

Silicon Valley Style



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Melissa Jones never has to work again. She took a big risk out of college joining a high tech start-up in the Silicon Valley, where her measly paychecks came with hundreds of promising stock options. When the software company was acquired last year, her options soared and Melissa became a millionaire at 25.

"A \$40 millionaire," she says laughing. "Is that how you say it?"

So why do we find her this week driving her old college Honda Prelude, living in a shabbily furnished overpriced apartment, eating In and Out burgers and working 16 hours a day building her own new company?

"I'm having too much fun to stop," she says, holding a cell phone to one ear and checking her pager. She pulls into the fast lane, the dot.com billboards flashing past in a blur. "We're young, we're smart and we're actually changing the world. That's certainly a lot more exciting than money."

Welcome to the Silicon Valley, a land where young, intense and insanely brash entrepreneurs are fueling the international economy, pushing technology to new limits and tucking their personal millions away to deal with when they're not so busy.

And yet for all their high tech savvy, Silicon Valley leaders have some serious knowledge gaps.

Take style. It's not unusual to find CEOs – cutting-edge business leaders renowned for their high tech savvy – showing up at important meetings

wearing striped pants, checked shirts and worn out jogging sneakers.

It's also not unusual for Silicon Valley's stock-wealthy workers to lose touch with their personal financial reality.

Take Steve Pinson. He's a technical engineer at a Silicon Valley start-up company who does all his banking online. His options, when he vests, will be worth millions. But he walked eight blocks to a different bank during a recent family reunion in Virginia to avoid a \$2.50 ATM fee.

Social norms are also a bit different. "Flirting" is often a series of cute, or not so cute, e-mails rushing back and forth between workers too busy to actually stop and chat. And when they do talk, some software developers and engineers have spent so many hours communicating only with machines that they seem to lose their ability to banter.

Typical Silicon Valley pick up line? "What do you code?" Typical sexy answer? "Java and cXML, how 'bout you?"

Sven Jamison arrived in the Silicon Valley last fall to join a burgeoning networking corporation. He says he often looks at those around him and wonders if they realize that paging their pastor for advice, considering their colleagues as their family and buying everything – even their toilet paper – through the Internet is "a pretty warped way to live?"

Yep. We realize it. And we wouldn't have it any other way. 