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## Answer the call for high-profile work

You might expect Bill Gates to make a convincing case while recruiting a desirable new employee. But in Daniel Reed's case, it took more than just recruitment by the company's chief technology officer and an interview with the founder to seal the deal.

Reed's reluctance to take the Microsoft job offer was complicated. He had recently moved to another state to launch a new institute and for the sake of his wife's career, and he was reluctant to make another change. Beyond that, he had spent

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his entire career in academia. A tenured professor, he wondered if he would fit in at Microsoft. He also wondered if he would lose touch with his academic colleagues and narrow his options for returning to academia.

In the end, Reed accepted a position leading R&D strategy for next-generation mega-data centers at Microsoft. He couldn't resist the chance to see his ideas translated into a product, at a scale that was simply not possible in an academic environment.

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There were aspects of the corporate culture very different from academia. Reed notes in particular the value of time-as-money. "In academia, we tend to have a surplus of labor—lots of people with ideas. But capital is hard to come by. Certainly in large companies, capital is widely available, but people are really expensive—don't waste people's time."

Another difference: Industry invests in near-term research, while the end goal of most academic research is a published paper. The perception of how much time research should take was also dramatically different. While university research can occur within a 10-year horizon, "It's a rare problem that (industry) can afford to work on for 10 years," says Reed.

Reed found that Microsoft's focus on talent development far exceeds academia's. "The talent of a company is what it rests on," notes Reed. "Its financial success depends on keeping and expanding the capabilities of its talent."

He was also struck by how industry's compensation structure is markedly different. For senior staff, company stock is a more significant part of compensation than is straight salary. And corporations evaluate employees annually, whereas academia evaluates employees for accomplishments achieved over several years.

"It was a huge learning experience, seeing how a large company worked and how its decision processes transpired, and where there were opportunities and friction," says Reed. "What makes companies succeed is vision, passion, commitment, and talent that can drive ideas from conception to implementation."

Reed returned to academia after five years. He missed participating in higher education's mission of empowering people to realize their talent and potential. "To me, that's one of the most important things that one can do," he says. He took a position as vice president for research at the University of Iowa. In the transition, he brought ideas for facilitating research that he learned from his Microsoft years—a key benefit of working in industry and then returning to academia.

His next career move was to the University of Utah to serve as senior vice president for academic affairs. He sees "The U" an institution on the rise, with a major health care center co-

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located on the campus. He is energized by the interdisciplinary approach to solving complex problems with a 360-degree perspective. "You really need teams of people who can bring disparate perspectives to bear on complex issues, because they're rarely amenable to very specific solutions," he says.


At each step of his career, Reed transferred skills to his new position. Before moving to Microsoft, Reed had worked with companies on technology transfer and deployment. His computing background led to his initial role at Microsoft. When he later led international technology policy for the company, he drew upon his experience on the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology.

### Key transferrable skills Reed identified:

- **The ability to communicate and persuade.** "The ability to sell your ideas and be persuasive about them is often a bigger determinant of which ideas get uptake than the inherent quality. The individuals who can best sell and market their ideas are the ones who get traction."
- **Networking and relationship building.** Keeping one foot in both camps—by maintaining relationships and doing relevant work—is important for those who want to shift sectors with an eye on returning, he said.

Reed also offers advice for postdocs and faculty who want to experience industry while keeping their academic options open: "If you have an opportunity to do high-profile research, then you will be mobile."

Reed was, and is, a fierce proponent of the value of higher education. He never sought out industry, but when the offer was too good to turn down, he ultimately made the move.

"Being at Microsoft was one of the most wonderful experiences of my life. I am absolutely glad I did it--it's a great thing to do. And that's true of every academic job I've had, too. Each one has been a blast in different kinds of ways." 



Dan Reed at the University of Utah's South Observatory, which offers an expansive view of both the main campus and the health sciences campus.