



Microsoft Corporation

'I Intend to Stay Here as Long as They'll Have Me'

By Tom Schuman

There are three things abundantly clear after talking to team members at the Indianapolis location of Microsoft Corporation: They work hard, they love their jobs and they don't intend to go anywhere else.

John Holton, district enterprise sales manager and head of the Indianapolis office, is in his third role with Microsoft in nine years. He says, "We all work too hard, but they (the company) make a real conscious effort to try and minimize how many hours we put into work to give us that true work-life balance. I hope I never have to work anywhere else. I really mean that, without hesitation."

On the other end of the longevity scale, account manager Pamela Sellers came to Microsoft in October 2011 from another technology organization. "We work really hard at Microsoft, but there is a better balance. So far it has been – awesome," she exclaims. "I feel very fortunate and lucky to be here. I'm thrilled to be able to take this ride and be developed every day. There's no limit to where I can go."

Steve Sweet, also an account manager, was familiar with the company, having worked at a partner organization reselling Microsoft solutions for six years before joining the technology giant four years ago. "I didn't know, at first, how hard it was going to be. There was a lot more work than I ever thought, but it is manageable." And he has no intentions of changing positions in the short term – "I really like what I'm doing today."

Becca Reed, who has worked nearly two years as a technical account manager on the business services sides of the company, calls it "one of the most rewarding jobs I've ever had."

And Amy Kemper, who was just beginning a new role as a business productivity solutions specialist (her third position in three different groups in nearly seven years) at the time of this interview, clearly states, "When I think about why I wake up every day happy to come into work, it's definitely that Microsoft enables that work-life balance. For me, I intend to stay here as long as they'll have me, and with that I'd like the opportunity to try a lot of different things."

Balancing it all out

Move up one step on the Microsoft ladder and a similar message resonates. Staci Trackey Meagher, general manager of the Midwest District (Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin), says it's no secret that team members are expected to "work really hard and effectively." But people are willing and able to do just that if they are provided the tools for that strong work-life balance and if they truly feel valued."

The "tools" begin with internal use of the latest technologies. The resources that Microsoft

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strives to sell to organizations around the world allow the company's associates to work where and how they want. The bottom line, after all, is simply to get the job done.

Trackey Meagher notes that employees have the "ability to take their office with them anywhere they go. Their office is their PC, their headset and their phone, but it's very mobile. Through enabling that technology that we have internally, it makes it a very seamless experience for them. Microsoft has a vision and a passion – and our goal is to make people (their own and others) and companies around the world realize their full potential."

The primarily cubicle spaces in the Indianapolis office are far from luxurious. All of the associates we talked to prioritize face-to-face time with their clients. When they are at work at other locations, it's just as likely to be at a home office, the nearest Starbucks or ...

"I'm involved in some life coaching programs and I do some volunteer work," Reed offers. "The work from home and other flexibilities that are offered give me the opportunity to participate in those. I have access to everything I need regardless of where I am at. Most of my teammates are spread around the Midwest. I reach out to engineers around the world on behalf of my customers."

Sweet confirms that most of the Microsoft peers he works closest with on behalf of his clients are not locally based and that he strives for some office days at the beginning and end of the week. But as far as the independence to determine one's own schedule, he asks, "We're all adults, right? As long as you're doing the right things and delivering appropriate results, I don't think anybody is really going to ask too many questions."

Sellers terms it "refreshing" that she can set aside family time and not start her day until 9 o'clock if appropriate. The near instant responses she receives from others within the company, no matter their location, allow her to offer superior customer service to her clients.

"I have less travel and a lot more relationships," she offers in

Technology is the name of the game for Microsoft – for employees and clients.



Team members from Microsoft and partner companies packaged more than 20,000 meals in less than two hours to benefit Kids Against Hunger.



comparison to previous positions. "Today (the day of the interview), on a call, I needed solution set. I talked to people in Redmond (Washington, home of the company headquarters). They will send me a deck (of information) today that I will use tomorrow."

And then there is the advantage of being part of a large corporation. Trackey Meagher reports that in an annual companywide employee poll, associates offered that they understood the standard refresh cycle on portable communication devices, but that the newest versions on the market would truly help their productivity.

"The organization flipped on a dime and said, 'OK, let's get them all new devices.' It was fantastic to see the company move as fast as it did."

On the right path

Many businesses say and do offer opportunities for employees to advance their careers. Microsoft takes it to the extreme – in a good way. It considers the investment in its own people to truly be a top priority, paying off for those individuals and the customers who benefit from the employee loyalty.

Trackey Meagher describes a system in which each employee says, "Here's where my strengths are, this is what I would love to do and here's my development plan. The employee and manager talk about that in great detail. Then we monitor that over the years to make sure the employee is getting to where they want to go.

"One of the career conversations I had recently was, 'Hey, I don't want to work here, here or here in the United States but I'd really like to go to Asia and what do I need to do to get there,' she continues. "Having those conversations and deeply caring about those conversations is part of who we are as an organization. The reason why the company is so successful is because of the people we have."

Holton terms it looking at not just the next position for the individual, but maybe two jobs down the line. The manager and employee work together on a plan to get to that ultimate goal. He meets with everyone as often as monthly, but "it's always their agenda. I think that is incredibly important."

It makes a difference. Just ask Kemper.

"Sometimes a lot of us come here and think,

'Here's what I want to do at Microsoft.' But then you get here and you realize, 'Oh my gosh, there's so much opportunity to do all these things I didn't realize might be available to me.' It's a blessing and a curse in a way," she shares. Sometimes it derails your focus, but it's a great thing because it helps you open up your mind to, 'Wow, I could go do this and I didn't think I would ever have that opportunity.'

"It's a very open organization. I was just blown away that each and every manager, on a monthly basis, sits down and spends time talking about nothing but my career development with me, and helps me think about how to get to that next role."

Kemper adds, "Networking is so important in a huge company like this. People are very open to doing one-on-ones, informationals with employees. I have never been turned down when I request some time – whether it's people high up or peers."

Reed has started to explore additional opportunities with mentors and management. She envisions being in a similar role for the short term, possibly with different accounts or moving to a new region. She also has a potential interest in working in the onboarding process for new employees.

After working in mid-sized organizations, she declares, "I knew this would stretch my career growth and my personal growth. Part of me just wanted to know if I was up for the challenge. Two years later, I'd like to think that I am. Many jobs are challenging, but what I really like about working here is that Microsoft provides the tools for success to meet those challenges. They will encourage you, stretch you to do more than you think you can."

Community focus

While collaboration in serving clients often involves national or international resources, the Microsoft team in Indianapolis comes together in giving back to the community. Doing just that is a corporate priority, but Trackey Meagher proudly states she "really sees the community effort pouring out of Indianapolis." She cites more than 1,700 technology and other business partners for Microsoft in Indiana, "so the goal is to partner with them so they can do some of the same things we're doing."

Reed admits there are a few people who work out of the Indianapolis office that she hasn't met. But despite – or maybe because of – the fast-paced environment and the global footprint, there is no difficulty in getting the local team members to work together for a good cause. "Everyone is so service-minded here," she says.

Sweet, Kemper and Reed all mention a special 2011 event for Kids Against Hunger. A "competition" between Microsoft and several of its partners allowed more than 20,000 meals to be packaged in under two hours for the humanitarian food-aid organization. Several thousand dollars, all generated locally, were also donated.

The plan, according to Kemper, is to make this an annual event with a "silly, cheap trophy" for the team that packages the most meals. "We've been able to give back large sums of money in creative ways. That's really rewarding from a personal perspective. It also enables you to get to know your co-workers on a personal level."

The teamwork carries over, she believes. "We're one of the top performing groups in the region year over year, and I think it's based on how well we work together as a team. We're not competing against one another. We never look at it that way; it's how do we get the best out of each person's abilities."

Another signature effort in 2011 was adopting a number of local families through the United Christmas Service. Sweet points out that employees not only bought gifts and donated funds, but participated in a wrapping party at the office and delivered the presents to the needy families. He termed it both fun and fulfilling.

That was special for Sellers as she was able to involve her 11-year-old daughter.

"She got to see (and participate in) Microsoft at work instead of me just making a donation to something she never sees." While her son was unable to take part in the gift wrapping, "My kids got to see Microsoft as not just a place that I work for every day, but also a place where we reach out to other people in the community. That was a really cool thing to hear my daughter tell her friends. Microsoft gives tons – I'm amazed at what they do."

It's all about what the local employees want to participate in, Holton shares. Golf outings for the Boys and Girls Clubs, Indianapolis Children's Museum events, service on many technology boards



Becca Reed is one of many Microsoft employees to enjoy the benefit of working from a home office when that increases her productivity.



Amy Kemper and Steve Sweet are among the team members who value the flexibility they are given to serve their clients.

and initiatives, software donations for robotics competitions and much more are part of the mix.

Many of the Microsoft team members come from the local information technology community. Referrals and networking are prime ingredients with so many partner relationships. For people wanting to come on board, Holton looks closely at their integrity and passion.

“Most of our people are very passionate about Indiana,” he contends. “An advantage that we have over a lot of the other offices is that our people want to stay here. The people out of this office love Indiana. They love the city and they love the community.”

Perfect pairing

Trackey Meagher uses one word – transformational – in summarizing the Microsoft experience.

“It is so transformational when you release your organization and you enable (workers) with technology. Rather than coming into the office, they can go to Starbucks and get it done. It’s an amazing transformation for people, and it’s happening across the world. Flexible means I can work anywhere, be able to do anything wherever I want to, closest to my customers, and that’s most convenient for me so I can have the balance that I need.”

Reed concludes that the company and individual match is a strong one.

“The people who work at Microsoft are all about innovation, pushing boundaries, challenging themselves and others, and serving our customers. I think that’s a very exciting place to be.”