buy this game, and my name is Jessah Foulk. Will it work on my computer?” They can go with their system and say, “Oh, yeah, the computer you bought six months ago? *Ooh*, looks like you’re gonna need a bit more RAM.” Or, “The hard drive looks plenty, but if you still have that little, cheesy 14-inch monitor, you’re probably gonna want to upgrade to something else.”

You know, to be able to say, “*Wow*, they remembered what I had,” hopefully it won’t feel like Big Brother or anything like that. And again, you can turn it off and say, “I don’t want to participate” and all that. Their hope, of course, is that you will.

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

So, that's an application I'm working on right now, just the design of it at least.

JF: So, you work with a team here?

BA: Yeah, so it depends. On the project prior to the one I'm working on now, we had a team of nineteen, which was *huge*. Which, I was the lead. And for this particular, there's two of us. And I've had other projects where it's me by myself, you know.

So sometimes you're put in an engagement where they'll send you out to Golden, Colorado, and you're the only guy there. And if you need help, of course, you have a team back here that can help, you know, answer questions you just can't recall and simply don't know.

Because oftentimes, you're put in engagements where you're thinking you're going in to talk about one particular thing, you know. Somebody says, "Billy, come in and talk about the engine in an automobile." OK, I'm gonna study up on engines, I'm gonna get it really good. Then you go in there and they're saying, "Hey, I'm having problems with these other aspects of the car," or "My boat doesn't work." You know, I mean, just off-the-wall. [If] they know that it somehow touches Microsoft, customers ... I won't say they expect it, but they *hope* you know it.

It's a little unreasonable, but if you're like me and you follow technology, you really do have a passion for computers and whatnot, you're normally able to use your deductive reasoning and use your troubleshooting skills to get them the fix that they need, so if they ask –

Sometimes they ask problems like "I'm having a problem with Word, Microsoft Word." And I'm work with as little as anyone. I type my documents in and that's pretty much it. But Word does so much more, and sometimes the customer's using it *way* more than you are. I mean, they know it in and out, but then they see the Microsoft guy and say, "Oh, the Microsoft guy is here! How do I do this in Word?" I'm like "*Whoa*," you know, "you're *way* beyond me." [laughing]

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

But, you know, you can sit down with sometimes and just walk them through it. And the fact that I have such close ties to Microsoft, I mean, I can send the right e-mail to the right person on the Word team that wrote that aspect of Word and say, "Hey, John, I'm here. How does the Thesaurus do this?" He sends it back. "Here you go" or "Here's the algorithm." And I say, "Cool."

And I can answer the question. So that's some of the value that we bring just by you engaging with Microsoft, as opposed to another partner of Microsoft. Because we are Microsoft.

The fact that we're customer-facing, it's a benefit to you, but the fact that we're still Microsoft, and we come back and, you know, if you had a problem with a piece of software, we push that feedback back into the product, so that hopefully a fix will come out, or the next version of the product or whatnot will have that fix in there. And, you know, we can help the customer back and forth with the product group, so we can act as kind of a conduit in that case.

JF: Can you imagine doing this job without the same ties to the different programmers here at Microsoft?

BA: I can imagine it, and I wouldn't like it as much. I would still, I think, be an effective programmer and consultant, but the turnaround time, I would imagine, would be a lot slower in getting good, pertinent information.

So another aspect is I know what's coming out. And so if someone were to ask me to design something, you know, not having the intimate knowledge of what's going on in Microsoft –

End of Analog Audio Tape 1 of 2 for August 6, 2002, Side A

[Side B begins with a repeat of what was at the end of Side A, starting with "It's a little unreasonable ..." The transcript for Side B begins with what follows "not having the intimate knowledge of what's going on in Microsoft"]

BA: ... I would potentially design something that will be replaced by a true product in two months. You know, it could be in the works and just getting ready to be released. But the fact that if you're outside of Microsoft, we don't necessarily advertise the things that we're working on until they're really solid.

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

And I could come out with this, and work really hard on it, and it's good, it solves the problem. But after I release, two weeks later, Microsoft says, "Hey, we're releasing Product X." And it's a real product with a real product team behind it – testers, and it'll have upgrades, and all those good things. And it'll cost, let's say, \$1,000.

But the time I spent building it and the customer paying for it, they spent \$10,000 on me doing it, and mine isn't as good. It just wouldn't be, you know, one or two people building something that a team of fifty is building is probably not going to be as good. And so that would be very difficult to be as effective, and on the outside. It's a lot more convenient for the customer and it's a lot more convenient for me to have these close ties, you know.

And I have been a consultant. I've worked on the outside. And it was fine but we were working on a specialized problem. And I wasn't as interested and didn't need the close-ties information. But to be a consultant, where you're consulting with customers, and saying, "Hey, this is how we should do something, this is the direction we should take. It's gonna take six months. Oh, no, there's no other products out there that do this. We have to build it by hand."

And then later on, Microsoft comes out with a product that's just far superior. Well, the customer would be upset, to a certain degree. They couldn't be upset with you necessarily, but they would be *disappointed*, I guess is a better word, [about] the fact that no one had an insight into knowing that Microsoft was coming out with something.

Or even a competitor of Microsoft, another company. To build something custom that just solves the problem and that's it, I mean, that has no upgrade path or anything like that, would just be difficult for a customer to work with beyond that.

JF: How, today, are you kept up on what's going on in other parts of Microsoft?

BA: Well, they try to keep us up-to-date. But I mean, Microsoft has 51,000 people and any number of products going on, any day. So, I mean, it's hard

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

for them to keep you up-to-date unless you ask to be kept up-to-date. And in order to ask to be kept up-to-date, you'd have to know what you're asking to be kept up-to-date on. And if you know that, then you're *somewhat* up-to-date, if it didn't just confuse you.

So, I mean, if they have Product X coming out, and I know about it and I'm interested in it, I can sign up for the e-mail list, to learn about it. Or get into the discussion groups and continue to learn about it. But if I don't even know that a product is coming out or whatnot, have no idea that that this new product exists, then I probably won't get on that list, I probably won't get in those discussion groups.

So the best thing is just keeping really close contacts with a lot of different people, and having some really good generalists around you. Like I'm pretty good at being a generalist. Just people that kind of are plugged in to things that are going on, from a technology perspective at Microsoft.

So you can say, "Hey, I'm getting ready to build a new widget." So I can say, "Oh, no, you shouldn't build that. Bob's already built one." Or, "There's a group that's building the widget to end all widgets," you know. "Cool, then I'll use theirs."

Then you can talk to that program manager and they can say, "Oh, it'll be out in a month." And you're like "Wow, it was gonna take me three months to build it. Cool." But if you don't know what you're looking for oftentimes, it's really hard to get plugged in to the information.

And it's the same thing with the Internet. I mean, the Internet has so much information, and not all of it is true or relevant, you know, and so you have to become really good at searching and navigating the Internet.

My mother will e-mail me and say, "Is this true?" And it's something from, you know, something like urbanlegends.com but she didn't know it. So it's like "No, it's not true." [laughing] "Before you ask me, go to this site and see if it's there. If it's there, then they're telling you that it's not."

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

Same thing with Microsoft. Just ... 51,000 people, everyone has their own ideas, and everyone has access to information and access to publishing information as well. So it's just kind of information overload at times.

JF: What are some of the technologies that you really have to be fluent in, in order to help your customers?

BA: I would say ... well, what would I say? My focus is Internet technologies. That's kind of broad, but it at least gives me some scope. So anything that runs over the network are the things that I need to be familiar with.

And fortunately, I don't have to be at the lowest levels, you know. We have developers in the product groups that have to be very, very deep in those areas. But they're very narrow in the scope.

So I might know a good amount about most all of the network technologies or all the transports, you know. But someone working in Windows knows TCP/IP like nobody else. I mean, down at that level. And I don't know it down to that level, but I don't need to. His job is to make it so I don't need to know it at that level. Because if everyone did, then his utility is a lot less useful for people.

Because the way Microsoft works is we try to abstract the complexities of computers and programming and whatnot. So that's why we put easier-to-program, application programming interfaces [API] on top of things, and try to have kind of a common programming model to make. So if you learn how to program, and if you learn how to program *this* API, you'll know how to program *that* API as well, until we come out with brand new ones. And you're not "*Oh wow, this is something new I have to learn.*"

That's kind of a big part of Microsoft's .NET initiative is that we have different ways to do different things, different ways to do the same things, and some things were available to some developers and other things were available to other developers. And there was some overlap and a lot of non-overlap between them.

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

So a VB developer had ease of use, but it's really hard to use the WIN 32-API. The C++ developer had exposure to all the WIN 32-API, but it took him four times as long to get anything out. A Script developer had the easiest way to do things, but in order to talk to – well, actually, it was impossible for him to talk to a C++ library. So, I mean, it was just kind of confusing to people.

And so all what .NET does is say, "OK, we're not going to say we screwed up, because we didn't. But we're going to start over. We're going to start over, and have this common API and these common libraries. And we don't care what language you use."

I mean, effectively right now, .NET supports at least twenty-six different programming languages. So we don't care if it's COBOL, if it's C, if it's Eiffel, if it's – If you want to make a language, go ahead, make a language. [laughter] As long as it knows how to talk to our APIs, you'll be just fine.

And that's really good for developers, so that a developer can continue to be productive in the language that he or she knows without having to necessarily re-tool themselves, you know, just because they want to use this API.

If I'm a VB developer and we say, "Oh, you need to call this API."

"*Oh, wow*, now I gotta do it in C, or C++. I'm not very good at it, so now I have to go and learn the bare minimum to be able to do this."

So it's like no, it doesn't matter now. If you know how to use your language, and you know how to use our programming model, you're fine.

JF: Before we move on, could you define a couple of terms for me?

BA: Sure.

JF: The first is, just to clarify, VB? Visual Basic?

BA: Visual Basic, yeah.

JF: And then you were talking about .NET?

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

BA: So .NET is – .NET is a lot of things obviously, and I won't even attempt to expand on everything. But .NET is an initiative by Microsoft, and it's really geared around what we're calling, or what are called, XML Web Services.

XML Web Services are ways in which you expose pieces of programmatic functionality over the Web. That's really just very general, but if you have a system, and you want to make it so other people outside of your corporation, or even within your corporation, can leverage its data, in the past, you would create your own kind of API in order to do that. And it could be done, you know, but you would have to create a specialized way in which people could talk to your application.

And the problem with that is if you create an API and a way to talk to it, and I create one, and he creates one, that's probably three different ways to do the same thing. And so what XML Web Services does is that it leverages standard Internet protocols, such as XML for communicating with these different systems.

So effectively, if you expose a XML Web Service, and I have permission to use it ... Permission is a big thing. You might not want me to use your system. I know how to program against it. And Microsoft's push is that we're creating the best technologies, and the best tools, and the best runtime, in order to do that.

So, there are standards out there. Everyone is implementing against these standards. So effectively, you can do it in an open-source environment, you can do it on a Sun environment, with Java, and you can use it with Microsoft. So what we're betting is that we have the best tools in order to do it.

So, if it's literally, in order to use your component that's out there on the Web, if I can go through a wizard, you know – say, you know, “I want to use her servers, and I see how to use it, and I've built the wizard and I'm ready to use the service,” basically.

[For example], if it's the credit card verification service, and all I have to do is get permission, and then send you the credit card number and the expiration date and, I don't know, the amount that we're trying to authorize for. And I

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

can send you that data, and you come back with “valid” or “unauthorized” or “lock that guy up”, or something like that. [laughter] That’s easy.

And what that means is you don’t have to write your own credit card validation. And that’s pretty important. So, that’ll help time in the market, when you’re trying to build new systems.

So, if you’re the best cookie baker in the Seattle area, you don’t want to have to focus on “How do I do credit card verification?” You want to bake cookies. I know that’s a really simple scenario.

And so, that’s what XML Web Services allows you to do. It allows you to say, “He does credit card verification. He has a product catalog publishing service. And this guy over here has a shipping service, like UPS has a shipping service. If I can somehow get a developer together and they can glue those pieces together, I can continue to bake my cookies, and people can get to my cookies.” You know, they can order them and get them sent to them and things like that.

And that’s kind of what XML Web Services brings. It allows those systems to all be tied together, without – with their being Internet standard protocols. Because, again, these things could have been done prior – people are doing them to this day, without using these protocols. But there has to be a tightly-bound contract between them.

They have to go and say, “So how do I talk to your system? OK, can you send me the document? OK, I’ve got the document.” And, I’m having to bug you, and say, “Could you change it so I can use this instead? Because I’m using Sun and you’re using Pearl, and Sun doesn’t have this kind of type and Pearl doesn’t understand that...” And it’s just really confusing and it takes a long time.

But if there’s a standard way of doing it, and everybody has these protocols defined on their system, and there are tools that are built to talk to them, you don’t even worry about that anymore. It’s literally, you know, if you are conformant to the XML Web Service standard, and SOPE, and UDBI and all those other acronyms out there, and I have a toolkit or language and

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

technology that says *it* conforms to those standards, then we can play together.

It's no big deal to hook up to your system. If I have permission, it takes me two minutes. I mean, it literally does. Now, that's not a production-level system, but I can now do credit card verification. And so, that gives you a little bit of an idea about it.

JF: Uh-huh, that's great. Now, you talked to me about what you do, but could you paint me a picture of what a typical day looks like for you?

BA: OK, typical day. I normally wake up ... if I was lucky enough to be able to go home, I wake up at home. I always go home. Pretty much. [laughing] so, I wake up at home. Normally check my e-mail, you know. It's right there. I always check it, just to make sure there's nothing like on fire. And normally there isn't.

And then I go through the normal morning routine. By the time I get to work, after having my *chai* tea every morning, I again check e-mail. Our day is really based around e-mail. There's a lot of e-mail.

A day like today, I have probably six meetings. A little bit too much. That's a little much for me, you know. For me to be a technologist and a developer and all those good things, I don't like that many meetings, but it's part of the job. And a meeting can be effective. Some are not, though.

If I'm on a project, I'm probably either designing or developing something. And that simply means coding or programming, whatever a person likes to call it.

My preference is design. I think design is oftentimes harder than the programming, and to actually come up with a design that works and can be extended and that a person can understand and program against, is actually pretty fun to do. I enjoy the programming part as well, but I've been doing that for a little bit of time, you know. But I'm not saying there's not new stuff that I would want to do, that'd be a lie. But the design part is ... I can kind of think about it, without a keyboard necessarily in front of me. I mean, I can

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

literally go sit in our little lounge area over there and just kind of pontificate [laughing] over, you know, how these systems will interact.

And when you're talking about large-scale systems, you know, where there's literally 50,000 people banging on the system at any given time, and it has to be up and available, and if it's not, then the company, whatever company it is, is losing money, you know, \$100,000 per ten-minute period, those type of things, that's when you really have to think about design a great deal.

And the development aspect is oftentimes a lot easier when there's a good design, when it's really clear what this person meant to do, or these are the design patterns that they had in mind. Their structure. How are we going to handle exceptions and errors? Oh, we're gonna use these technologies ... and whatnot.

So, the day continues with e-mail, meetings oftentimes. I don't have any reports; I'm not a person-manager in that respect, so I don't have to schedule my day around helping someone else with their career in that perspective.

My job is only a project manager. And so, MCS works around a project-based structure where, you know, anything we do is around a project. And if you have people working on it and you're the lead on the project, the people are effectively working for you *for* the project. Again, you're not leading their career, but you're leading on the project, you know.

If I'm the program manager, he may be the developer, or he may be the tester, this guy may be doing the documentation. I have to put structure around that, and schedule, you know. Let the customer know how much you believe it will cost, because it's always an estimate. And track to the scheduling.

You'll be able to say at any given time, "We're ahead of schedule" or "behind schedule". Or "We're over budget, and if you project at this rate, we'll be out of budget in a month and we'll need two more weeks. What'll we do?"

Do we cut scope and say, "We'll drop these two features", or do we say, "Hey, we need more money," or ... or what, you know, at that time.

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

So, my typical day is normally designing ... and project management ... and a couple meetings. A couple meetings, yeah. It sounds really boring and that, but the programming and the designing, that's actually fun for me. I actually enjoy it a great deal.

And also, I have a great team that I work with, so ... I've been with the same group, technically, since January 1996. So, I've seen people come and go and whatnot. I started out as the lowest level in the group, which is an associate consultant. And did a good jog of advancing through the levels, associate to associate 2, consultant to consultant 2, senior to senior 2 and whatnot.

It's good to know that you've kind of paid your dues, so when someone comes in and they kind of get their history and whatnot, it's nice. As opposed to "Oh, he came from XYZ Corporation and that's why he's in that position."

But you've never done anything with Microsoft technology, you're not familiar with the methodologies we use, you don't have any real connections within the company or anything like that. But [despite] the fact that you've been in the industry for x number of years with another company that may not have anything to do with Microsoft or Microsoft technologies, you're there.

People look at you and say, "No, he went through the ranks." It helps a great deal, having that history is a certain level of comfort, you know. Not just in the position, but just in that you've seen how things have evolved.

And so, when something happens, or something is getting ready to happen, you're normally a little bit more ... you're normally smart as to how to deal with it, just in the general sense. Because [you can say], "Oh, this reorganization's that coming on? There was something like that back in [19]98. So I'm not going to let it get me down too much, because then it only lasted for six months, and then they changed it back," or something like that. And so, I enjoy that.

JF: About how many hours a day do you work?

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

BA: Ten. Ten. I mean, I've done twenty-four hours before, that's no big deal. But it's typically ten. So I normally get in anywhere from six in the morning to eleven, you know. It just depends.

That's one good thing about working in this field, and not having a phone that rings and having to answer the phone, because that's not what I do. I get in when I want to get in. And when you work with a company like Microsoft, and you're in that kind of position, they know you're gonna be in by the time you need to be in, you know. If you've got meetings at a certain time, they know you're not gonna miss your meetings. Or if you have a customer engagement, you're not gonna miss that.

But at the same time, if you were late that night before, don't expect me to be in early the next day unless I have some type of commitment that I couldn't change.

So ... it's normally like, ten hours. I mean, last night I was here for probably fourteen, but that was because we were releasing something and I just wanted to make sure that it got – I wanted to get it out early. And so, it was being released at eight o'clock this morning, and the fact that I was able to release it at nine o'clock last night was good. I mean, it's ahead of schedule, but then, I had overnight to see there were no problems.

And so, when I woke up this morning, my inbox only said, "Hey, great job, great job, great job." That's what you want to see, as opposed to "*Ohmygod!* Where were you?" [laughter]

And so, you know, that was a late night last night, but normally it's ten hours.

JF: Now, do you have a family?

BA: Just me and my girlfriend. Me and my girlfriend, and I need to get a dog or something.

JF: Do you see any strain or anything, with families of people that you work with, who have these kinds of hours?

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

BA: Yes, I think that people – I think Microsoft, and a lot of people in the technology industry, especially back in the start-up days, were probably getting divorced, and losing their significant other, because of the hours spent. And, you know, it's kind of like, "Do you love me or that computer?" And that was a question that a person had to think about. "Hmmm ... I don't know, that's a good one," you know. [laughter]

My girlfriend, she's an attorney, and she's a new attorney, so she right now isn't working as long of hours as she and I expected. She works anywhere from nine hours or so. But she understands, because she's been with me for a while, and she kind of knows this is what I do. I enjoy it and it's a pretty respectable profession, and all of that.

You know, when she has to work late or something like that, and she's really into a case or whatever she's working on, she enjoys it. She kinda likes the stress of it. So she has an appreciation for my level of commitment.

So for me, it's not a strain at all. And, you know, I get vacation, just gotta learn to start taking the days. [laughter] I just don't use them, I guess. But, it's not a strain for me.

But I do know that it's a strain for many people. Like some people, especially in consulting, travel. And consultants, just by the very definition of what you do, normally you travel a lot. I mean, I have co-workers that travel Monday through Friday, and then they come back for the weekend, and then they have to jet out Monday early in the morning. And that's a strain.

And I have other co-workers that their wives have said, under no certain terms, can they travel more than like once a year, you know, that type of thing. And if they do, you know, there'll be heck to pay. [laughter]

So, I'm not in that situation. I couldn't be in that situation where my significant other wouldn't understand, but, you know, some people are like, "Hey, you've been doing this for twenty years. Let some of those younger guys do the traveling."

And a lot of the younger guys like it because they haven't had the opportunity to see the world and things like that. So you say, "Hey, here's a credit card

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

that we're going to pay for. Go to Paris. We've got a customer out there."
Like "Cool," you know.

But me, it's like I don't want to get on a plane, and I don't want to go through the airport lines, and whatnot. But, I do it.

JF: What kind of traveling have you done for work?

BA: Oh, well, I've seen – I've been to Paris three times or something like that. London, twice. Where else, where else, where else, where else? ... That's pretty much it, international. I've hit New York two or three times, and Miami. And, you know, so sometimes you get to go to the cool places. Like New York and Miami? Yeah, you can do worse. You can do worse.

Just got back from New Orleans and Minneapolis. I was gone for two weeks during that time. But I don't normally travel a great deal. It's not because I won't or anything. I just – my customer base lately has been internal, so I've been doing stuff for Microsoft. And so I travel over there, right across the freeway, to another building.

Or we do everything virtually, through e-mail and conference calls. And the technology, honestly, at this point, allows you to – you can do video-teleconferencing and things like that. We have all the technology, just that everyone forgets to use it, you know. You're on a plane to Amsterdam and you think, "Oh, I probably could have done this [by teleconference] ..."
[laughing]

And, you know, it's probably not as personal, and you probably need to travel to see the customer the first time, and maybe the last time. But I don't believe that you should have to be there *every single week*. I mean, unless you're working with a team, and they're all there and you're the only – you're the odd guy. And that sometimes is the case, and you can't say, "Hey, bring your twelve guys here, because me, the odd guy, I don't want to go there." It's not even cost-effective. So, you can't do that.

But my travel schedule, prior to the two weeks out of town this month, or last month, I'd traveled maybe a week prior. I mean, a week another time during

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

the year. And last year, maybe a total of three weeks, or something like that, which isn't that big a deal. Actually, it's about right.

It's like, "Oh, I could use a trip right now." "Hey, Billy, we need you to go ..."
Hey, perfect timing. [snaps his fingers] And then you go there, you spend three or four days, and then I'm ready to go home.

JF: Looking back on the education experiences that you've had, which do you think are the most necessary for the job that you have now?

BA: For my job, I guess, public speaking ... math ... and my writing courses. So, in political science, you're doing a lot of writing. It's kind of like a lot of like English and history, and being able to convey ideas and whatnot. And that's been really important for the consulting aspect. The math helps a great deal with programming.

But if I had to pick the two ... if I had to pick the two, I'd probably say my writing. I would say my writing. I've actually co-authored a book last year. You don't have to be an English major to write necessarily, but it helped. [laughing] It helped a great deal to be comfortable with writing.

Because we write a lot of specifications, so if you're going out to a customer site, you need to be able to convey oftentimes in writing what it is you're going to deliver. You know, you can't just say, "We're going to build this for you. We'll see you in a couple months."

You're going to have to say, "Here's the document, what you're going to get." Because they're going to be paying for that. I mean, you have to give them another document of how we're going to build it. "This is the document of how we built it," so they can take in on and do the maintenance long-term.

And being able to write, being actually comfortable writing, helps out a great deal. Everyone in my field of consulting does have to do a lot of writing. Some people just do it better than others. Some people are comfortable writing to the point where it's beyond draft, and saying, "Here you go, take a look at it." And know that any revisions are going to be pretty minor, if any.

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

Some people will be like, “No, I want you guys to see the pre-draft, and the next draft,” because they know that writing is not their strong point, but then, they might be great in technology.

So, it’s just kind of a toss-up what you lean towards. I kind of lean towards the customer-facing side as opposed to kind of the “super-geek,” you know.

JF: That’s a good term. [laughing] Can you tell me more about this book that you helped to co-author, or that you co-authored?

BA: *ASP.NET: Tips, Tutorials and Code*. It’s a book focused on ASP.NET, which is Microsoft’s Web programming model. And it was started simply because I do a lot – not a *lot*, I’ve done *some* article writing for the publishing site.

Again, it’s really because of my writing instincts. I have an idea, or I’ve learned how to do something, or someone’s asked me enough questions about this, that evidently the information isn’t out there, or isn’t good enough that is out there. So I just write an article.

And I’ve written five or so out there on the site. And I’ve gotten – They have rating systems, you know. “Billy Anders got a rating of five stars out of five,” or whatever. And it’s not because – I think it’s because I tend to express myself to the audience in the way in which they need to know, in order for them to understand it.

So, some people don’t – you know, if speaking to a non-technical audience, they’ll still use the most technical jargon that they possibly can, because they know it. And me, I don’t. I kind of say, I know the audience is Script developers or something like that, and they’re normally not the CS computer guys maybe. So don’t talk to them that way.

So you have to explain things a little differently. But again, not kind of belittling the knowledge that they have, but just, you know, speak in English. [chuckles] And it might take a couple of sentences, but it’s OK, no problem.

And I think that’s what some people appreciate about my writing. And also, I write like I talk – kind of casual, you know. Like we’re sitting here talking,

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

that's how I write, to a certain degree. And I think people appreciate that as well. I can be concise, but at the same time, I'm comfortable when I write. So I'll throw humor in my articles and whatnot, and people tend to like it.

And so, a couple of people called publishing-acquisition-somethings, I don't know the title, but basically, the people that go out and find authors to write books they have ideas about. And I got approached by four or five from different publishing companies and whatnot. And I took the easiest one.
[laughter]

Not that I'm lazy, but all the other ones wanted me to write a full book, and I knew I just didn't have the time or even the desire to do that much writing. I mean, I write every day, and it's for my job – it's my "day job," as they say – and to go home and write another 900-page book ... honestly, on technology that changes so fast that the shelf life of a book is really six months, or nine, maybe.

And so, after spending four months writing something that only lives on the shelf for six months, you know, it's like, ah, not quite enough. But if you only wrote two or three chapters, then you don't feel quite as bad. You still got published, so you can kind of say, "Hey, I got published. Evidently, I'm good enough to do that."

So I went with the one where they were saying, "If you don't want to write your own book, these other five guys could really use help with these two chapters, and you would write these two chapters." And I say, "Well, what are the chapters?" They said, "What do you want?" I said, "I want this one and this one." And they were like, "OK, you can do the ones you want."

And that was perfect, you know. It was just perfect for me, just being able to write about two things that, at the time, I honestly didn't know. Because this was pre-released Microsoft technology. But it was stuff that I knew I wanted to know, and like with any project, it forces you to learn.

Otherwise, you kind of find yourself skimming over the details. When you skim, it means you don't know it. "Oh, no, it's just kind of ..." Wave your hand. And then you kind of look at it and say, "You know why you did that."

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

It's because you need to go deeper." Therefore, you have to go learn and do and whatnot.

And so it was a good opportunity for me to learn the technology really well. And it has helped me, because I have actually used the book that me and another author wrote, as a reference for myself. I didn't write their chapters, so I open the book, and if I need to look up something, I probably am not looking at my chapters, because I know that stuff pretty well. But I'm looking at theirs all the time. I do.

That's a big part of programming and consulting and demos – references. Because trying to keep it all in your head, you'll just explode. You really know where stuff is and how to use stuff, but you don't have to know everything about it. "I know how to do this, so why don't you just show me an example. OK, great, that's what I needed."

So it's relatively well-received. It's a decent book. I mean, I don't really speak a lot about it. [laughing] A lot of people in my group didn't even know I wrote the book until three months after, and one person said, "I was in Barnes & Noble and saw 'Billy Anders' on the side, on the spine of a book." Opened it up, and then there's a picture of me in there.

And so he sent it out. "Do you guys know that Billy wrote a book?" And they'll all say, "Why didn't you say anything?" And I say, "I didn't do it for you." [laughing]

And I didn't, you know. I wrote it because I wanted to. I didn't write it so I could say, "Hey, look what I can do, everyone." It was just kind of something to be able to say, when you were whatever age, to say, "OK, I did that. I climbed that mountain," or whatever. Even though it was only two chapters.

I'll probably write another one, though. At this point, I've been kind of pushing back, because I'm trying to focus more on my day job. And again, it takes a lot of time. You have to go through a lot of process, you know, in order to write.

I mean, you've got probably four different types of editors that go through things. Then, putting code in books is a pain, because code doesn't fit well in

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

books. And so you're writing and you give some sample code. And then you have to write everything in two different languages, because some people know VB and some people know C# [C-Sharp], and therefore, you have to be able to appease both of them. So, it's not something that I'm rushing back to do, but I know inevitably it'll catch up with me and I will.

JF: I kind of want to talk a little bit about what else you do, besides your day job, like you said. And I'm wondering if you could tell me about Blacks at Microsoft: what it is and what their main purpose is.

BA: Oh, *wow*, main purpose. I should know that, huh?

JF: What you feel their purpose is.

BA: OK, so, Blacks at Microsoft – we call it BAM – is an organization at Microsoft for Blacks. It's an African-American organization that was started by, I think, four or five people maybe ten or twelve years ago, that really was an organization for the few African-Americans here at Microsoft. Kind of to just get together and share ideas and ... just have another, honestly, another Black face that you could just talk to.

Because, I'll be very honest, Microsoft is less than 1 percent Black. And then, on top of it, the bulk of those people may be spread out in the field. And the "field" is not Redmond, so [it's] New York and North Carolina and Texas and everything like that. So, spread out. So not only is it a tiny number, but it's spread out, in addition.

So you can't even say, "I'll probably see one." I can go easily, easily, two weeks without seeing another African-American face at Microsoft. And, you know, you'd say, "Oh, no big deal."

That *is* a big deal, you know. *It is*. And, you know, a lot of other cultures and races are represented here at Microsoft. Definitely Caucasians, definitely people from East India, but ... not a whole lot of Blacks.

And so, the people got together – and I know one of them is Mitch Duncan, who is a friend of mine. I don't know what the real reasoning was. I don't know if it was for social consciousness or something like that. I don't think it

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

was that. I think it was literally just a social organization that would probably do some good community service as well.

At the time – it was twelve years ago – *god*, there were even fewer Blacks. I don't know how many people, there might have been twenty people in the whole organization. Now, worldwide, I think we have a few hundred or so.

So the executive summary of BAM, I just don't know. And I'm the VP of Technology, and I probably should know.

End of Analog Audio Tape 1 of 2 for August 6, 2002, Side B

BA: But again, I'm the VP of Technology. I don't know what the president thinks about the organization. [chuckles]

But right now, what it is, is we have a lot of good initiatives. So we have BAM minority student day, which is ... how can I explain it? ... One day out of the year, BAM gets, effectively, a few busloads of minority students – not just Black, but just underprivileged and minority students from the Seattle area – together.

And they do a tour of Microsoft. They get to meet executives. Like Steve Ballmer will give a talk. They get to go and do product group tours, whereby they'll see what the Xbox team does during the day, how games are made. And then they'll go see how Office is made, and whatnot.

Then they'll talk with a person such as myself, to see what consulting's about. Probably just bore them out of their mind. What it does is it allows them to kind of see that there are other avenues into Microsoft.

So when they meet people like me, who's from East Oakland, and about the biggest knucklehead *ever*, back then. Definitely wasn't born with a silver spoon in my mouth or anything like that. And then they meet people that went to Harvard or like that, they kind of see the diverse range of people that work at Microsoft. And that it really doesn't matter terribly, at least, where you come from, that you can still get to a good point in your life if you strive to do so.

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

And so they take this tour, it's like an all-day thing. It's always published in our *Microsoft News*, but it also normally gets published in KIRO or something. So one of the local news stations will come and cover it and film a couple pieces of it. It's really well received. It's probably one of the most well received events of all the diversity groups at Microsoft.

So, we have other groups. We have Spanish at Microsoft, we have Filipinos at Microsoft, we have the women's group, other diversity groups, so it's not just BAM. There's probably one for every type of group here at the company, but BAM has been around probably the longest, if I remember correctly. I don't know that for sure.

But we do a lot of community service. So right now, we have a computer tutorial programming class going on at the Boys Club of Seattle. And that's in my area. So as the VP of Technology, I understand what's going on there, where we're teaching basic programming. Not BASIC, the language, but I should say, the fundamentals of programming, to underprivileged students at the Boys Club.

So, if the student can pay, they do pay. They're not paying us, they're paying the Boys Club, about twenty bucks or something. If they can't pay, guess what? They still get in the class and there's no problem, it's no big deal. It's just pay if you can.

And, you know, that's the kind of things that we do. It's kind of like my fraternity did in college. We did those community service type things. And so, it was really nice to come here, and I learned that there was another African-American organization doing those same types of things.

Because we have some people that are brand-new to Microsoft, like interns or whatnot, but then we have people that have been here twenty years that are in the group. And everybody kind of wants to help somebody else.

We also have mentoring programs in BAM, where you might have an official Microsoft mentor, but it's really kind of computer-assigned, you know. It's kinda like "Hey, I need a mentor." And somebody runs a program, and the next thing you know – *boom*. "Jessah's your mentor." And it's like, "I don't

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

know how you got selected, we're not even in the same group, or we're not on the same paths, or anything. But, you're my mentor now."

It's really nothing based on oh, she's been here longer than you and she's smarter, so therefore, she'll help you. With BAM, we have the same type of thing, but it's a little more personal, you know. One, you can pick a person. You can say, "Hey, I kinda like you, I see what you're doing. You're on the same path that I'm on. Do you think we can sit down and talk once a month or every two weeks?" Or something like that.

Or you can say, "Hey, I'm new here. I plan to do big things while I'm here, and this is my background. If anybody can recommend someone I can talk to..." And we go through and we find out who has time, you know, who would be willing. And who we believe would handle the commitment of actually speaking to this person and giving them good advice, and whatnot.

And it's probably a two-way street. It's not just, "You should do these and these and these things," because I don't know, honestly. But you'll learn at the same time. So you can see that this person's in a different product group, and these are some of the troubles and some of the good things that are happening with him. And you can share some of your experiences here at Microsoft, or beyond, life experiences as well, and help influence them.

But oftentimes, you learn a lot about what they're doing as well, and it can help you, by the same token. So you can find that "Wow, that sounds like a really cool group. I want to go to your group." Or "I didn't know that's what your position did in the organization. That sounds cool." Or "Wow, I thought it was cooler than that, but it doesn't sound very cool, so I'm not going to go over there."

So it's really nice. And one funny thing is that it's not a mentor/protégé relationship. They actually changed the name. I think people didn't like the word "protégé," so it's mentor/mentee. So if you hear "mentee," that's what they're talking about. It sounds silly to me, but that's what it is, mentor/mentee.

So that's another little program that we have. And we have like "Bat for Cash," softball games, where all the proceeds go to some local organization.

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

And again, it's not normally even an African-American organization, it's just, normally, underprivileged people. It could be kids, it could be the homeless, or something like that. But that's a big part of BAM.

And then we have the social part, where we have restaurant tours, where interns come up for the summer, and they don't know anyone. So we go on these restaurant tours and movie outings, where we go and say, "Hey, let's go to P.F. Chang's in downtown Bellevue" or "Let's go to Wild Ginger in Seattle."

And we all meet up. It's normally a large group. Go hit a restaurant. You get to meet people, talk with them. And at the same time, learn some of the good food that there is in Seattle. And then we do the movie thing. "Let's go see *Scooby Doo*" or whatever it is.

And it's just a great opportunity for people to meet each other in a non-work environment. But you can talk about work, you can talk about whatever you want. And we have barbeques.

And after a while, you branch out and you meet your own friends in the group. Then if you guys want to go on a date, or whatever you want, hang out and play basketball, or go to the Pro Club and work out together, you can do that as well. But it's just kind of an "in" to meeting people outside of your work group, you know.

And that's oftentimes the only way you *can* meet people, is "I only work in this one group of forty people. These are the only people I know." Unless you stumble into somebody in the cafeteria or something like that. So, a little bit about BAM.

JF: Now, you've already kind of talked about the diversity at Microsoft. Do you think that is an accurate reflection of the IT industry in general, or what are your thoughts on that?

BA: I think it is, honestly. Because I guess the IT industry typically is more diverse than the African-American population. So we're less than 1 percent at Microsoft, but if you talk about diversity, you need to include all the different

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

racess, and need to include women, men, you know, the number's much higher. Thirty percent, I don't know, whatever it is.

And so I think that number is indicative of what's going on in the industry, but Microsoft may be a little lower than the industry when it comes to the Black population. I don't know that. I haven't studied that as far as a statistic. But I would assume that's something to do with Seattle as well, because Seattle isn't known for a great Black population, to my knowledge.

And so like a Houston may have a lot more, and Atlanta would have even more than that. And the San Francisco Bay area, you know, the other places where the African-American population is a little larger and therefore I would assume the technology sector in those regions would reflect that. I assume.

JF: Do you see any other drawbacks or advantages to working and living in the Seattle area?

BA: You're not talking specifically about Microsoft, just working here in general?

JF: Uh-huh.

BA: Disadvantage: the weather could be a little bit better, but I don't think that's going to change any time soon. Advantage: I think the people are friendly here. I believe the crime rate is low to moderate, as opposed to other regions.

It used to be the unemployment rate was low, but now I think we're the second highest in the country, behind Portland, so that's not it.

The technology sector here, although much smaller than the Silicon Valley or Boston or Houston, or whatnot, seems to be pretty nice and pretty influential, industry-wide, you know. We have Microsoft, and I don't think there's any more influential companies in technology than that.

But we have RealNetworks here, and a lot of other companies, if they're not headquartered here, they at least have set up shop here. Maybe probably to

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

be close to Microsoft, that's probably it. But they're here as well. So, that's pretty nice as well.

Boeing, it was nice that they *were* here. You know, they're still here, but they're *not* here at the same time.

What else is nice? ... I really like the landscape. Talking nature here, but I like water over there, mountains over there, trees everywhere. That's really nice.

In the summertime, maybe I'm blinded by all the gray that I went through for all the other ten months, but I don't think there's a more beautiful place than this region. I mean, to go to Lake Washington, or Puget Sound, and just go forty-five minutes east and just hit the mountains and go hiking or whatnot.

If you really don't like the weather, you can just go on the other side of the mountains. And the east, you know, the Spokane area, is probably hotter than you want. It doesn't get gray like this, it's the mountains that block all of this. So I really like the way things look here.

And it's very clean with all the rain, but it even smells clean. Just probably all the rain. [laughing] Or the trees and everything like that. So, I really like that. It's kind of tranquil, you know. Tranquil, yet it's still a city. Seattle's like *there*. Like, I wouldn't want to live in the woods or anything like that. I'm a city boy and I kinda need that. But at the same time, I can get away from it.

That's why I kind of like the Eastside, because although it's growing and kind of dense, they're still maintaining some of the aesthetics, as far as the way things look. And they're keeping things kind of lush. You can easily find lawns and things like that.

Those would be the things that I like. The landscape. I wish the unemployment was a little bit lower or employment higher. Crime rate, I think is low. I believe so, at least. And it's all I can think of right now.

JF: OK. Now, I want to talk about what you see in the future of IT for a few minutes. First, for those students that are just now thinking about a career in

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

IT, what can you – uh – how would you describe the industry that they'll encounter in the next five to ten years?

BA: *Wow ... you want me to predict the IT industry. Well ... hopefully, I'm not copping out here. My prediction would be that computers in general, or specifically, will continue to play a large role in the lives of people. I don't think anyone will argue that.*

I think computers, though, will become less main characters, as far as being in the forefront, and take somewhat of a back seat, kind of ... I don't know how to explain it. Their role will be increased, yet their visibility will be decreased.

So right now, everybody's staring at a PC, and they've got these big screens in the car, and you've got a computer at your home, and you've got two screens there. I think they'll get smarter, and therefore, their interface will shrink a little bit. So, they'll be understanding your voice, they'll be understanding the motions of your hands and your head and whatnot. You'll walk into a room, it'll know "Turn on the lights," that type of thing. You won't have to go to turn on the light.

So their role will increase, but you won't have to *explicitly* interact with them as much. And so what that means is there'll be more computers, you know. Like your camera, your car, I mean, your watch – I mean, just everything will have one in there.

And so someone that wanted to get into electrical engineering, or get into software programming, or get into repair, for that matter – because these things are going to break, as well – I see that as being a definite, safe, and potentially very lucrative career choice for everyone, for that matter.

So, that's kind of my prediction. And I don't think it's all that revolutionary. I don't think anyone would argue that, to a certain degree. But I just believe that we'll stop worrying about PCs and computers so much.

And I think it's kind of indicative of what Microsoft is doing, kind of putting computers and embedded OS's in the Xbox, you know. And putting – companies are putting the smarter components into the stereo system, and

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

they're learning how to tie all those things together, so that you can get one remote, and it knows how to control them.

And then after a while, you'll say, "Hey, I want to play a movie." And it'll know "Hey, I gotta turn on the TV, I gotta play the movie, I've gotta put the receiver into this mode," and all these things. And that's a really simplistic approach, and that's what they're doing now.

But later on, it'll be, you know, you might walk in and it'll just ask you "What do you want, Billy?" "I want to watch a movie." "OK, which one?"

You'll have like a media server in your house, where it has all your movies kind of digitally stored, you know. Or it'll work with the pay-per-view company and they'll just have this vast library, that nobody even buys this many DVDs. They do because they want them, they don't necessarily have to.

They just say, "Hey, I want to watch *Tombstone* tonight." "OK." And it'll stream it down, and you'll watch it. And you'll be able to pause it, and all those types of things. But you didn't really touch any computer to actually do that.

[Or], you know, "Hey, I've gotta pick up somebody from the airport and the plane arrives at 6:35." And it'll say, "Well, you know how the traffic is, so you'll probably want to leave at 4:00 to get there on time," and those types of things. [laughter] And oh, while you're driving, "You might want to take a left here and get off the freeway, because there's an accident up ahead," and those types of things.

But you didn't necessarily have to ask it. It's like, "Hey, you know I'm going to the airport. You know the time I need to be there by. I shouldn't have to tell you of the urgency. You see I've got an hour and a half till I get there, so you know I can sit in traffic a little bit of time, because you know I have the time in order to do it. But if you see that I've got thirty minutes, you might want to warn me. Say 'Hey, Billy, you're not gonna make it. Deal with it.'" [laughter]

Or "I'll call ahead, if you're not picking someone up but you're actually leaving, I'll interface with the Genesis airport reservation system, airline reservation system, and see if we can schedule you on a new flight. Because you're not

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

gonna make this one. And I'll also call the Sheraton Hotels and schedule something there, so you'll have a late check-in."

So, you'll be interfacing, but you won't be. It'll be doing things kind of on your behalf, you know, kind of like a butler type system. And I think that'll happen.

JF: What advice then would you offer to students, in terms of education or experience?

BA: Well, I mean, I could say, "Everybody go out and learn how to program." But that's not for everyone. And the worst thing would be to be put in a job – well, hey, maybe you're good at, but you hate. I mean, obviously, that wouldn't work out very long for most people.

So, if a person were interested in technology, I would really have them speak to counselors, or whoever's out there, to help them understand what different people do in their jobs. And if they find that they're interested in four different things, because they're young and they just don't know which one would be it, find what is the good overlap between them, as far as skills are concerned. And let that be their focus as far as curriculum or what.

So if it's like I can always fall back to programming because I'm familiar with it. But if they find that, hey, they like programming games, but they also like working with embedded systems; but if they find, hey, they're both technically running programs, it's just one's embedded and one has an interface to it. They can say, "You know, I should learn how to program, and then when I get out of college, or while in college, I'll do an intern at – whatever – Sony, working on an embedded consumer device, and then also do an internship at like a Microsoft, working on a PC, and find out which one kind of moves me the most."

I think that'd be beneficial, you know. I didn't do any official internships when I was in college, and that might have helped me understand what I wanted to do, more so than me having to get out of school and taking ... well, it only took me a few months to kind of get on track, so it really wasn't a big deal. But some people, it takes a lot longer, you know.

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

They go and do something, and invest a great amount of time and money and resources, and get out and do their job that they've been training to do for one to ten years, and they're just hating it every day, or something like that. I know people that have Juris Doctorate degrees, you know, passed the bar and were lawyers, and they find out that they didn't like what lawyers do in a day. And they do it for ten years, and it's paying good, so it's hard to leave something that's paying the mortgage and things like that. But then they say, "Hey, I gotta change."

And they do, and it's somewhat disruptive to their life. So then they have to go and re-prove themselves, and re-tool themselves. And, you know, now it's like, we have this attorney programming our computers, or it's an attorney that wants to be an auto mechanic or whatever he wants to do. And, you know, he has to start over.

It's like, "Hey, I'm forty years old. I don't want to re-prove myself. You know, I was the best doggone attorney in the greater Seattle region." And it's like "Well, we just need you to fix this engine." [laughter]

So going through and doing the counseling, and talking to people that are in positions that you may be interested in; even talking to people that may be in positions that you kind of know you *wouldn't* be interested in, but just get their feel on it. Kind of get their feel of their – [a word] we use around here at Microsoft – their *passion* for it.

You might find that there are some subtleties to a job, or to a career, that you didn't quite think about. If you kind of look at the pure mechanics of it. "Oh, it's a lot of pushing paper," or something like that. "I don't like that."

But then you find out, *wow*, they're working with kids that are ill, and they're touching them, and making sure that their last wish comes true. "Oh, that's kind of nice. That's the kind of thing I like."

You were thinking that they were doing just this other part, but you've learned that it has a lot of other pieces to it that, you know, when you look at the brochure, you didn't quite notice.

Museum of History and Industry
Speaking of Seattle
www.seattlehistory.org
FINAL TRANSCRIPT

JF: Now, do you have any other personal or professional goals that you'd like to accomplish?

BA: The answer is yes, but I'm thinking about what they are. [chuckles]

Professional goals. [sighs] I don't know, I mean, I don't want – you know, a lot of people want to be the top dog. I don't know if I'd want to be the top dog. I don't know if I, when I look at my manager's manager's manager, if I like what his day-to-day job is. Of course, who wouldn't like to be paid like that? But if you talk about, in order to get paid like that, you have actually *do* the job. And so, I'm not sure if I'd be interested in that.

At some point, I would like to do something on my own. But it would probably be something totally different. And I don't even know what that is right now. I mean, so I'm gonna be at Microsoft for quite some time, unless something goes wrong. [chuckles] I'll be here for a very long time, but hopefully I'll be in a position where I'm not struggling for money, and therefore I can do something that just feels good. And I don't know what that would be. I enjoy riding motorcycles; maybe I'll have a motorcycle repair shop, you know, where I don't think I'm gonna get rich repairing motorcycles. But I like it and I'll continue to do it.

Or maybe I'll work on my house and get better, till it gets to the point where "Hey, I can do this for other people." Just something that feels good. And it'll probably be something working with my hands. And that would be a personal goal. It's not definite as to what it will be.

Right now, I'm thirty-two years old, and I'm happy right where I am, in what I'm doing. And I think I'm well rewarded by the company and whatnot. And I think there's a level of appreciation for the work that I do, you know, the attention to details that I have. So, I'm really comfortable, you know. I'm really comfortable with what I do and happy with what I do. And when I wake up in the morning, I'm happy to wake up and go to work. As opposed to, "Wow, I've gotta go there again. They'd better not talk to me today."

No, I want to come here, and I'm happy to see my co-workers and find out about a new problem that we have, so I can fix it. I'm not happy to hear a

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customer complaint, but I'm happy if I can help a customer, and things like that. So, you know, I'm OK.

Personal ... on the personal side ... I don't know. I want to travel a little bit. But again, it has to be at a time when I'm not traveling for work, you know. Because back to back travel, whether it's personal or what, is just a bit much.

That's pretty much it. That's pretty much it. I enjoy my life right now. I enjoy my life, you know, the things that I do. On a sunny day, I get out on a motorcycle, and go *way too fast*. I love doing that. And when the snow is falling in the mountains, I get on the snowboard and go down the mountain *way too fast*. And at the end of the day, every day, I go and work out. So I take pretty good care of my body.

It's a kind of ... there's definitely a schedule to my life that I'm following, and kind of makes me look a little boring, but it's comforting to me, to a certain degree.

JF: Good. Is there anything that I ought to have asked you about that I haven't?

BA: No, no. You've covered it.

JF: OK, thank you so much for your time.

BA: Thank you.

End of Analog Audio Tape 2 of 2 for August 6, 2002, Side A [there is no Side B]

END OF INTERVIEW WITH BILLY ANDERS ON AUGUST 6, 2002