

The Future of Work podcast is a weekly show where Jacob has in-depth conversations with senior level executives, business leaders, and bestselling authors around the world on the future of work and the future in general. Topics cover everything from AI and automation to the gig economy to big data to the future of learning and everything in between. Each episode explores a new topic and features a special guest.

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0:00:01 Jacob: Hello everyone. Welcome to another episode of The Future of Work podcast. My guest today is Sanjay Poonen. He is the chief operating officer at VMware. Sanjay, thank you for joining me.

0:00:12 Sanjay: Thank you Jacob. Thank you for having me on your show.

0:00:14 Jacob: Of course, very excited to talk to you. And I know we're gonna talk about a lot of different themes, but I wanna start with a little bit of background information about you. I'm always really fascinated with where people come from and how they got to where they are today. So tell me a little bit about the younger Sanjay. How did you grow up? How'd you get involved with what you're doing now?

0:00:37 Sanjay: Yeah, happy to do that. I grew up, I was born in India, so I'm an Indian-American. I came here as an immigrant at age 18 on a scholarship to Dartmouth College, but I grew up in India. India at the time was a developing country. We're, I think, progressed a little bit further now, but at the time, and I would say, by all American standards, a poor family. And we were taught some basic principles by mom and dad, which is, work hard, respect people. It didn't matter whether people liked you or didn't like you. I wasn't very popular at school. I grew up wearing thick glasses, so people made fun of me.

0:01:11 Sanjay: But I knew that irrespective of whatever happened, even if I was bullied at school, I was loved and secure at home, and my parents gave me that sense of assurance, of security at home, which was very important to me. I had a reasonably good outlook on academic performance, and played sports and things of those kind, but academics was kinda what I did, and I had a strong interest in math. And at the point of age 18, most kids in India around that age, would either become an engineer or a doctor is typically the career path that most people took in India at that time.

0:01:49 Sanjay: It may have changed a little bit now, but that was how things were like at that point in time. And I had an interest in computer science. I got into the MIT of India, it's called Indian Institute of technology, IIT, and I was gonna study electrical engineering there. And my uncle who lives in the United States, had moved there many years prior, suggested I apply to a few colleges in the United States that offered scholarships for international students, so I applied. I think I got rejected almost all the colleges except for Dartmouth College and I had respected their computer science department, so I ended up accepting that offer and came here in 1987 on a scholarship and to Dartmouth College. Landed in Logan Airport, took the Greyhound bus up to Hanover, New Hampshire, 50 bucks in my pocket and began my journey in this wonderful country. So that was my first 18 years of my life...

0:02:39 Jacob: Wow.

0:02:39 Sanjay: And was felt very honored to obviously have the opportunity to study in the United States.

0:02:43 Jacob: Crazy, I love that story. My family actually has a similar story. They came from the Republic of Georgia, and similar story. They came here no money. And it's just so amazing to hear these stories of people who come from virtual poverty, and are able to build such great lives for themselves through a determination and learning and studying and education. So it's always very, very inspiring. And when you came here, did you already speak the language, or did you have to learn all of that while you were in the States?

0:03:12 Sanjay: Yeah, because the British were very involved in India for three, 400 years, the English language was fairly well spoken in India. I went to an English speaking school. Although my parents spoke other languages and I understood some of those, our language at home was English. So we were taught, in what I would describe as the British system of education; O levels, A levels, that way of being educated. So English was a language I spoke pretty well, and my parents encouraged me to be participating in public speaking and debate, so that was something I didn't struggle with at all coming into the country.

0:03:53 Sanjay: Obviously, there were figures of speeches and things and cultural aspects of the United States that we can talk about that were always a little bit of a shocker to me when I first got to college. But the language wasn't it. And then I think the other part I felt very prepared coming in here, because of the focus on what today people call STEM, Science, Technology, Engineering, Math, but especially science and math, I came very well prepared into the school, the college system here. I was placed into many of the junior level classes in Math and Science, Physics, Chemistry, so on and so forth, because I was very well prepared in India for that.

0:04:28 Sanjay: And I would argue that maybe some of the arts topics are not something that the school systems in India, at least in the 1970s. And '80s really focused on, and if you were prepared for a math or an engineering or a science type degree, you were very well prepared coming in here, and I felt fortunate for that. And then of course you built on that. The college system here in the United States and the graduate system here is very good, which is why a lot of international students like me come to this country. And then, obviously, decide to pursue further education, be it a PhD or get into the workforce, which is the path I chose.

0:05:01 Jacob: Do you remember how you felt when you were boarding that plane from India coming to the States? Were you scared? Were you nervous? Excited? And also, do you remember how you felt when you first landed in the States and you were taking that Greyhound bus? What was going through your mind?

0:05:19 Sanjay: I was homesick. I was nervous, I didn't know what to expect. This was a... My family was gonna be 10,000 miles away. I did have an uncle and aunt who lived in Boston area, but practically this was a new country. And everything was new. I'll tell you a couple of things that were just remarkably funny in the first few months. I thought... I didn't have enough money to buy a very warm jacket so I just assumed I'd buy the thinnest jacket available in Kmart and just layer clothes, and then somebody told me, "Hey listen, that's actually not an efficient way to dress for the cold of New Hampshire. Just save your money in the dining hall..."

0:05:52 Jacob: When we used to have Kmart.

[chuckle]

0:05:54 Sanjay: Exactly, the days we had Kmart. That's all I could afford. I don't know, maybe the jacket was \$50 or something, and I couldn't afford a \$300 one. But he said, "Listen, you can't wear numbers of layers of clothes and then take 'em off in the dining room and then put them back on. It's just too much work. Why don't you save a little more money and buy a \$300 jacket and it'll actually serve you good?"

0:06:15 Sanjay: Here's another funny one. This is more sort of culture rather than the being... I remember... There's no Halloween in India. I remember one of my, I don't know if it was the first year or somewhere in my first few years in the United States. I had these kids coming up to our, we were living off campus, to our home with a bag of chocolates or candy, and they mumbled something. What they were saying was, "Trick or treats," and I had no idea what they were saying. So imagine, you're not from this country, you don't know the culture, you don't know what Halloween is, and someone throws a bag of candy right in front of you. What do I do? I just put my hands in and take some candy out.

0:06:45 Jacob: That is awesome.

0:06:46 Sanjay: And the kids were screaming, laughing. They're thinking I was being a jerk, but I was... I had no idea what they were saying, and the kids' mom was standing at the end of the driveway and thinking we were a bunch of punks.

[chuckle]

0:06:58 Sanjay: But this is the awareness and the learning of a new culture that you're trying to assimilate into. Fortunately, I had some really good friends who were understanding of the fact that I was an international student. And if you're willing to be humble and just learn and assimilate, you're often starting off with people who are of a similar culture, who are also international students, but then you start to develop some American friends. And that's been my story.

0:07:20 Sanjay: So I'd say the first three, four years from age 18 to 22 were hard, because you are struggling with the new culture, trying to make friends. You are different. Your home is, whatever, five, eight, ten thousand miles away. You're not gonna see them. And you miss them perhaps the most at the times when other classmates of yours go back to their family, whether it's Thanksgiving. In my first few years Thanksgiving or Christmas, I couldn't afford to go back to India. I'd find some place, either local relatives or local friends, and those were... The campus would completely become empty at Thanksgiving, and it would just be us, international students.

0:07:57 Sanjay: So we would kinda get to know each other well, and there would be some family who may adopt an international student into their family and bring them in for Thanksgiving. We were very grateful for that, because those people who allowed us to feel at home in our first few years, I think back, and I wanna do the same to other folks who are newer into our society, because I think that's the part of this American dream. If you're willing to work hard, you apply yourself, anything is possible. And I feel enormously blessed that there were people who allowed me an opportunity to assimilate well into this culture. And then the rest, of course I had to do my part of it, which was to work hard, and that happened both in Dartmouth and then later on at Stanford and

Harvard where I did my further graduate work.

0:08:40 Sanjay: But those first few years were tough. If you have seen the movie, *Animal House*, that movie is actually created about Dartmouth College. So imagine coming right off a plane from India, taking the bus from Boston to Hanover and landing in what's kind of the scenes out of *Animal House*. That's how crazy it was. But people were very friendly and nice. I have some really good friends from my Dartmouth years that I'm enormously grateful for, who practically adopted me as their sibling. And that helped me assimilate well into this culture.

0:09:12 Jacob: What gave you the courage to make that change? And, actually, what still gives you the courage to take on something new or to tackle some big obstacle 'cause, obviously, moving from one part of the world and leaving a lot of your family and your friends behind and leaving what's comfortable and going to the other part of the world is pretty scary. But also a lot of people experience is that just with trying to tackle a new challenge, trying to switch careers, trying to ask for a raise, so where do you get that kind of, the courage from to be able to do these challenging things?

0:09:50 Sanjay: I think it's probably my mother. I think my mom is, you met her, she's not very tall. She's 5 foot 1, 5 foot 2. And she is an incredibly brave woman who is extremely courageous, even though she is soft-spoken, and she taught me to just work hard and not worry what people thought about me. Like I said, right, I was not popular in school. I wore thick glasses and people made fun of me. I felt bullied. But she was sort of a rock that in our home, it didn't matter. She was sort of the, this 5 foot 2 mother bear who took care of our four. I'm the oldest of four boys. And I learned a lot from that, which was, whatever culture you're in, don't worry what people think about you. Stand up for your conviction, stand up with courage. Work hard. She taught us how to work hard. And there is no substitute for hard work. A lot of people expect things to just come, land in their lap. Some are born with a silver spoon. I wasn't. But when I saw those examples early, you persevere.

0:10:47 Sanjay: And then some part of it is also my own personality. I like risk. I'm an entrepreneur at heart. I tend to... I don't have a huge group of friends, but I take my friends... I'm very loyal to the friends that I create strong friendships with and vice versa. I've been very blessed with those friends who were loyal back to me, and that's how life sorts through. And, with every turn, whether it was landing in Boston, going to Hanover, New Hampshire, or coming here to California for my first job, where I actually knew nobody in California, I feel very blessed that somewhere along the way, whether it was a roommate or someone in my church group or in my home or... Sorry, yeah, in my workplace, those people became a friendship circle that helped me assimilate, even though my family was 10,000 miles away.

0:11:37 Jacob: I asked this question to a previous podcast guest, I had, who went through a similar journey from a different part of the world. Do you think that the mentality or the mindset of immigrants is different as far as work ethic? And I think back to my family, for example. My dad very much had a lot of the same, he would always tell me the same thing, "Work hard. Don't worry what other people think, nobody cares about your problems, you just gotta work really, really hard." And I... Part of me wonders, and I talked to a couple of executives who come from immigrant families, who believe that there's just something different. Some people view being an immigrant as a disadvantage, but a lot of executives actually view this as a huge plus, as a huge advantage, because maybe you have to work harder. I don't know. What do you think?

0:12:30 Sanjay: Yeah. I think there's an element of that, Jacob. That is true. I think... I have a number of friends who are either Indian or Chinese or African or European or even Canadian or from Latin America, people who have come from outside this country. And we've had to come in, take a number in line, so to speak, and earn our way into this. Many of us who were educated here, whether it's undergrad or graduate had to survive among very, very talented people in the university programs.

0:13:00 Sanjay: So that's certainly the case, and I certainly want to... It's harder in the next generation, because my children probably have more that they have growing up than I had growing up. So I hope I can instill in them that sense of humility and hard work, what I call being humble and hungry. So that is true, but I've also seen people here in this country who are... So I don't think it needs to be just an entitlement of an immigrant. I hope that everyone realizes this, and if you're willing to be humble and willing to be hungry.

0:13:29 Sanjay: And of course, set limits. I've also been not trying to be something that I'm not. You understand who and what you are, because you're comfortable in your own skin. You hope that those values you can teach, and I do think there's some of it that can be taught to the next generation. There's some of that people learn, even if they weren't taught that by their family. We owe that, listen, those of us who have come as immigrants owe it to the people that we have in our teams, because they are, in some senses, family to us at work. We owe it certainly to our children.

0:13:57 Sanjay: And I hope that that's the way in which we can continue to build a great country, where people, whether they have grown up here, meaning they've been several generations here or forever been here, or they're newer immigrants here, they realize that this country is amazing because of its combination of smart people who are hard working, and the diversity of talent, whether, whatever country they've come from.

0:14:18 Jacob: Today, you are one of the top executives at VMware, the chief operating officer. Maybe you can give us a little bit of context around, who is VMware? So what do you guys do, how many employees do you have, and what do you do there as the chief operating officer?

0:14:35 Sanjay: Yeah, happy to, Jacob. We are the 5th largest software company about 10 billion in revenue, about 25, 26,000 employees. We've just announced two acquisitions that will bring us another 3, 4000 employees. So when we're done, that will be somewhere close to 30,000 employees. We're based headquartered in Palo Alto, Silicon Valley. And the history of this company is amazing. A wife and husband, Diane Greene and her husband, and a few founders invented this technology called a virtual machine, that allowed what are called servers and data centers to run significantly more efficiently through software than the hardware. And if you think about it, if you had all of this hardware running in data centers, if you could make it more efficient, you would actually save money like electricity bills, carbon.

0:15:19 Sanjay: And this whole idea of doing things through software revolutionized the data center and VMware was at the absolute core making that happen. And that original product just took off and this company that's housed in an extension of the Stanford campus, these people were all ex-Stanford people, invented the virtual machine for Intel processors. And then one after the other, this company's added more and more products to become the de facto standard in what we call the software-defined data center. We've now expanded our vision and product set into public clouds with partnerships like Amazon and others, and are also now participating in the management security of devices like phones and laptops.

0:16:00 Sanjay: We advanced into some new technologies with acquisitions, we've... And recently like Carbon Black and security. So one thing that's true in technology, if you continue to innovate and hopefully what we in the industry, tech industry, call it disruptive innovation. In other words, you take something that's done a certain way and you disrupt it. A good example of a company that's disrupted everything is Apple. They've disrupted the music industry, they've disrupted the phone industry, they're disrupting a number of other places. Tesla is another example of companies disrupting automobiles. We seek to be that same type of company that's disrupting traditional ways in which software is done and infrastructure. And we've been very blessed to be successful in our journey from zero to 10 billion the last 20 years and we feel we're continuing to chart the course of this company for the next 5, 10, 20 years on a path to 20 billion and beyond.

0:16:48 Jacob: And as the chief operating officer, what do you do there? Maybe you can walk us through. What does a typical day look like for you, starting from when you wake up to when you get home?

0:16:56 Sanjay: Yeah, I run all of the customer-facing operations in my role which are sales, marketing, consulting, support, alliances. So everything that faces a customer and all the revenue the company reports to me. And a significant part of my day in life if I'm not doing internal meetings is dealing with customers. Either making them happy to understand they have an escalation or an issue or pitching them a new product, speaking at major conferences where I can get hundreds of thousands or tens of thousands of customers, doing either a podcast like this or getting on a broadcast television show like CNBC to get that story out. So everything I do is all centered around customers, that's the number one focus. Helping existing customers and trying to win new customers.

0:17:40 Sanjay: Secondly, I spend a lot of time with my employees, and really wanna make sure that they are motivated. Certainly, I have six direct reports but they in turn have probably sum total of 14, 15000 people before these new acquisitions. We've gotta make sure that we are hiring the best people, that we are retaining them and recruiting new people and that we've got the best leaders in place. And another part that the... Of the leadership model is very important, that means what I call servant leadership. Which is not just focusing on the top of the company, but making sure everyone who is an individual contributor sort of who might feel they're at the leaf of the company, views me in a C-level position as serving them, as opposed to be just top-down, having to run an organization that's top-down and command and control, I invert the pyramid and my role is to serve them.

0:18:28 Sanjay: Because most organizations are kind of like this sort of picture that I've put up often in slides, of birds on various little rungs of a tree, and they look up at the CEO or board and the CEO or board are just crapping down on them. And that organizational model it could work for in the Army or in some command and control cultures, but in today's world you wanna invert that in the pyramid, where the C-level executive is serving. You invert that pyramid, and you're servant leading the people who are at the front line, whether they're an engineer or rep. So the employees are very important to me.

0:19:00 Sanjay: And then, of course, the third is, I'm constantly looking to learn. So how do you learn? You have to have that growth mindset of what you don't know. So I'm meeting a lot with partners or with new startups to understand what they do. And every meeting if I can learn something new, your brain actually gets bigger and you're trying to figure out how you implement.

So those would be I would say the top three things I seek to do, meeting my customers a lot, taking care of our employees not just the people who are higher up in the organization but the leaf level of the organization, and then constantly challenging myself to learn and improve.

0:19:32 Jacob: Obviously, you guys are very much in the technology space. And technology is obviously a major topic of conversation, with all sorts of madness that's happening out there. What is your general take on just technology in general today? Are there certain technologies that you think are gonna have a great impact versus others which are maybe a little bit over-hyped?

0:19:57 Sanjay: I think it absolutely is. There will be some that have enormous impact and they already are. You think the mobile device. This has had enormous... You think about... Just like the personal computer, they'd have a tremendous impact on our productivity and brought us tools like word processing and graphics and so on. And the PC, whether your Michael Dell or Steve Jobs or Bill Gates, that's had tremendous impact from the '80s and the '70s and '80s, all the way today. But the phone and the smart phone, is that tremendous? That's one, mobile is one.

0:20:28 Sanjay: I think artificial intelligence is another, that I think is gonna allow us to do things in much better ways, whether it's buying products and then having a recommended next product suggested to you, like Amazon is doing or Netflix is doing. Or potentially help... Even if you don't believe in self-driving cars, if a car could help... You don't wanna see me park a car, my parking is atrocious. I either park too close to the curb or I park too far away from the curb. But parking is not in a life-threatening exercise if done by a machine. You're likely not gonna get into a life-threatening accident while parking. But if a machine can park the car, because it's all geometry and lenses and cameras, and it could park the car better than I can, that's an example where it's gonna do a better job than me.

0:21:13 Sanjay: Or if it can drive through stop and go traffic, again, probably unlikely I'll get into a life-threatening accident there, but if it could keep me more alert than potentially me, that might have a tendency to fall asleep or something, that's a good example of AI. Or speech recognition, where I can speak and it helps a doctor type out a prescription better through spoken form than the illegible handwriting of a doctor, or having to even type it in. These are all examples of AI done well, and I think there'll be many, many others. Those are two areas.

0:21:44 Sanjay: I think some fundamental other areas is the way in which cloud computing, security, some of these newer technologies are gonna make our world more and more productive. Everything about technology should be, hopefully, helping your life become more and more productive, so that you have some work-life balance. And it's used for good. The challenge often for technology is, technology not used for good could be just like a matchstick. Is fire good or bad? If it's used for good, it's kept us warm, it's helped us cook our food. But it also could be used by an arsonist to bring down a building. And there's been plenty of bad examples, but does that mean we dismiss fire? No. So for every aspect of technology, we, and many others, but certainly our goal at VMware has been to be a force for good. If technology can be a force for good, I think we'll build a better society.

0:22:34 Jacob: I'm always fascinated with technology. So I have a three-year-old. And I still remember, I'm a millennial, towards the later stage of millennial generation, and I still remember things like a Rolodex, I still remember things like dial-up, I still remember those weird old Nokia phones that you could swap out the face plates, and the little flip phones that we used to have. So I have a three-year-old, and sometimes it just blows my mind to think about, that she is never going

to experience not being connected. She has no idea what a server is, she has no idea what a desktop is gonna be, no idea what a CD is. And she's three. And I'm wondering, what is the world possibly gonna look like when she's eight, when she's 10?

0:23:22 Sanjay: Yeah.

0:23:23 Jacob: Where is all this going?

0:23:26 Sanjay: I think the principles... Listen, I grew up in the era of listening to music on a tape, even before CDs.

0:23:33 Jacob: I remember the tapes, I had a Walkman, I had Sony Walkman.

0:23:35 Sanjay: Exactly, right? And I'm probably a little bit older than you, but I quickly began to see CDs, probably after college. And the idea of DVDS. So I think the principles we have to teach our children are the principles of science, technology, engineering, math. What is an atom? What is the principle of bits and bytes? And then of course, for historical reasons, I think it's always good to know what people did. How was the first fire started? How was the wheel first... Okay, what did tapes look like? What do CDs look like? They don't need to necessarily see it, but I think it's good to have some historical perspective.

0:24:12 Sanjay: The principles of all of those digital media were bits and bytes, and that's not gonna change. Zeros and ones, and maybe some of that may change with quantum computing. But this idea of how technology and bits and bytes are stored, even though the media and the format have changed, those fundamental principles are really important that we teach our kids early on. Which is why I think the time-tested principles of math, and the way in which we teach science, have been relatively the same over thousands of years.

0:24:44 Sanjay: Teaching people the principles of physics, teaching people the principles of math, the way in which it's done may be different, but that's super important. Because on those foundations, a lot of different things could be taught on top of that. The principles of logic, I think it's super important because whether your program with... A certain construct in programming languages in the '1990s may have changed today in the 2020s, but the principles of logic, that doesn't change, right? And how do you construct an argument, how do you parse... I think those principles are super important and I think for... I'm not an educator, but I'm a big fan of understanding what's the best way to continue to keep learning.

0:25:24 Sanjay: I think more and more that we are using technology to help with that. I think, for example, Sal Kahn and the Kahn Academy and the way in which their approaching education through these videos, YouTube videos of Khan Academy, are phenomenal. I'm using that, certainly not just for my kids and teaching them new things, I'm using that for myself to refresh new learning concepts. Wow, it's so much easier to learn from a video class than to learn from just reading a book. And if we can continue to tap into that way in which technology education is changing. The format of how people use things, whether it's a tape or it's a CD with the DVD may change, but the principles will be timeless.

0:26:05 Jacob: I love the importance there of the history of the stories. And actually, I even find that in a lot of companies, a lot of organizations around the world don't do a good job of even teaching their own company history to their employees. And I know a lot of employees at

companies, you ask them, how was the company founded? How did it get to where it is today? How did it grow? What were some of the challenges that the company had to go through over the past, hundred years in some cases? And a lot of people have no idea. And I really think this kind of this historical context, these stories are important. So I agree. I hope we do a good job of teaching this to kids and employees, going forward.

0:26:43 Sanjay: Alright, can I say one thing there, Jacob?

0:26:45 Jacob: Yes, please.

0:26:46 Sanjay: I think it's super important that we emphasize storytelling to our kids. And I hope that dinner table conversations are not obsessed by keeping the TV on and the device on. We try to keep a no device policy for a period of time in the evenings in our home. It's super important we go back to that basic principle of what people did around the dinner table, which is tell stories. And I hope that the classroom setting is the same time too.

0:27:09 Sanjay: One of the danger of this obsession with devices is that we move away from whatever friendship or family constructs that got people telling stories. I find often today, people are so obsessed with their devices, they're not as good at carrying on a conversation, they're looking down, they're not doing the kinds of things. So we have to as parents and leaders, as technology gets used, understand its appropriate place, and not let it take over our lives, where some of the basic principles of history and storytelling become something that become a gift and an art that disappears from our society.

0:27:45 Jacob: Is there anything you do either at work or in your personal life to help maintain this balance? For example, I saw a talk that you gave, and you said that one of your favorite parts of your day is when you read your kids stories at 8 o'clock. So are there any habits or practices or techniques that you personally use to help maintain that balance of technology not overtaking your life?

0:28:08 Sanjay: Listen, we're all learning, and I'm far from... I mean, I'm trying to be the best dad, the best husband, best manager, best employee, all the time. So I'm big believer in growth mindset, which was a professor from Stanford's book. So I think in the context of our own kids, I think that sort of storytelling time towards the end, play time that encourages them to play a sport, but then, even if it's something that's not necessarily always academic. I would just say, like one thing that we've been trying recently, for example, is teaching, I've twin nine year old boys and a 13 year old girl, how to debate their point with logic, almost like a lawyer and say, "Okay, you know what, we're gonna debate this particular topic over dinner."

0:28:53 Sanjay: And help them understand, they have two minutes to construct their logic, and help them say, "Okay, you know what, don't interrupt this person for two minutes, let them speak," they have a little time prep. And you start to have that nice discussion. That's a debate. And you can, that's the skill that hopefully as they get older, whether it's in college, whether it's in discussion later on in graduate school or at work. I mean, a significant part of our life is constructing a argument for our point of view or having a dialogue and teaching them that in small settings, getting them comfortable with public speaking and not being shy about it. Now, some people have the gift some people don't, but I think you can start developing that conversational skill which has nothing to do with science, technology, engineering and math. It's the art skill of being able to communicate well. Music is another one. I'm very passionate.

0:29:37 Sanjay: I'm very fortunate my parents forced me to learn the piano. I didn't like it initially, when I was six, because I go to piano lessons and the only other people in piano lessons were girls, I was the only boy there. And then later on, like, 11 12, I start to play the piano well, and the girls start liking me and I'm like, "Wow, that's actually cool." So I've been trying to teach my kids a little bit of a music too and getting them, they don't necessarily all like it but forcing them to learn a musical instrument. And either they grumble and complain, they start to develop that skill that is artistic.

0:30:08 Sanjay: And I think we've got to continue to work ways by which as much as science technology and your STEM super important. I'd like to add an A into STEM and make it STEAM, where the arts or whatever form. Music is just the one I'm most passionate about. Communication and speaking is another one I'm passionate about. It could be arts, it could be theater, it could be sports, whatever is the artistic form, that we want to reinforce in our kids. I think it's important that we emphasize not just the STEM, but also the STEAM.

0:30:34 Jacob: I love it. I think that's great advice. Now, speaking of technology, is there anything in the realm of technology that scares you or freaks you out a little bit?

0:30:45 Sanjay: Yeah, I think, the whole topic we talked about, like I said, technology could be like a fire matchstick. Do you want it to be good or bad? Let's take AI. Do you want your face recognized every single place you go, and then being used in some fashion that you may not approve? Is your face your private property? So that when you go through a TSA line, they should not do, use face recognition on you, because they may get it wrong and confuse you for a terrorist. Or they may get it right, and still, personal. I mean, those are all topics of ethics. Facial recognition right now is a very hot topic of [0:31:16] ____ 'Cause it's sometimes being use in software that people may not agree with, and it impacts my privacy.

0:31:24 Sanjay: Is my personal information, in terms of how it's being used in a public cloud or by a credit card company, fair game to participate in AI trends as to what people want to buy, so they can then better market to me? Maybe, maybe not, but do I want my data being used in a way without my permission? These are all topics where marketeers and technology companies are taking data and using it, maybe for good but maybe for their own selfish purpose. And we have to have a point of view that ethically works through these core issues. What type of control should we have over free speech versus abuse of free speech on social media platforms, because abuse of free speech is leading to bullying, and to these irrational things that are unfortunately leading to suicide. Or is leading to child abuse, or is leading to pornography among kids and under age, things which are leading to sex slavery.

0:32:24 Sanjay: These are all topics that I think that as technologists, we have to have a point of view that is putting a frame on society as to what's the appropriate use of technology. We can't legislate morals, I might have my private view of morals, but it's not my place to lay just late that for all of society, but I do think certain principles are very important. I think this is one of those places where technology has to work closely with government. On policy, I'm not saying that we should become a communist society that's heavily governed, but I do think that some of these things are very wise, the debates that are happening right now, given artificial intelligence, social media, the preponderance of these newer technologies taking over our lives. And what's that balance?

0:33:08 Sanjay: And then overarching policy and legality, I think every person has to have their

own constraint that they exercise because we wanna be balanced individuals. The last thing we want is to create a imbalanced society where we don't have a work-life balance. And that might be, for example, restriction of screen time, restriction of how much I'm spending on just working, balancing that out, making sure that I'm balancing all of my work and technology with health and fitness.

0:33:37 Sanjay: One of the things I'm deeply concerned about in our society is life expectancy impact because of obesity, and the amount of... I wasn't exposed to how bad sugar really is for you till way later in my life because I grew up in India, and there was a lot of carbs and sugar in our diet. And we never knew. We just kinda ate, and of course, I think I'd have a reasonable amount of balance of bicycling to school. So I count myself active, but there's not a lot of benefit to sugar. And if I can start eliminating that from my diet and educating my kids on that, it's just the taste bud that you can eliminate. That those are things that if we can educate our society, we can save ourselves from a lot of unwanted obesity.

0:34:22 Sanjay: And I think unfortunately, that's not been happening in the decade. It's slowly starting to happen, but there are agendas there. The food companies have agendas, and we've gotta work as a society if we're gonna expand life expectancy for all of these to be something that we drive a consensus towards better living. So these are not things that Sanjay Poonen, sitting in VMware can solve, but these are topics I think about. I converse a lot, not just in my family and friendship circles, but with government officials, with other company executives. And I think we all wanna be making technology a force for good.

0:34:57 Jacob: Yeah, these are all huge topics, and they get talked about quite a bit. And it almost sounds like listening to you talk, and correct me if I'm wrong, but it sounds like over the past few even decades leaders were able to get away with playing in the gray area, maybe not taking a specific stance on something because they wanted to stay neutral. But it seems like now going forward, leaders need to have a stance on something. They need to speak up. They need to share their perspective, their voice if they support something, if they don't. Would you agree? Are we moving more towards that direction?

0:35:31 Sanjay: Yeah, and I hope it's not imbalanced to the point where... The danger in any of these or being opinionated 'cause it becomes quickly tied to either religion or politics. And even though I'm a deeply... I am a man of deep faith and religion, I wanna keep a line between my point of view that might be personal. And even if I talk about it publicly, imposing that on people who may not be ready or wanna hear that at all, that's religion. Same thing with politics, we have people who are red, some people are blue, Republican, Democrat. It's not my place to drive a wedge. So that's the place where I'm sensitive to ensuring that while I think we need to have a point of view on many of these topics. There's a lot of discussion going around about vaping right now. I have a point of view on there.

0:36:19 Sanjay: And if it's detrimental to people's health, that should be something that we speak up about. And I have no problem speaking up about it. And same thing as it relates to, whether it's Bitcoin or what's the appropriate place of using that where it's getting, ruining people's lives. The abuse of social media that's leading to bullying. So I think all of these things here, but I think the place we need to be careful about, is not allowing that to very quickly become a demagogic point of view that ultimately leads to division in society. And often, religion and politics are those two that can lead to division. And we have to be comfortable even if we are strongly opinionated on a political point of view or a religious point of view, that we don't cause that to become a point of

division between friends and family and people in the workplace.

0:37:08 Sanjay: So for example, I'm a Christian. I've gotta make sure that I don't have a point of view that is exclusionary of Hindus and Muslims, and atheists, and whatever have you because of my point of view. I tend to be somewhat neutral and independent in my political disposition, but I voted on either side of this debate. But that should not become the reason by which I publicly create a distance between me and either employees or customers and partners. So I think there's a balance to being vocal about some of these issues, but not using it as a lightning rod to divide our society.

0:37:43 Jacob: Which is actually, by the way, I think a very important skill, and will probably be even more important in the future for leaders, is being able to take a stance on something, but also being able to maintain that balance of not trying to force your perspectives and ideas on others, which by the way, a lot of people are not good at doing. So I'm glad you brought that up. You mentioned a couple of minutes ago that technology should help make people more productive. And one of the things that I think, and maybe you hear this from your customers, how do you balance using technology to be productive and efficient, but at the same time, balancing the humanity?

0:38:21 Jacob: Not... 'Cause it's easy, for example, to use technology and say, "You know what. We're gonna get rid of 10,000 jobs, because we don't need them, and we can be more productive with technology." How do you maintain that balance, so you're not hurting people, but also being more productive?

0:38:36 Sanjay: I think at the core of every executive, you have to build empathy. You have to always build more empathy. Listen, part of growth mindset is not just learning how your IQ gets better, but how your EQ improves. That's always a balanced mind, is having a perfect form of IQ and EQ. And then when you figure those I and the Q, maybe you gotta improve your GQ, which is your giving quotient. So I think there's many quotients that you are constantly looking to improve, so let's talk about that particular one. And I think, listen, there's tremendous amount... There's been debate for many, many years, does technology displace jobs? From the first form of industrial revolution. We're probably in the fourth Industrial Revolution. But in the first form, where machines started to help people become more productive, so that more cars could be produced or more, particular manufacturing jobs could be better produced.

0:39:23 Sanjay: It always led to people moving up to higher productive jobs rather than doing things that were less productive. So if somebody could actually produce a car faster and better through robots, over time, those people became more and more software people as opposed to manual people. So I think the key is to ensure that with every generation, we are allowing people to move up that stack, so to speak, in higher level value added things, rather than things that are mundane, that over time are gonna get done by machines.

0:39:55 Sanjay: So I'll give you a practical example, if my value add as a person was I was the best spell checker, manual spell-checker and there were a whole bunch of people were the best at spell checking, you know what, quite frankly, over time as spell checking became part of every word processor, that's not a sustainable skill, but how about getting your writing in your... Yeah, that's always gonna be a skill for better writing and better artistry or so on and so forth, right? Even as spell checking became something that's part and parcel of technology.

0:40:21 Sanjay: So I think, as self-driving cars, for example, I hope it doesn't displace every driver but it makes those people who want to use some of their free time to help drive people. That's what

Uber hopefully is driving either for full-time drivers or part-time drivers, it makes their job more productive, more safe, it's not gonna completely eliminate it, but it's gonna make them more productive. And then maybe over time, it allows this ship that's basically moving from place A to place B, where the likelihood of an accident is low.

0:40:56 Sanjay: I think in the future, a containerized ship, maybe it could automate a lot of itself, in a big, big ocean, it may need fewer people on it. And as a result, those people in the next generation are doing more of the computer programming jobs that help that self-driving ship get from place A, to place B, and carrying all of its containers. So I think that that's how we have to be thinking about this and my hope, I don't have the perfect answer here, but my hope is that, even as technology makes people's lives more productive, there's always a job for every person on this planet of the seven billion people who need employment, because there's higher value added jobs that are always needed.

0:41:33 Sanjay: And so far in society that's being the case. There is unemployment in every country, but as people get more and more educated into those higher level jobs, the next generation is able to do more and I think that's an acute thing that we in the United States didn't really think through, because there's a number of people who've been working in the blue collar jobs whether it's coal mining or others, and they're concerned about whether the wealth and the technology is really affecting just the course.

0:41:58 Sanjay: Well, is this entire technology revolution benefiting Seattle, San Francisco, LA, Boston, New York, on the East Coast, and the middle of the country is not benefiting? We owe it as technologists for ways by which every part of the American economy and every American state can participate in that. And to me, it's very simple. The universities, which are in every state, need to feel responsible for the jobs that are created around that area, and more and more tech companies need to be willing to invest in software or hardware or other technology companies, that are outside of just the Silicon Valley.

0:42:34 Sanjay: I'll give you an example. We... About five years ago, I had the choice of acquiring a company in a space called mobile management, enterprise mobile security and we had a choice of buying some companies in the Silicon Valley, and we had a choice of buying a company, acquiring company in Atlanta and for a variety of reasons, the company in Atlanta was building good products, but I felt it was actually gonna be awesome for us to really tap into that engineering workforce in the southeast of Atlanta, there were a number of vibrant colleges, whether it was Georgia Tech at the time or University of Georgia, now we're recruiting from Morehouse. There's...

0:43:11 Sanjay: And I felt like we would actually be showing the people of Georgia and Atlanta a new model of how we could create jobs in that location. And we did that. And the governor of Atlanta and the... Sorry, the mayor of Atlanta and the governor of Georgia were super excited about AirWatch, this company, because they became a beacon for many other tech companies in Atlanta, they became one of the first companies in 2014 to become the talk of the town. The Mayor loved it, the governor loved it and now we've become very successful in Atlanta.

0:43:36 Sanjay: And I think that could be the model of many other places, where the middle of the country or the places outside of the Silicon Valley benefit. That's our obligation to society. So I think as a technology executive, we've always gotta be thinking about, what are the things that we could do to make this country a better place? Whether it's jobs in this country. And the same thing, I think, as a globalist, back to my home country, what can I do as a Indian born, I'm now an American

citizen, but to the extent whenever I travel to India, my parents live there, what can I do to make US-India relationships even better? What can I do to make sure that India is thriving? If you do that both from the lens of the country you're living in, and any other country you feel passionate about, we're doing our small piece to make the world a better place.

0:44:24 Jacob: We only have a couple of minutes left, so I wanna use our remaining time to talk a little bit about a topic I know you're passionate about, which is leadership. And earlier, towards the beginning of the podcast, you mentioned the importance of motivating and hiring and retaining the best talent, and then also making sure that you have the best leaders in place. Can you talk a little bit about what do you do to motivate your people, or to bring in or to find the best people at VMware?

0:44:51 Sanjay: I think, first off, I talked about servant leadership, it's super important that you're always humble and hungry, and looking to learn. And part of it, being a servant-leader doesn't mean that you're a doormat that everybody steps over. I'm strongly opinionated, I'm passionate, I'm a hard negotiator, all those things. But I don't want any smell of me that I'm arrogant, unwilling to learn, unwilling to listen. I make plenty of mistakes, I'm a work in progress. But I want my team to feel like, "You know what, this guy's got a growth mindset, so I can give him feedback."

0:45:22 Sanjay: And that's... And want the person who's at the lowest rung of my organization to feel like I'm approachable, as opposed to sitting in some ivory tower with a bunch of security guards around me that they can't come and talk to me or send an email to me or walk into my office. And I'm always challenging myself to how I could continue to drive that servant leadership mindset, both in myself, and role model it to my organization.

0:45:42 Sanjay: And then I think the other piece of leadership, I talked about a few of these principles already, is that constant desire to learn, a growth mindset that says, "Listen, I'm good at these three or four disciplines, but there's one or two, I'm not as good as yet." And you hear that from a 360, where people give you feedback to say, "You're doing these well, but in these particular areas, one, two or three, you're not as good as..." And I often, when I hear that, I wanna find somebody else who's better than me in that particular area and learn from them. 'Cause often, just saying, "You need to improve there," without a role model of who you can emulate, is tough, right?

0:46:15 Sanjay: So first off, I think we have to have the humility to accept feedback when we're not good in a particular area. And then I want to role model myself to somebody who's really good in that area where I'm weak, to try and get as best I can. And then when you're done with it, you're never gonna be perfect. But there's sort of this leadership model I saw once from some business school, I think it was a European business school, INSEAD, that talked about leadership qualities as like a tent where you'll likely have three pegs of the tent that you're strong at, and one peg that you may be weak at for the rest of your life.

0:46:48 Sanjay: Your goal is to kinda shore up that one area that you're weak forever as best as you can, but you'll never be world-class at them, and then strengthen those other three areas to be world class and get better and better and better at that, because you'll be recognized for those three that you're really good at, but you're trying to shore up this one. And those are the ways in which we've sought to try and build a great organization here. And we're fortunate. There are days where I feel good about, there are other days where I feel humbled and I go back home like "Man, there is so much I can improve."

0:47:19 Sanjay: And fortunately, if you can let those days where you're being humbled never get you totally down and out, where you're depressed and you're not willing to come back the next day saying, "It's a great day. I'm fortunate." And even our day, I've been, not in my recent past, but 15 years ago, I was fired from my job. And it was very humbling. But when I got fired from my job and it took me five or six months to find the next thing, I felt like, "You know what, even this is for a reason. I'm gonna basically grow my mindset and find the next thing and improve." I think if you do that, life is very happy.

0:47:48 Jacob: And even today do you still practice being humble and having humility? I know you shared a funny story of how you fell asleep on a conference call.

0:47:57 Sanjay: Oh, there's plenty of those humbling moments all along.

0:48:00 Sanjay: I love that story.

0:48:00 Sanjay: I mean that was actually one of the... Yeah, once I think it was years ago when I was dialed in from India and I was jet-lagged. And I was on the conference call and the next moment someone is calling out name and I was like, "Oop." Then I woke. He was like, "Hey, you were snoring." I was like, "I'm sorry, I fell asleep." So yeah, you listen, you just have to be willing to have... Let people make fun of you, and roll with the punches when they do. Being humble and hungry is a state of mind, and hopefully you have people around you that keep you that way.

0:48:28 Sanjay: I feel very fortunate that my mom kept me that way growing up, and now my wife and my children keep me that way. It doesn't matter that I'm COO of VMware, when I walk in at home, I'll be leaving home right after this podcast, I walk in there, I'm just their father or their husband. And it did this matter what title I was, you're just down in the weeds with them. They may have had a miserable day, they don't care whether you've had successes, whether you are promoted, if you got a big raise, you're there in the trenches with them, and that's that. Things like that keep me humble.

0:48:57 Sanjay: And if you surround yourself with blue collar people, people who are not like you, who keep you down to earth. I mean I'm very fortunate the church that I go to there are many people who are in diverse backgrounds in the society I'm in. I wanna surround myself not just with people who are a certain kind. If you do that, hopefully your circle of friends will keep you down to earth and then we do that, I think all of us become better people.

0:49:20 Jacob: And it sounds like you make yourself pretty easily accessible to your co-workers and colleagues, even if they're not that senior. Can people at VMware just kind of come up to you and approach you?

0:49:28 Sanjay: Absolutely.

0:49:28 Jacob: Okay.

0:49:28 Sanjay: Oh, listen, it's an open door philosophy. I get emails all the time from people across the world. I'm on LinkedIn, I can't... Obviously, I probably have a very large social gathering of I think 30,000 people on LinkedIn and 27, 28,000 people on Twitter, so I'm not able to all of them. But certainly within the company, I try to respond to everybody and if I don't have time to meet with them, I'll try to respond quickly or point them to a place. I certainly offer that access to

our customers. If someone... If you're a customer and you have an issue and you need to reach me, you will get a response within 24 hours. I am... Because we owe a high level of satisfaction to our customers, but employees are just as important to us as our customers and partners.

0:50:07 Jacob: What do you do... And I don't know if you have experience working with these types of people, but I know there are a lot of leaders out there who might say, "Oh man, Sanjay is crazy. He makes himself accessible to all of his employees. Shouldn't he just be telling other people what to do and they should just be reacting to his orders?" What do you say to leaders who are having a very hard time embracing the concept that their job is to serve their employees and not the other way around? How do you make that shift?

0:50:39 Sanjay: I think, listen, at the day let me be very, very clear. I'm not giving objectives to 27, 28,000 people of VM. I'm not setting their objectives, that's their boss' job. And I'm not expecting all, even the 15,000 people in my organization to report directly to me. That's not it. But I wanna be listening. So the key is not to be... There are different forms of communication. There are points when I'm talking one-on-one, there are times when I'm talking one-on-10, one on 15,000. But the way in which you hear whether what you're doing makes sense is you're listening, right?

0:51:09 Sanjay: And I use, whether it's Twitter, whether it's LinkedIn, whether it's email, whether it's one-on-one conversations. No, I cannot schedule one-on-one time even 5, 10, 15 minutes with 15,000 people. So I'll be, admit I can't set up one-on-ones, but they're all not here anyway. So I tell people, "Listen, I'm gonna communicate with you in some regular form, mass form. But if you send me back an email with a question, I'll try to answer it but I also want to hear your feedback." And often people don't write back to me expecting an answer, they just want me to know. "Hey, I just want you to know that I really appreciate, and what you said here, this made complete sense. What you said here could be improved a little bit." "Man, wow, thank you for sending that to me because I learned."

0:51:49 Sanjay: So I use a lot of this sort of two-way feedback down to the leaf level as a way of being two ears, one mouth. Listening. And sometimes I could dialog back with them, but I certainly don't have bandwidth to have a regular one-on-one with 15,000 people. That's not scalable. I don't expect other people to emulate that. But you have to have a mindset that's willing to listen. Even if you're not corresponding back with all of them, you are listening and occasionally if you have a dialogue with them, I think it makes you a better person.

0:52:14 Jacob: Couldn't agree more. And by the way, I noticed, VMware, you guys have fantastic reviews on Glassdoor. Your CEO, I believe in 2019, was ranked the number one CEO on Glassdoor.

0:52:24 Sanjay: Number one, number one. We are very proud of that. That's been phenomenal, and he emulates everything I've been saying straight.

0:52:30 Jacob: That's amazing. So I'm wondering how much of what you're talking about has to be emulated by senior executives? Because I'm sure there are a lot of people listening to this. Maybe they're mid-level managers and maybe they believe in a lot of these concepts, but it doesn't come from the CEO or the COO. Those senior executives are old school mindset, they don't believe in this stuff. How important is it to have those senior executives like Pat, like you said, who lives and breathes a lot of the stuff that you're talking about?

0:53:00 Sanjay: Paramount. Absolutely paramount. I mean, listen, there's a lot of companies who

have values that are set up. If I showed you the value statement of a company, that I will not name for a second, but they said things like, "We respect people, we're high integrity," stuff that you'd be like, "Wow that's an incredible company," then I told you the company it actually was talking about is Enron. So having values, just saying them, putting them on the website, is meaningless if you don't live 'em.

0:53:26 Sanjay: So we talk about EPIC values; execution, passion, integrity, focus on the customer and the community. Those are the values that we encapsulate at VMware. We're proud of 'em. But we have to live 'em. Those values mean nothing if you don't live 'em. And it has to be emulated and lived at the top much more so because the leaf level of the organization is gonna emulate what the leaders are. You typically become a lot like the boss of the cultures that you set up.

0:53:49 Sanjay: So Pat, myself, everyone in the executive team here has to live that. We sometimes make mistakes, and people we hire and they either get weeded out themselves, they don't feel like they're a culture fit or we have to weed them out. And we're extremely careful when we bring new people in to make sure they're a cultural fit with where we wanna take this organization. And none of this... Just because we're willing to listen doesn't mean that if you listen to one of our internal or there is vigorous debates that sometimes throwing things at people like, "Oh my gosh I don't feel welcome in this room," but that doesn't mean that we don't respect the individual. There's vigorous hard debates that are going on and you have to be welcome... You have to be willing to get into that kind of Shark Tank so to speak. But once you come back from that you always know that's nothing personal, it's just the iron sharpening iron.

0:54:40 Jacob: Yeah. No, I agree. I think that makes a lot of sense. Well, maybe one more question for you before I have just a couple of fun rapid-fire questions for you. What do you think the number one mistake that leaders make is? So and I'm sure you've talked to and have worked with a lot of 'em. Is there a very common pitfall or mistake that you see a lot of leaders making with their people?

0:55:05 Sanjay: I think not just with people, but in general. So something I have to tell myself, is, "Listen, what got you here won't get you there." So you...

[overlapping conversation]

0:55:19 Jacob: That Marshall Goldsmith book, yeah.

0:55:19 Sanjay: Right. There's a book written on that too.

0:55:19 Jacob: Yeah, Marshall Goldsmith had it.

0:55:19 Sanjay: I mean you saw... Exactly. And that book had a lot of influence on me. I met him, I like him, Marshall Goldsmith. And I think it's... The whole principle of that book is the 360 of being willing to listen to feedback that what got you to a particular point of success may not be what gets you to the next step. And you have to constantly willing to have that growth mindset to change and not be happy with the status quo. If you stick with the status quo, you can sometimes start believing in drinking your own Kool-Aid, where you, hubris things like, "You know, I've been successful with this. I can just apply the same playbook."

0:55:53 Sanjay: You almost have to throw that playbook out and be willing to understand what...

And so I think leaders who are willing to hear the negative feedback on themselves, negative feedback on themselves. It gets harder and harder to listen to that as you go higher up the organization 'cause you can live in a bubble where either people are insecure, giving you that feedback 'cause they are scared, or they feel like you never listen to them. I think that's ultimately the slow cancer of leaders, where they are not willing to listen, they get into that and they surround themselves with yes men, yes women, who are just flattering them so to speak and not challenging them.

0:56:31 Sanjay: And I think that that's ultimately what I've seen. And I hope, I can only judge my own self and say, "Listen, I hope that never happens to me, where I'm not willing to listen to the critique or the failures." I learn a ton more from losses that I lose to a competitor in a deal or failures in my own life. They have always, those valleys have always catapulted me to the next peak, so to speak. And I tell people my own life story of highs and lows are more defined by the valleys of my life than the peaks.

0:57:02 Sanjay: And if you only celebrate... If your life journey, if you just plot your journey as ups and downs over the continuum of time, and I sometimes do that, as we call this sort of the leadership journey, and when I do this with people, if people are just like, "Oh up into the right," and they have no valleys, I almost think they're an artificial person that's not being authentic. My own personal story is, I've learned a lot more through the valleys of my life than through the peaks, and I'm extremely grateful for those times because those have catapulted me to the next peak. Then you get to the next peak and then something comes and humbles you, and you learn something from that and you bounce back up. And I'm so thankful for those ups and downs in my life.

0:57:36 Jacob: I love that advice. That's one of the best pieces of leadership advice I've heard. So, don't just focus on the peaks, you gotta remember those valleys as well. Well I just have a couple of fun, just rapid fire fun questions for you, starting off with, what has been your greatest business failure?

0:57:52 Sanjay: I think the role that I was at Informatica and I got fired from my job. Now, I thought I was doing a good job in that role, I was running marketing there. And the CEO decided that he wanted somebody new. And I thought I was competent, but the CEO didn't. And whether there was a competence issue or a fit issue, could have been either one. I thought there was fit, but in the grand scheme of things, your boss gets to decide why. That didn't work out, and I had to move on from that.

0:58:17 Sanjay: And it was humbling, very humbling. It took me four or five months before I decided what I was doing next. But some good came out of that. One, it allowed me to take stock of what was important in my life. I'd been working relentlessly and not had balance in my life, so I just put on more weight than I needed to. So I got on an exercise regimen that helped me lose some weight and get more fit. I met the wonderful woman that I'm now married to, at that point. I'm not saying I wouldn't have met her, but I think the timing of my going through a little bit of a lull in my life and having more time, allowed me to meet the person that I... So I just look back and I say I'm really grateful.

0:58:53 Jacob: See the positive.

0:58:53 Sanjay: Yeah, the positives were very helpful.

0:58:56 Jacob: What has been your most embarrassing moment at work?

0:59:00 Sanjay: I think this falling asleep situation, not at this, with VMWare. But I think it was... I can't remember, it was Semantech maybe, when I was on a call and I fell asleep and started snoring at the other end of it.

[chuckle]

0:59:12 Sanjay: And it was like a moment of embarrassment. And there's probably many many more. I think the Halloween story, not from work but way back in college, is another humbling moment. But I look back to these as now comical stories that I can joke about and self-deprecate myself.

0:59:27 Jacob: What are you most proud of?

0:59:29 Sanjay: I'm really proud of the people I've invested in, who've been enormously successful in their own right, and I see them doing things that are incredible. And I feel like, wow, I had a chance to invest in them, whether it's the people who worked for me or worked with me." And then I'm also very proud of the places where I had a chance to create a team myself where I'm made the leader of them. And together, as a team, we achieved great things, whether it's at VMware, whether it's at SAP, or any of my previous roles. If I was a leader of that team, and as a team we achieved something, I feel very, very honored and proud to led those dreams. So both the people that I invested in that went on to great things or the teams that I invested in, collectively, we achieved great things and moments of great pride, and there are always those types of accomplishments that I look back in my 27 years in my tech career that I'm very proud of.

1:00:21 Jacob: What's the hardest decision you've ever had to make? And this could be either a personal one or a business one, up to you.

1:00:25 Sanjay: There's plenty of hard ones. I think at VMware, the collective decision, it wasn't just me, but the company made, to embrace the public cloud and embrace Amazon, which was a competitor at the time, it took a lot of courage. There was a few of us, I was very involved in that decision, and then since then I've been leading a lot of our efforts into the public cloud, with other partners whether it's Microsoft. That took a lot of courage. So Pat, myself, Raghu, are probably the three key people here at VMware, that drove that decision with Amazon, and since then, others. That's been a tremendous courage.

1:01:03 Sanjay: I think the acquisitions we've done here at VMware, all took enormous courage to put the case together, and put that together. And then I think on the personal front, decisions I've had to make, like I described, during values in my life to change some aspect of my life, whether it is getting more healthy, or taking stock of failures and understanding what I can learn from them. Those are all moments, which I feel I learned something good out of them in the end.

1:01:27 Jacob: Last three for you. What's your favorite business or non-business book that you recommend other people check out?

1:01:33 Sanjay: I think, The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, from Stephen Covey, is an all-time classic. It's had a seminal impact on my life. How to Win Friends and Influence People, Dale Carnegie. Those two are awesome books. One's later on in life, that had a big impact on me,

Crossing the Chasm. I think one that's also... I think it was somebody from Bloomberg, or Fortune Magazine, who wrote a book called, The Presentation Practices of Steve Jobs. I think that's a classic that every person who's publicly presenting in speech is gonna learn, 'cause a lot of Steve Jobs I admire. He's one of the best public presenters of a product of anybody I have found. A lot of his presentation secrets, keynote secrets, are very replicable. There are certain things that are just born gift, but there are many things one can learn and I relate, and I've found a few of those books to be very impactful in my life.

1:02:24 Jacob: Alright, last two. Who's been the best mentor you've ever had?

1:02:27 Sanjay: Oh, there had been so many, Jacob, but if I look at the grand scheme of my life, it's probably my mom. And is it not like in a way that she's constantly mentoring me, but early on in my life, up 'til age 18, there was a lot of active. Since then, it's much passive. But I'm watching and learning a lot. I mean, she's 76 years old, a wonderful person in my life. And everything about... When I talk about servant leadership, the picture in my mind is my mom, Annie Poonen. And she is the epitome of servant leadership. And if I could be more like her, she's sort of the Mother Teresa in my life.

1:03:03 Sanjay: And when I think about servant leadership, she epitomizes to me, even though she was not a corporate executive, she was a doctor, and sacrificed a good part of a doctor's time to help with the family home. But to me, I would say in the grand scheme of things, she's probably been the mentor who's had the most impact on my life.

1:03:18 Jacob: And very last question for you. If you were doing a different career, what do you think you would have ended up doing?

1:03:24 Sanjay: I would have loved to have been involved more in music. I would never been as gifted as, I don't know, pick your favorite; Elton John, Eric Clapton. But if I could be playing in a band, I'm a jazz pianist, and if I could have done that for living, that would have been incredible. If I were to say a distant second, I don't think I was anywhere close to having the gift, but if I could have played a sport and had been really good at it, whether it was soccer or cricket growing up, or maybe later on... I don't think I was tall enough to play basketball, maybe tennis. [1:03:53] _____ been good, but I'd say music was probably a higher priority. That would have been great. So what do you do when... If you can bring music into the tech world, which I've tried to do, sometimes I'll do keynotes and play music in the middle of it.

1:04:07 Jacob: I saw. I saw a video of you doing that in the video. It was great.

1:04:11 Sanjay: Well, sometimes I'll write songs with music in the middle of it, and write a song... And some of it on there, on YouTube, a song that I wrote called, Hannah's a Winner. I'll write words to Piano Man. It's just ways of having fun, because most tech keynotes are death by PowerPoint. And when you have all of these PowerPoint plans, I tell people, there's probably no power and very little point. And the key that you have to do is to find ways which you make it interesting. And sometimes that musical gift has allowed me to bring music into keynotes to make it vibrant, and that hopefully entertains people too.

1:04:39 Jacob: You gotta have fun with what you're doing. I couldn't agree more. Well, Sanjay, thank you so much for your time. Where can people go to learn more about you? I know you're very active on LinkedIn or VMware. Anything that you wanna mention, please feel free to do so.

1:04:53 Sanjay: Yeah, @Spoonen on Twitter and on LinkedIn. I'm fairly visible on those social media platforms. Feel free to follow me on Twitter, @Spoonen, S-P-O-O-N-E-N. And you can also dialog with me that way. I read a lot of what people contribute there. And I hope this... Thank you, first up, Jacob, for having me on your show. I hope our hour together has played a small role in somebody who listens to it, and helping them be inspired and encouraged and live a better life.

1:05:21 Jacob: Oh, it was fantastic. I really appreciate your insights. Thank you for taking time out of your day. I know it's the end of the day for you. You're gonna go spend time with your family, now. So thanks again.

1:05:30 Sanjay: Thank you, Jacob.

1:05:31 Jacob: And thanks everyone for tuning in. My guest again, Sanjay Poonen, Chief Operating Officer at VMware. I will see all of you next week.

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