Giigle

(EXCERPTS)

How I Got Lucky Massaging Google

Bonnie Brown
A Definition

Main Entry: goo·gle
Pronunciation: gü-gl
Function: transitive verb
Inflected Form(s): goo·gled; goo·gling \-g(-) l\n
Usage: often capitalized
Etymology: Google, trademark for a search engine
Date: 2001
: to use the Google search engine to obtain information about (as a person) on the World Wide Web

(From the Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary Eleventh Edition (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc.), 2003.)
Google was incorporated as a privately held company on September 7, 1998, by Larry Page and Sergey Brin, who’d met as doctoral students at Stanford University in 1995. They’d started working on a search engine that analyzed the relationships (links) between Web sites (rather than ranking results based on number of times the search term appeared on a page), and created BackRub, the precursor to Google, in 1996. By mid-year of 1998, they’d renamed their company Google.

Page and Brin had worked out of their dorm rooms until the incorporation, accomplished by raising one million dollars from friends, family, and angel investors. They put their PhDs on hold and moved the company into a friend’s garage in Menlo Park, California. There were four employees. At this point, Google answered ten thousand search queries per day.

By June of 1999, Google had managed to attract twenty-five million dollars in equity funding. Eight employees moved into a new office in Palo Alto; they were answering five hundred thousand search queries per day. Late that summer, Page and Brin moved the corporate headquarters to Mountain View (where they remain); the company was performing three million searches per day. By the end of 1999 Google had thirty-nine employees, one of whom was Bonnie Brown.

Google launched search capabilities in ten non-English language versions and introduced the first comprehensive wireless search technology for WAP phones and handheld devices by mid 2000. In June of that year, Google became the largest search engine on the Web and answered eighteen million search queries per day. There were still less than one hundred employees.

Awards began to pour in. After early notice from *Time* and *PC* magazine, *Forbes* included Google in its Best of the Web roundup; *PC World* called it the Best Bet Search Engine; it was awarded WIRED Readers Raves for Most Intelligent Agent of the Internet.

By December of 2000, Google answered more than sixty million searches per day. That number almost doubled by February of 2001, just two months later, with one hundred million searches per day. Its agreements spread to Europe and Asia.

By 2001, Google powered the top three portals in Japan, as well as corporate sites for
Procter & Gamble, IDG.net, Vodaphone, and Marthastewart.com. A few months later, Google was powering one hundred and thirty portals and destination sites in thirty countries. Advertisers numbered in the thousands and users could select from nearly forty languages. That summer, Universo Online (UOL) partnered with Google to provide millions of UOL users throughout Brazil and Latin America immediate access to the Google search engine. The global expansion continued with new sales offices in Germany and Japan.

By 2002, the total number of interface language options was seventy-four. AOL and Google announced a service agreement in June and the international expansion continued to London, Toronto, and Paris. By the end of the year, Google’s Web index was more than four billion Web documents. Interbrand, an international branding consultancy, named Google the 2002 Brand of the Year.

In early 2004, Google consolidated much of its Mountain View operations into a new headquarters building, called the Googleplex. A new Web-based mail service, G-mail, was introduced, and on April first, Google posted plans to open a research facility on the moon. By the end of that month, the S1 was filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission, declaring to the world the company’s intention to go public. With its more than three thousand employees watching worldwide, Google’s initial public offering took place on August 19, 2004. It raised $1.67 billion, making the company worth $23 billion, and a few Google old-timers worth more than their wildest dreams.
A man on my massage table said one day, “I figure I can do anything for four years.”

That sentiment was not his alone. Many Google old-timers intended to work hard until they vested their corporate stock options and then reap the benefits. (Interestingly, others loved the Kool-Aid and would stay forever.) While in session, these future millionaires often shared their dreams with me. They loved their jobs and were proud of their accomplishments … but it is always good to have a dream in place.

…He wanted to go on an archeological dig and make a great discovery.

…He wanted to start a winery.

…She wanted to start an orphanage in Africa.

…She wanted to secure her children’s education.

…He wanted to buy a Cirrus and pilot it.

…He wanted to race his bike.

…She wanted to have a baby and watch it grow.

…She wanted to go to Asia for the first time.

…He wanted to build schools in China.

…She wanted to buy her first house.

…He wanted to take a very long nap.

…I wanted …
(Excerpt from...)  

A HANDY NEW CAREER

As I slowly came out of my emotional coma, I enrolled in a local massage school. I wanted to add to the massage techniques I already knew and used, and to further my knowledge of anatomy … and a new career began to unfold. The previous year, in Southern California, I’d bought a massage table on a whim from a fitness center, and figured I’d better learn what to do on it. After attending three months of night school, I’d received a certificate in massage. (It was mostly a diversion from my daily life and I never intended to work on the public. I just wanted to learn how to properly give massage so I could work on my friends.) Then I discovered a school that offered more advanced study, and in order to practice what I was learning I had to work on the public. And I discovered that I loved giving massage. Even to strangers. It felt very natural to me, and after the stress of the previous years, this was very relaxing (when you attend massage school, you receive as much massage as you give) and only mildly challenging. The therapy was perfect for my state of mind and body at that time.

So over the next couple of months in Silicon Valley, I improved my massage skills and gained more confidence by touching a lot of bodies. You never really learn massage until you do it—a lot. The school I attended was very small and poorly managed, but the teacher was the best. A very gifted therapist, Barry wanted to teach others what he knew, but didn’t want all the responsibilities associated with running the business. He saw that I had skills to run a business, so we joined our talents to build a smoother running school. My responsibilities were to expand the school, find a new location, help bring in students, manage the existing school, go out and get corporate accounts in which to place the graduating students, help him find his cell phone (which he lost every day), and figure out how to pay for all of it. His job was to instruct in massage.

The roles were clearly defined and justly suited to our abilities, though off balance in terms of compensation: he got paid … and I didn’t. I worked at this very seriously, though, in hopes of a future payoff. The carrot was this: once I filled up his classes and the therapists were trained and I placed them in corporate work, I would then be paid a percentage of what they produced. I did my part. I found a new location; negotiated a manageable lease; interviewed potential students;
did the books for the existing business; got us in the door at several corporate offices; set up massage booths at trade shows, schools, hospitals, and a number of other venues to place our new therapists; and began recruiting for the next group of students. Barry wrote an expanded version of his existing curriculum and taught his new students the beautiful art of massage. It was a difficult course and stressed the mastery of anatomy. The students were required to draw the muscles freehand, including the origin and insertion, which really imprints their location in the therapist’s brain. This is very important when you are giving massage. Barry taught techniques using many different modalities and produced a great group of therapists.

Our business arrangement didn’t fulfill all my needs—especially the ones involving getting paid. I’m a patient woman, but I know when I’ve reached the neon sign marked *enough*, and so I left the school and started doing massage on my own. I did a lot of corporate work, and began building up my private clientele. In my business, it was too dangerous to advertise (because by this time I had my own apartment and was working out of my home), so my business had to grow solely the old-fashioned way: by word of mouth. Surprisingly, this method was very productive and I soon had more business than I could handle. …

**MASSAGE**

**Sensing the Importance of Touch**

On so many levels, it is of enormous benefit to be touched. One day a man told me that I would probably think it was pathetic, but this hour of massage was the highlight of his week. I didn’t think that at all. He lived alone. His work was primarily on the computer. He had no time for relationship building—the kind that offers tenderness and touch. I was giving him the physical contact his whole being craved.

Massage offers something gentle and sweet, similar to a physical relationship with another person, but it is not sexual or binding. Another engineer told me it felt like a dance. He said the rhythm of my hands felt like they were dancing on him and it was very soothing. With massage come trust and familiarity, but it is one-sided. People granted me the honor of touching them and with the touch, infusing them with new energy.

Our bodies are crying out for touch, silently, all through life, with an unspoken desire to feel the warmth of hands that care about us. Pain is relieved
from the muscles, but it’s more than just physical. I once read, “Your issues are in your tissues.” We lock up the tensions of the day in our jaws, in our shoulders, in our necks. You hear troubling news and you start squeezing your muscles. Sometimes they stay squeezed and then you have what feels like a knot in your back. The combination of shutting down for an hour and having skilled hands searching and destroying these knots also seems to release pent-up emotion, unresolved anger, and painful memories.

People have written to me about how different the rest of the day went because they were able to let go for that brief time. A nap is great. A walk is therapeutic, but being nurtured and soothed by sensitive, caring hands does more than we might expect.

There is so much potential power for good in physical contact. It’s a shame our society is erecting limitations on it all over the place. With the scandals in the Catholic Church, clergy are more reluctant to touch parishioners. Many in positions of authority are not allowed to reach out and touch those around them for fear of legal threats. When I used to work with children at my private school, where it was still OK to touch them, I could give hugs, pat them on the back, and hold their hands to offer encouragement, congratulations, acceptance, approval, or sympathy when the situation warranted it. Sometimes touch is the balm—over any amount of words—to a nervous soul Samuel Johnson said, “Words are the heart of human exchange,” and I would add, “touch is the life of human exchange.”

I noticed an interesting pattern with my clients. When they were in a romantic relationship they got less massage. As soon as they broke up they came to see me more frequently. I observed there was more to massage than just relieving muscle pain. It filled a void left in someone by rejection or abandonment. A woman who divorced after twenty-five years of marriage made massage a priority in her new budget even though she was struggling as a single mom. She knew she was missing something and felt massage replaced a part of what she lacked from a spouse. A man who was in a rocky relationship with a woman for
several years would always call me as soon as they broke up and set up regular massage. When they got back together he came less frequently—until they broke up again and then he was back on my calendar. He thought it was just time constraints and such, but I saw a pattern with so many clients that I began to realize it had a lot to do with feeling cared for and not only about relieving stress.

According to the *International Journal of Neuroscience*, massage therapy increases serotonin levels. People don’t like living in pain, and will search for a way to feel better wherever they can find it. I love the faces of people when they have just received their massage. The look is pure felicity, although their hair usually looks like a lion’s mane.

Sometimes the client asks for a certain fix:

“My neck won’t turn to the left.”

“My hamstring on my right leg is so tight, it hurts when I walk.”

But most often, once they know me, they just lie down, sink into the table, let go, and trust me to find and correct the problems. They have discovered that I usually find things they weren’t even aware of. With my own massage therapist, I don’t bother telling her where I’m hurting because she always goes right to the heart of the problem as she begins her work on me. I don’t even know where that is. My leg might be hurting and she will find a muscle pattern in my gluts that is causing the pain. My right wrist will hurt and she’ll start working on my neck and the pain in my wrist is relieved. I know that it’s a combination of knowing anatomy, normal movement, and intuition.

As I first started learning the art of massage, I felt like I was missing it altogether. The instructor would begin by demonstrating the technique on a volunteer. Then we paired off and tried to “feel” what we were just shown. I’d do everything the instructor did, but I wasn’t “feeling it.” The other students would be commenting about their experiences and I just kept feeling around on my poor victim, thinking the others must be making it up. One time an instructor could see my frustration and came by and whispered in my ear, “You’re the only honest one in the group. Nobody really gets it the first time. You just have to keep trying.
Eventually it will come.” Eventually it did come. I have had the pleasure of applying pressure in just the right spot and feeling the muscle spasm “melt” under my thumb. I say pleasure because I know what it feels like to be on the other end and the great relief when the knot lets go and you regain freedom of movement.

(Excerpted from…)

GOOGLE?

One lovely morning, I received a phone call from Debbie, my friend who had introduced me to my German roommate, Maria. She said, “Bonnie, I was reading the paper and saw an ad for a full-time massage therapist at a start-up company named Google.”

“What?” I asked, thinking I’d heard her incorrectly.

“Google,” she repeated.

“What are you saying? Google is the name of a business?” I wondered out loud.

“Yes. Why don’t you send them your resumé?”

Though I was not interested in a full-time position, because I already had a lot going on, she convinced me to go ahead and send them my resumé anyway. I faxed it to the company and swiftly got a reply. Here is how it went:

“Hi Bonnie, this is Leesa from Google. I received your resume … I’m reading it right now … and I’m noticing we have the same address … I think you live upstairs from me.”

After six months of living with Maria, I had just moved into my own apartment in Los Gatos, and hadn’t met my neighbors yet. Leesa invited me to come in for an interview. And that was the coincidental/providential beginning of my next big adventure. …

GOOGLE CULTURE

Massage Perks

Google’s founders were smart to provide massage for their employees. In the beginning, the company provided massage free of charge to everyone. After it became evident that it was a very popular perk, it grew difficult to get in on the calendar, because it filled up so fast. In the early days, every employee would pay me with a massage coupon that he acquired from the company free of charge … but soon there was a copay of twenty dollars. This caused a momentary lull in the
schedule, but the addiction to massage was strong, and pretty soon the calendar filled back up to overflowing.

In a few years, Google would raise the copay to thirty dollars, which was still a bargain for an hour-long body massage. Employees calculated the benefits and decided it was a small price to pay for the improvement in their health; I would work on many employees regularly for the next five years of my service to Google.

(Excerpted from…)

MY FIRST “HOLIDAY” PARTY

After I’d completed about a month on the job, we had our first “holiday party.” I liked to say “Christmas party,” but quickly learned that my terminology was not politically correct. One day, while standing in line in Google’s cafeteria, I heard the guy next to me ask his friend if he was going to the Christmas … and then he put his hand over his mouth, as if he were a preschooler who’d just said “fart,” and “correctly” replaced it with “holiday” party. I’m not sure exactly when Christmas, the greatest day of my childhood, became such a dastardly offense, but … I went to my first Google holiday party—stag. I was apprehensive until I got there and realized I fit right in, as most everyone there was without a partner also.

The party was held in the area later known as the Feeling Lucky Lounge. They hired a three-piece jazz combo, provided hors d’oeuvres, and I found a self-serve coat rack in the hall. Arts and crafts tables were set up for creating ornaments. As I watched the engineers, particularly the former brain surgeon turned techie, creating the most imaginative and unusual ornaments, I was far too intimidated to attempt one. Where I would have spelled out Happy Birthday, Jesus in glue and then rolled it in glitter, they were engineering a way to decorate the inside of the clear balls with the entire nativity scene. Just kidding, of course. That would be right up there with saying the words Christmas party.

The photographer grabbed small groups of people throughout the evening to have their bodies choreographed into formations of letters and then photographs were taken to spell out the words Google, the World’s Best Search Engine. I was the “e” in Search. It remains hanging in the
lobby and looms as a sort of prophetic image. (If you can actually read it!) Those very bodies contorted like letters that evening continued contorting themselves through the years, making my massage skills constantly in demand.

The founders made a profound sounding speech and everyone felt happy to surge ahead into the new year. We had a champagne toast and we all got our glasses as party favors. I still have mine. It reads *Google Holiday Party 1999*. Even the glasses are politically correct.

The next year our party was at the San Jose Tech Museum. A robot greeted us and called us by name. The company had grown to about three hundred by this time, so we had a caterer, a disc jockey, and dancing. The sight of those awkward engineer bodies jerking violently around the floor stays with me even now. I’ve never seen anything like it, and I’ve been to a *boma* in Africa. This appeared more primitive than the feathered natives leaping in the dirt. It was a fun party overall. I brought a date, Trevor, with me that time and once again fit in because at this point, these Googlers were getting older, starting to mingle with the opposite sex, and a number of them had actually gotten married. They must have done it on a holiday, because while the company does provide just about every service known to man I can’t remember seeing a justice of the peace on staff. …

*(Excerpted from…)*

**PRELUDE TO A KISS**

While I don’t make a habit of dating men from younger generations, I was sometimes attracted to the brilliant minds inside those young Googlers. And I can only guess that there was an equally strange draw to want to go out with one’s masseuse. I guess that is how I ended up in the middle of the following comedy.

On a Saturday morning in June, Clayton (a fellow Googler) and I sat in my postage stamp–sized apartment, each making our dream list …

… A house on the cliff overlooking Laguna Beach.

… A white Rolls Royce Corniche.

… A graduated string of Mikimoto pearls to replace the ones that were stolen.

I kept trying to see his list, but fair was fair; we agreed to write everything down first and
then trade lists.

It’s always good to have a dream in place. The pages of writing tablet we used were a muted shade of green and had a heading that read *Old Money* across the top of each page. I’d bought it at the U.S. Treasury Department on a recent trip to Washington, D.C. Upon close examination, one could determine that the pages were made out of recycled currency. (I have always wondered how they got all that money back to recycle it in the first place. Even in California—where we are big on recycling—I’ve never seen a recycle bin for used money next to the trash receptacles for glass, paper, and plastic.)

Anyway, we had each bought a lotto ticket that day and decided it would be smart to plan ahead how we would spend our ten million dollars. If one of us won, we decided to share the money with the other in some equitable way. We sat across the table from each other and continued to develop our lists in secrecy. I would see the light go off in his head … he would grin and jot down the next dream item to complete the fantasy … then he would eat some more strawberries.

We wrote, we contemplated our lists, and we polished off an entire flat of strawberries. An entire flat! Clayton and I had met at Google and instantly became friends. We’d even gone out a few times, because there was a mysterious attraction between this tall, lanky twenty-something-year-old and me, a fun-loving forty-something-year-old. Today he’d come over to spend the day with me and take a break from his arduous job. I’m not sure what he does for Google, but I’ve observed him from my office window. His cell phone is held up to the side of his blond head by one hand, while his other hand is constantly waving through the air. It looks like a cross between Hitler and an orchestra conductor. He paces while he holds passionate conversations with this Snickers-size device in his hand. I would see him out the window (most of this yelling is done outside, probably at the request of his office mates) and think to myself, *I will someday witness his head just explode right off his shoulders.* Clayton is a moody, deep thinker who obviously reads the dictionary for fun, because I can only understand about every fifth word he utters. I’ve never met anyone with a broader vocabulary and a more philosophical mind. His thoughts eat up much of his energy, which probably keeps his body so trim. (Not a recommended diet plan.) His mood swings with such irregular rapidity that it makes him a nice place to visit … but I wouldn’t want to live there.

Anyway, this particular day was set aside for relaxation. After finishing our dream lists, we
strolled around the quaint little town of Los Gatos, where I lived. We bought two hefty bean burritos and lay back on the grass at the park to eat them, while we contemplated the universe and discussed the depravity of man. You never have light conversation with Clayton, even on a relaxing picnic in the park. He was finally starting to unwind by nightfall and decided to stay longer. We rented a really bad movie (his choice) that I endured to the end, though it wasn’t easy. By the time it was over, I had melted into my cushy, overstuffed couch with my feet snuggled under his legs which I think he read as affection, but actually my feet were just cold and I was too tired to get up and put socks on. As the credits and bad music continued to roll, he moved in for a kiss. I don’t think he was totally sure about it, so he got within about an inch from my face and then just froze. Not being one to beat around the bush, I said, “It seems like you’re going to kiss me right now.” And then he did. Do you ever just surprise your own self? I kissed him back and then the temperature began to rise, as it can in those hormonal situations (but I had a sudden vision of the police rushing through my front door and arresting me for child molestation). I pushed him away and said, “I don’t think this is a good idea.” I was relieved when, after a few minutes, he gave up the idea. We said a friendly good night and I crawled into bed. The only thing I remember at this midnight hour, before drifting off to sleep, was the gurgling sound in my stomach. …

GOOGLE CULTURE

A Cafeteria of Gastronomical Proportions

In developing their business plan, I can envision the founders, in all seriousness, adamant about including a lot of gummy worms and Cap’n Crunch. There are food bins all over the place at Google. Of course M&Ms (red, yellow, blue, and green) indicative of the logo are a mainstay. Licorice, Holland mints, Reese’s Pieces, dried fruit, nuts, protein bars, fig bars, trail mix, chips, and gum. It’s a snacker’s heaven. Glass cases full of drinks—soda, water, fruit juice—smoothies, espresso makers, soy milk, Toroni flavoring, bread making machines, fresh fruit, Krispy Kreme donuts. It’s a wonder everyone there is not a candidate for sumo wrestling.

I ate constantly when I was at work, but I burned more calories doing massage than I took in eating snacks. Between clients, I ran to the bathroom to scrub up and then stopped by the bins for a quick snack. One might not think
massage is much exercise, but it is—the way I do it. I created techniques to work out my whole body while doing massage. For instance, when I effleurage down the back, I stand on tiptoe and balance my whole body with my abdominal muscles. While working with the arms, I lift one leg behind me and do leg lifts. I keep everything tight and stand with my feet in Pilates stance and demonstrate exaggerated breathing, so my clients will remember to work with me with their breath. As I use one hand on their bodies, I stretch back my other arm to get a full and open release of all my shoulder muscles and then repeat it on the other side. I turn my head from side to side, look up and down, and roll my shoulders forward then back. I squat and stand on my toes and lunge. I get a constant upper body workout using my arms and upper back strength to smooth out my client’s tangled fascia. My hands work hard, but so does the rest of my body. I could eat snacks in between every client at Google and still be minus in the calorie equation at the end of the day. (I always thought I should make a massage workout video demonstrating how to work out while you work. My friends advised me the market was too small.)

Google had an incredible staff of chefs led by Charlie, the former chef for the Grateful Dead, which is probably impressive to many, because he’s always introduced that way. It was lost on me, however, because shortly after I first met him we were sitting on floor cushions in a Japanese restaurant and the conversation was on art, as I recall. Charlie said something about Jerry Garcia and I asked him who that was. He just stared at me and then asked a gentle question—something like, “What planet are you from?” That was the beginning of a great relationship. I’ve always adored him, even though he made me cry once. He had a strict twelve o’clock sharp lunchtime and you did not violate it. (I thought helping myself to a cup of soup at 11:45 was allowed, but I learned the hard way.)

When it got too crowded, they installed lunchroom cameras so you could sit at your desk and click on the lunchroom site to see how long the line was, to determine when to take a lunch break. I never had time to do that, or stand in
line, so I always butted. No one ever complained. After all, who wants to be mean to the masseuse? Charlie took great care of us by providing meals using the best ingredients and with a lot of cultural diversity in mind. I ate a broader variety of vegetables and ethnic dishes at Google than during the rest of my life put together. Lunch and dinner were provided to Googlers every day with simple menus like, “Rosemary scented New Bedford sea scallop skewers with lemony apricot couscous, grilled, stuffed squid with teriyaki sauce, cauliflower asafetida …” et cetera.

One engineer informed me that it was a bad idea to tell his wife what he had for lunch. When she set down a plate of spaghetti with meatballs in front of him for dinner, it didn’t create a pleasant evening when he described his lunch at work beginning with phyllo-encrusted halibut …

Most of it was delicious, even the turkey meatloaf (I hate meatloaf), but every now and then a dish was a little too spicy for me. One day Charlie served mussels in some fire-hot sauce with a delayed reaction. I had to run into the break room to grab water. I was putting out the fire in my mouth when a coworker came by and asked me what was wrong. “Those mussels were hot!!” I breathed out. I’m sure he heard, “Those muscles were hot!!” because he just stood there, furrowed brow, staring at me, the masseuse. I was hopping around and waving at my face and breathing hard. (Needless to say, he did not rush to his desk to sign up for a massage.)

Fat Tuesday, we always had a spicy meal. It was a “big ass” (to use a Charlie-ism) festivity, with music and New Orleans decorations, including those colorful bead necklaces. The chef hid the miniature plastic baby baked inside the cake, which in Charlie’s telling meant that if you lucked out and got that piece you would give birth that year. I guess it’s a tradition like catching the bouquet at a wedding. (Fans of a Louisiana-style Mardi Gras will note that in New Orleans, getting the piece with the Christ child makes you king or queen for the day—and also requires that you assume responsibility for throwing the next Mardi Gras party, thus ensuring that the flow of alcohol continues unabated right up until the
moment Ash Wednesday begins.) Naturally, I got the piece with the plastic baby and started hyperventilating at the thought of starting that experience all over again. I kept that baby on my nightstand all year as a constant visual reminder of the importance of abstinence.

When we moved into the new building (and this was becoming a regular event to the point that I bet we single-handedly kept the moving companies in Silicon Valley in business), the café grew to meet the needs of all the hordes of Googlers—and now there were food stations with food culture themes. Charlie’s Grill, Back to Albuquerque, Joaquin’s Landfill Grill, East Meets West, Al Forno Romano, and Vegheads. Often they provided music in the form of live bands outside for your dining pleasure. (If you are fond of young men screaming unintelligible words at you and jumping all over the stage abusing their instruments as you try to eat, pleasure. I am clearly not from this generation. No regrets.)

Nevertheless, the food continued to be incredible: cauliflower asafetida; spanikopita; pollo en mole verde; baked mahogany salmon; orange ginger scented mahi-mahi; pizza quattro formaggio … ho hum and the list goes on. We enjoyed this luxury every day, for free, and you could bring guests. (There were also peanut butter and jelly sandwiches if you just couldn’t take it any more.)

(Excerpted from…)

TO IPO OR NOT TO IPO

Google, the search engine formally known as BackRub, was a stressful place. Day after day, which often blurred together until there was no distinguishable delineation between them, the swelling number of worker bees swarmed the hive—building, thinking, strategizing. Make it better. Make it faster. Organize all the information in the world and make it universally accessible and useful to everyone. Don’t pause or the flood will rush by you and throw you up on the shore like mossy debris. Why work so hard? At first, the excitement of the project fueled your engine. Then you found yourself peering off in the distance—just for a second—to make sure that the
carrot was still in place. Soon you found yourself looking a little more often. Not because your love of the project at hand had waned, but because your car was broken, your roommate was moving out, and you wanted to take a weekend off sometime before you went bald.

Was the carrot getting smaller? It kept slipping just a little farther away into the future. *Put your dreams on hold,* everyone told themselves. After a while, the old-timers just looked at each other, rolled their eyes, and said, “What IPO?” There were times when the word came down that they never intended to go public, and the worker bees were evil for even desiring it. Then they added sugar to the Kool-Aid in the form of bonuses and other tangible perks and everyone stopped dreaming and went back to work. Soon the media would pump everyone back up again and the cycle would start all over.

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The first quarter of 2004. We thought this was it. We waited for some kind of announcement. Then, at the international sales conference, right before the Google annual ski trip, the big letdown came—no IPO.

The disappointment hung around us so thick you could cut it with a knife. Frustration and exhaustion blanketed the overall mood. There had been an internal audit going on for the past year, to make sure we complied with all the expectations of a public company. The added responsibilities of finishing the audit—on top of an already demanding workload—affected many. Sure, there was hope that all this relentless work would soon be rewarded, but now hope was deferred, and everyone just felt sick. …

*(Excerpted from…)*

**FINANCIAL PLANNING FOR THE SOON-TO-BE INSANELY WEALTHY**

OK, we all agree the A.M.T. (an archaic tax rule used by the I.R.S.) is evil and we want to avoid it like the plague. We need to have a trust and a will set up for asset protection. No, wait a minute, it doesn’t really provide any protection if you are in control of it. If you separate yourself from it, for asset protection, you risk the possibility of your trustee stealing everything out from under you. Reinvesting and diversification decisions could come a little later. Just *thinking* about it was becoming a full-time job.
So then the financial seminars began. Google provided Nobel Prize–winning authors to come in and give lectures about the new financial territory we were entering. They were all over the place. Get a manager for your investments. Go with the index. Don’t have a manager. Only buy volatile stocks to raise the chances of making a lot more, at best, or offsetting your losses, at worst. Then began the small meetings with private banking houses. They were making the rounds to several Google offices, handing out literature and letting us know they don’t even handle clients that have a net worth of less than two million dollars. It made me look back over my shoulder to see if they were talking to someone else. Then I realized I was sitting in this meeting; a woman from humble beginnings, only wanting a house in the ’burbs with a husband and two-point-five kids. It was intimidating even to ask questions, but my head was full of them, along with dozens of figures, duties, and pieces to organize.

I subscribed to a financial e-mail list that was going around Google. I read it for about a half hour every day. Engineers discussing investing and tax strategies is *not* easy reading. I thought to myself, *They know everything. How could people so young know this much information?* Plus, when they had a discussion they hypothesized every imaginable scenario using N and X and other meaningless (to me) terms. I could not keep up with their ability to calculate at Mach II. You can’t use your fingers when you’re a millionaire. I started taking ibuprofen on a regular basis. That was unthinkable in my past. Now my head was so full of information it was throbbing and I had to relieve some of the pressure before it blew.

I set up an appointment with a tax professional. I presented my situation and she told me the opposite of everything I had learned up to that point. I came away frustrated and lost. I had been reading books from the library for months on the subject of finances. I thought I was starting to get it, and then she looked at me and told me completely different stuff. I started over with another tax person. This man knew every answer to every question, and he told me I had done things correctly, up to this point. I shook his hand and told him it was a comfort to meet him. It is as comforting to have a good tax person as it is to have a good doctor. It’s actually better because at least you know what to expect from the body. God put it in motion and the same rules always apply; the tax rules change every night while you are trying to sleep.

My friend Cheryl, who worked for a lawyer, offered to help me set up a trust. She printed out the preliminary documents for a trust, a will, and a power of attorney, and I took them on a
trip back east while I had some time to review them on the plane. As I was reading them on my way home from a fun vacation, exhausted and jet-lagged, I kept reading the same sentence over and over again. *Is this the same English that I speak?* Then I noticed a very, very handsome man across the aisle was reading a bunch of documents he pulled out of a big notebook on the floor under his seat. When he picked up the notebook, I glanced over and read the tabs on the side. It said *Wills and Trusts.* …

*(Excerpted from…)*

**MONEY: NEW PURPOSE AND MEANING**

One of the greatest feelings in life is to be debt-free. Paying off my car and a credit card that beautiful morning was like a big load off my shoulders. I licked the envelopes closed and whistled down the driveway to the mailbox and then smiled and walked back to the house feeling a lot lighter. That act was the beginning of an amazing transformation in my life. Money slowly but steadily took on a new identity in my mind. That afternoon I stood in a store while a man behind the counter was fixing the broken arm on my sunglasses and I asked him what the most popular pair of sunglasses he sold was. He pointed to a three hundred dollar pair of Chanels. Then the weirdest thought came out of nowhere” I could buy those if I wanted to. I wasn’t going to, but it was a powerful feeling to know I could.

It was as if everything I thought I wanted in life but couldn’t afford didn’t have the same appeal anymore. I had my eye on this beautiful ring for a year, but I thought the reason I hadn’t bought it before was because I couldn’t afford it. Standing in front of the glass case at the jeweler’s with it shining brightly on my finger and the salesman complimenting how beautiful my hand showed off the diamonds, I suddenly didn’t want it anymore. I knew then that the only thing that would make this ring a treasure to me is if it were a gift from the man I loved. That was the meaningful story of the ring in my mind.

I started learning that things only have value because of circumstances, not because of the object itself. The reason I wanted a graduated string of Mikimoto pearls was because my father gave the strand to my mother as an act of love. Since I never saw my parents together, that string of pearls was a truth of my parents’ love for each other. When it was stolen I lost more than the
necklace. I thought replacing it would give me back the evidence of my parents’ love for each other. But as I held the mirror up and admired the new string on my neck I asked the clerk to unclasp it. I no longer wanted it. I turned and left the store and left the notion that I could buy what I had lost. I could not.

I made an important work decision; no more going to work sick. Rain or shine, in sickness and in health had always been my work motto. Now I was going to take the tempo down a notch. I did not need to push myself quite so hard. Then for the first time in the six years I had been a massage therapist, I did it. I woke up one morning with flu-like symptoms. I struggled for a few hours before making the call. Finally, I picked up the phone and left a message that I was sick and not coming in that day. I rested and drank wheat grass juice and took Echinacea and two thousand milligrams of vitamin C. I didn’t get sick. Before my new motto I would have worked anyway, wearing a mask and pushing myself too hard. Now, I was totally working for the pleasure of working and not because I needed the money. It made a big difference. Over half of my life had been spent taking care of others and now it was time to take care of myself too. And I didn’t feel guilty. Well, at first I did, but it didn’t last long. …

(Excerpted from…)
FEELING MY WAY AROUND JUST FOR LAUGHS
(Famous People I Never Massaged)

(Excerpted from…)
A Rock Star
A couple of days after 9-11, my girlfriend Yolanda called and said, “Bonnie, I just heard on the radio that Huey Lewis is doing a concert tonight at the Mountain View winery in Saratoga and there are still tickets available. I think we should go and try to get our minds off the fear.” I agreed because I thought it was a good idea and because Huey Lewis is one of my favorite rock stars. I’ve been to many of his concerts. He did a great job that night of uniting the audience in our love for our country and courage in the face of our recent attacks. It was a warm, beautiful night to be singing and dancing under the stars and trying not to notice that there were no airplanes anywhere in the sky over our heads. …
A Prime Minister

As I mentioned earlier, during my trip to D.C., I was invited to a function that was also attended by President Bush. In the room that night were Tom Ridge, Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, and other famous celebrities. I did not massage any of them—but not for lack of trying. I had to sit on my hands so I wouldn’t reach out and start working on all the tense shoulders I saw. I figured I might get in big trouble for touching without an invitation. But when you are a masseuse, you are a toucher. Plain and simple.

In the elevator at the Mayflower Hotel in D.C., I offered my services to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. …

A Politician

One day, in the Google cafeteria, I was rushing in to grab some lunch when I noticed a suit. You could always tell when we had visitors at Google—they stuck out like a sore thumb. This man in his suit was staring at me in the lunch line. I thought, Why is that guy looking at me? Do I know him? I inhaled my food and prepared for my next client.

I was standing outside the massage room door, waiting for my client to undress and get on the table, when an entourage of people headed toward me. Out in front was the bearded suit from the cafeteria. He stopped in front of me and stuck out his hand to shake mine. Then I recognized this man as Al Gore. …

A Sex Symbol

Not wanting to be characterized solely by the workings of my digestive tract, I hesitate in telling the next story. But if this has never happened to anyone else, I’d be surprised.

When I worked in the Santa Monica office for Google we occupied much of the upstairs office. In true Google fashion, we soon made plans to take over the downstairs and spread out. I was the first to go. My new office downstairs was a more permanent arrangement and needed a new, more permanent massage table. I purchased the table and brought it to work one day,
arriving a little early to set it up. A little early, in my world, is about forty-five or forty-six seconds. I found a dolly and loaded up the table from my car and began wheeling it into the building.

I was rather rushed that day, especially because I had to buy the table on the way to work, so I didn’t spend a lot of time getting coiffed. My hair was thrown back in a ponytail, I had no makeup on, and I was juggling my purse, briefcase, and bolster, while trying to maneuver the massage table on a short little dolly. Of course, we had stringent security rules at Google and I had a badge to enter the inner sanctuary. I stopped in front of the entry door, which was also in front of the door to the men’s and women’s bathrooms, to get out my badge and swipe it. Now my dolly and table were blocking all the entrances. As I stood there fumbling the evidence of the previous night’s very spicy Thai food presented itself in the form of a cloud of very bad gas around me.

And then I heard the exact thing you don’t want to hear at that moment—approaching foot steps. Oh no! I saw a man coming toward me in my peripheral vision. As he got closer, even though I was panicking, I still noticed that he was extremely good-looking. Who is that? I’ve never seen him at Google before. …

(Excerpted from…)

HAPPY VALENTINE’S DAY

Valentines Day is normally about love. February 14, 2005, was, for me, about money. I woke up early and stared at the computer screen. With one phone call, I was going to become a millionaire. It was excitingly terrifying, like jumping off the tree platforms in the jungles of Costa Rica into the cloud forest, holding only a cable that disappeared into a cloud hundreds of feet above the forest. I imagined it was going to feel free, like flying, but there was always the possibility the cable would break and I would plunge to my death. This was just like that. I might feel the freedom of having gobs of money in the bank. Then again, I might become tangled up in the pitfalls of managing it and the smorgasbord of problems that accompany wealth and lose my bearings. In the end, I experienced both. My wise cousin, David, advised me not to disillusion readers with all the pain associated with my new wealth, but instead to focus on my good fortune and how it enriched
my life. Having a lot of money is not all it’s cracked up to be, but it does have its rosy side. The next year brought me many “Valentine Roses.” …