



Lisa Brummel

Senior Vice President

Microsoft[®]

Though you could call her Microsoft's ultimate "people person," Lisa Brummel is hardly your typical senior vice president in charge of human resources. A Microsoft employee since 1989, Brummel nevertheless did not rise through the human-resources ranks. Instead, she was offered the job in 2005 on the basis of her wide-ranging managerial experience and her highly regarded interest in the *people*—more than 70,000 talented individuals spread over 120 countries—who work for Microsoft.

And while Brummel's mandate of "creating an environment where people can do their best work" may sound clear enough, implementing the systems needed to achieve that goal in a company of Microsoft's size and scope is a complex challenge—a challenge she relishes.

Of course, Microsoft isn't the same company it was a decade ago. It's growing so fast, in fact, that it experienced a 17 percent increase in hiring during a recent four-month period. Yet the company's fundamental human-resources systems—e.g., performance management, employee feedback, and compensation—

are essentially the same as when they were implemented decades ago, when Microsoft had but a few thousand employees. Brummel intends to fully revise these performance systems across the board, spearheading a host of "next-generation" processes.

Brummel's mission began with more handshaking than number crunching. "I've probably had face-to-face meetings with almost 5,000 employees during my first year in this job," she says. "We've been addressing evaluation and compensation at all levels of the company, executive and otherwise." Brummel held



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dozens of meetings in the company's Redmond and Silicon Valley offices and has visited offices in India, Copenhagen, and Latin America as well. "The main thing," she says, "is getting out and talking to employees so you understand who your 'customers' are and the expectations they have."

Brummel began her Microsoft career with the Multimedia Publishing Group. "When I came to Redmond for my interviews as a campus recruit from the Anderson Graduate School of Business at UCLA," she recalls, "the employees I met seemed very confident in who they were as people, and the company felt like it had a solid vision and direction. They were looking for smart people who wanted to change the world, who were willing to work on new and creative ideas, and who had a true appreciation for what technology can do. And that remains true today. At every other company I interviewed, it felt like people were trying to be what the company wanted them to be."

Microsoft is increasingly a software-focused company comprising many different businesses, divisions, and geographies. Brummel's career has taken her through Microsoft Office for Macintosh and several different jobs within the developer and consumer divisions. She became a manager 18 months after her arrival, and her managerial skills, networking acumen, and development of many of the company's rising stars didn't go unnoticed. Nevertheless, she characterizes her current position as a career anomaly. "Not only was it the first time I'd ever been *asked* by anybody to take a job, I'd also never envisioned myself running human resources for the company."

Due to the scope of Microsoft's investment in different businesses, Brummel says, "you could be in this company for 20 years and be involved *meaningfully* with five or six major high-tech businesses during that time." These include the platform area with Microsoft Windows, online services through MSN®, the enterprise division with SQL and Office, and the Xbox® video-game arena, not to mention mobile devices and telecommunications. Notes Brummel, "I think

people overlook our ability to offer a tremendously deep and competitive career here in a variety of different businesses."

There are many different pathways through a Microsoft career, and it has become easier over the years to sketch out such routes with personal examples younger companies can't provide. "When the company was quite small we didn't have any systems in place to let you know what jobs were open or not," Brummel explains. "But for the average person coming into the company today, a

lot of good connective mechanisms help us place senior people in different jobs." One new system, for example, consists of a clearinghouse of key jobs and a complementary clearinghouse of people ready to make their next step in the company.

The qualities Microsoft wants all of its leaders to display, according to Brummel, are "courage and conviction, leadership and accountability, integrity in the way you work, and global experience." As for integrating oneself into a company with a culture as rich, passionate, and lengthy as Microsoft's, she recommends patience and a willingness to simply listen.

Brummel enjoys life in Woodinville, Washington, with her partner of 20 years and their two daughters. She golfs, bikes, and attends "just

about every sporting event there is." She is also working with the head of the University of Washington Medical Center's department of orthopedics to establish an endowment for women's sports and fitness.

Brummel sports a trademark sartorial style, and when it comes to meshing individuals with Microsoft's corporate personality she's a thriving example of how the individual always comes first. "I wear shorts to work every day," she admits, "even when it snows. And I think I represent the fact that the company encourages unique, free-spirited people to come and do great things. When I moved into an office directly between Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer, people asked, 'Gee, are you still wearing shorts?' Yes, I still wear my shorts every day, and somehow they put up with it."

Growing Leaders

Career counseling at Microsoft isn't solely about metrics. The company actively fosters opportunities that in turn foster leadership.

"Midcareer, we start to profile the competencies company leaders display," says Lisa Brummel. "If someone doesn't display a competency, it just means they haven't been exposed to a situation where they might develop or demonstrate it. We might say, 'This woman has run a development group for the past five years. She knows how to do complex management, how to ship products on time, and how to work with budgets. But she's never had any international experience. So her next career step should be someplace outside the country.' We greatly prefer these profiles to simple ratings."

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