



In the News

SAN JOSE MERCURY NEWS: RED-EYE MOM MAKES GOOD WITH GOAL

March 9, 2000

Section: Business

Edition: Morning Final

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MIKE CASSIDY column

THERE was Vani Kola last fall sitting in her downtown San Jose office, mostly talking about her kids, but also mentioning her goal of building RightWorks software into a company worth \$1 billion. OK. Sure, I thought. Why not a billion? Nice round number.

Then, on Wednesday, she announced she actually did it. Sold about half her private company for \$657 million in a deal that put the company's value at \$1.25 billion.

So, Wednesday we were talking again. This time, Kola was juggling the cell phone, trying to grab a cab in front of the Waldorf-Astoria in Manhattan. She needed to get to the airport, so she could fly home for a night before leaving this morning for a conference in San Diego.

It's the way Vani Kola lives. You might remember reading about her -- the Red-Eye Mom, who tucks the kids in in Cupertino, flies all night, spends the day back east in meetings, then jets back overnight in time for breakfast with the kids.

How does it feel, I asked, to reach your goal only four years after founding the company?

"The goal just changed," she says, putting me on hold for a call from a board member. That's the problem with Silicon Valley's super-achiever atmosphere. Doing great isn't good enough. You have to do better than great. Now Kola, 36, says she's shooting for \$10 billion or \$20 billion with the help of Internet Capital Group Inc., the Pennsylvania company that just took a 53 percent stake in RightWorks.

"Before I could land my ship on the moon," says Kola. "Now, I think I can land it on Mars." Sure, it's going to take a lot of work. More, even, than she's been doing as CEO of RightWorks, which makes software to ease online business-to-business purchases.

"I think I need to work somehow, seven days a week, 24 hours a day," she says. Of course, no one can work every hour every day, as hard as some here try. It wouldn't leave time for sleep, for love, for reading, for music, for family. Ah, family. That's where the true cost of success sometimes is measured best.

Vani and her husband, Srinu Kola, have two daughters: Tara, 6, and Sandya, nearly 2. Kola has help with the kids (her parents, a nanny, a housekeeper, her husband who usually arrives home at 6 p.m.) but not much time with them. This deal isn't going to change that. "At different phases in your life, things need to get prioritized," Kola says. "There is a unique opportunity to build a

truly, truly great company and make it bigger than anything we started to dream of."

Hers is the Silicon Valley story. Emigrated from India in the mid-1980s to enroll in grad school. Worked for Control Data and Consilium Inc. before leaving to start her own company. No, she did not start it in a garage. She started in the Sunnyvale public library, where she read what she could about business.

The company is a part of her. Yes, she feels a responsibility to her children. But, she says, she also feels responsible to the 100 or so RightWorks employees and its investors. "It's a juggling act," she says. "I wish I had an easy answer for you. I wish I had an easy answer for me."

True, a male CEO selling his company for a big number wouldn't be asked questions about caring for his family, but maybe he should be. Anyway, Kola is used to answering them. The sale will substantially improve her family's fortune, though she'd rather not say by how much. Her children will not want. She will be able to pay someone to do some of what she can't. For his part, Srinikola, 39, a freelance network consultant, understands the ambivalent nature of his wife's big score.

"There will be a lot of work," he says, "but there will be a lot less stress about what's going to happen tomorrow."

About tomorrow, Vani Kola feels a little stress. She needs to make it back from San Diego for a big-time strategy session.

"My little one's birthday party is coming up, and I haven't planned anything," she says. "Other than having sent out some invitations."

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