

Oral History of Kevin Espirito

Interviewed by **Becky Monk** for the Microsoft Alumni Network

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Preface

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Kevin Espirito as conducted by Becky Monk on August 22, 2024, at Microsoft Studios in Redmond, Washington. This interview is part of the Microsoft Alumni Network's Microsoft Alumni Voices initiative. The goal of this project is to record the institutional history of Microsoft through the recollections of its former employees, so that the information may inform and inspire future generations.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word captured through video rather than written prose. The content reflects the recollections of the interviewee. The following transcript was edited by the Microsoft Alumni Network, which holds the copyright to this work.

Interview

Becky Monk: Alright, Kevin, we're going to start with the hardest part. You're going to tell me your name, the years you worked at Microsoft and what you did there. Just a brief summary of what you did there.

Kevin Espirito: My name is Kevin Espirito. I worked at Microsoft from 1999 to 2015 and I started in OEM, went into the partner group it, and then finished out my career at Microsoft within Legal and Corporate Affairs.

Becky Monk: Fantastic. And I know we'll get back to all of that, but I do want to go back to your beginning. So where were you born and where did you grow up?

- Kevin Espirito: I was born in Seattle and grew up in Spokane, Washington.
- Becky Monk: What was childhood like for you?
- Kevin Espirito: Oh, childhood was, I dunno, I was always happy. I didn't realize that we were quite poor and moved around a lot. I think by the time I was 13 we were in 13 different homes, remember that was kind of an easy thing to remember, but my mom made it fun. So every time we moved it was exploring a new house, exploring the neighborhood. But yeah, I look back on it now and think, "Wow, okay. That was not normal."
- Becky Monk: Okay. So you were growing up, you were growing up in Spokane, you'd been in numerous homes. Where'd you go to school?
- Kevin Espirito: We went to school in Trinity, which was a private Catholic school. My mom worked in the office, so we got our tuition paid and then on one of our moves I moved to a public school, Brown Elementary in sixth grade. Went to Glover Junior High and Shale Park High School to round it out.
- Becky Monk: So when you were in high school, did you know what you wanted to be when you grew up?
- Kevin Espirito: Absolutely. I wanted to be a teacher.
- Becky Monk: You wanted to be a teacher?
- Kevin Espirito: Yes, for sure.
- Becky Monk: Why?
- Kevin Espirito: No idea. I just thought I wanted to be an influence, influence others. I just love the thought of being with elementary school kids and being able to teach and yeah...
- Becky Monk: Okay. So that begs the question, did you ever become a teacher?

Kevin Espirito: No, I did work in an elementary school and worked in a third-fourth grade split class and absolutely loved it and it was a lot of fun. At the time, I was also coaching hockey and was a doorman for a hotel in downtown Seattle, and I realized that I was making more as a doorman at a hotel with tips than in the classroom and becoming a teacher wasn't going to necessarily pay the bills. And I came to the conclusion that I could still have influence with youth by coaching hockey. It didn't need it to be a career.

Becky Monk: So that big discovery that being able to pay the bills was a good thing. Yeah. So did you stay as a doorman at the hotel for a while?

Kevin Espirito: I did. Yeah. So I was doorman at two different hotels downtown, and it was during that time that Windows 95 was coming out. It was this exciting time and I knew nothing about computers and so I wanted to learn and I've always been curious. So I had a friend that had built his own computer and helped me to source the parts from mom-and-pop system builders. At the time, these were folks that literally just sold all the computer parts and you put it together yourself. And so yeah, I learned how to build the computer and that was while I used tips to buy all the components because at the time the computers were about \$2,500 to \$3,000 and I was able to buy all the parts, put it together myself for \$800. And so I thought that was pretty good. I'll save some money.

Becky Monk: Nice. Okay, so you're building your own computer, but did you think, hey, I want to go work for the company that's making all the software, or...

Kevin Espirito: Not at all?

Becky Monk: How did that happen?

Kevin Espirito: Yeah, I had no even thought, my curiosity was really around computers, the internet, what did this all mean? And I actually, I had multiple jobs at the time, so I was a doorman, but I also was a valet

parking attendant and worked at The Met downtown, but also that valet company would take on private jobs. And so when Windows 95 launched, I was actually on campus parking cars for a valet parking company.

Becky Monk: So while Jay Leno was talking about Windows 95 on the big stage, you were helping park all everybody's cars were coming to that event?

Kevin Espirito: That's right, yeah. And I remember because years later joining Microsoft, the parking lot that we were parking the cars became one of the buildings that I had an office in. It's funny.

Becky Monk: Which building was that?

Kevin Espirito: 25.

Becky Monk: Okay. So you were parking those cars, but how did you eventually decide you wanted to work at Microsoft and get that job at Microsoft?

Kevin Espirito: So building the computer, I had a friend that introduced me to SQL Server and something just clicked with SQL Server. It felt like this just all made sense, and I learned that, but I didn't have any place to apply it. I didn't really have any practical use for it. And so that same friend was able to give me some work in order to use those to pull reports and whatnot. And it was that, and I think he was first, he was the person that also told me about an opening for, at the time it was a vendor position that was using SQL Server to pull reports and I said, I'll go interview and see what this is about.

Becky Monk: So you really came to Microsoft as a vendor first. Okay. So what was that first role as a vendor? What was it that you were doing? And maybe remember to try to say the question as part of your answer.

Kevin Espirito: Yeah, so when I first started as a vendor, it was within the OEM Group. And it was interesting for me, I've used these new skills with

SQL Server with a couple different areas, but now it felt like I could actually really dive into it and it felt really good. It felt like there was so much more in front of me to learn or one, but also it was, I felt like a little bit of a fish out of water. So I was coming in and I had taught myself these things and I thought, well, everybody around me, I, they're all geniuses and they know everything. And so for me it was a little bit of imposter syndrome, but I love the work. So we were doing the project at the time was looking at the sales database and the marketing databases, many databases and bringing those together and trying to figure out strategically if we ran a campaign, were we actually getting the results. So the only way to do that would be to say, okay, what are our sales coming in after the campaign? And tie that to our marketing databases of when the campaign went out, who it went out to, are we getting at that time in OEM, it was Bootable Operating Systems (BOS), and they were three packs to system builders. So went into the system builder group, which was the same folks that I bought all of the components from. So I thought it was fun and interesting.

Becky Monk: Little bit full circle.

Kevin Espirito: Yeah, a little bit.

Becky Monk: Alright, so you're there, you're working as a vendor and I guess I'm curious, you said SQL Server, it sort of really clicked, it made, why was that click, that aha moment for you?

Kevin Espirito: When I was learning it or using it?

Becky Monk: What really got you excited about computers?

Kevin Espirito: It was all new. So, for me growing up, we didn't have computers, we had word processors. I mean, we all had typewriting, typewriters and typing class, and so this was just all brand new. And to be able to connect up your phone line and be able to connect into the world, that's just amazing. And then to think that you can type in

code or just lines of commands and for it to retrieve what you're looking for in an instant, well, maybe not an instant, but that just blew my mind. It was incredible to me. And this was probably the lowest of the things going on at the time, but for me it was all brand new and exciting and I just couldn't get enough. I just wanted to soak it all up. Yeah.

Becky Monk: Alright. So you're at the company as a vendor. How did you get to be full-time?

Kevin Espirito: So at that time, there was a lawsuit in 2000 and they did a lot of conversions. And so I felt very lucky that I was converted into, I still had to apply and go through the interviewing process and there were certain roles that were converted and many that weren't. So I felt very lucky, but it was during that time, May of 2000 is when I came on full time.

Becky Monk: Fantastic. And what was that role

Kevin Espirito: Title? I don't know.

Becky Monk: What was the job you did?

Kevin Espirito: Let's see. So it was database report writer I was a vendor. And then when I came on, oh, maybe an analyst or something, but the job was continuing a lot of what I was doing, but then some of my role was on a project to create software to automate what we were doing. So instead of us writing the code, we produced produce some software that would basically do it in the background. But what that allowed was instead of us running that code and giving out reports, anyone in OEM could type in their distributor or their process or their program and be able to get that information for themselves. So we had sales folks that could now see how are they actually doing real time? Real time. Started out to be, I think we refreshed once a month and then my role was to bring that refresh period down and we got it to once a week and then twice a week

and just kept getting it more to real time. So the folks out in the field were able to actually see their sales marketing brought together and see how their distributors are doing, how they're doing personally.

Becky Monk: So really helping speed up the way we do business today.

Kevin Espirito: Yeah, yeah. And we thought it was amazing to be able to take all of the data, and bring it together and really synthesize it to say, okay, there's 20 marketing databases. Are they the same people? So it had some software we were using, I think it was called Trillium, that was a de-duping matching software. And my job when I was a vendor was literally the software would do its thing, but it just wasn't sure. So I would go through thousands and thousands of lines to say, look through the data and say, yes, I think that's pretty good, or No, this is way off. And then be able to come back with the different codes to say, these are better than these. But it was all... You know when you play Tetris and you close your eyes and you can see the pieces coming down? That's when I would go to sleep. I would see the spreadsheet moving up as I would go through and look at the data. It was literally tens of thousands of lines to look through to optimize the software to make it better and better and better.

Becky Monk: I mean, it's incredible to think about what we had to do as humans to get to that point, get to the point where we are now where when you say real time, it really means real time.

Kevin Espirito: Yeah.

Becky Monk: Alright, so you were working on these projects. What was next for you?

Kevin Espirito: Well, so I was bottom of the poll, I came in, I was doing the work that had to be done, but it wasn't the big important strategic work for sure. So for me it was all new and exciting and I loved it, but

things were shifting and changing. I would say, what was next for me? I think reorg, I think we got reorged into the partner group, which was interesting because it was a larger group coming out of OEM at the time was very insular. It was very, everyone almost took pride in it being such a small group that brought in such a large amount of money. So it was able to do kind of what it wanted to. We had special trips and different things that we did that felt really, now looking back on it, very special in the company at the time. And it was also probably after the Shrimp and Weenies Email.

Becky Monk: For everybody who doesn't know the Shrimp and Weenies Email?

Kevin Espirito: Well I don't believe this was before me, but it was a memo that went out from Bill that said, Hey, as the company's growing, we have to really look at what we're spending and some of the excessive spending needed to come in line. So as you're looking at the spending, look at are you ordering the shrimp or the weenies? And now I'm sure there are people, this is what I got coming in at the lowest level hearing about it. I'm sure there's some of our other alumni that probably helped draft it. That would be good.

Becky Monk: Good. Alright, so you were in OEM and you were on the Shrimp side of things?

Kevin Espirito: Very much. Yeah.

Becky Monk: How long did you stay in the OEM group?

Kevin Espirito: I think it while I was a vendor, and then at least another year or two. I remember. I mean the OEM team at that time may have been 300 globally. It was a very, very small team. And Joachim Kempin was lead of that. And there was a lot of, we heard a lot that Bill and Steve wanted to meet with Joachim and everyone knew it was kind of coming to an end on some of the things that we were doing instead of MGX or MGS or the global summits that were happening. OEM would do its own thing. And I remember going to Las Vegas

one time and we would have our business meetings, but we would also then get to choose, okay, are we going skydiving? Are we going golfing? Or we'd pick your thing and it would be a charter that would take us down. And those days were coming to a close. So going into partner, I think it was a couple years in OEM and then, yeah, it was a bigger shift.

Becky Monk: Okay. So for you, your bigger shift out of OEM was to where?

Kevin Espirito: So all of the System Builder group that I was a part of moved into the Partner Group. So we were part of a larger organization now, more tied into the company. We went to the actual MGX at the time, all we got reincorporated into the rest of the company.

Becky Monk: And now as part of the Partner Group, what were you doing? Were you working on, what was that role?

Kevin Espirito: So what we worked on is the same tool that we were working on that was bringing the marketing and sales databases together. Now the software's gotten better, we're able to really look at those things and with some certainty be able to say, yes, this is the same system builder or the same partner across all those databases. So now we're getting better data and we're able to then look at that data and make other people were making decisions based on it. So for me, we kept developing that tool and that tool then started to be used as the folks in the field. That was how they were compensated, so for their sales. So everybody was very interested in that data. And my role was to go out and train. So I would go out and train folks on what the backend does, how it works, how to pull those reports. And we pulled a lot of reports in the beginning, but we kept creating and evolving this so that people could pull their own real time. They knew when it was up to date and they knew how to use it, and they could see are they meeting their goals, are they not? Are they going to be compensated to the next level? That kind of thing. So very fun. My role shifted into more of a training role on the system that we were building.

Becky Monk: So that education, that desire to be a teacher came back a little bit?

Kevin Espirito: It did, yeah. I remember thinking that when I took a training for public speaking, my very first training, and we had a big video camera at the back of the room, and the instructor would video you and then everybody watches it, and they had, so if you stepped side to side, it was the following leave. He would put it on fast forward and be able to kind of show, okay, these are some of the things that you may not notice, but the audience knows. So I remember going through that and being terrified, learning that public speaking is the second fear behind death apparently. So that's fun to know when you're going into a new role that is all about public speaking. But yeah, I made that switch and ended up really loving it, and that became a role within the partner group and then going into IT where I got to travel the world and got to see Europe and got to see Asia and South America all in training for the different tools that we had within the IT group.

Becky Monk: Great. So take me to one of your favorite spots that you went for training, and tell me, walk me through what that looked like for the people who were in the class.

Kevin Espirito: There's so many favorite spots. I would say, well, one of the most memorable, I was on a plane about four hours outside of Bangkok when 9/11 happened. So flying into Thailand and literally walking through the airport and it being completely relaxed at that time, the security, everything was pretty lax.

And my driver trying to say in broken English, plain compromised crash, I thought he was talking about his favorite movie. And so just didn't get it until I got to the hotel and the front desk was able to explain, go turn on the news. So, I would say that was a very memorable experience. And we were in that Bangkok hotel with all the sales folks, and we had bomb threats and all kinds of things that were happening that week. So that wasn't a typical one, but it was a very memorable experience for sure. And that was about the time

that I was doing quite a bit of travel. So I'd say that was memorable. Another time, I don't know why it became I was traveling enough where I would go and try and go get it done, get back. And so I did five countries in one week, and so this was all in Asia, so I would fly in the morning, go straight to the hotel and drop off a bag, go train, and then it was usually two to four hours, usually right in there. And then back to the hotel, shower, go up to the airport, catch a flight, and just repeated it. And so it took seven days, five countries, got it done, got back.

So I don't know, I would love to ask some of them. How were those trainings? I thought they were fantastic. Yeah, so definitely some memories. I think the trainings were, at the time it was a new tool, a new way of looking at the data that we had. So everyone was very interested in it. So I think the trainings went well. Yeah, it wasn't like everyone was bored and they had to be there

Becky Monk: Just because people won't necessarily know what it was like. Talk me through, I mean, was it a classroom setting? Was it, how many people were there? Were they all Microsoft people? Were they partners? Who was in the room and who were you teaching and what were you teaching?

Kevin Espirito: Yeah, the majority were, it depends on maybe, oh yeah. So when I would go out on trainings, every training was a little bit different. So some would be where it would be all of the sales folks would gather in Singapore from the 13 different countries that were in APAC at the time. And so it could be a few hundred or more folks. And on those, we wouldn't do a full four-hour training. It would be more like, here's 30 minutes, let me go through and just give a high level what this is and we'll come back and get into detail later. And then sometimes it would just be the sales folks that were from each of the country, we would get in and maybe there'd be 30 people or 30 to 50 people, and we would go through in depth and work with them on making sure they understood the different tools.

Becky Monk: What was new about these tools that you needed to educate them.

Kevin Espirito: In the beginning days, it was really about bringing in, and this is OEM, bringing the sales and marketing together. So we had the data, but being able to bring them together, we were now able to say, are these marketing? Is it working? If we go out with a campaign, did it work? Do we see a spike in Bootable Operating Systems sales to these system builders? So that was kind of the beginning as a new way of looking at data to make decisions that moved into more, because it was part of how we were compensated. They were very interested in how it worked and making sure that the data was right. So that was kind of moving into there. And then we got into additional tools within IT at the time that we're just helping run the business. And those were, I guess I got to represent corporate in bringing out, here's the direction that it is going, here are some of the things that we're doing, and here's how to get connected in with it.

Becky Monk: Got it. Okay. How many years were you doing the training?

Kevin Espirito: It started pretty early, so maybe 2001, 2000, end of 2000, 2001 started training, and then I was doing training up until 2009 when I moved over to LCA. Okay.

Becky Monk: And so your move to LCA, you've been in training, you've been in actually working with data and working with product. What made you decide you wanted to go work in LCA? And specifically if I'm not wrong, it wasn't just you weren't working with the legal team so much as working with community affairs,

Kevin Espirito: Community Affairs, Philanthropy.

Becky Monk: So what made you make that change?

Kevin Espirito: So that brings us way back before I actually made the change. So when I first became a full-time employee, I had already been

working with the company for a year, I'd been working with my manager. I had lots of ideas and I thought, well, now I'm coming on as a full-time employee. I get to share these great thoughts, this genius that I thought I had. Because for me, in my mind at the time, I was 25 and I thought this was some of the most important stuff that the company was working on, not really, but in our little group, it was pretty important. So I came with three to four pages of all of my thoughts that I thought strategically we could shift over here or change the tools or bring the timing down. So I came to my manager on our first one-on-one, and I start going into all of these things that I just thought we're beautiful and perfect for what we were doing.

And he cut me off after maybe the first sentence, and he knew where I was going and that I was excited and had all these ideas, but he said, you know what? There's going to be plenty of time for that right now I want to talk to you about the company and what the company does in the community and why it's so important. And what was, now looking back on it so odd at the time was this was May, this wasn't near the campaign, the campaign's in October. So I don't know if he just had gotten something about VPALS [Vice President Appointed Lead] or something about the campaign or why that was maybe, I mean for him, how it was portrayed to me was this is one of the most important things that I need to share now that you're a full-time employee. And right off the bat, and that had a huge impact on me, and I thought, if this is important and that important, then I need to pay attention to it.

And so when it came time, who wants to help out with the campaign, I raised my hand and said, I'll help. And that first year I had a friend that was in Tacoma that was working with foster youth and she was a case manager, and I was able to connect their needs into our OEM campaign, and we were able to buy all the gifts that they had on their wishlist, and then they said I could go down and deliver. And so just that first year going from that first meeting

where I was a little bit taken aback, I've got lots of good stuff to share, you're going to ask me to give money away before I even get my first paycheck as a full-time employee. That's weird. But looking at it now, it was a moment that absolutely changed the trajectory of my Microsoft career and my life. So my first meeting with my manager to then connecting in with my friend and the community to then raising my hand every year, becoming a VPAL, wherever I was in the organization, growing that to helping out with it, and then applying to be a loaned executive, moving and being loaned to the community affairs group for three months and having that experience, then applying and moving over to run the program.

Becky Monk: Let me back up and as we're talking about it, because a lot of people won't know what the campaign is or a VPAL. So let's talk a little bit about the Giving Campaign. When you started, can you, during that first conversation with your manager, what was the Giving Campaign like at Microsoft at that time? Do you remember?

Kevin Espirito: So the first year, I think I was pretty, I didn't really know what was going on with the rest of the company. I was in OEM, this is what I did. So that first year, it was just a lot of little things that were happening in our group, and that was my experience. So my experience was we had a lot of emails going around and it came in and heard from one of the loaned executives. So these are people that are loaned to work for the Giving Campaign for a few months. They came in and spoke to our group about the importance of giving back and being able to give right from your paycheck. And so I remember that, but really it was the program that my connection with my friend working with our VPAL, which is VP Appointed Lead. So, each group has an appointed lead to work on the Microsoft Giving Campaign. So making that connection and then helping them to get the word out and make sure that we were doing activities and just volunteering and helping with the activities that year, and then being able to go and take those presents down. So that was kind of my first interaction. I'm sure the company was

doing the same thing in every group, but my visibility to it was very small. It was just the OEM side at that point.

Becky Monk: So you were a VPAL?

Kevin Espirito: No.

Becky Monk: You were never a VPAL?

Kevin Espirito: Oh yes, yes, yes. But that first year, just beginning, no, no.

Becky Monk: Got it. Okay. So that first year you worked getting your nonprofit integrated into the program, so you guys were able to focus on that and raise funds and raise gifts, get gifts for that. How did you become a VPAL then?

Kevin Espirito: I don't remember the first time. Do you remember what group

Becky Monk: Do you remember what group you were in?

Kevin Espirito: It would be the Partner Group, yeah. Yeah, so I think I first became a V PAL in the partner group, but from that first time becoming an FTE, or a full-time employee, I always raised my hand to help. So whoever was chosen as the VPAL, or VP Appointed Lead, they have a group of people that help them. And I was always a part of that in the beginning. I believe it was either under Rosa Garcia, Allison Watson, either the two VPs that I had helped out for a number of years and always been excited about it. So I don't remember which one, but I was asked if I wanted to do it, and reluctantly at the time said yes.

Becky Monk: Okay, so why reluctantly?

Kevin Espirito: Reluctantly, because it's a lot of work and it's a lot of, I could see that it was a lot of work because just helping out and being on the team, I could see that it was a lot of extra. And at the time, we were doing a lot. We were out and we had our full-time jobs and then

some, and with traveling and everything else was, I knew it was going to be difficult. So it was a little bit reluctantly, but very much enthusiastically.

Becky Monk: Okay. So what did you get personally out of being a VPAL?

Kevin Espirito: So I think being a VPAL personally, to me, it was that connection to the community. So it was the connection to fulfilling needs, and it was a feeling of I didn't have to do that much extra to make such a big difference. So from that first time, delivering gifts and being able to be there and see the kids and thinking to myself, if we hadn't done that, would these kids have those gifts? Maybe not. And so what did it take on my part to be able to do that? Not very much. And being able to tap into a network of people that wanted to give and wanted to make the difference and wanted to double their impact. That was a big part of the campaign is you can double your impact because everything you give will be matched. For me, there was just some magic in that.

Becky Monk: Yeah, I think we're getting now kind of closer to getting into CELA, or LCA at the time...

Kevin Espirito: Yeah, Community Affairs, then LCA, then CELA, then Microsoft Philanthropies, or Microsoft Philanthropies inside CELA?

Becky Monk: Yes. Philanthropies is inside CELA.

Kevin Espirito: Affairs. Oh yeah, something like that. Think the majority of time I was there, Community and Government affairs, majority of the time it was LCA. So in my head, LCA kind of comes up.

Becky Monk: Okay, you became a VPAL that had a big impact on you personally because you had that connection to the community. How did you become a loaned executive and what is a loaned executive? Who are you loaned to?

Kevin Espirito:

Yes. And that's changed over time. So I would say being a VPAL, so going from helping a VPAL to being a VPAL was exciting, but there was a lot of pressure because now the VP is looking at you to run the campaign for their organization. So that was fun and exciting and a little bit of pressure, but also for me, it solidified even more so that everyone wants to help. They just need to be asked. So again, from my perspective, if I give a little bit more, because being a VPAL, you still have your day job, but if I can do a little bit more, look at the impact that I can have, look at the scale that I personally can have by doing a little bit of work and tapping into this network of philanthropists, these people that want to give back to their community.

So being a VPAL really put gas on that fire a little bit, and then going into being a loaned executive. So being a VPAL for a number of years and then wanting to go into the loan to exec position, a loaned executive. Historically, there were a number of folks that were loaned to United Way. It was a United Way program, and these folks are loaned to United Way help with the United Way campaign and then brought back to the company. And that was historically Microsoft shifted that a little bit in its evolution of the programs and now you're loaned to LCA or CELA to the Community Affairs Group to run the Microsoft campaign and raise all of that money. So in being a VPAL, I was exposed to the loaned executives that had left their job for three months to be a part of Community Affairs and integrate in with that team to manage the strategy or implement the strategy of the Giving Campaign for that year.

And I thought it was amazing. And if I only could, and I asked my manager, I think it was, I think I started discussions early and then each time I switched managers, restart that discussion, but I think it was 2008 or so, and I really wanted to try it. And so in my mind, I let them know what small chances it could ever be that I would be chosen. I went for the interview and ended up getting it. And when I was chosen, I could see my manager was a little bummed. I was

like, what are we going to do? But also excited for me at the same time.

Becky Monk: So when you got the job in LCA in Community Affairs, what was the job?

Kevin Espirito: So when I went through the interview, so I was a Loaned Executive for those three months, went back to my job and at that time after that campaign, the person that was in the role running the campaign for community affairs was moving on. And so I definitely wanted to apply for the role at that time, went through the interviewing process and I received an email from Lisa Brummel that congratulated me on the role and had all the execs on it. And in my mind, I remember it being about 10 minutes later was the email that came from Lisa. That was the first layoffs in company history. So while I was initially elated, this was kind of a blow, it was, holy crap, this was kind of an unheard of thing. We thought this company, maybe it was a little different, maybe it was immune to this and obviously it wasn't. So coming into the role with that, I knew it was going to be extremely difficult to then ask a company that's going through this, ask the employees to give.

Becky Monk: So you were in charge of the Giving Campaign then right after layoffs. And how by now you know how big the Giving Campaign had grown by 2009. What did the campaign look like at that time for the company?

Kevin Espirito: Yeah, so I think part of knowing that we all had to do more with less, that was kind of the thinking at the time of the first layoffs. We took the Giving Campaign and the Matching Gifts program and combined it with the volunteer program. So I came in taking on both volunteer program and the matching gift and giving campaign. The campaign at the time, if I remember correctly, was maybe in the sixties, \$60 million raised, \$68. I have to look. And my thought at the time was, can we at least make the same as we are? But also how are we going to go out? How are we going to ask

employees for money? And at this time it was when we had the first layoffs, we had people coming up and saying, can I give part of my salary to keep these folks on? How can we not do this?

And the decision was made had it already gone through it. So those weren't viable conversations at the time, but that was kind of how the employees were thinking at the time. And so coming into it, we just knew that it was going to be really tough. And I don't remember if it was the first year or the second year, but I thought we have to let employees share their own stories and share the stories of why they give to the community and what the company match means to them and the impact that they personally are making. So we did something called the Story Wall, and we went out and we encouraged everyone to take video and upload it to the story wall on what organization they support, why, and just ten second videos. And then we had a whole wall of little snippets of people's faces and then you could click on it and find out who they gave to and then had that as part of their auto signature. So as they're sending around their emails, they're able to click in and see what they support. And we did that for the month of October. So I think kind of a trying time and one where we got really creative in making sure that we didn't lose sight of what the campaign was about the Microsoft Giving Campaign in October and the ability that the company has to double that employee's impact in the community.

Becky Monk: Did you stay steady? Did you make gains in terms of the amount given? What was that like that first year?

Kevin Espirito: It was very nerve wracking because, number one, we also were wondering from the executive point of view, this is a lot of money. It could be something that could be cut and it could save a lot of employee jobs. And that conversation was had at the highest levels and they determined that this is part of Microsoft's culture, it's who we are, it's who we will always be, and that it's a Microsoft benefit

as an employee, this matching gift, this volunteer match is a benefit. So knowing that and knowing that we were moving forward, it was a little unsteady, but I think I need to look at the numbers, maybe a half a million more than the year before. And we had always jumped up by millions because the company was growing, we had more employees each year. It almost guaranteed we were going to make a little bit more. But every year that was there, even though that was the hardest, we still made gains even through that time. And by the time I left in 2015, we were at a little over \$115 million raised.

Becky Monk: What were some of the other programs? I know we talked a little bit about the volunteer matching, so there was Dollars for Doers. Were you still calling it Dollars for Doers at that time?

Kevin Espirito: Volunteer Match. Volunteer Match, yeah.

Becky Monk: And the annual campaign, the Giving Campaign. What were some of the other programs that were under the Community Affairs umbrella at that time?

Kevin Espirito: The other programs under community affairs or the employee engagement, what I have, umbrella?

Becky Monk: Maybe let's start overall and then what you were under your umbrella.

Kevin Espirito: So we had disaster relief. So when there there's a disaster around the world, we would make a special plea and the company would give, employees could give towards that. It was always natural disasters, not human made. We also had all of our grants programs. So Puget Sound was a large piece of that. And then Washington State and then larger grants. We also had additional programs during that time. We were sending engineers into the classroom to code teach coding. It was...

Becky Monk: Was it Spark? Was it Teals?

Kevin Espirito: Teals. Teals. Okay. Yes. Sorry,

Becky Monk: That'd help you remember which one it was.

Kevin Espirito: So we would be able to, no matter where they were, mean they could do it virtually and be able to help them for a year. These were volunteers, but all of the volunteer matching dollars could go back into the program and help those schools. So yeah, that was a phenomenal program that was part of it coming to mind on the main programs.

Becky Monk: And then under your watch, what were the programs that were under your watch?

Kevin Espirito: Some additional things. It was all, so it was Volunteer and then Matching gifts and the Giving Campaign. And so under my watch, I tried to expand it out and also look and say, we're not just looking at employees, but what about the interns? These are future employees, so we should be looking at how can we support them in what they want to give to. And then also looking at alumni. When you leave the company, how can we still support you and what you're doing in the community? That one's a tough one, and I get it as an alumni.

But yeah, spreading that and making sure that we looked at it holistically from end to end, that was one. And then another area that I really enjoyed was expanding outside of the us. So around the world, people would see what we were doing and say, we want that, we need that. And so helping New Zealand and Australia get a matching program. And then India brought on a fantastic program and there were some things with the government and give back that were going on at the time that made it perfect timing. So I would say the global expansion of some of those programs and being able to then have the global give and go where, and this was

a group out of Microsoft IT that we really expanded on, but it was every time zone for one day during the campaign, it would be kind of passing the torch to the next time zone and they would do activities to raise money. And so we literally, we were bringing it globally and part of our campaign time period, but every time zone, okay, passing the torch to Sweden and then Sweden would start posting about what they're doing and then okay passing the torch. And it was pretty cool. I'd say the global, and I don't know where they are with that now, but that expansion was part of what we were doing.

Becky Monk: I know that that was something that employees wanted for outside of the Puget Sound area, outside of the US, wonder for a long time. But there were challenges to that because of all sorts of things. Can you speak to some of the challenges of just ramping up something outside of the us?

Kevin Espirito: Some of the challenges, the biggest challenges were in the US we have a 501(C)3 designation. That is pretty sound. We can point to what the government determines and we can say, okay, it's a 501(C)3 designation. It's not political, it's not any of these other things in each country around the world. Every country is different. So how do you vet the organizations that we as a company are going to give money to and make sure that it's going in the right hands and it's being used for the right purposes. So I would say that was probably the most difficult one at the time. The other was really, I think the employees all were absolutely wanted to do something. It was more how can we manage it? And the company was interested and gave me leeway to, with Akhtar [Badshah], explore some of those ideas. But yeah, it was difficult. Yeah.

Becky Monk: So, you said, did you start with Australia and New Zealand?

Kevin Espirito: I think they were the first ones to have a matching gift program, if I remember correctly. And then shortly after, India had a pretty big program and we helped them with how our campaign ran and what

they could do and they just took off and did some amazing things if they continued the way that they were going, I'm sure the US is learning from those countries and the creativity that they have in their campaigns.

Becky Monk: Fantastic. What are you most proud of your time in the community fairs program?

Kevin Espirito: I would say the biggest milestone is what am I proud of or biggest milestone or both. I would say the biggest milestone is we hit 30 years of giving at the same month that we hit a billion dollars in giving from the company. And it happened to be in October during the campaign. So I think that milestone was just a lot of fun to be able to have all of that come together. And I remember before that campaign, we weren't even thinking of it being the 30th year. We hadn't even run the numbers to say how much have we raised up until that point? It was, and it was a momentous year for me as well. It was a year. My daughter got married in October, the year I met my wife the year I went to Vietnam for the first time as a citizen diplomat.

So really big year milestone year for the company, 1 billion dollars, 30 years of giving, because it started in 1983. I remember when I kind of realized it, I had to put it in a spreadsheet and then count. Okay. If we started in '83, is it really 30 years in 2012? Yes. Okay, I'm going to use my fingers and toes, I'm going to make sure before I bring this up and just made sure, okay, it's 30 years then started running the numbers. I was doing a lot of history trying to figure out the history of the campaign and see what stories I could pull and and realizing 30 years, \$1 billion biggest milestone. I think my proudest moment, I dunno. I would say all of those things in terms of just working a little extra, knowing that it's going to mean a couple more million dollars in the community in the, that was what was driving me. Looking back now, I think it's the way that I was introduced to philanthropy and introduced to the impact that has

shifted my life. It shifted my career in every year being a VPAL, then a loan exec, and then running the program, but then shifted my life in terms of what my wife and I have decided to do after Microsoft. And so I would say that's my proudest moment is the shifts in myself and the growth in myself while at Microsoft and in these programs.

Becky Monk: Fantastic. Let's talk a little bit about what you and Beth are doing today. When you left the company, you didn't go work for another corporation, you went off to do some pretty amazing things. Let's talk about that.

Kevin Espirito: Sure. Yeah. When I left the company in 2015, my wife and I moved to Vietnam, which was supposed to be a 10-month time. We weren't missionaries, we weren't trying to save the world. We weren't trying to do anything except be and be with people, share the worry with others and be the other in not a, at Microsoft, I was very comfortable. I took The Connector in every day. I worked on the way in and worked on the way out, and I had my dry cleaning done, and it was very comfortable. I also didn't have to look out the window and see the realities of what's happening. Even in Bellevue, the homeless situation, you could choose not to address that. I think what we wanted to do was be in a country as an "other" and share some of that worry and just see what it brought up in us and nothing more.

So we went and of course stars aligned. When you start walking into the fog, more things reveal itself and it can be a little nerve wracking when you want to place everything perfectly and walk a path knowing exactly that your next step is on solid ground. But this was taking a little bit of faith that what will be needed will be provided. And what comes up in US is was meant to, as we started down that path, got connected in with an organization that was asked by the Vietnamese government to start a drowning prevention program. So, we started that, got the program off the

ground, ended up being there for two years and reached over 75,000 kids in the classroom. So maybe back to that teaching piece. And then also that program has expanded to many pools in the province where kids are learning how to swim. And we were able to get all the PE teachers certified at international level so that long after we left the program is thriving. So that was our initial two years after Microsoft and a beautiful time, amazing country.

Becky Monk: What was the name of that organization?

Kevin Espirito: The program was Swim for Life, and it was under an organization called Golden West. And Golden West is an organization that trains the folks that go in and get ordinance from the Vietnam War, they call it the American War, that are still there in the ground that could explode and that still does explode, taking off limbs and costing lives.

Becky Monk: So you were helping, there was a problem. A lot of people were drowning. And so you were coming in and helping again get them teaching people to swim and teaching people how to teach people to swim. And so after two years in Vietnam, you guys came back to the States, what was next?

Kevin Espirito: So while we were in Vietnam at the final months, we went away and decided to take a weekend and just really think about what is coming up, what is next for us? Are we going to go back to our careers? Are we going to reenter or what's next? And my wife was really thinking about what she learned and what we learned about. Communities have much of what they need. They've got the leadership, they have the energy and passion. They know what they need better than anyone else outside of the community. And so why not help communities with opportunity and resources? So how could we be a connector of opportunity and resources for communities to help them and then get out of the way, let them thrive. And so that's when the initial thoughts of We Bloom was Born. We Bloom is the nonprofit that we had eventually started.

And for me, working at Microsoft, seeing a lot of nonprofits and a lot of nonprofits that did similar things, I was a little reluctant to start another. I said, well, how about we do this? We'll go find an organization that does this and then we'll just raise money for them and then we don't have to go through all of the starting an organization, starting and fundraising and going out and doing that. But we couldn't find anyone that did exactly what we wanted to do. So we ended up going and really taking inventory back in Indiana on what the needs of the community were and going into that direction.

Becky Monk: What is it specifically that We Bloom is doing today that you're doing with We Bloom Today?

Kevin Espirito: Yeah, so we bloom right now. Our biggest program is called Recovery Cafe, and this is a national network of cafes for people in recovery. And it's a place based, it's a place people can go to be in community and feel loved, get out of solitude. It's also all pathways. So it's not just 12 step or a NA, those types of things, or it's not just religious based. It's really any pathway that somebody is on where they want to do different. This is a place to go and be in community with other people that want to do different, not bad, not good, anything like that. It's just a place to be and it's a place to be loved as they are coming in. We found it's not just drugs and alcohol and it's a lot of times mental health as well, and people experiencing homelessness, people that are lonely, people that have gone through a divorce, it's really life.

Those hard things in life can really shift perspective and it can also isolate. And that isolation, a lot of things just happen and coming to the Recovery Cafe to feel loved and feel a part of a family and have classes if you choose, or just to get a warm meal and a cup of coffee and play some cards. So that's our main program. We started that in 2019 in Indianapolis as part of a national network, so we didn't want to reinvent the wheel. It was actually started in Seattle.

We knew about Recovery Cafe and the network from our time in Seattle. We started the first one in 2019 and now there are 21 cafes in that we've helped start. So 21 communities in Indiana and the network has grown to over 60 nationwide. So it's been very fun. That's our main program in the US.

We also are really, it took a while to get licensed to operate in Vietnam, but we were able to get that and now we're starting a program for suicide prevention. And so we've taken a program and not only translated it, but really adapted it to the culture. So fully understood. It had folks on the ground that are in this work that fully understood the program and then culturally translated it. So yeah, it's a beautiful program. This fall is the first time that that's going to go out into schools in the city and the province that we lived in. And then we'll learn a lot from that to see where we can take it.

Becky Monk: Fantastic. That's wonderful what you guys are doing. I want to think back to your time again at Microsoft and thinking about now that from that time that you sat down in that first one-on-one from your first year as an FTE, and they said this is really important to the company. How do you now looking back, think about Microsoft's legacy in terms of the Philanthropies programs and sort of in context now, how do you think about that?

Kevin Espirito: Different? So the way that I think about Microsoft Philanthropies, the programs, it's very unique. I can see it as a very unique program that really is part of the culture. And it was from the beginning. The first giving campaign was 1983, and there were 17,000 employees, no, 200 employees with Oh man, now it's been too long. It \$17,000 raised and it was like two or 300 employees. It was, yes. So I look at it as philanthropies at Microsoft is Microsoft, it's the culture. It is who we are. Microsoft has changed the world and it also continues to change the world in the philanthropies area. When I was in the group, I was able to speak at many conferences and it became a

passion of mine to speak to small and medium businesses and really share what our programs were. But then to say, it doesn't have to be this big, this is where it started, this is just take a first step, look at it as part of who you are, what do you believe in? Yeah, so to me, these programs are Microsoft. Microsoft are these programs? Yes, Microsoft has changed the world in technology, but the ripple effects for the philanthropy have also changed the world, and I don't know which ones more

Becky Monk: Love that. I love that. How did Microsoft innovate in the philanthropy world?

Kevin Espirito: Well, Microsoft innovated in philanthropy by really many things in my area. In the employee engagement, it was inspiring to other companies that you could give to whatever the employee wanted. So to have employee choice over where the company is going to match, that was innovative. It was also innovative to match and then to increase that match up to \$15,000 a year per employee. That was something that always raised eyebrows. Microsoft wasn't the first to do Dollars for Doers, but to come out at \$17 an hour or was it \$12? And then raise up amazing, right. I think then going into not only employees but interns and having programs for alumni as well, I think the holistic nature of the program is part of the innovation. I would say one of the also, and before my time I might've been Jen Walcott was the person before me and I stand on her shoulder. She was amazing. But to have the money not come from a philanthropic pot of money, but to have it incorporated into hr. So when there is a hire, there is a small portion of money that is allocated to the matching gifts and the employee engagement program. So it truly is a benefit, not charity. So shifting that mindset was a huge innovation and one that I was very proud to speak of when I would go out on the different tours.

Becky Monk: When you, did you have any favorite, I know there were a lot of challenges and crazy fun fundraising things because employees got really into how to, very competitive

Kevin Espirito: For sure. Always. Right?

Becky Monk: So can you talk a little bit about some of that competition and what maybe some of your favorite fun ideas were? So people can get a sense of what some of the things employees did to raise money.

Kevin Espirito: Some of my favorite things in the cafe, the activities I would say are the fun run. That was a really just, it kept growing and kept getting more folks that would come in. And the bigger it got, the more fun it was to put on the fun run the poker tournaments, which started out as just a couple here and there became really big to the point that we wanted to make sure we weren't in trouble for having gambling. But I would say the poker, the fun run, the concerts, there would be people with connections in with different bands that they would bring the bands in.

Those stand out to me, but every single year I would be amazed that someone would come up with a creative idea and just bring it. It was all encouraged. So yeah, those stand out to me. There was the cat calendar, so people could submit their pictures of their cat and spend \$25 and they get put in the calendar, the dog calendar. Then it became the horse calendar. Lots of different calendars that came up. Yeah, I think if I sat and thought about it, I would come up with a hundred more. It was just innovative. The photo books, the, yeah, amazing. The creativity and innovation of Microsoft employees to raise money and get others engaged and involved just blew me away every year.

Becky Monk: So Kevin, we are almost out of time, so I just want to see, is there anything else, I know we just sort of skated over some things, but is there anything else you want to make sure that we talk about that you're super, super proud of? Or do you really think if we didn't tell

a story than the history of Microsoft, of Community Affairs and your time, there would be a miss?

Kevin Espirito:

I don't know. I mean, the time of Microsoft was very, it was a weird time. It was a time that was very flat. So all those years were, people were bonded, they weren't making, the stock wasn't going up, people were leaving. It was like, okay, am I going to be here or not? And then it was competitive, but it was right before the hackathon started and things like that. Right before Satya, I would say it did become a little bit, well, nothing that I would want to share, but sure. It was a strange, strange time. It was like I came onto Microsoft in a time that it was Microsoft's amazing, but it was starting to get the DOJ happened right as I came on, and then after that it was okay, well, somewhere in those years it was Microsoft employees are all arrogant and that was probably true for some of them. I never saw it and the folks I worked with and a lot of the stuff that I did was really in the philanthropic area.

Becky Monk:

Yeah. Alright, well I know that that it was kind of a different time, but it still amazes me that even in the harder times, the philanthropies, the employees and the company didn't back off of the Giving Campaigns. They may have been more sedate, but there was still that growth in giving and that's a big thing, right? There was really never a big dip after all these years. If people are looking back on this and is there one thing that you would like them to think about you or the giving campaign or your time there in that role? Is there something you'd like to think about and say, I remember Kevin, I remember this thing. What would you like them to think about?

Kevin Espirito:

I think the creativity, I think I would want people to remember the creativity that went into the campaign year over year. That kept the excitement going and kept the enthusiasm. And I think outside of Microsoft, there were a lot of people that didn't believe in Microsoft anymore. And every year within the giving campaign, the creativity

that was brought to the forefront and the ability to absolutely lead globally in this area just showed who we were in this area. But also more than that, it showed the trust and the willingness to just keep going. Even through some trying times, knowing that we are extremely intelligent, creative, and the stuff we're working on matters. So I think I would want people to remember the creativity and the ability for Microsoft employees to step up and give to the community, fill those needs, fill those gaps, no matter what's happening. Always being a part of something bigger than themselves and thinking of others. Yeah.

Becky Monk: Excellent. Thank you so, so much, Thank you so much, Kevin, for taking the time to speak with us.

Kevin Espirito: Heck yeah. That was fun. Thank you.