and their staff members’ actual health. To date, more than 100,000 people from 35 companies have completed the 12-week program (clients pay $12 per participating employee). Keas has begun enrolling some companies for a second 12-week stint; Bosworth and colleagues are hard at work devising ways to keep the experience fun and novel for repeat visitors.

The product is constantly changing—Keas releases updates two or three times a day—and relies heavily on user feedback, letting the crowd decide which features stay and which go. One change is that the program now limits users to setting three goals; habit creation is sufficiently difficult that when there are too many things to focus on, none of them takes.

After noticing that there was no difference in participation between companies that offered cash prizes to the winning team and those that didn’t, Bosworth stopped recommending that companies pony up. “To be honest,” he says, “Keas is nothing but a form approach to education,” according to Stanley Bosworth’s obituary.

Before Bosworth turned his attention to solving problems of health, he spent three decades solving problems of technology. His previous work experience includes leading the design of the Microsoft Access database management system; co-leading a team to redesign the Internet Explorer browser; and overseeing the rollout of Google’s Web-based spreadsheet, document, calendar, and photo-sharing programs. But he is best known as one of the pioneers of XML, a set of rules for how information is shared between computers (and the basis for frameworks such as RSS, as well as common software such as Microsoft Office).

During what he calls a “classic midlife crisis,” Bosworth realized he didn’t want technological innovation to be his only legacy apart from his children. (Son Alex, 23, has a start-up building smartphone apps in Beijing; daughter Allison, 23, is finishing premedical courses at Washington University; and Zeke, his son with his second wife, is one and a half.)

In 2006, while still at Google, he sought permission to pursue a project of his own design. The result was Google Health, an online health information repository much like his original vision for Keas. But he says the product was not a high priority for the company and he had trouble getting resources allocated, so he left to try it on his own. (Google officially deactivated the service on January 1, citing a low usage rate.)

One gets the sense that Bosworth is almost happier with failures than successes, for the lessons they provide and the problems to solve. Describing his first start-up, a company he founded with friends in 1982 to help people and companies manage data (a precursor to database software), he says it failed because it didn’t include a way for users to customize and add functions that weren’t part of the standard software. “It was a fatal flaw,” he notes, “and very interesting.”

At Harvard, he studied history. He sees continuity between his interests then and now: “History teaches you to take data and look for patterns. That’s very much what I do in my job.” But in some ways, his college years were a time apart. Bosworth grew up in New York City, but spent summers in Vermont, and fondly remembers how he and a sister close to his age spent their time reading voraciously and “running riot” in the woods.

At school, he was no less free. He attended Saint Ann’s School in Brooklyn, where his father, Stanley, was the inaugural headmaster. Under his leadership, Saint Ann’s became an elite school known for its “free-form approach to education,” according to Stanley Bosworth’s New York Times obituary.

“The school didn’t push you,” Adam Bosworth recalls. “You moved at the pace you wanted to move based on the courses that interested you. That worked well for me.”

Harvard, on the other hand, “was very much about telling people what to do.” He feels he got in “by accident”: “I’m very good at test-taking so I appeared smarter than I was.” He is dyslexic and says he doesn’t deal well with theoretical constructs: “I have to form pictures in my head and work backwards.” Surrounded by people with methodical, traditional study skills, this non-traditional learner found the culture stifling.

He found relief in spending the summers programming (projects included rewriting the code that powered off-track betting ticket-printing terminals). He says he likes building things; he once aspired to become an architect, but realized the mathematics involved wouldn’t come easily for him. Programming did—and still does. A new Keas “console” screen that allows human-resources representatives at client companies to track the employees’ progress was programmed by Bosworth himself.

He still wishes for change on the doctors- and hospitals side of medicine, so that providers, insurers, drug companies, and testing labs could share information freely if a patient authorized it. But he no longer believes that he is in a position to drive that transformation. Because of the way payments to providers are structured, “There is absolutely zero financial incentive” for making these changes, even if they would increase efficiency and patient satisfaction. “For most of healthcare,” he says, “it’s as if the Internet never existed.”