What’s Next after Microsoft?

Vijay Vashee, ’77, was the 160th employee to join Microsoft. Over the next 20 years, he would make major contributions to Windows, Mouse, Works, Word, Excel, and other products. Vashee also was responsible for designing and selling PowerPoint, boosting the business from $100 million to $900 million.

“For the first 15 years, it was a very entrepreneurial company. It gave key players a lot of autonomy. With PowerPoint, I was able to work my guys into a frenzy with every competitive release, even though we had 70 percent of the market.” Despite his success, Vashee left the company late in 2002. “I had two herniated disks in my neck,” he said. “If I worked at a computer more than four hours, my left arm tingled and went numb.”

Friends and colleagues wondered if he would start his own company. “I said no, because I’d have to commit myself to working 14 hours a day, seven days a week. And if you wouldn’t make that kind of commitment, it’s not fair to ask others to do it,” he said.

Instead, Vashee became the founding president of TiE Seattle, a nonprofit organization that provides guidance to entrepreneurs. The time is ripe for their success, he said. “A lot of the American economic future lies in businesses being started up after the bubble burst,” he said. “People have more rational expectations now. They’re willing to work for no salary if they believe in something, and they’ll put money into something if they believe in it. If they lose, they’ve got a lot to lose. Failure is not an option.”

Don’t look for Vashee in his office, though. “My days of sitting behind a desk and keyboarding are over,” he said. “Hallway discussions with the folks in start-up companies remain exciting, promising, and—hopefully—financially rewarding.”—P.B.
Stacey Hadash’s career path has taken her from conducting research for Bill Clinton’s 1992 presidential campaign to investment banking at Morgan Stanley—hardly typical for a woman under 40. In fact, said Hadash, ’96, most executives with a foot in business and politics rise to the top of a corporation before making the leap to public service, usually with an appointment.

After traveling between the two worlds for more than a decade, Hadash has found a job where they meet—at Public Strategies, a strategic communications consulting firm. The atmosphere on Wall Street and the campaign trail have a lot in common, she said. “With a political campaign, you actually start up an entire organization—raise the money, put in the infrastructure—to get somebody elected on election day,” Hadash said.

“Investment banking is similar in that ‘election day’ is the date a transaction is announced. A similar battle-ready camaraderie develops on an investment banking team in order to complete a transaction for a client.”

Hadash is a director at Public Strategies (headquartered in Austin, Texas), where she works with former Texas governor Ann Richards in the New York office to develop new business and advise clients.

She began her career in 1988, when she worked with political strategist James Carville on a New Jersey state senate race. After the campaign, she joined Morgan Stanley as an investment banker until 1992, when she moved to Little Rock to join the Clinton-Gore campaign as a research assistant. Hadash served as special assistant for the Departments of Labor and State before enrolling at Chicago GSB with an eye toward heading back to Wall Street.

After graduating from the GSB, she spent nearly six years in investment banking at Goldman Sachs in New York and London. She joined Public Strategies in 2002 and now advises some of the same blue-chip clients that she worked with at Goldman Sachs. “I still work with clients at the CEO and senior management level. In an environment where the public pays more attention to how business conducts itself, a company needs a strategy to manage its public reputation beyond traditional investor relations and marketing activities,” she said.

One project involved helping a new Fortune 50 CEO “find his voice and communicate in an environment that is much different than what his predecessor had to face in terms of corporate scandals and 9/11,” she said. “How does he differentiate himself and set out his vision and strategy in a way that is convincing to employees, customers, and shareholders? Public Strategies took a campaign approach in advising him. That’s what we offer all our corporate clients.”—P.B.