

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing this letter as a way to introduce myself and to provide context about my background for my application for the Microsoft LEAP program. My hope is that this letter will help to convey a bit about some of the decisions that I have made in the past that have brought me to where I am today, as well as illustrate the resilience and determination that I've learned throughout the years.

When I was 20 years old I dropped out of college to launch a bitcoin hedge fund. Back then I was very ambitious, but also very reckless. I was impatient and wanted to leave my mark on the world as fast as I could. The fund ended up growing very quickly, over the course of a year and a half raising over 1000 BTC. I wrongly thought that I would be capable of managing this venture without any experience all by myself. I mismanaged my risk and when the market dropped significantly I tried to hide some of these losses I encountered from my investors. In doing this I committed commodities fraud which I was eventually convicted of. I served 22 months in custody of the BOP, half in federal prison and half in house arrest.

The time I spent in prison gave me a spark that lit in me a desire to come out of this bleak experience a better person. In prison, I found solace and eventually joy in educating myself and expanding my horizons through learning new things. Since being released I have continued to pursue educational opportunities. I first completed the Justice Through Code software engineering intensive at Columbia University. After that I applied and was accepted to a cohort of six justice fellows that can take undergraduate classes on the Columbia University campus in the fall 2024 semester as a pathway to eventually completing my undergraduate degree.

Another thing that has transformed the way that I see the world is the importance of community. When I was younger I thought that I didn't need anyone else's help and that I could do everything by myself. When I was incarcerated I was thrust into a community that was extremely foreign to me. After a little while I eventually found solace in the community of other people that I was imprisoned with. Many of the people I was incarcerated with were out of touch with modern technology, so I started tutoring them in digital literacy skills. I also assisted many people with their GED coursework. Giving back to this community gave me great satisfaction. As I continue along my journey I plan to put myself in a position where I can give back and help others that are somewhere along the path that I was on. What this experience has given me is an opportunity to reset my life and redefine what's important for me. I want to spend the rest of my career creating value for people around me and giving back to my family and community that has supported me through this lived experience.

This experience has given me a strong sense of resilience and adaptability, which I now use in my approach to both work and learning new things. I welcome new technical challenges as I've developed a confidence in my ability to overcome any obstacle that I'm presented with. As modern technology is shifting so rapidly I believe that this newfound growth mindset gives me a strong competitive edge. I'm eager to bring this mindset to Microsoft, where I believe it will enable me to contribute meaningfully to the challenging work that is being done there.

Since my release I've been looking for opportunities to work on interesting projects with people that are smarter than me that I can learn from. I believe that the Microsoft LEAP program will offer many opportunities for this. I am also extremely excited about the mentorship opportunities available in the Leap apprenticeship to assist me in continuing along my current path of personal and professional growth. My unique past experiences, both positive and negative, have given me an original perspective in which I find that I approach problems differently than many of my peers. I am excited about the prospect of applying this multidisciplinary mindset to the interesting and important problems that Microsoft is working on.

I understand that my criminal record may raise concerns, but I hope that you can see beyond my past mistakes and give me the opportunity to prove myself. Thank you for your time and consideration.

If there are any remaining questions about my past I am more than happy to provide more explanation. You can reach me at j.spence@columbia.edu.

Sincerely,
Jeremy Spence