

# San Jose Mercury News

## FINDING A HAPPY PLACE



LEN VAUGHN-LAHMAN — MERCURY NEWS PHOTOGRAPHS

IBM employees visualize themselves as happy during an hourlong presentation by life coach and former vice president Lisa Whaley, below.

### *Former IBM executive tells workers it's OK to slow down*

The danger in rushing to invent the future is that sometimes you lose track of the present.

Lisa Whaley knows all about that. She started as an IBM programmer in San Jose right out of college. She moved up in sales and marketing. She moved to Atlanta, to Seattle, to Armonk, N.Y. — maintaining ties to San Jose through marketing work at the Almaden Research Center.

As her career blossomed, so did her family. Married in 1986. Two babies less than two years apart. And the promotions kept coming.

"That's when I went into what I call the perfect mommy zone," Whaley, 44, says.

Why not have it all and do it all — perfectly? Whaley convinced herself that she needed to be the perfect boss, employee, mother and wife. Pedal to the metal.

Soon she had plenty of money, a nice house, expensive cars. In early 2002, she made vice president at IBM.



**mike cassidy**  
silicon valley dispatches

But in the race to collect it all, Whaley lost herself and her family.

One fall morning in 2002, Whaley woke up in her Connecticut house. Her husband had left her, their marriage wounded by inattention. Her then 14-year-old daughter was struggling with drugs. At work, Whaley had overseen two rounds of layoffs.

"One day, I woke up and just really felt like all hope in life was gone," she says.

Still in her pajamas, she went into her closed garage, got into her Mercedes, started the engine and waited to die.

"I was sitting there," Whaley says, "I thought of my youngest daughter."

She thought about how her then 12-year-old would find her when she returned from school. And, as crazy as it sounds,



"Every day I have to remind myself that I don't have to do everything in one day."

— LISA WHALEY

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## CASSIDY | Coach says it's OK to slow down

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she thought about her IBM legacy.

"At IBM, I'd be the bright and shining star that self-destructed," Whaley says.

That was her bottom. She shut the car off. She got help. She examined her life.

In April, she left IBM to start a life-coaching business and to promote her self-published book, "Reclaiming My Soul from the Lost and Found."

Whaley's new life had her back in San Jose last week speaking to workers at the Almaden Research Center.

She tells hard-chargers, women especially, that there is nothing wrong with charging hard. The trick, Whaley says, is to know when to slow down in one area of life, like work, and turn your energy to another, like family. We should all make conscious choices defined by what we want, not by what we think others expect of us.

"Sit down and really think about these choices and what we think we want," Whaley says.

Her advice is simple, but not easy. In Silicon Valley, long work hours are a badge of honor. The warp speed of innovation keeps many at full-throttle for fear someone else will beat them to the next thing.

"Is it easy? No," Whaley says. "But if anybody had told me 18 months ago that there would be sunshine again in my life, I would not have believed them."

And yes, there is sunshine. She and her husband have reconciled. After intensive counseling, her older daughter is off drugs and attending a boarding school. Her younger daughter continues to do well in school.

And Whaley understands that she must make a con-



LEN VAUGHN-LAHRMAN — MERCURY NEWS

Lisa Whaley, 44, started a life-coaching business and promotes her book, "Reclaiming My Soul from the Lost and Found."

scious effort to build a life with her children.

"Every day," she says, "I have to remind myself that I don't have to do everything in one day."

Some of it can wait for the

future. For now, there is the present.

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