
Episode 125: Parker McCurley Talks Applying Blockchain to Practical Problems

Kelly Weaver: Welcome to Crypto Token Talk, a Crypto 101 podcast exploring how blockchain applications, like Bitcoin, Ethereum, and other crypto assets could change the world. Learn from blockchain experts, thought leaders, and founders of some of the most innovative companies and world changing ideas of our time. I'm your host, Kelly Weaver, CEO of Melrose PR, a leading blockchain communications agency. Thanks for joining us today. Today I'm here with Parker, who is the founder of Decent. He's an Ethereum developer, and he's here to talk to us a little bit about his experience in the industry. Welcome, Parker.

Parker: Hi. Thanks.

Kelly Weaver: So, how did you first get involved with Bitcoin, Ethereum, like how did you first hear about crypto.

Parker: Absolutely. When I was, let's see ... It was probably six or seven years ago. My buddy of mine gave me a phone call, and he was telling me that he had been reading online about something called Bitcoin. You know, I kind of researched it, looked into it. At the time I wasn't a software developer. I didn't really know anything about computer programming, but I was really interested back then in the philosophical concepts around it, kind of the whole idea of decentralization and this crazy scene that was building up around it online. I became-

Kelly Weaver: What was happening at that time? Was Silk Road around?

Parker: Yes.

Kelly Weaver: What were people using Bitcoin for in those days?

Parker: At that point in time there were really two different camps. The one that's obviously always highlighted by the media is Silk Road, right? There was a camp of people who felt invincible, because you could do anonymous ... It's not that it was a new currency for crime, right? Like the US dollar's the currency for crime, but it was the fact that you could do criminal transactions online anonymously. It's very safe.

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- Parker: The second camp that most people don't talk about is actually freedom fighters, whistle blowers, and journalists, people who perhaps are journalists in a country where their media is extremely oppressed by the government or other people who are at risk of being political targets from oppressive governments, who need funding in order to do the good work that they do. That was what really attracted me to it at that point in time. There was a lot of freedom fighting rebellion occurring around Bitcoin. That was really fascinating to me.
- Kelly Weaver: Did you have existing beliefs about things that kind of lent itself to you being curious about that?
- Parker: Yeah. I mean, I'm a young guy. I was younger then. I was very, I don't know, like rebellious and felt like the world sucks and that we need to fix all these problems.
- Kelly Weaver: Cut to it's six or seven years later now, and you're actually working with the technology, coding, things like that. How did that evolve?
- Parker: Totally. Yeah. I started my career as a software developer working at a credit card company based in Atlanta. I was a programmer there, built web applications for them. I kind of worked in the financial technology space. After that, I got a job at a consulting firm in Cleveland, Ohio called DXY. They're like a boutique consulting firm, and we worked for everybody from like 30 to 50,000 employee companies to a two person startup. We built enterprise grade web applications and mobile apps. While I was working there, I met my business partner, Adam. He was also a software develop there. I had gotten a little bit more intrigued by cryptocurrency, because 2016, you know, Bitcoin started to pump back up again for the first time in like four years, three years rather, since the crash in 2013, which is when I kind of went radio silence.
- Kelly Weaver: Did you hold Bitcoin at that time?
- Parker: Oh, yeah. Yeah.
- Kelly Weaver: That you now still hold?
- Parker: No. No. I am now no longer a trader. I now simply accumulate crypto. I don't spend it. I don't trade it. For years, I would buy, and sell, and buy, and sell, and if you just do the math today on the amount of cryptocurrency that I had, I mean ...

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Kelly Weaver: Now, you just buy and hold?

Parker: Buy and hold. I don't sell. I don't trade. So, my cryptocurrency, I don't even know my own private keys. They're tucked away at an undisclosed physical location. It's about as secure as they can go. Even if I wanted to spend them, it would take me a significant amount of time and inconvenience to spend them. Yeah. I meet Adam, and he's super not cryptocurrencies. I at the time was really into the computer programming scene in Cleveland. I'm like an event organizer, host a lot of meet-ups for the Node.js and Ruby on Rails community, and I meet Adam. I try to tell him, "Hey, man. If you're really into this crypto stuff and it's exploding right now, why don't you create a meet-up?" Two months later, Decent was a company, and three months later, we had quit our jobs and were running Decent full time. Three more months later, we were in an office space with six employees.

Kelly Weaver: What does Decent do?

Parker: We do mostly Ethereum development. Generally speaking, I mean, if there's an interesting problem that we can help out with, like we're problem solvers. We're software developers. We want to help, but Ethereum and the way that that technology is moving is mostly closely aligned with Adam's and I own beliefs, so we like to work on projects in that space. We do get phone calls about Stellar and some other platforms, but yeah.

Parker: Typically, we'll meet with a company. Maybe they're a brand new company. Maybe they're an existing one that's making a brand new product. They will approach us. Generally speaking, at this point in the game, whether you're a highly technical person or not, you probably don't know that much about blockchain, so when people approach us, they're not asking us, "Produce software with these features." They're like, "Is this possible, and how?"

Parker: Typically, I'll fly out with Adam. We'll meet up with the company, and kind of a do a whiteboard session, and take some vision that they have of pivoting into the blockchain space or creating a product in the blockchain space, and turn that into something real, like something that is attainable within three, four, five months, some kind of prototype. Then we build that.

Kelly Weaver: That's super cool. Can you explain ... because a listener may not be as familiar with Ethereum in general and what it's good for. Can you explain some use cases that you think that Ethereum's perfect for or what you like about Ethereum?

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- Parker: Totally. Yeah. I think, first of all, if you think about Bitcoin being the most fundamental blockchain and being just a representation of a cryptocurrency, Ethereum I think of as the most broad and open blockchain. You know, any application that is currently in existence on a mobile device or a web server can be reproduced on the Ethereum platform or will be able to in the future.
- Parker: There's plenty of difficulties in getting there right now, but the beauty of it is essentially ... and I don't want to use disruption, because I don't really like a lot of the startup words, but if there is a system that is flawed inherently due to its hierarchy of control, Ethereum is a platform where you can flatten that system and incentivize individual participants to contribute to it, rather than rely on one or multiple parties that have control over them. In my head, that's the whole idea of this decentralization.
- Parker: When I think about Ethereum, I'm not just thinking about cryptocurrencies at all. I think that that's the minimal value of Ethereum. I'm thinking about the institutions in the world that can be newly represented in a fashion where the individual has both incentive to be a positive contributor to this institution and receive some benefit from the institution as a whole.
- Kelly Weaver: Wow. Yeah. It's a total potential shift in the landscape of how I guess enterprise works. Where are we today in that sort of cycle? Are any companies actually using Ethereum for this, or is that still in development?
- Parker: Yeah. There are real applications that are currently using Ethereum. We have produced real applications that are currently using Ethereum. Here's an issue, for example. Data storage on a web server is extremely cheap. We have figured it out. It's very easy to store data with the whole cloud computing advent, where I don't have to have a server in my office anymore. I can just pay Amazon a couple dollars a month to store. Yeah. It became extremely commoditize after a few years. The prices are just not expensive to store data, but storing data on a blockchain is extremely expensive, due to just the nature of how blocks are cryptographically linked. There are ways to store information on blockchains, or at least a representation of information on blockchains that are affordable. Here's an example. Okay. Do you know the app Acorn?
- Kelly Weaver: Mm-mmm (negative).
- Parker: Acorn's an app where when you swipe your credit card, any change is ... if you swipe your credit card for \$4.70, 30 cents gets redistributed into a mutual fund. It's a way to turn your change into a savings account.

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Kelly Weaver: Cool.

Parker: Acorn would be extremely difficult and today does not exist on a system like Ethereum, because it would cost more than 30 cents to send 30 cents worth of Ethereum.

Kelly Weaver: Do you think over time that that will change?

Parker: Yeah. I would liken that conversation to people who approach me and they say, "Well, with the advent of quantum computing, all of this encryption is valueless, and cryptocurrencies are gonna be destroyed." My response is, "If quantum computers become feasible and accessible, we have far bigger societal issues than Bitcoin, because everything's broken." If cryptography stops working, which is the underlying layer of the entire internet ... That's not just like your cellphone. That's the ATM that you pull cash out of. ... then the whole world is just gonna ...

Parker: With the whole Ethereum situation, we're building a massive industry around opensource technology. There's gonna be a point where the open source technology is going to ... As a necessity for the industry to exist, the development will need to occur that allows that scaling. I'm extremely optimistic about that, because basically we're gonna get to a point where businesses will only be able to generate money if this project scales. If the project does not scale, those businesses will be forced to hopefully in some way assist the project to scale.

Parker: The only thing I'm a little bit worried about, which happens ... This is an issue with like the Node.js world a little bit, which I'm a huge fan of ... That's a programming system. It's a server side JavaScript programming system. In the Node.js world, it's very much like the next shiny thing, so you'll see every year a new tool will come out for developers. In other ecosystems in the tech industry, you'll see people contribute to these products for years and years and make them perfect.

Parker: In Node.js, people will look at it, identify the negatives, and then just create a brand new project. You have this whole assortment of things to choose from, but none of them have really matured as a result of the whole community building them up. I am really worried in blockchain with all of the massive amount of opportunity for wealth, that that's gonna incentivize so many people to create their own projects and none that are the perfect solution.

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- Kelly Weaver: Ah. Interesting. Like too many people all trying to make the same thing, instead of working together.
- Parker: Yeah. People are like that, right? I run my own business, because I don't want to work on somebody else's life. I want to, you know, control my own situation every day. I think a lot of people are naturally like that, but there's times when it's better for the whole to identify where my skills could be most useful working with somebody else.
- Kelly Weaver: Can you explain opensource to us?
- Parker: Totally
- Kelly Weaver: And how maybe blockchain has changed the game for opensource development in general?
- Parker: Totally. Yeah. I'm not really the guy to wax poetic about opensource. I mean, I feel like all software developers in the modern day stand on the shoulders of giants, the people who paved the way for that. My roommate is a fashion designer, right? I'll talk to him, and in that industry, if you want to learn how to cut and sew a suit, you have to somehow in the world find somebody to teach you how to do that. It probably involves a lot of hard work and money. The software community's really all about sharing knowledge openly. I guess in the spirit of the internet, lowering the barrier for entry to access to information.
- Parker: You know, we can't fix all the problems in the world, but by giving people an equal access to information, it's like one step in the correct direction. I think the whole thing with opensource software is, you know ... It's a huge assumption, but I guess in my mind it's this idea that if I produce something of true value and I offer it to the world, only good things could happen to the world. It takes a lot to identify that the risk attached to that, which is losing trade secrets or something ... There's this concept in business of trade secrets, of like, "Oh. They can't find out how we do this, because they're gonna ..." Which is implying a really ... It's really devaluing a business, assuming that if somebody figured out how to do what you did, that they could just blow you out of the water with it.
- Parker: Yeah. I guess opensource is rather than hiding information about how you are a success or how you've invented something, you are gonna give that invention to the whole world and hope that the response is simply making it better and not turning that against you, right? It's kind of hard to parallel to other parts of society, but yeah. Yeah. It's interesting. I don't think programming is a

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competitive thing, because we're all just building on top of each other. It makes sense why a hedge fund wouldn't expose the formulas and models that they use internally, because it's an extremely competitive world, and you wouldn't be able to provide for yourself if it wasn't. Yeah.

Kelly Weaver:

I think I heard a developer say once that they want to work on stuff that gets them paid, so that they can work on all the free projects. Do you know what I mean? They want to do something that pays the bills, so that they can do all the things that they actually want to do, but has blockchain opened it up? I mean, I know now there's crowdfunding, which I don't want to get too much into, but I feel like developers are able to have way more access to capital early on through blockchain financing, ICOs basically. Do you see that phenomenon a lot?

Parker:

Yeah. Decent hasn't done an ICO. There's no place in our future plans where we're planning on doing one. I'm not saying that that's never gonna happen, but at the moment that's not on our roadmap, but we've assisted and produced smart contracts for a large number of ICOs. I think it's not so much the ICO, but it's due to the critical nature of the software. In one sense, where opensource software is critical is security. I would never use security software that is a business telling me that my stuff is safe. I want to be able to go look at the code, audit it, and assume that other people have done the same ideally in the world and use software that in some way has been proven to me, like really exposed to me as being what I'm told it is.

Parker:

That's not critical for Instagram, right? If I'm uploading a photo, it doesn't matter to me why or how that's happening, but if I'm saving my passwords in an application, I really want to know what's actually happening, because a company could easily, if you're using proprietary software, be storing all of your passwords in an insecure way, and you could be ... Everything about your digital life could be compromised. With blockchain, similarly, due to the nature of blockchains, not just the fact that they're publicly auditable, but because the code is also dealing with finances and also dealing with security, I would never, ever, ever, ever touch any crypto project that exists on the Ethereum blockchain or that exists as a cryptocurrency that's not opensource.

Parker:

That's really an expectation. The really beautiful thing about blockchain with opensource is that for the first time, almost everything that I do ... Unless we have a customer who requires us to produce proprietary software, we opensource everything we do. Chances are if it's a blockchain project, that it is

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an opensource project. We really do end up in a situation where for the first time in my life I'm making a living almost wholly off of opensource software, which is a dream. Every developer just wants to produce just like objectively good stuff that the whole world finds useful, not something that five people can profit off of. Yeah. I don't know. That's been a really cool experience.

Kelly Weaver: My last question is how can we get more people involved with blockchain in general? What opportunities do you see that there are here for people who may want to be any kind of player in the industry? What do we need more of?

Parker: Totally. I'm giving a talk tomorrow about education and technology in the blockchain space. I guess personally I feel that a focus on the technology is extremely important. I think a lot of people, it's very easy with all the glitz and glamor in blockchain right now I think to become distracted from the point, which is the tech and the philosophy. I don't know. I think adequate technological education's extremely important. I'm a huge-

Kelly Weaver: Where? Are there places where you can find that?

Parker: With blockchain it's a little bit tricky, of course, because ... People ask me to direct them to educational content for blockchain a lot. We've published a few things on Pluralsight as a company, which is a cool training platform. Those are all free articles. Then we have some blog posts as well. There's no content providers that I've found already that I would point to and be like, "They are a gold standard. They're doing it great," but there's a couple cool ... You know, if you Google search, there's some cool stuff, but I think people stepping up to the plate and producing ... Maybe Decent should make sometime to do that soon. But I think producing professional educational materials that focuses on the technology, that focuses on the philosophy of decentralization would be really important.

Parker: The other thing, I'm a really big proponent of digital education. I wouldn't say self-taught, because I've been lucky to meet a bunch of people in my career who have been very helpful, but I didn't go to school for computer science or anything like that. For me, I was a person who in my life I had very little opportunity, up until my entry into the tech industry. The last job I had before I was a software engineer, I was making eight bucks an hour. I try to remind people that the tech industry is an ... Computer programming is an extremely open minded, friendly, welcoming world. For me, spending a significant time in

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my life learning that and then turning it into a profession was a way to better my life and give me a lot of opportunity.

Parker: I think if you would like to participate in this crazy world that's currently occurring, I would hope to inspire somebody to think about looking at it from a technological perspective and a development perspective, even if you think that you're not capable of that, because that's not true, and entering it as a contributor that way, because you might not do like the moon shot, 20, 30, 40, \$50 million ICO or whatever, but you will ensure a sustainable life for yourself if you can do that, and you will be contributing to the greater good of the space.

Kelly Weaver: Love it. Great advice. Where can people reach you if they want to reach out?

Parker: Yeah. My name is Parker. My email is Parker@DecentCrypto.com. Our website's DecentCrypto.com. Yeah. Email's are probably best.

Kelly Weaver: Perfect. Well, thanks so much.

Parker: [inaudible 00:21:06]. Thank you.

Kelly Weaver: That's all for today's episode of Crypto Token Talk. To learn more about blockchain and keep up to date with this fast paced industry, subscribe at CryptoTokenTalk.IO, where you can also find today's show notes. If you have suggestions for topics or guests, please drop me a line on Twitter, @CryptoKelly, or you can follow the show on Twitter, @KryptoTokenTalk. If you enjoyed this show, please rate and review it on iTunes and share it with family, friends, and colleagues who want to stay up to date on how blockchain technology is changing the world. Thanks for listening.

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