

SUMMARY

BY ALYSSA BURNETTE

Hit Refresh

By Satya Nadella



Summary of Hit Refresh by Satya Nadella

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How one boy's journey led him to become the CEO
of Microsoft.

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Introduction

When you were a kid, did you ever dream of becoming a professional athlete? Did you ever watch athletes like Michael Jordan or Simone Biles and imagine that you could be exactly like them? If you did, you're not alone! Many kids hang all their hopes and dreams on the fantasy of a professional athletic career. And young Satya Nadella was no different. But where you might have dreamed of becoming a basketball star or a professional football player, Satya had a different dream: he wanted to be a professional cricket player. That's because, growing up in India, cricket was the most celebrated sport in Satya's culture. To be a professional cricket player in India was the equivalent of becoming an NFL quarterback in America. But, of course, the reality is that that dream doesn't come true for everyone. Satya didn't become a cricket star-- but he did become the third CEO of Microsoft. And over the course of this summary, we'll learn about the journey that led him there.



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Satya's Childhood and Early Career With Microsoft Prepared Him for Future Greatness

Satya Nadella was born in 1967 in Hyderabad, India. His father was a member of the Indian Administrative Service (or IAS). And in the 1960s, this was a pretty big deal. Before he accepted his position with the IAS, his father had been a recipient of the highly competitive Fulbright scholarship. To understand just how competitive this scholarship program is, you should know that only 20% of all applicants are awarded a Fulbright scholarship. And there are hundreds of Fulbright applicants from a variety of countries all around the world! So, being one of the 20% of accepted applicants was a very significant achievement for Satya's father! When he was offered the Fulbright scholarship, he had every intention of accepting it. He planned to use his scholarship to move to the United States and pursue a PhD in Economics. But when the IAS called, his plans came to a halt.

That might seem like a shocking change of plans; after all, what could possibly be better than his Fulbright scholarship? Well, to understand why a position with the IAS is so important, it's important to do a little bit of time travel and understand the purpose and history of the Indian Administrative Service. Historian Ann Ewing has devoted much of her life to exploring the role of the Indian Administrative Service. Her article, "Administering India: The Indian Civil Service" was published in the academic journal *History Today* and her work provides a brief and informative overview of the Indian Administrative Service. In her article, Ewing explains that:

"The Indian Civil Service was a tiny administrative elite, never more than twelve hundred in number and, until the twentieth century, overwhelmingly British in composition. It was composed of those officers appointed under Section XXXII of the Government of India Act of 1858 to posts reserved for them alone. Officers were recruited by competitive examination at first held only in London but later also in Allahabad and the strength of the Service was restricted to the number 'absolutely necessary to fill the supervising and controlling offices' of the governing structure. The lower ranks of the

administration were peopled by a vast army of subordinate clerks and provincial staff, recruited in India to do the more humdrum tasks. But the hierarchy was headed and guided by the well controlled hand of carefully selected ICS officers. These officers held all the key posts: they surrounded the Viceroy, they dominated the provincial governments and they were ultimately responsible for overseeing all government activity in the two hundred and fifty districts that comprised British India.”

So, originally, the IAS was an extension of British rule. But by the 1960s, the Indian government had changed hands. After gaining independence from Great Britain, the people of India were finally free to rule their own country and establish their own forms of government. So, when the Indian Administrative Service reached out to Satya’s father, they weren’t just offering him a job. They were offering him an opportunity to become a leader of his country. In this position, he would have a say in the direction of India’s future. He could be part of the movement to reclaim his country, contribute to India’s newfound independence, and make his country a better place. And even though the IAS had changed hands, its exclusivity remained the same. While the organization was controlled by the British, positions in the IAS were extremely limited and highly desirable. But even now that the IAS was back under Indian control, it was still a very competitive job. Satya’s father was only one of a hundred young professionals who were offered a position with the Indian Administrative Service. So, even though he valued his Fulbright scholarship and was proud to have received the honor, his national pride won out in the end. Satya’s father turned down his Fulbright scholarship to become a civil servant with the Indian Administrative Service.

This aspect of his family’s background was important because his father’s work ethic and national pride had a powerful impact on Satya’s worldview. Because the entrance exam for the IAS was so grueling and the pay rate was so high, many members of the Indian Administrative Service were content to simply rest on their laurels once they got the job. But Satya’s father was different. He was proud of his achievement but he didn’t want to stop there. Instead, he was determined to use that pride as motivation to push himself towards future achievements. He held himself to a high standard of

excellence throughout his entire career. Unlike many high-achieving parents, however, he didn't try to force his personal work ethic onto Satya. This memory of his childhood stands out to Satya because it was so different from the upbringing of his childhood friends. Many of his friends were the sons of fellow IAS officers and their fathers held them to impossible standards which put them under a lot of pressure. But Satya's parents just wanted him to be happy.

Although his mother's career could not have been more different from his father-- she was a Sanskrit scholar and teacher-- she didn't try to force her career choices onto Satya either. Instead, she was just patient and loving, a constant source of encouragement and support for both her husband and her son. But as Satya grew older and his potential for greatness became more apparent, his father changed his tune a little bit. Satya was very smart but he wasn't terribly interested in school. His grades were okay but not great-- and they could have been spectacular. He didn't have much ambition either; his plans for the future mostly involved graduating high-school, going to college, playing for his college's cricket team, and working at a bank when he graduated from college. That was pretty much it. But his father believed that Satya had the potential to do more. He also saw that growing up in Hyderabad-- where everyone valued and idolized cricket players-- was leading his son astray. "You've got to get out of Hyderabad," he told Satya. "Otherwise, you'll ruin yourself."

Although Satya didn't really share his father's opinion, he took his advice. So, when the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee offered him an opportunity to study computer science, Satya took the leap and moved to America for college. Once he was immersed in a computer studies degree, he soon realized that he found the subject fascinating and he developed a brand new passion for school. His dreams of being a professional cricket player quickly vanished as he discovered that there was more to life than cricket. He also quickly abandoned his uninspiring life plan to work at a bank in Hyderabad. His American university experience had shown him that a career in technology was his calling and he wanted to do great things. So, he graduated

from the University of Wisconsin in 1990 and prepared for his first job with Microsoft.

When Satya started his first job with Microsoft, he wasn't the CEO and he had no plans to be. Instead, he was working as an "NT Evangelist." This meant that he was working with the Windows NT operating system as a salesman. In short, his job was to travel the country and show companies why they needed to upgrade their computer software to Windows NT. He was so successful at this job that he was eventually given his first managerial task: working as the lead developer on Microsoft's new cloud technology. Today, we know all about the cloud; we have access to iCloud storage on our iPhones and we use programs like Google Drive to create and store cloud-based documents. But in the early 1990s, cloud technology was brand new and highly competitive. And Microsoft's competitor Amazon had beaten them to the punch. Because Amazon had such a monopoly on the new and emerging cloud technology, it was difficult for Microsoft to catch up. So, they knew they had to act fast and put their best minds on it. And that's where Satya Nadella came in.



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Satya's Family Taught Him the Skills he Needed to Become a Successful Leader

Satya handled his first promotion at Microsoft with such skill that he quickly made a name for himself. His newfound notoriety put him on the fast track for corporate advancement and it seemed that his life was heading in the right direction. But he found that he needed to develop one crucial quality that he struggled with: empathy. In Satya's line of work, creativity and ingenuity were valued most highly. As an engineer, it was important to be the guy who was great at solving problems, not the guy with the bleeding heart. But an interview question showed Satya that if he wanted to succeed, it was important to be empathetic as well as innovative.

The interview question that served as his wakeup call was simple: an interviewer asked Satya, "Imagine you find a baby crying in the street. What do you do?" Without much thought, Satya gave the practical answer: "You call 911." But the interviewer was looking for an answer that showed some human compassion. "No, dude" he replied. "You pick up the baby!" That early interview experience taught Satya a lot of valuable lessons. But at the time, he had no idea just how important empathy would be. And he certainly couldn't imagine the painful path life had in store for him. In a LinkedIn post that summarizes his personal and professional experience with empathy, Satya told his story in his own words and invited readers to go behind the scenes of his personal life. He wrote:

"I remember the year 1996 as a thrilling time. My wife, Anu, was 25 and I was 29. My career as an engineer was taking off, while she was building her career as an architect. We were far from our families in India, but settling into our new life together in the Seattle area. Even more exciting, however, was that Anu was pregnant with our first child. In the apartment we were renting next to the Microsoft campus, we spent months busily preparing for his arrival — decorating a nursery, putting plans in place for Anu to return to her career, envisioning how our weekends and holidays would change. We were ready to add a new joy to our life. But then our plans changed.

One night, during the thirty-sixth week of her pregnancy, Anu noticed that the baby was not moving as much as she was accustomed to. So we went to the emergency room of a local hospital in Bellevue. We thought it would be just a routine checkup, little more than new parent anxiety. In fact, I distinctly remember feeling annoyed by the wait times we experienced in the emergency room. But upon examination, the doctors were alarmed enough to order an emergency cesarean section. Zain was born at 11:29 p.m. on August 13, 1996, all of three pounds. He did not cry.

Zain was transported from the hospital in Bellevue across Lake Washington to Seattle Children's Hospital with its state-of-the-art Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Anu began her recovery from the difficult birth. I spent the night with her in the hospital and immediately went to see Zain the next morning. Little did I know then how profoundly our lives would change. Over the course of the next couple of years we learned more about the damage caused by in utero asphyxiation, and how Zain would require a wheelchair and be reliant on us because of severe cerebral palsy. I was devastated. But mostly I was sad for how things turned out for me and Anu.

To say that period of time was difficult is an understatement. One of the things I remember most clearly, however, is how Anu's reaction to Zain's birth was immediately so different from mine. For Anu, it was never about what this meant for her — it was always about what it meant for Zain and how we could best care for him. Rather than asking "why us?" she instinctively felt his pain before her own. Watching her in those first few days, weeks and beyond taught me a lot. Over time, Anu helped me understand that nothing had happened to me or to her, but something had happened to Zain. As his parents, it was up to us not to question "why," but instead to do everything we could to improve his life. Anu is an amazing woman, mother and partner. Her empathy for others runs deep, and from her I have learned that when I infuse empathy into my everyday actions it is powerful, whether they be in my role as a father or as a CEO. She inspires me with her willingness to share more about her journey as a mom in the hope it can help others.

Becoming a father of a son with special needs was the turning point in my life that has shaped who I am today. It has helped me better understand the journey of people with disabilities. It has shaped my personal passion for and philosophy of connecting new ideas to empathy for others. And it is why I am deeply committed to pushing the bounds on what love and compassion combined with human ingenuity and passion to have impact can accomplish with my colleagues at Microsoft.”

Satya’s experience as a father taught him the importance of empathy and revolutionized the way he did business. He realized that Microsoft’s focus should not be on new and innovative tech, but rather on finding new ways to help people with technology. His love for Zain also inspired him to create new forms of accessible technology and create new initiatives to help people with disabilities. Ultimately, these transformative experiences made the difference in Satya’s life and they contributed to his success and promotion as the CEO of Microsoft.



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Final Summary

As a young boy growing up in Hyderabad, India, Satya Nadella did not dream of becoming the CEO of Microsoft. In fact, he wasn't interested in technology at all. He wanted to be a professional cricket player. Although that might not sound like a big deal to American readers, millions of people around the world are in love with the sport of cricket, and this is especially true in India. So, when Satya saw how much his country idolized cricket stars, he dreamed of a career as a professional athlete. But his father recognized that very few people achieve that dream. He also believed that his son could do more, so he encouraged him to expand his horizons and leave Hyderabad.

When Satya took his father's advice, his experience at the University of Wisconsin- Milwaukee was a transformative time for him. He discovered a passion for computer science that eventually led him to a job with Microsoft. But Satya's career really took off when the birth of his son Zain changed his perspective. Being a father to a child with special needs caused Satya to see the world-- and technology-- in a whole new light. And when he began to lead with kindness, empathy, and a passion for accessibility, he found that he was really able to make a difference. Ultimately, this change of perspective was responsible for his success as the third CEO of Microsoft.



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