



# Debra Chrapaty

Corporate Vice President



**Need a face-to-face with Microsoft's corporate vice president of Windows Live Operations?** Try the campus weight room early in the morning. Or catch her during her weekly hike through all five Windows Live buildings. Or join her on a bike ride, or a paddle around the lake. Debra Chrapaty—the executive responsible for the entire global network, data centers, infrastructure, and physical architecture of Windows Live, a division with revenues of well over half a billion dollars—thrives on connection. Once a week she eats lunch alone in the cafeteria so that anyone can informally address issues to a VP.

"I believe in being visible," Chrapaty says, "and I love the people I work with."

An infectiously passionate individual, Chrapaty acquired her people skills while working in, and living above, the Philadelphia diner owned by her immigrant parents. Microsoft recruited her in 2003 following her stint as senior vice president of technology at Organic Inc., an Internet marketing company. During the mid-'90s, she served very successfully as president and chief operating officer of E\*TRADE Technologies.

Microsoft originally courted Chrapaty for a position in its .Net division. When this seemed a less than perfect fit, her recruiter explained that "at Microsoft we have great jobs, and we find great people. But our philosophy also includes finding great people and then finding them great jobs—and I'm going to find a great job for you!" Soon the recruiter pointed her toward Windows Live. The division presented an opportunity to advance Operations as a strategic element of the company's investment in online services. Chrapaty's real-world experience running services included her



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stint at E\*TRADE, another as chief technology officer of NBA.com, and yet another as president and chief operating officer of Allbusiness Inc. It was a perfect fit.

Chrapaty challenged herself to create a vision for Windows Live Operations while turning around an inwardly competitive team. "You're fighting over running Operations," she declared upon her arrival. "But that's not what we're doing here. We're going to build the global online infrastructure for the company that's going to support the world. So let's start talking field of dreams." She returned to basics, defining a service strategy she called GOLD: Global OnLine Delivery. Given free rein to change Operations, Chrapaty cut \$100 million out of the Windows Live operating budget and improved efficiency by 30 percent during her first two years on the job.

"It's great how empowered my staff and I are to change things," she says, adding that CEO Steve Ballmer and his executive team no longer refer to the division as Windows Live Operations; now it's simply "Debra's stuff."

Chrapaty admits that many of her friends in San Francisco were surprised by her decision to move to Redmond. "I told them, 'Come on, it could be cool. It could be interesting. It could be *fun*.' How else am I going to understand Microsoft, and make it a healthier and better company, if I'm not in it?" She asked herself questions typical of new hires: Will I fit in? Am I smart enough? "I wondered if there was as much arrogance as I'd heard. But I also wondered if there was as much *brilliance* as I'd heard."

Chrapaty's strategy for making herself comfortable within Microsoft involved engaging herself as thoroughly as possible in its dynamic flow. "It's a passionate place," she explains, "but you get to be yourself." Although she wasn't surprised to find that the company reflected the background of the men who created it, she believes it has made great strides in expanding its perspective and assimilating women and minorities into meaningful positions. And when colleagues manifested their intelligence as arrogance,

she spoke up immediately. "My badge reads Microsoft," she says, "and I'll do whatever needs to be done—whether it's using someone else's system, partnering, or shifting a piece of my group elsewhere—for the good of the company. I try to live and breathe openness and collaboration. You can poke and prod me and I won't take offense. I'm totally into direct feedback, because I need to grow, too."

## Valuing Differences

***Creating a culture of inclusion is just part of the job for Debra Chrapaty and Microsoft executives like her.***

*"I lead the Windows Live Diversity Council and sit on the Diversity Executive Working Group. We're steadily raising our numbers on women and underrepresented minorities, and we're retaining more people with the help of our mentorship rings. We sponsor the Global Summit of Women, a wonderful flexible-work program which attracts about 5,000 of Microsoft's 15,000 women each year. We also sponsor hundreds of internal diversity councils; these range from Native Americans to the gay, lesbian, and transgendered council. I run the Brazilian group, because I really like the parties."*

The power of her positive attitude has not been lost on Chrapaty's peers. "One of the senior vice presidents came up to me after a year and said, 'You're the single best external hire I've made at this company in 20 years.' I was like, *right on*."

When it comes to balancing her work life and personal life, Chrapaty sees little distinction between the two. "I have a different philosophy than most people," she explains. "I believe in loving everything I do and doing everything I love." In her case this consists of moving fluidly between professional and personal responsibilities. This could mean leaving work early for a cooking class or a Bikram hot yoga session, then catching up on e-mail later in the evening. "One of the things I love about Microsoft is

that I can build an enormous infrastructure with a team of executives seriously changing the world, and five minutes later I can be designing a gay-pride parade T-shirt. Then I'll be called into an accountability meeting, and minutes later be in a deep dive with Cisco about architecture. For me, this is the essence of Microsoft."

Hearing her describe summer paddling sessions and winter ski trips to Lake Tahoe, one might justifiably envy Chrapaty's rich home life on Mercer Island, where she lives with her partner, a technical innovator for Seattle Public Schools, and three small dogs. The pair also give back philanthropically through their Molo Project ([www.moloproject.com](http://www.moloproject.com)), which funds technology-oriented education for underprivileged children in South Africa.

"You can be involved in the work you're doing and then you can do *more*," emphasizes Chrapaty, who is proof incarnate. "There are endless opportunities right here."



Windows Live™

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