



The Engage Chronicles

Leadership Lessons for the Digital Age

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Leading Out Loud: Why I Write on Viva Engage

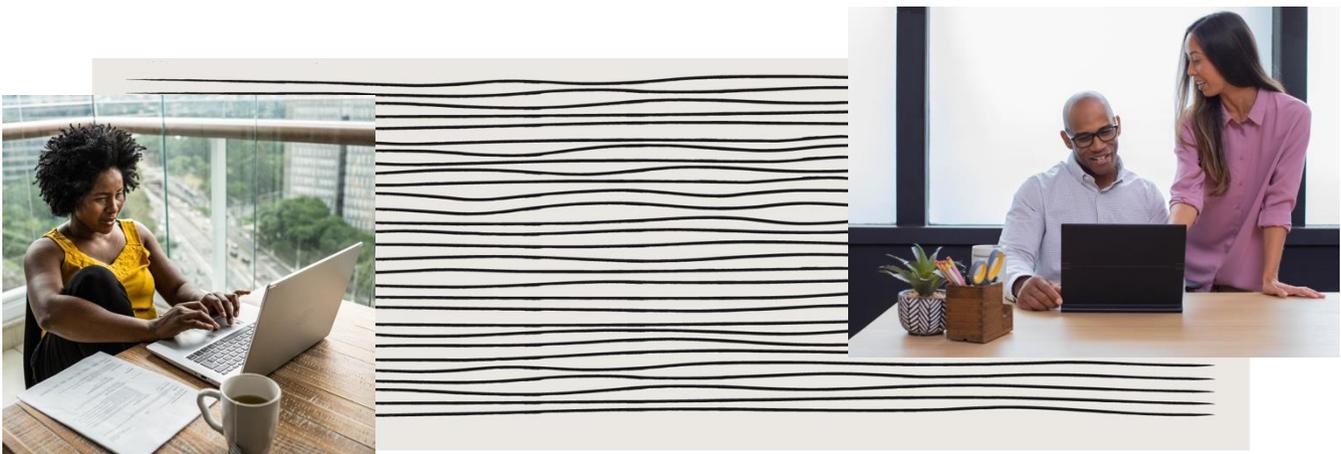
WHEN I FIRST BEGAN POSTING ON VIVA ENGAGE, I didn't set out to do so accompanied by a grand theory of leadership. It wasn't part of a communications strategy nor a checklist handed down by HR. It was simpler than that: I wanted to show up for my team, and I didn't want to disappear as a leader.

I'm Ravi Vedula, a Corporate Vice President and engineering leader at Microsoft, where I lead IDEAS—Insights, Data, Engineering, Analytics Systems—a global organization of technologists, product managers, and data scientists supporting Microsoft's productivity cloud. Over the course of my career, as my role expanded, so did the distance between me and my team.

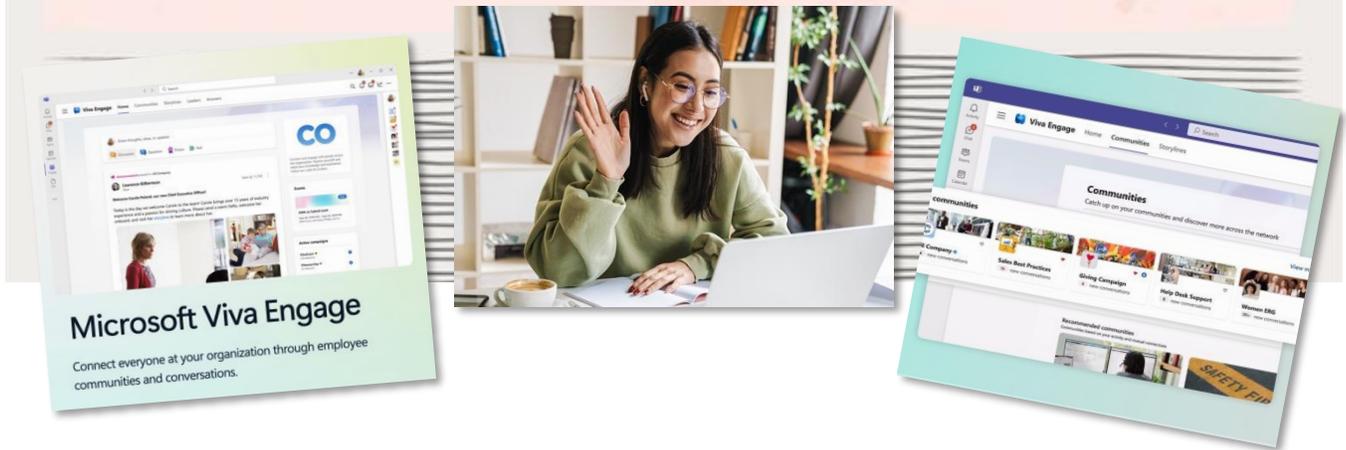
What began as leading a small, tightly knit group became responsibility for hundreds, then thousands, of people across disciplines, geographies, and time zones. My calendar filled with decisions instead of conversations. In this growth, I realized that many people on my team I would never meet in person.

They wouldn't see me in the hallways, overhear my conversations, or catch me at the coffee machine. Presence (the kind that happens between meetings and in passing) grew rarer, not because it mattered less, but because the system no longer supported it. Without intention, I could have easily become a title, a name on an org chart, a distant figure.

And that was precisely what I didn't want.



“ I have always believed that leadership isn’t about control; it’s about connection. And connection requires presence. If people can’t feel you, they won’t follow you. If they don’t know who you are, they won’t trust you.



I have always believed that leadership isn’t about control; it’s about connection. And connection requires presence. If people can’t feel you, they won’t follow you. If they don’t know who you are, they won’t trust you. In small teams, presence comes relatively free—it happens almost as a byproduct. But at scale, it disappears unless you build it intentionally. I needed a way to show up that didn’t rely on hallways, time zones, or being in the right room at the right time.

So I turned to Viva Engage—not as a tool for announcements, but as a way to **lead out loud**. It became a place where I could let people see what I value, tell stories that humanize, celebrate milestones, share gratitude, laugh a little, mourn when needed, and show what leadership looks like when it is scaled with care.

Now, people sometimes ask why an executive might spend time writing posts on Viva Engage, especially when our calendars are overloaded with meetings, decisions, and strategy. “Why not leave communication to formal memos or polished all-hands?” they’d say. The answer is simple: Because formality can’t carry humanity. When I write about a promotion, a wedding, or a product launch, I’m not just transmitting information, I’m building culture. What looks like a few sentences on a screen is, in practice, an act of leadership; a signal flare in the digital hallways of a company saying, “this matters.”



Viva Engage gives me a platform to make those signals visible at scale. It lets me reach thousands at once in a way that still feels personal. In that, it collapses distance. It allows me to be present without being in every room. And in an organization that spans North America, Europe, Asia, and beyond, with engineers, data scientists, product managers, designers, administrators, and leaders all working across time zones, that presence isn't optional. It's the oxygen of leadership.

This book isn't a how-to manual or a checklist for leaders. It's a series of reflections on what that presence can look like in practice. Each chapter begins with a post I've written (a short message in a digital hallway) and then steps back to tell the story behind it. I disclose why I wrote it, what it meant in that moment, how it landed, and what leadership lesson it holds.

The posts themselves are brief. But behind them lies rich narratives of people, culture, and community. These posts, though on the surface are casual, are indeed signals of values, rituals of recognition, and reminders that leadership isn't about distance or formality.

**It's about showing up, consistently, humanly,
at scale, and in ways that matter.**

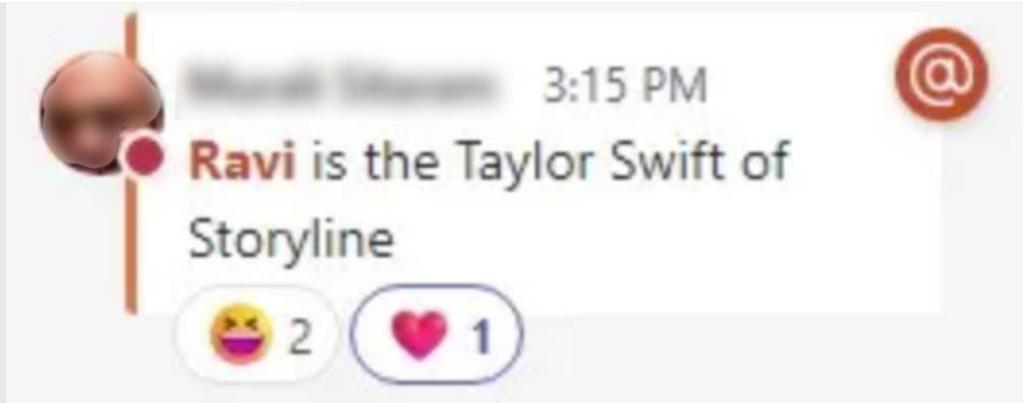
In our research on digital leadership communication, 97% of new generation employees said they expect some form of two-way interaction with senior leaders, not just broadcast messages.

Presence today is defined by interaction, not proximity.

– *Paula Wellings, Microsoft UX Researcher*

The Taylor Swift of Viva Engage: Storytelling as Leadership

The Post



“ My parents would be so proud ... Thanks to [redacted], there is no bigger authority on Storyline than you, so it must be true ... Great work Viva Engage and Storyline teams ...”

Sometimes appreciation shows up in the most unexpected compliments. For me, it was the day the leader of Viva Engage itself jokingly christened me the “Taylor Swift of Viva Engage.”

I laughed when I first heard it. Me? Taylor Swift? But the more I thought about it, the more humbled I felt by the title. Because in that phrase was the validation that my presence on Engage wasn't just noise, it was leadership.

Let me explain—what Taylor does with music is what I've tried to do with Engage. She uses:

- Stories to connect.
- Visibility to make people feel seen, and she
- Shows up consistently, authentically, and with a voice that's unmistakably her own.

These core tenants, when applied to our team at Microsoft, mattered enough that Viva Engage's leader himself saw it as something noteworthy.

“The ripple effect of this nickname surprised me. People laughed, teased, congratulated. But it also sparked reflection...”



So when I went to thank him, I was humbled and moved. But what my small thank-you post didn't say was how much Engage has shaped me over the years. It gave me a stage to lead authentically at scale, long before digital leadership became unavoidable. It allowed me to amplify moments across IDEAS, from promotions, to weddings, code launches, and anniversaries, in ways that reached thousands. And it brought me joy! Writing posts became a ritual, a rhythm, and a way to experience leadership not as a series of transactions, but as a continuous story.

All this made me better, both as a person, a colleague and a leader. Writing publicly forced me to slow down, to distill what I value, to articulate lessons, and to put care into recognition. Turning moments into stories sharpened my leadership in ways I didn't anticipate. At the time, I took being called the Taylor Swift of Engage as a sweet aside and moved on—but only later did I start to notice what happened next.

The ripple effect of this nickname surprised me. People laughed, teased, congratulated. But it also sparked reflection; if Engage could elevate one leader's presence so much that it became part of his identity, maybe it could do the same for others. People began to think, and to share more of themselves.

For my team, this moment reinforced that Engage wasn't just a platform I asked them to use—it was one I lived on and believed in. For colleagues across Microsoft, it showed that leadership presence could be authentic, humorous, and cultural, not just corporate. And for me personally, it marked a moment of deep gratitude: that a platform could give me tools to scale empathy, care, and presence in ways that have defined my leadership.

Over time, I realized something had changed. People didn't know me from meetings anymore. They knew me from what I chose to write about. From which moments I noticed, which people I named, what I celebrated, what I lingered on, and what I let pass. Without intending to, I was telling a story, week after week, about what and who mattered. In a distributed organization, that story becomes the primary way leadership is experienced.

At scale, leadership looks like storytelling. That's what Taylor Swift does with her music—and it's what leaders can do with platforms like Engage. When you tell stories consistently, stories of people, stories of gratitude, and stories of culture, you can create connection across distance, time zones, and hierarchies.

That's why this nickname matters. Not because of the pop icon comparison, but because it reflects something real: leadership in the digital age is less about control and more about narrative. Less commands, more connection.

Engage has allowed me to lead not just with strategies, but with stories. And stories scale.

LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

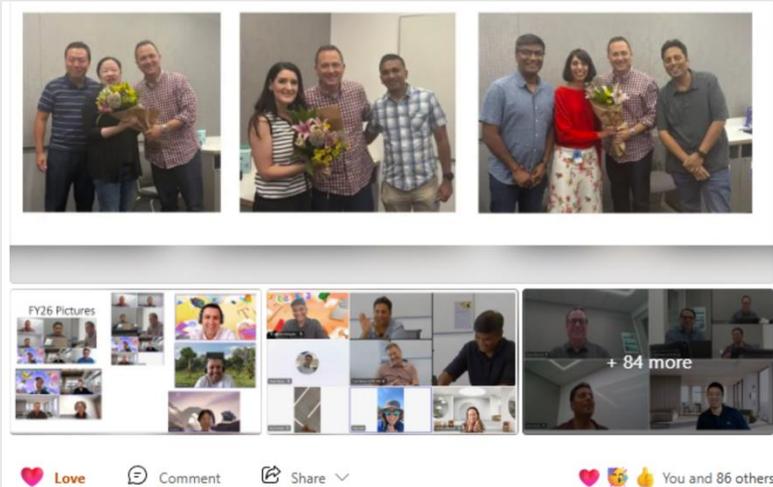
**Leaders are storytellers.
At scale, stories are how leadership travels.**

In sociology and economics, the Signal Cost Theory states that **for a signal to be credible, it must carry some cost to the sender. Cost demonstrates commitment and authenticity.** When leaders communicate on sensitive topics, the "costs" are rarely monetary. Instead, they "cost" cognitive effort, emotional labor, and vulnerability.

– Paula Wellings, Microsoft UX Researcher

The Power of Promotions

The Post



// At IDEAS, every promotion matters—and everyone is celebrated with the full leadership chain, across levels, disciplines, and geographies. This year, that meant nearly 100 celebrations worldwide, a powerful reminder that career growth is always worth pausing for, no matter how busy we are. Proud of this team. Inspired by every journey.”

Late one Friday, after weeks of back-to-back promotion meetings, I stopped and took stock of my week. I had just finished up ninety-eight promotion conversations. Of course, each had its own energy and story. But after a while, the meetings started to blur together. And that made me sad.

Promotions can become logistics: calendar invites, decisions finalized, boxes checked. But they aren't transactions. They're milestones in people's lives. Years of effort made visible in a single moment! And as I moved from meeting to meeting, it struck me how few people beyond those calls ever saw or shared in that person's big moment.

I started thinking back to my own career. Chances are, you, like me, remember every promotion you've ever received: the email from HR, the call from your manager, the rush of pride when your peers congratulated you. Those moments are sticky because they're rare. They punctuate the long rhythm of daily work with recognition that says: this mattered.

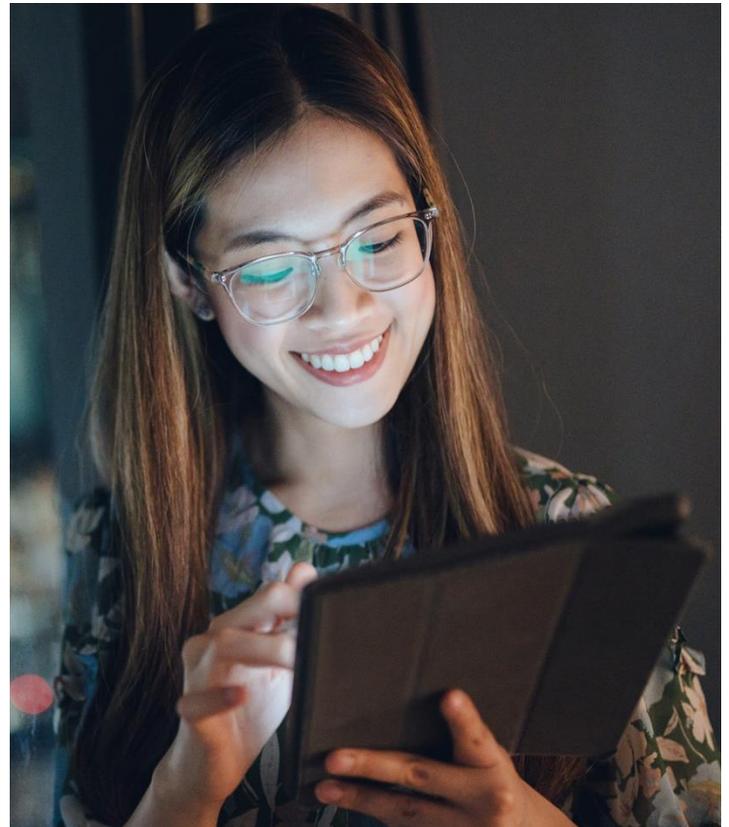
I then pushed myself to imagine that exact moment—but magnified. Instead of a quiet email, or even your leadership chain showing up on the screen, you see posts across the organization celebrating you, tagging you, and amplifying your story. This kind of post goes beyond recognition and creates something much larger—belonging. It’s the message that you’re seen, valued, and celebrated by a community much larger than your immediate team.

That realization changed how I looked at those ninety-eight meetings. I didn’t want them to add up, reduced to a tally. I wanted them to amount to meaning. I wanted the broader team to see what was happening: to feel, like I did in those meetings, the momentum of growth, the humanity behind the titles, the investment behind each step forward.

So I posted about it on Viva Engage. Not to count promotions, but to reflect on what they represent: the people behind them.

And something else surprised me once those stories became visible. In the comments and time after the post, I noticed people felt permission to be proud of their accomplishments. I believe this is important, particularly with diverse teams; in cultures where success is often downplayed, public recognition from leadership sends a different signal: growth matters here. Celebrate it.

“Public recognition from leadership sends a different signal: growth matters here. Celebrate it.”



Over time, the Viva Engage feed became a living archive, one where careers unfolded, took shape, and blossomed. Recognition stopped living only in one-on-one conversations and became a shared ritual in our digital hallways.

At scale, invisibility is a real risk. Without intention, people can feel like anonymous parts of a massive system. Platforms like Viva Engage don't solve that on their own, but they give leaders a way to show up: to collapse distance and to make values visible. When leaders take the time to celebrate promotions publicly, those signals accumulate. They become culture.

The response to the post about nearly one hundred promotions wasn't really about the number. It tapped into something universal: the desire to know your growth is seen, that someone noticed, that your leaders showed up.

LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

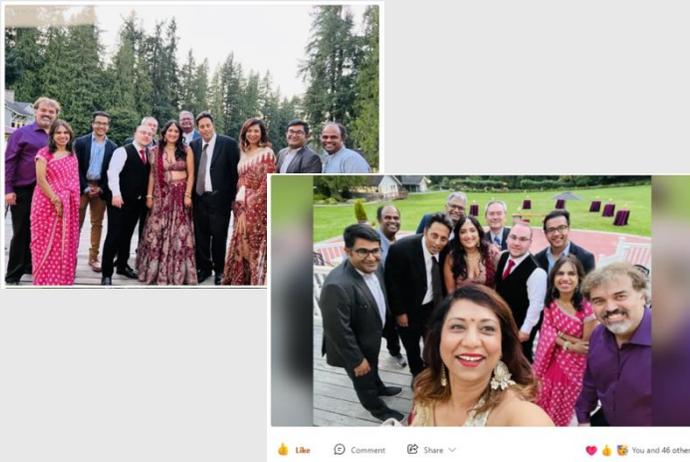
Celebrating promotions reinforces the importance of and excitement about growth. Shared recognition builds pride, belonging, and trust at scale.

Our research shows that public acknowledgment by leaders is one of the strongest signals of effort, with over half of participants citing recognition of individuals and teams as a key driver of trust and connection at scale.

– Paula Wellings, Microsoft UX Researcher

Love, Weddings, and New Beginnings

The Post



"This weekend, some of us from IDEAS—past and present—came together to celebrate the wedding of IDEAS' own, [redacted]. Though she is an alum now, it is a reminder that IDEAS has always been more than just a team: it's a family where bonds last well beyond projects and roles.

It was also wonderful to reconnect with other IDEAS alumni, all sharing in the joy of this milestone.

Whether you're part of IDEAS today or have been in the past, these shared milestones remind us of the connections that make our journey special.

Congratulations, [redacted]—wishing you a lifetime of happiness!"

" [redacted] , our beloved IDEAS team admin, the one who keeps us all running smoothly, just made a major upgrade—she got engaged! ❤️

Name, we're absolutely thrilled for you and Name! Your engagement photos are as joyful and vibrant as your presence in our team.

Also, I just have to say... using Engage to announce an engagement? That's peak platform synergy.

[redacted] , you've made IDEAS better every single day and now, we couldn't be happier to cheer for you as you begin this new chapter.

Congratulations, [redacted] !"

Weddings, engagements, births, losses—these moments don't pause just because we're busy at work. They arrive in the middle of deadlines, spreadsheets, and meetings. We all know the feeling of juggling a full calendar while life unfolds in parallel. When a team notices those moments, names them, and makes space for them, something changes. Work becomes more than a place where tasks get done; it becomes a community that bears witness to life. One weekend, I wrote two posts that made that truth clearer to me.

The first was about a wedding—someone who had once been part of IDEAS then moved on to another team, but whose connection to this community still felt very much alive. Colleagues who had worked alongside her years earlier showed up in the comments, sharing congratulations and memories. The post wasn't about the role she held anymore. It was about the relationship that hadn't ended when the project did.

The second post was about an engagement. This time, it was someone on the team who quietly held everything together for the IDEAS team—smoothing logistics, making sure the work kept moving while the rest of us focused on bigger-picture decisions. Celebrating that moment felt important for a different reason. It acknowledged not just the milestone, but the presence she brought to the team every day—the invisible work, the care, the steadiness.



At the time, I wasn't trying to make a statement. I wasn't thinking about culture or community in abstract terms. I was responding to what I was seeing: life happening alongside work, and the way those moments had a gravity that felt worth pausing for.

What surprised me was what happened next.

People didn't just react with congratulations. They shared their own stories. I realized that former colleagues, by proxy, felt remembered. Current teammates felt seen. Newer team members got a quiet signal about what mattered here, without anyone needing to spell it out. The feed began to feel less like a stream of updates and more like a living record: projects shipped alongside lives unfolding.

Over time, I realized those posts were doing more than acknowledging milestones. They were creating continuity even when roles changed. They kept threads intact as teams evolved. In a fast-moving, distributed organization, they made it possible for people to experience a sense of belonging that didn't disappear when a project ended or a reporting line shifted.

LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

Acknowledging personal milestones reinforces belonging. Shared recognition builds pride, trust, and connection at scale.

Employees report that communications from leaders that acknowledge **life circumstances and personal milestones** increase feelings of belonging and respect.

– Paula Wellings, Microsoft UX Researcher

The Long View: Celebrating Tenure and Legacy

The Post



Celebrate Comment Share You and 76 others

“Today, we celebrate 25 incredible years of dedication to Microsoft and brilliance from IDEAS’ own [redacted]. Her contributions as a data scientist have not only shaped our team but have also driven innovation and excellence in ways that inspire us all. Her commitment, talent, and passion have made a lasting impact, and we are beyond grateful for her journey with us. Here’s to [redacted]—her achievements, her legacy, and the exciting chapters ahead!”

The one thing everyone in tech seems to be able to agree on is that time moves fast in this work. Launches, reorgs, new priorities—everything is pushing forward at a clip. It’s easy to live in the next quarter, the next milestone, or the next problem to solve. In that rush, long arcs get quiet. Years can pass without anyone stopping to look up, pause, and take stock of what’s happened.

I felt that need to pause hit when someone on our team reached a major milestone: twenty-five years of showing up. Not simply one breakthrough moment, but a long career built through constant presence. Constant contribution through waves of new technologies, new systems, new teams, and even new ways of working. Reinventing again and again, while staying rooted. The kind of contribution that doesn’t shout, but it does shape everything (and everyone!) around it.

I'd written posts before marking promotions or personal milestones, but this felt different. This wasn't a moment of acceleration—it was one of reflection.

From this, I started to think about how rare it is for us to make space for that. We celebrate what's new, what's fast, what just shipped. And while those are important, we seldom pause to honor the steady hands that carry teams through decades of change.

So I wrote the post, not just to mark an anniversary on a timeline, and not because tenure alone deserves praise, but because her arc deserved to be seen. Her years spent mentoring others, and the time she spent building and rebuilding systems as technology shifted. It was for her, and the institutional wisdom and context she'd dutifully carried forward for 25 years. This quiet consistency becomes culture when no one's looking.



After the post, people from across the company chimed in—some who were currently working with her, and others from years before. Alumni resurfaced with stories about her from their time as new employees. Newer team members commented that they hadn't realized what twenty-five years really meant until they saw it named. The post turned into something bigger than a congratulations. It became a shared reflection on what it takes to stay, adapt, and still matter.

That's when it clicked. In organizations this large, contributions measured over decades are easy to let pass by unless someone intentionally points them out. Making her milestone visible honored a way of working—one rooted in commitment, resilience, and reinvention. It quietly told others: this kind of journey and commitment counts here.

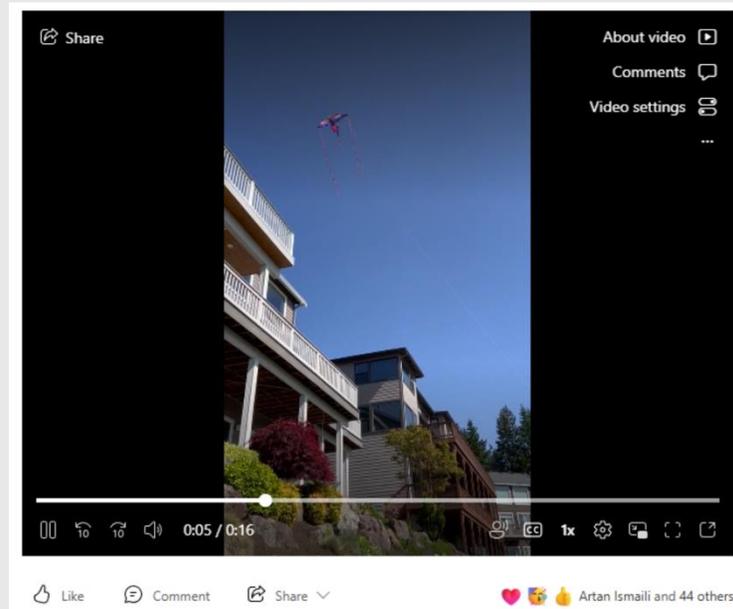
Careers aren't sprints. They unfold in chapters. When we pause for these moments, we remind people that impact isn't only about the next win—it's about the steady accumulation of trust, expertise, and care over time.

LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

Honoring long service and enduring contributions reinforces the value of commitment. Visibility turns years of quiet impact into shared pride, strengthening trust and cultural continuity at scale.

Leading with Lift: Lessons from a Kite

The Post



User 1:

"Taking the 'go fly a kite' advice to new heights today!"

User 2:

When they said, 'hold it together', I took it literally ...

User 3:

Holding the string, but letting IDEAS soar ...

Ravi:

Do you have a better caption for my Memorial Day weekend kite flying experience?"

And then came the comment that reframed it all:

User 4: "Love this! Perfect reminder that great leadership is about knowing when to guide (and sometimes pull strings) and when to let things take flight. Keep soaring, team IDEAS! New title: Leading with lift!"

One Memorial Day weekend, I found myself flying a kite. A playful, almost childlike activity, something I hadn't done in years. As the kite caught the wind and rose higher, I felt that small rush of joy that only comes from simple pleasures. Standing there, string in hand, I didn't expect it to turn into anything more than that.

But as the kite climbed, something about the motion stayed with me.

Flying a kite requires tension, but not force. You guide it, but you can't dictate where it goes. You pull back when it drifts too far. You loosen your grip when the wind takes over. You stay present without trying to control it. The kite doesn't rise because you pull harder—it rises because you learn how to work with the wind.



When I got home, I shared the moment on Viva Engage. Nothing polished, just a lighthearted post about a holiday weekend and a kite in the sky.

Then something familiar happened.

A colleague left a comment that stopped me, "leadership is about knowing when to guide, when to pull, and when to let go." They called it leading with lift.

I hadn't used those words, but I knew immediately they were right on the money.

That's the quiet power of posting. You don't just send messages—you let others complete the thought. You co-create messaging in real time. A personal moment becomes something shared.

In IDEAS, I don't write every line of code. I don't make every decision. And I can't be in every room. What I can do is stay connected—like a hand on the string—offering direction, maintaining tension, making sure the kite doesn't drift out of sight. The team does the flying. The lift comes from their talent, creativity, and commitment.

What surprised me was how far that simple post traveled. The phrase “leading with lift” stuck! It showed up again and again—in conversations, in check-ins, in how people described their own roles. A playful moment became shared language, a shared vocabulary. Not because I defined it, but because I put out a simple personal idea and others recognized something true in it and naturally built on it.

That’s when I noticed the pattern. At this scale, people don’t experience presence through proximity. They experience it through signals—what gets named, repeated, and remembered. Small reflections accumulate and metaphors stick. The meaning people carry forward isn’t delivered; it’s made together.

The kite didn’t rise because I pulled it upward. It rose because I knew when to stop pulling and let the wind do its work.

That’s why the post mattered.

Not because it explained anything—but because it invited others to see their own work, their own teams, their own leadership differently.

And remember: every now and then, go fly a kite.

LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

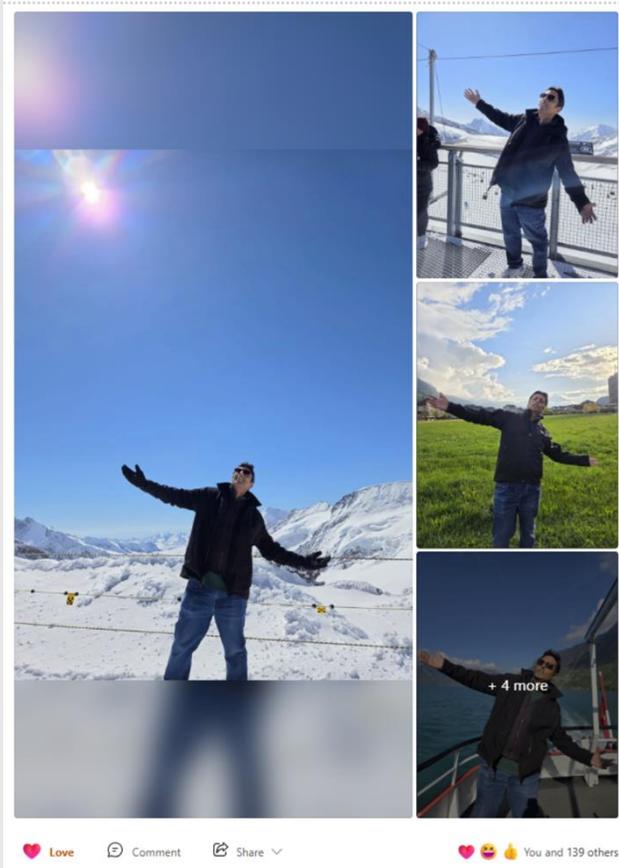
Great leadership creates lift. Trust, accountability, and the right conditions allow people to soar to greater heights.

Participants in our research consistently described **authentic, informal leader moments** as more trustworthy than polished corporate messages—especially when they reveal personality, humor, or humanity.

– *Paula Wellings, Microsoft UX Researcher*

Bollywood in Switzerland: Just Like a Wow

The Post



“If Bollywood has taught us anything, this is what you are supposed to do when you go to Switzerland.”

The image was me, arms outstretched, channeling Shah Rukh Khan in a classic Yash Raj Films pose against the stunning backdrop of the Swiss Alps.

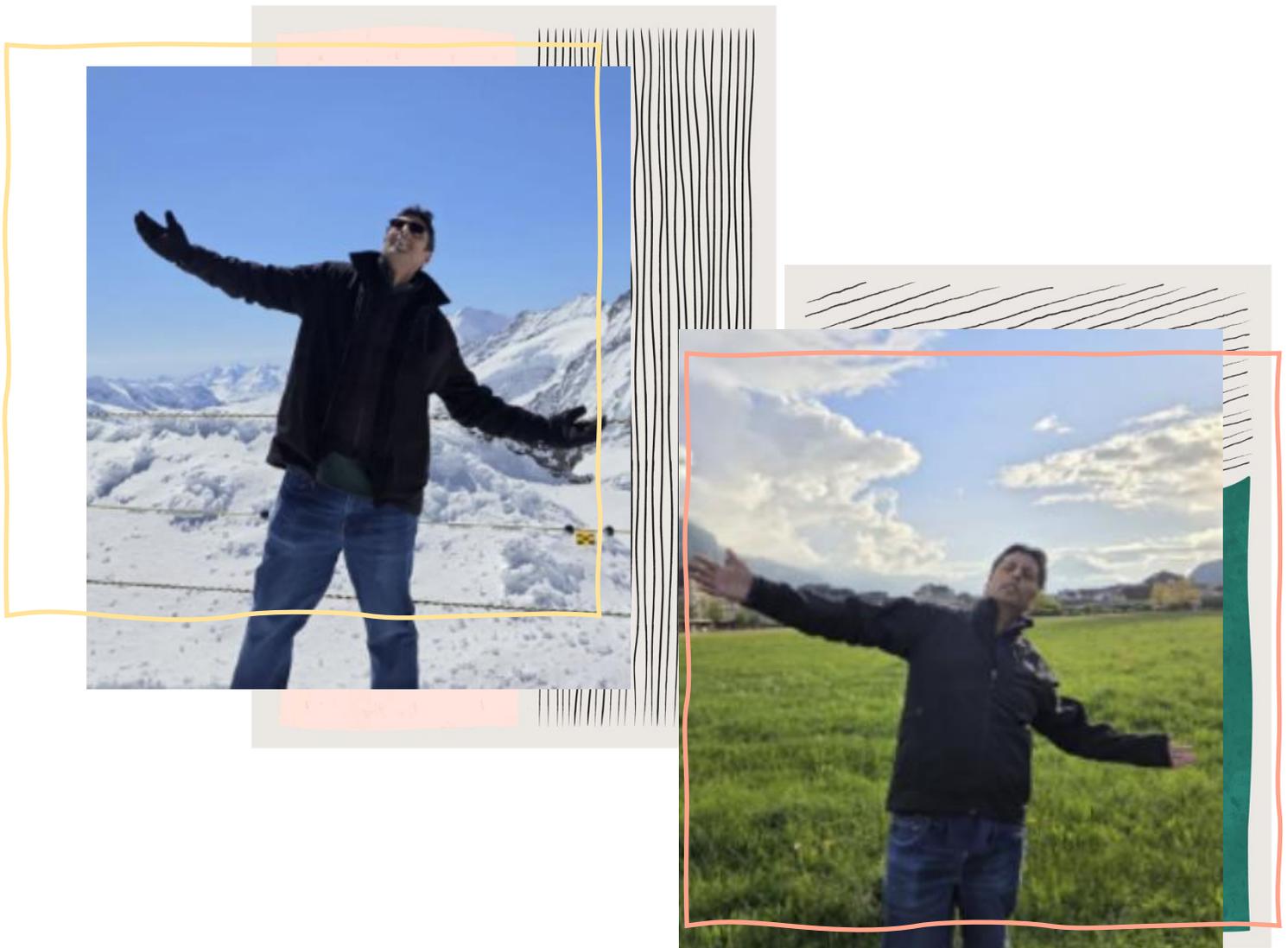
The comments that followed were as memorable as the post itself. The leader of Viva Engage himself wrote, “A cricketer, a Bollywood actor, and leading IDEAS by night. What can’t you do, Ravi?” Another teammate chimed in simply with the now-iconic line, “Just like a **wow.**”

It stopped being just a post. It turned into a moment we all shared.

It started as a joke. I was in Switzerland and I couldn’t resist the urge to pay homage to the Bollywood films shot there. Anyone who grew up with those movies knows the trope—romance meant a scene in Switzerland where the music swelled and the hero stood against the mountains with his arms wide open. I leaned into this trope, took the photo, added a playful caption, and posted it on Viva Engage without much thought.

The response surprised me. Comments came in fast. They were teasing, nostalgic, and affectionate. Someone joked that overnight I'd gone from leading IDEAS to becoming a Bollywood leading man. Another simply wrote, "wah!" People weren't reacting to Switzerland or even to Bollywood so much as to the tone of it. The post didn't explain anything, and it didn't need to. It was just a shared moment, one that signaled something unspoken: I grew up with these stories, I carry that culture with me, and I'm willing to laugh at myself.

That mattered more than I expected. Leaders are often seen as serious and buttoned up, defined by reviews, strategy decks, and decisions. This post punctured that image. It showed a more human version of me—someone shaped by Bollywood soundtracks, who enjoys a joke, and who's comfortable sharing a bit of themselves. People didn't just see a vacation photo. Rather, they saw permission. Humor softened the edges and allowed hierarchy to fade. From this, conversations among colleagues felt easier, more seamless. Even a little more casual.



After the trip, the moment lingered. Colleagues referenced the photo in meetings and jokes popped up in chats. “Bollywood Ravi” became shorthand for delight, a reminder that not everything at work has to carry weight. In a large, distributed organization, most people experience leadership through screens—in meetings, emails, and all hands. So these small glimpses of who someone is outside of their title add up. Is the leader distant and formal, or human and relatable? The Switzerland post answered that question with regard to me without explicitly saying it.

I hadn’t posted the image to make a point, but the reaction made one clear. Authentic, playful moments travel farther than carefully crafted messages. They stick because they feel real. People connect to what feels human. Over time, that connection turns into trust.

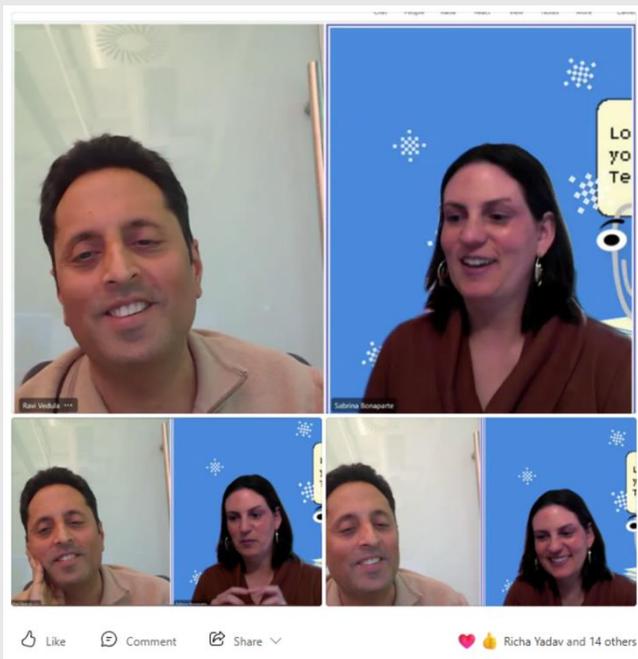
LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

Authenticity and humor build trust. When leaders show up as real people, connection follows—and connection scales.



The Power of Allyship: Showing Up Beyond Your Circle

The Post



“Thanks to Sabrina Bonaparte and Rebecca Schmierer and Jews at Microsoft (JAMS) for inviting me to participate in a conversation around Allyship this afternoon. It was energizing to be among the group who were extremely kind to me and engaged in a thoughtful conversation. Sabrina was a marvelous host and as can be seen from the photos, the conversation was fun and engaging for me. I am treasuring this opportunity, I loved being a part of it. Thanks again JAMS for this. To all who participated in the conversation...”

It started as a meeting invite. A calendar block—one of dozens that week. I joined expecting to listen, learn, and then, frankly, move on to the next thing. It didn’t take long to realize this one was different.

The invitation had come from a group called Jews at Microsoft—JAMS for short. As the discussion unfolded, I found myself doing far less talking than I normally would. Colleagues shared stories rooted in identity, history, and lived experience. They spoke with openness and trust, not because anyone asked them to, but because the space made that possible. I wasn’t there to speak for anyone or to represent an answer to these larger quandaries. I was there to sit beside them, to learn, and to let the conversation be what it needed to be.



After the session ended, it stayed with me. Not because of anything I'd said, but because of what I'd witnessed—how much courage it takes for people to speak honestly in a corporate setting, and how much it matters when leaders are willing to be present in those moments without directing them. There was no agenda to drive, no decisions to make, no outcomes to report. The purpose was simpler—and more demanding—to show up, listen, and be present in a conversation shaped by experiences different from my own.

I wrote a short thank-you post on Viva Engage later that day. It wasn't meant to recap the conversation or even to explain it. It was simply a way to acknowledge the generosity of the invitation, the trust in the room, and the people who created that space.

But something unexpected happened once the post went out. Colleagues who hadn't been part of the session commented. Some thanked the group for creating space like that. Others noted how meaningful it was to see leaders show up and listen. The moment expanded beyond the meeting itself. What was meant for a small group found a wider audience, quietly signaling that these conversations mattered.

It made me think about how easy it is to stay rooted inside familiar circles: in teams we lead, in domains we know, and in spaces where we're comfortable speaking with authority. Those spaces do matter, but they can also become boundaries if we never step beyond them. Showing up elsewhere, without the need to lead or conclude, sends a different signal. It says this belongs in our shared culture, not just in closed rooms.



The post didn't capture the vulnerability of the conversation or the depth of what was shared. But truthfully, it wasn't meant to. What it did, and what I needed it to do, was make the moment visible. It let others see that listening, learning, and standing alongside colleagues is something worth recognizing, and something that deserves space alongside product launches and milestones.

That's when it clicked for me: **allyship often begins not with having the right words, but with being willing to show up beyond your circle**; to listen before speaking, and to stand with rather than speak for.

LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

Allyship begins with showing up—listening, learning, and standing alongside others.

Our research shows that one-way leadership communication actively reduces psychological safety. Employees expect the ability to respond, question, or engage—and interpret “do not reply” channels as a signal that their voice doesn't matter.

– Paula Wellings, Microsoft UX Researcher

Cricket Dreams and Leadership Lessons

The Post



“Today, June 25th is a red-letter day in the history of cricket. It was on this day in 1983 that India stunned the reigning two-time world champions West Indies and the rest of the cricketing world by winning the Prudential World Cup. The win, coming against all odds, completely changed the trajectory of not just Indian cricket but world cricket.

For me, having a signed autograph by Kapil as a boy (on my wall at home) and then meeting him and hanging out with him as an adult, cricket dreams ...”

A version of me formed long before job titles and calendars. It was the kid who fell in love with a game, a story, and a dream. When I wrote those words about cricket on Viva Engage, I wasn't writing as a corporate leader. I was writing as the boy who grew up in Hyderabad in the 1980s, glued to a black and white television, watching Kapil Dev lift the World Cup. As the kids say, “if you know, you know”—and for Indians who lived through the '80s, June 25, 1983 is a day we all know. It's etched into our collective memory! The win that day wasn't just the team's victory—it felt like it belonged to all of us. Every kid playing in narrow lanes with a rubber ball and a broken bat felt it.

To me, cricket is deeply personal. I have Kapil Dev's autograph on a scrap of paper, pinned to the wall of my childhood home like a holy relic. To me, it was proof that heroes were real. Years later, life did something unexpected: I met him. I even got to spend some time with him. The distance between fan and hero quietly collapsed.

When I posted about meeting him, and referenced the signed piece of paper from my youth, the response frankly surprised me. People didn't immediately reply with comments about systems, metrics, or work priorities. Instead, they shared their own stories about cricket, about football and their childhood heroes. Collectively, we shared and realized the commonality among us—we all had moments when belief first took root.

For a moment, the feed didn't feel like updates and announcements. It felt like a room full of people remembering who they were before titles and responsibilities arrived. In a large, distributed organization, most people experience leaders at a distance, through meetings, documents, and emails. Small personal posts and moments can collapse that distance.

I didn't share the post to make a point. I shared it because the memory felt alive. What came back showed me why it mattered. When someone shares what they care about, others feel permitted to do the same. The exchange creates connection. Trust comes more easily. Work stops feeling purely transactional and starts feeling human.



LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

Sharing personal passions builds connection. That connection is the foundation of trust across teams.

Purpose, Presence, and the Blazer

The Post



“Big cheers to IDEAS’ own [redacted] who recently suited up to inspire the next generation of students at a local school ([redacted]’s kids’ school incidentally), delivering wisdom, passion, and possibly flair...

But he didn’t stop there. Now, he’s been handpicked as the speaker for his own graduation at the Harvard Business Analytics Program. Yes, that Harvard. Congratulations [redacted] !

From giving back to young dreamers to standing tall among global achievers, this is a full-circle moment that reminds us all of the power of purpose, presence, and a well-fitted blazer.”

I remember smiling as I typed out that post. The blazer was a joke, yes, but it was also a symbol. Not of status or style, but of presence. Because leadership moments aren’t defined by titles or credentials or even uniforms. They’re defined by you showing up, especially when no one is requiring you to.

In the span of just a few weeks, our colleague managed to do that on two very different stages. First, he walked into a local school through a connection with a colleague and spoke to students about technology, data, and the possibilities ahead of them. It wasn’t a formal obligation or part of his job description. He chose to be there. He chose to give his time, his story, and his energy to young people who might not otherwise see someone like him standing at the front of the room. That choice mattered because representation matters and with it, showing up matters.

Then, shortly after, came his full-circle moment. He was selected as the graduation speaker for his cohort in Harvard's Business Analytics Program! One week, he was standing in a school gymnasium speaking to students just on the precipice of starting their adult lives. The next, he was addressing peers from around the world, reflecting on his own journey. Yes, they were different audiences and different stages. But ultimately, both arenas served same purpose.

What struck me wasn't the contrast between the school and Harvard. Quite the opposite, in fact. It was how naturally those moments belonged together. He didn't treat one as more important than the other. He didn't shrink the school visit or elevate the Harvard stage. He showed up to both with the same intention: to share, to inspire, and to serve. That's where leadership lives; not in the scale of the stage, but in the consistency of the presence.

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There's a quiet courage in moments like these. It takes courage to walk into a room of young strangers and speak from experience rather than from slides. Just as it also takes courage to stand on a global stage knowing you're representing not just yourself, but the communities and values that shaped you. And it takes humility to recognize that both moments carry equal weight.



At the time, I wasn't trying to make a statement. I wasn't thinking about culture or community in abstract terms. I was responding to what I was seeing: life happening alongside work, and the way those moments had a gravity that felt worth pausing for.

What surprised me was what happened next.

People didn't just react with congratulations. They shared their own stories. I realized that former colleagues, by proxy, felt remembered. Current teammates felt seen. Newer team members got a quiet signal about what mattered here, without anyone needing to spell it out. The feed began to feel less like a stream of updates and more like a living record: projects shipped alongside lives unfolding.

Over time, I realized those posts were doing more than acknowledging milestones. They were creating continuity even when roles changed. They kept threads intact as teams evolved. In a fast-moving, distributed organization, they made it possible for people to experience a sense of belonging that didn't disappear when a project ended or a reporting line shifted.

LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

Show up with purpose and presence, regardless of the stage. Leadership is about giving back.

Our research shows that employees don't assess leadership effort logically—they feel it. Messages perceived as rushed, generic, or overly polished trigger emotional distance, while imperfect, human communication builds connection.

– *Paula Wellings, Microsoft UX Researcher*

Full Circle Moments: Meeting Bill Gates at Microsoft's 50th

The Post



"A true honor to have briefly interacted and introduced myself to Bill Gates, the man himself, this week on the occasion of Microsoft's 50th anniversary. While this is my 25th year, it continues to be a real privilege working for this glorious company."



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The interaction itself was brief. Only a few seconds, a handshake and a photo. Yet it carried more weight than I expected. Standing in the middle of Microsoft's 50th anniversary, marking my own 25 years at the company, time felt compressed.

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It may sound cheesy, but Microsoft has never been just an employer for me. It's where I grew up professionally, where I found my voice as a leader, where I spent years building systems that now quietly shape how the world works. To see those personal milestones intersect with the company's was both grounding and surreal.

And then there was the moment itself — meeting Bill Gates! The founder! The person whose work helped set in motion not only my career, but millions of others! I didn't anticipate how emotional it would feel. But standing there, I realized this wasn't about proximity to a legend; it was more about proximity to a story. A reminder that I've been part of something far bigger than myself, that I've lived inside a legacy that continues to evolve.

That's why I shared the post. Not for the photo, but for what the moment represented. Behind that single image lived layers of history: the boy in Hyderabad encountering Microsoft as a name on software boxes; the early years in Redmond, navigating a new country and a new identity; the long arc of projects, pivots, setbacks, and growth; the colleagues, mentors, and teams that shaped me along the way. A quarter century of learning and contributing collapsed into a single handshake.



What surprised me most was how widely that moment resonated. I don't believe people responded because I met Bill Gates. I believe they responded because the moment reflected something bigger, a collective sense of belonging. For newer employees, it was a glimpse of continuity and roots. For peers, it was shared pride in how far we've come together. For alumni, nostalgia and reconnection. One personal reflection became a shared reminder of how we are all connected.

Leadership at scale often looks like this: connecting individual experience to collective meaning. A moment that could have stayed private instead became symbolic. Platforms like Engage make this possible. They turn reflection into energy, and they remind us that history isn't abstract; that it's lived by the people around us, visible in moments we choose to share.

Looking back matters as much as looking forward. Organizations don't endure on strategy alone. They endure with the help of stories: of founders, milestones, and people who carry those legacies forward. Leaders don't just create new chapters; they help teams understand the ones that came before and why they matter.

Microsoft at 50. Me at 25. Bill Gates in the room. I'm grateful for what's been built and hope for what's still ahead. That's the truth behind the post. Leadership is full circle. It's honoring the paths that brought us here, recognizing the legacy we inherit, and carrying it forward with purpose and presence for those who come next.

LEADERSHIP TAKEAWAY

Leadership is carrying the story forward. It's honoring what came before while building what comes next.

To follow along with Ravi's other writings and projects, visit him at RaviVedula.com