Good evening, everyone.

If the soft hum of the string quartet and those faces we just saw in the slideshow aren’t enough to make us feel the sweep of time, I don’t know what is.
Thank you all for being here to celebrate a colleague, a leader, and a friend: our Chief Technology Officer, Priya Patel—PP to so many of us—on the happy occasion of her retirement.

It feels right that we gather in a formal setting tonight, because Priya has elevated so many things around here—our standards, our conversations, even the way we think about what we owe each other as teammates.
And yet, for all the titles and milestones, it’s the everyday moments we remember first: the quiet walk-through next to a whiteboard; the handwritten note after a tough sprint; the way PP would lean forward, really listen, then ask the exact question that uncluttered the whole problem.

Priya joined our company in 2004 as a software engineer.
It was a very different time—some of us still argued about semicolons like it was a philosophy, not a syntax.
What stood out, even then, was not only her skill but her care.
She didn’t just ship code; she signed her work, not literally, but in the unmistakable way a craftsperson does—with structure that read like thought, with naming that reflected empathy for the next person to touch it, with tests that made you feel the future had already been considered.

We got an early masterclass in what she would bring to this company in 2009, when she led the Phoenix platform rebuild.
Those of you who remember the state of Phoenix back then know “rebuild” was a charitable word.
We were duct tape and prayer in a market that didn’t forgive either.

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Priya took on the mess without drama, built a team that trusted one another, and kept us focused on first principles.
When the new platform went live, we saw a 70% reduction in latency.
But the extraordinary part wasn't the number.
It was how she got us there—patiently, methodically, with curiosity as the engine and craftsmanship as the standard.
She didn't chase a quick tape-over; she rewired the foundation so the wins would compound over time.

In 2013, she became our Director of Engineering.
Some leaders step into a role by making more noise.
Priya did it by making more room.
Room for new voices, room for thoughtful debate, room for the right solutions to surface even when they didn't come from her.
She taught by example—one thoughtful code review at a time, one honest postmortem at a time, one "let's understand this before we try to fix it" at a time.
I lost count of how many people told me their best one-on-one in this company was with PP, and it wasn't because she said what they wanted to hear.
It was because she said what they needed to hear, with care, and then helped them practice it.

In 2016, she did something that spoke even more loudly than a promotion could: she established our diversity in tech scholarship.
It wasn't a press release; it was a doorway.
The scholarship expressed something fundamental about her: that talent is universal, but access isn't—and we can do something about that.
We now count several scholarship recipients among our colleagues.
Some are here tonight.
They're building features, leading teams, arguing for users in design reviews, and teaching the next cohort.
Priya didn't just support this initiative—she met with applicants, mentored awardees, and checked back to make sure the promise of the program was becoming a practice.

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That’s what inclusivity looks like in real life: not a value on a poster, but a calendar full of kept commitments.

And then, in 2020, she became our CTO.
If you ever want to know how someone thinks about the long game, give them a short runway.
PP inherited a charter with high expectations and a lot of moving parts.
She used the moment to launch our cloud-native architecture and articulate our AI roadmap with uncommon clarity.
It wasn’t a tech-for-tech’s-sake story—it was a patient design for how our systems and our people would grow together.
Under her guidance, we replatformed not just a stack, but a mindset: modular, resilient, and ready to learn.
Her AI roadmap didn’t promise magic; it promised better questions and better guardrails.
That’s very Priya: keep the soul of what works, design for change, and be honest about tradeoffs.

One of my favorite stories about her character came not from a planning document but from a stage.
Some of you were there at the client summit when a junior developer’s demo crashed mid-sentence.
You could feel the oxygen leaving the room.
Before anyone could panic, PP stepped on stage—not to rescue the demo, but to honor the developer.
She turned a moment of embarrassment into a moment of learning.
She opened the console and, in real time, taught the client what it means to build in the open.
She narrated each step of the debugging like a conductor opening a score: here’s why we set this flag, here’s the failure path, here’s what we expect and here’s what we got, and here’s how we recover.
By the end, the room was with her.
The standing ovation that followed wasn’t for a flashy feature.
It was for integrity.

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And then the client gave us a new contract.
That’s how trust gets built—with transparency and grace under pressure.

If you’ve worked closely with PP, you’ve seen the five values that define her show up, not in posters but in practice.

Curiosity, as a default posture—she meets the unfamiliar with genuine interest.
If you ever sat in on one of her design reviews, you remember the first five minutes were always questions.
Why this approach?
What are we optimizing for?
What does “done” mean in the user’s hands?
She treated good questions like compasses.
They don’t tell you how fast to go, but they keep you from getting lost.

Craftsmanship, as a responsibility—to leave a codebase, a process, and a team cleaner than you found it.
Priya used to say, “The code is a conversation with the future. Make it easy to talk back.”
It sounds poetic until you’re the one who has to read a module at 3 a.m. and realize someone actually cared about your sleep.

Inclusivity, as a practice—meeting people where they are, and making the room better by expanding it.
She ran interviews that looked for signal beyond pedigree.
She built ladders, not filters.
She made sure the ladder had rungs close enough together that first-generation college students, career switchers, and people finding their footing could climb.

Teaching by example, as her favorite way to lead.
Those Friday sessions—the quiet ones, not advertised—where she’d gather a handful of engineers and dissect a problem from first principles.
Or the way she’d pair with a teammate not to take the keyboard, but to ask questions that unlocked their thinking.

There was never a “watch me” posture, only a “let’s see” posture.

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And long-term thinking over quick wins.
When schedules got tight, she would say, “We can move fast without running red lights.”
In other words, speed is a design choice, not an accident.
It’s made of preparation, not bravado.

If you think all of this made her a serious person all the time, you never saw PP in the wild on a Saturday.
She is a weekend food explorer of the highest order.
I have personally been dragged across town to stand in a line because, in her words, “their spice-to-acidity ratio is exactly right.”
Also, she was right.
If you’ve ever eaten at a hole-in-the-wall recommended by PP, you’ve also been gently inducted into her worldview: listen closely, look widely, and assume there is a better version of almost anything waiting just two blocks over.

Outside the office, she has cultivated a life that reflects the same care she brought to our systems.
Her urban garden is legendary—tiny plots producing improbable abundance.
Ask her about heirloom tomatoes at your own risk; you will learn more than you planned, and be happier for it.
And then there’s the classical piano.
It’s fitting, tonight, to hear a string quartet while we celebrate someone who thinks in movements.
Priya’s love for music mirrors her leadership—there’s structure, emotion, and room for interpretation.
She knows when to take the tempo up, when to dwell in a rest, and, importantly, when to end a phrase so the next one can begin.

Mentoring first-generation college students has been one of her quiet commitments for years.
No photos, no posts—just hour after hour of real mentorship: reviewing résumés,

doing mock interviews, mapping choices, and checking back.
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A few of those students are now colleagues.
Several more are leaders elsewhere.
All of them have stories that include a moment when PP’s belief became a hinge on which a door swung open.

When Priya stepped into the CTO role, she didn’t just redraw our technical maps; she re-centered our sense of purpose.
Cloud-native was not a fashion to her; it was a promise to be deployable, recoverable, and ready to learn—which is a pretty good job description for a team, too.
Her AI roadmap didn’t indulge in buzzwords.
It asked useful questions: What data do we trust?
Which problems deserve prediction?
Where must humans remain unambiguously in the loop?
And how do we make sure the tools we build reflect our values?
Those questions outlive any particular technology trend.
They’re the reason our architecture feels like it was designed for change, not surprised by it.

Twenty-two years in one company is a rare sentence to get to say out loud.
It covers eras, not quarters.
For six of those years, PP has been our CTO.
But the throughline from 2004 to now is simple: Priya is a builder of things that last—systems, teams, confidence, and culture.
She builds so they will stand without her, which is how you know they’ll stand.

There’s a detail about PP that I will miss every day.
In meetings where the temperature rose, she had a way of lowering it without diminishing the urgency.
“Let’s differentiate what we know from what we believe,” she would say.
That sentence saved us hours, maybe weeks.
And you could watch people relax into clarity, because it gave them a structure to be both honest and ambitious.

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As we celebrate PP tonight, we also look ahead.

In a few moments, we will announce a new scholarship in her name.

It will carry forward what she started in 2016 with our diversity in tech scholarship, and it will do so in a way that reflects her style: practical, generous, and focused on momentum.

For the students who will benefit: you are part of Priya's legacy before you've even met her.

And if you do meet her—if you're lucky—you'll leave with a question that makes you better, and the belief that you can answer it.

PP, you once told a group of new engineers, "Build like the future will read it."

You meant code, but you also meant calendars, and commitments, and cultures.

You meant that the long-term is not something that happens later; it's something we shape now.

You have shaped ours.

And because of the way you've led—by asking better questions, by holding the bar high and the door open, by choosing the durable solution over the shiny one—we will keep building in a way you would recognize.

I want to return, for a moment, to that stage where the demo crashed.

What you did there is what you've done here for two decades.

You respected the problem, you respected the people, and you respected the moment.

You showed us that confidence is not the absence of uncertainty; it's the presence of method.

You taught us to treat the unexpected not as a verdict, but as information.

And you took care of the person at the center of it—the junior developer—so they could learn and try again.

There are careers quietly hinged on that kind of leadership.

There are people in this room who will do for others what you did for them.

There is, perhaps, one more thing to say about departure.

So much of modern work teaches us to be always on, to equate momentum with

meaning.

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Priya has reminded us, again and again, that rests are part of the music.

As she steps into this next movement, I can picture it clearly: mornings in a quiet garden, hands in the soil, growth you can't rush; afternoons at a piano, returning to a passage not to perfect it but to inhabit it; weekends spent wandering a neighborhood in search of something wonderful to eat, because discovery is still the point.

And threaded through all of it, the mentoring will continue, because for Priya, building people is not a job; it's a way of being.

On behalf of everyone here—engineers, designers, product managers, sales, support, finance, and all the people whose work never makes a slide but always makes a difference—thank you, PP.

Thank you for 22 years of building like the future will read it.

Thank you for the Phoenix rebuild that reduced latency by 70% and bought us time to think.

Thank you for becoming Director of Engineering and making that role about developing leaders, not collecting reports.

Thank you for the scholarship in 2016 that turned intention into opportunity.

Thank you for stepping into the CTO role in 2020 and guiding us toward a cloud-native architecture and a sane, principled AI roadmap.

Thank you for the courage onstage, the calm in the crunch, and the way you kept the door open behind you.

And thank you for reminding us that the real artifacts of a career aren't just the systems that scale.

They are the people who do.

PP, may your days ahead be filled with music, quiet gardens, and the freedom to build without deadlines.

May you have just enough structure to keep practicing, and just enough surprise to keep discovering.

May the tomatoes be abundant, the Chopin forgiving, and the new restaurants always just two blocks over.

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We are going to miss you.

But more than that, we are going to continue with you—because what you've built is woven into how we work and who we are.

That is the highest form of departure I can think of: to leave, and have the work keep speaking.

Please join me in celebrating Priya Patel—our colleague, our CTO, our PP—with gratitude for all she has given us, and with joy for all that awaits her.

Priya, thank you for building both our systems and our people.

Congratulations on your retirement.

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