

Getting the Soul Back

To: Xbox Leadership

In 1994, J Allard wrote a memo that changed what Microsoft was. Not because he saw the internet coming — everybody saw it coming. Because he named the thing Microsoft was getting wrong about it. I'm writing in that tradition because I think we're getting something wrong about next-gen, and I think I know how to fix it.

Xbox has lost its soul. Not its market share — those numbers can recover. It's lost its *identity* and with it its heart-share. Ask a gamer what PlayStation stands for and they'll tell you: premium, exclusive, polished. Ask what Nintendo stands for: joy, family, first party. Ask what Xbox stands for and you'll get: Game Pass. Maybe Halo — the Halo that was. That's not a brand. That's a subscription service wearing a brand's clothes.

The next generation isn't just new hardware. It's a chance to answer the question: *what does it feel like to be an Xbox player?* And the answer has to be felt in your hands, on every screen, and in the relationship between Xbox and its community. That's the job. Here's how I'd approach it.

I. Drip Premium From Every Surface

The community doesn't want another controller SKU in a new colorway. They want haptic triggers. They want the resistance when they draw a bowstring in an RPG. They want the granular road-feel in Forza that DualSense owners have been lording over them for three years. The rumors and leaks suggest this is coming — good. But it can't just match PlayStation. It has to be the statement piece: *we listened, and we went further.*

The same applies to the headset, the handheld ergonomics, the dock. Every physical touchpoint has to say: this was designed by people who play games, for people who play games. Not by a Windows accessories team that also makes mice. Premium doesn't mean expensive. It means *considered*. It means when a hardcore player picks up the device, they feel something they don't feel anywhere else. That's what creates evangelists. That's what creates the Reddit threads and the YouTube teardowns and the word-of-mouth that no marketing budget can buy. Win the hands of the hardcore and the rest of the market follows.

And here's how we do it: we build in the open. Send me to the biggest critics. Let me sit with the fanboys and the haters over pizza, beers, and Halo. Less polish, more humility. The next

generation of Xbox community engagement isn't a polished PR stream — it's a conversation. It's relationship. Think Major Nelson energy, but for hardware and platform. Let me take that energy back into building what's next.

II. Xbox Everywhere — For Real This Time

Phil has said local offline play on a handheld is "really important." He's right. And the vision of play everywhere — console, handheld, smart TV, phone, cloud — is the right vision. But right now it's a pitch deck, not a product experience.

My daughter plays on our smart TV. I play on my G Cloud. We both play on the console. Household sharing is finally coming — good. But it's one step inside a house that's still half-built across devices and users.

Making Xbox Everywhere real means: your library, your saves, your friends, your family's permissions and achievements — all of it moves with you, instantly, including offline. The handheld has to work on an airplane. It has to work in the car. The handoff from TV to handheld should feel like AirPods switching between your Mac and your iPhone. Seamless, invisible, no thought required; an actual hand-off, not quit here and start back up over there. And when you dock the handheld or switch to the big screen, it should feel like the same Xbox — not a different app on a different OS that happens to have the same logo.

The Xbox full screen Windows overlay experience has to be genuinely great. Not "pretty good for Windows." Controller navigation can't break when you exit the shell. It's estimated that SteamOS gets 15-18 minutes more battery life and better frame rates on the same hardware because it's an OS built for one job. We can't change Windows overnight, but we can build the experience layer so thick and so polished that what's underneath stops mattering — there if you need, and controller optimized, but most users won't need to.

III. Win the Creators, Win the Culture

Steam is the default home for indie developers. We don't outspend that. We out-invest it. ID@Xbox should be running guerrilla ops at universities, game jams, and studios that haven't shipped their first commercial title yet. Find the next *Hollow Knight*, the next *Hades*, the next *Celeste* — before Sony does, before Steam exclusivity deals lock them in.

And here's the provocation for Matt Booty: *what is the game that ships with every Xbox device?* Not a pack-in nobody plays. A showcase. Sony understood that *Astro Bot* bundled with every PS5 isn't a freebie — it's the first shared memory between a player and their

hardware. It became a beloved mascot and then its for-pay version swept Game of the Year 2024 and it sells consoles. Xbox had this instinct at CES 2001 with Malice — the ambition was right even if the execution wasn't. We need that energy back, except now it needs to work across every device in the ecosystem: console, handheld, cloud. One game that delights an eight-year-old and impresses a thirty-five-year-old. One game that says *this is what Xbox feels like*. A new distinctly our own mascot. It's the flywheel into the entire ecosystem: time-to-fun, software/hardware experience showcase, subscription lead-gen.

IV. My Track Record — And How I See This Role

I'm a fanboy, and this should be led by one. I've already been in the building. I led the Xbox Family experience and shipped results that prove I know how to move product inside this org: 21% MAU growth on the Family app, 266% increase in child account completions. I redesigned the sign-up experience for Minecraft and the operating model for a feature area that touches hardware, Core OS, content policy, and marketing — the exact stakeholder web this role sits in the middle of. I shaped the parent-approved subscription architecture and fought to get it prioritized. I know what it means to drive execution across a cross-company virtual team with no formal authority and high-visibility executive updates.

Then I went to k-ID and proved I could do it again from zero, at startup speed. In six months I rewired the product point of view, redirected our flows, and shipped the platform that won TIME Best Invention of 2025 and Fast Company's Next Big Thing in Tech. We scaled to 15 million players and 6.3 million verified users. We launched across Snap, Discord, Twitch, Hasbro, Konami, and Supercell. Meta adopted our AgeKeys system. I run a nimble product team, a research team, and a design team across a platform that coordinates with major game publishers and global regulatory bodies simultaneously.

Here's how I see my job in this role: I'm the person who sits at the intersection of hardware, OS, experience, content, business, and players — and makes sure the "Next Generation" isn't ten parallel workstreams that occasionally sync up, but one coherent product vision that ships. I know the cadence. I know key stakeholders. I understand the politics between hardware and services and broader Microsoft. I know how to translate between engineering timelines and executive ambition. I know how to run the weekly cross-team meeting that actually unblocks decisions instead of generating more slide decks. And I know how to keep a room of senior leaders aligned on what matters — because I've done it at Xbox and I've done it at a startup where misalignment means you die.

I'm not applying for a job. I'm coming home with a plan to get the soul back.

From my console to yours, **Mike Mongeau**