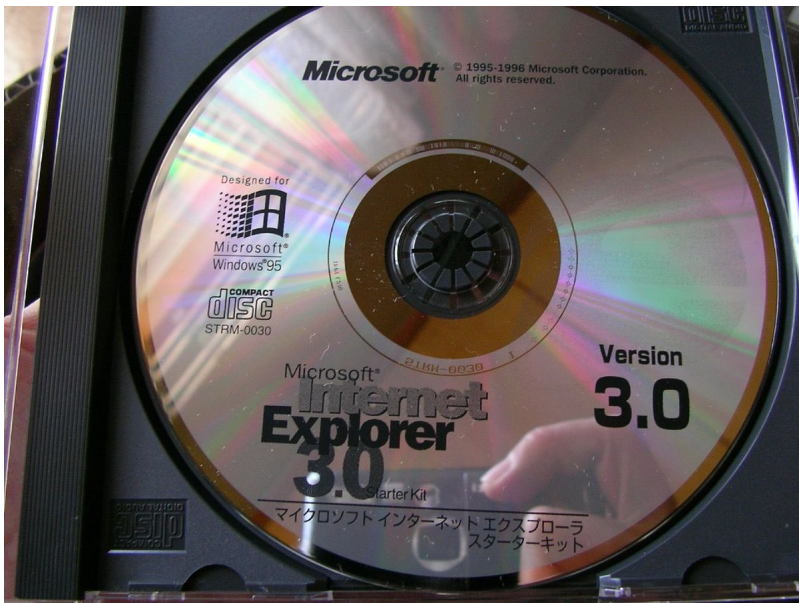




**Hadi Partovi** @hadip Sat Aug 14 16:51:54 +0000 2021

25 years ago Microsoft released Internet Explorer 3.0, its first real salvo in the “Browser Wars”. This launch taught me how a giant corporation could move at the speed of a startup. Here’s the story: <https://t.co/ZEYcxYrUgl>



I had joined the IE team a year earlier, at age 22. The team was only 9 people and trying desperately to grow as quickly as possible. I remember one question I was asked in every interview: “How soon can you start?”

Netscape Navigator had 95% marketshare, and Netscape was the darling of the tech industry. They were famously working on “Internet time.” We were almost 2 years behind and we needed to catch up.

Instead of hiring too fast, we kept a super-high bar for talent, betting that everybody would want to work for this new exclusive team at Microsoft that was so hard to get into. It worked.

Early on, I learned a critical rule about execution. My boss, Chris Jones, told me: “There’s 3 ways to handle work assigned to you. If you say you’ll do it, do it. If you say you can’t, that’s ok. But if you sign up for work and drop the ball, the team fails. Learn to say no.”

I also learned the value of motivation. Bill Gates wrote a memo to all of Microsoft, saying the Internet Explorer project is critical and asking every team to reorient their work to help us. Our inboxes exploded, but it made us feel important, and we worked even harder.

We announced our plans publicly on Dec 7, 1995. Pearl Harbor Day. It was war. Despite Netscape’s lead, we said we’d match their every feature and even leapfrog them. We signed partnerships with anybody who would help us, even competitors like Apple and AOL.

To motivate us more, I plastered the hallways with quotes from Netscape’s founder, Marc Andreessen: “Netscape will soon reduce Windows to a poorly debugged set of device drivers.” It reminded us that this new startup threatened to destroy all of Microsoft.

The Internet Explorer team was the hardest-working team I’ve ever been on. And I’ve worked at multiple start-ups. It was a sprint, not a marathon. We ate every meal at the office. We often held foosball tournaments at 2 am, just to get the team energy back up to continue working!

Sadly, there were divorces and broken families and bad things that came out of that. But I also learned that even at a 20,000-person company, you can get a team of 100 people to work like their lives depend on it.

When IE3 launched 25 years ago, it didn't win the browser war, but it made a serious dent, and Netscape began to worry. Two years later we shipped IE5, which became the dominant web browser of its time.

Tech history explains this to be about Microsoft's Windows monopoly, which surely played a role. But it wouldn't have been possible if Microsoft didn't also learn how to work on "Internet time."

For me personally, this was the launch point for my career. I got a chance to learn from the best leaders at Microsoft, such as Bill Gates, Steve Ballmer, and Brad Silverberg.

Sadly for me, Microsoft broke up the IE team because it thought "we won." As Andy Grove once said, only the paranoid survive. And Microsoft had stopped being paranoid. Years later, Internet Explorer would plummet in marketshare and become a sad joke among Web developers.

I didn't have the heart to watch the slow death of my baby. I left Microsoft in 1999 and joined my former competitors from Netscape to start a startup together, Tellme Networks. I finally had a chance to apply all the lessons I had learned at Microsoft.

Footnote to my mention of divorce (which I don't glorify, but to note repercussions, and I must admit I exaggerated): there were 2 divorces, both in leadership, one due to gender reassignment surgery.

This wasn't a toxic pressure cooker of working against one's will. The leadership worked hardest of all. Most of us were in our early twenties and it was a launch point for many careers.

Every member of this team considered it a highlight of their career. And there was great mutual respect with the team at Netscape who are still my friends.

People work hardest when they love their team and truly love what they do, and we did.

Also, I wasn't the boss then, I was 22. I wasn't exploited, I chose to work my hardest and loved my managers. As an immigrant who grew up poor and wanted to advance quickly and pay off college debt, it was absolutely what I wanted.

Most Microsoft engineers made \$1M+ then, regardless of team. But thousands wanted to join the IE3 team just to do their best work and give their all. And thousands considered it crazy and chose other teams. Anybody who left our team was quickly hired on other teams.

I mentioned divorces etc not to glorify but precisely to say hard work has repercussions. But these were absolutely repercussions we chose for ourselves.

Clearly my poor word choice gave a very falsely exaggerated impression. A recent dad who worked too hard chose to take a break to focus on family, and everybody supported him fully. The one boss who divorced was 25, no kids. Another boss got divorced but it was ~10 years later.

Considering how young this team was, the main repercussion wasn't on families, it was self-imposed sleep loss, which is bad for health. (Had I known this tweet would blow up I would have written that bit differently!)

The IE3 team had the highest morale of any team I've seen. Decades later this group still gathers as a team and looks back on those years fondly.

In light of all the responses, I really regret posting this tweet that mischaracterized reality: <https://t.co/chxjnuRemu>

In fact: The IE3 team did not have an unusual rate of divorce. I know of no broken families and only one divorce during the IE3 project.

Here's my statement reflecting on this in greater depth: <https://t.co/E1EyzulllH>