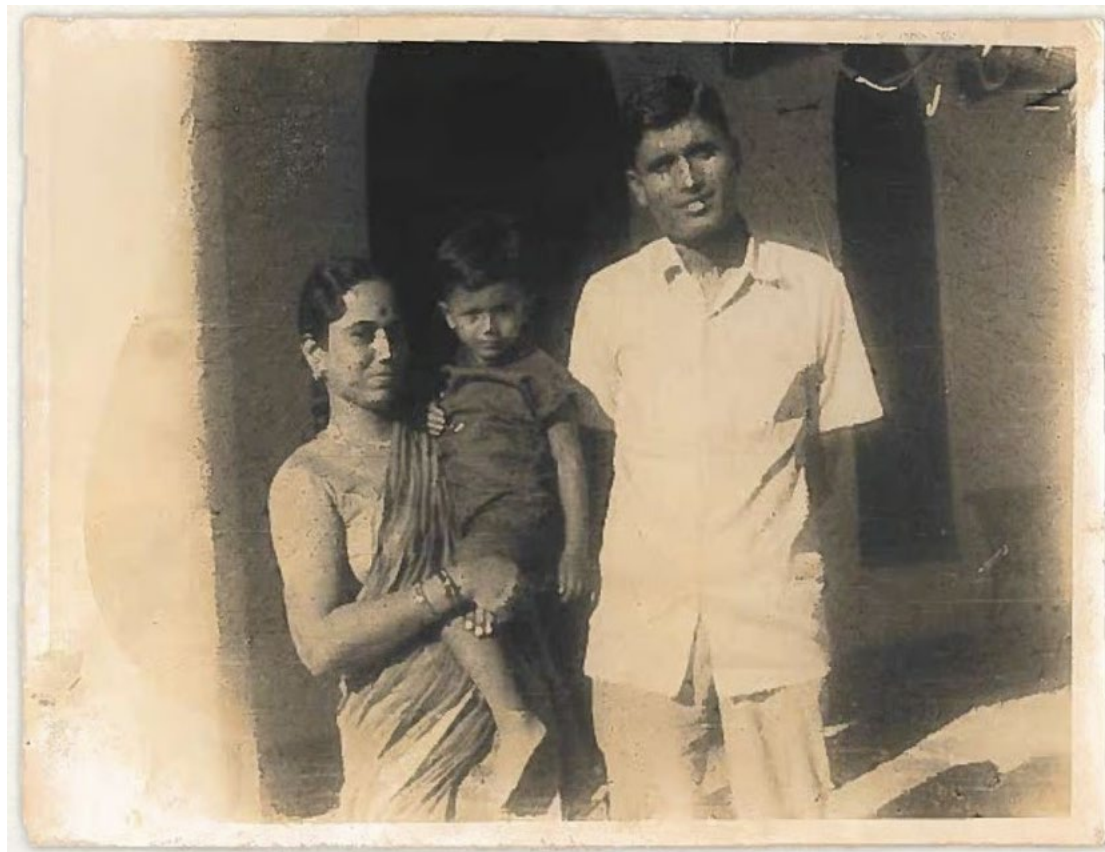




The Making of a Resilient CEO

Dr. Brooks Holtom

9 October 2025

Tell me the story of Microsoft

- Founding
- Growth
- Plateau
- Renewal



Microsoft

Ballmer's Tenure

■ Microsoft Corp Total Return Price % Change

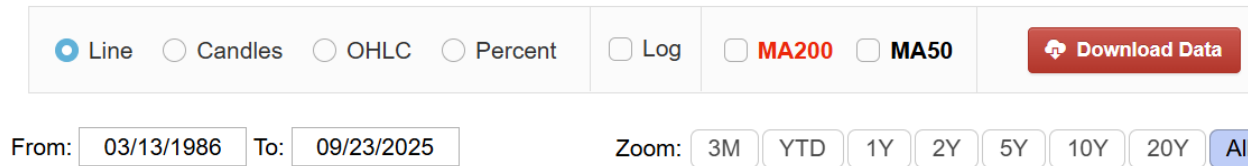


The Motley Fool.

Jan 18 2019, 1:02PM EST. Powered by **YCHARTS**

Stock performance

(Nadella 2014-2025: 1350%)



\$530

\$39

Early Life

- Born in Hyderabad, India, in 1967.
- Electrical Engineering at Manipal Institute of Tech.
 - Showed persistence and curiosity for computing.
- Developed a love for cricket which influenced his views on teamwork and strategy.



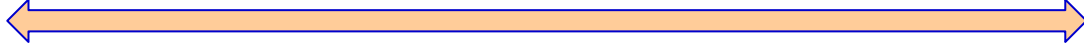
Immigration to the U.S.

- Came to the U.S. in 1992 for graduate studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
- Completed Chicago Booth Weekend MBA 1994-1997
- Faced cultural, academic, and personal adaptation challenges.



What is Growth Mindset?

- “[Growth mindset is] the belief that talent is malleable and expandable with effort, practice and input from others, as opposed to innate and concrete (fixed mindset).”
- Mindsets describe people at the end of a continuum

Growth  Fixed

- Mindsets can be changed through learning, experience or intervention

Personal Resilience

Family and Caregiving

- Nadella's first son, Zain, was born with cerebral palsy and required lifelong special care until his passing in 2022. Instead of being crushed by the weight of this personal challenge, Nadella embraced empathy as a guiding value. He said raising a child with disabilities transformed his perspective on life and leadership.
- He credits his wife Anu for teaching him to shift from asking "*Why me?*" to "*Why not me?*" — an essential reframing that built his resilience. This personal hardship deeply influenced his leadership style, making him more compassionate and inclusive.

Satya Nadella in black tie at the White House and caring for his son at his house



Professional Resilience

Climbing the Ranks at Microsoft

1. Nadella joined Microsoft in 1992.
2. His persistence and adaptability — particularly in leading the development of Microsoft's cloud platform, Azure — positioned him as a visionary leader when others had underestimated him.

Professional Resilience

Transforming Microsoft as CEO

- When Nadella became CEO in 2014, Microsoft was struggling. It had missed the smartphone wave, morale was low, and its culture was seen as rigid and competitive rather than collaborative.
- Instead of shying away from these challenges, Nadella embraced them. He:
 - Shifted Microsoft's focus from Windows to **cloud computing and AI**, which reignited growth.
 - Fostered a culture of learning and empathy, breaking down silos and encouraging collaboration.
 - Took bold bets, such as acquiring LinkedIn and GitHub, which revitalized Microsoft's relevance with developers and professionals.

Professional Resilience

Handling Setbacks Publicly

- In 2014, early in his tenure, Nadella made controversial comments suggesting women should not ask for raises but trust the system. The backlash was immediate. Rather than hiding, he owned up to the mistake, publicly apologized, and made gender equity a central focus in Microsoft's diversity initiatives.
- This willingness to learn from mistakes rather than be defined by them reflects professional resilience at the highest level.

In what ways does Satya Nadella embody resilience?



Lessons from Nadella's Resilience

- **Empathy as Strength:** Personal struggles shaped his compassionate leadership.
- **Growth Mindset:** He transformed challenges into opportunities for learning.
- **Persistence in the Face of Doubt:** He thrived despite skepticism, guiding Microsoft to a renewed identity.
- **Owning Mistakes:** Instead of denial, he demonstrated humility and course correction.

Video: <https://youtu.be/6tyCydR30pg>



What can you do to develop greater resilience?

1. Personally?
2. With your staff?
3. With your stakeholders?



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