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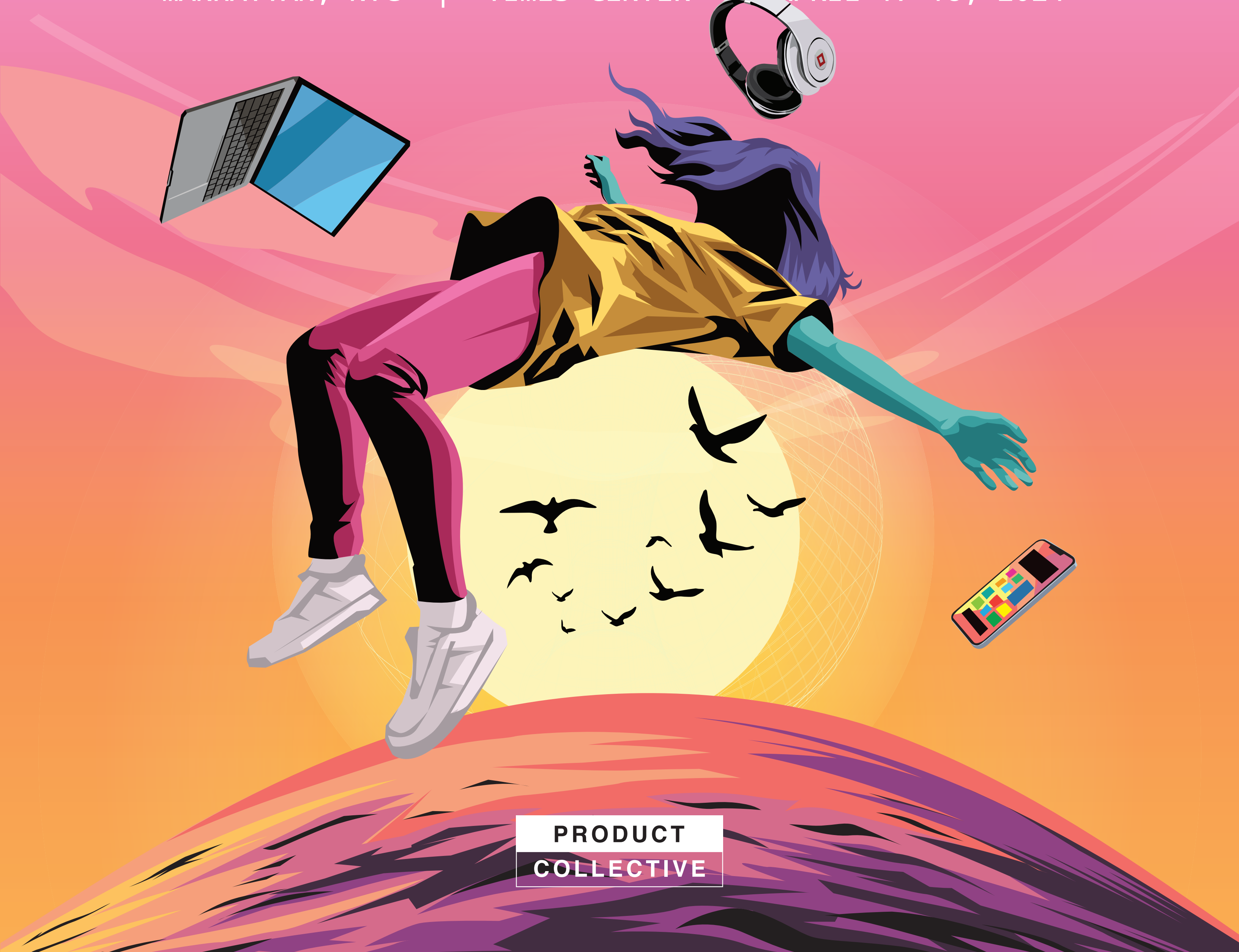

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

HOW TO CRAFT A PRODUCT SALES PITCH THAT WINS DEALS

April Dunford, Chief Executive Officer Ambient Strategy
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Session Overview:
We all love a good feature, but to win business, we need to craft a story around why our product's features matter to buyers. In this session, we will explore how to move beyond boring, undifferentiated product walkthroughs to a sales pitch that makes it obvious why buyers should choose your product over the competition.

Key Points:
Buying is hard. Buying your product, especially if you're in B2B, is likely worse than buying a toilet.
Strong Positioning = Stong Sales Pitch

A strong sales pitch is a narrative with the following structure:
- Insight: Identifies something we've identified about the market
- Alternatives - describes the pros and cons of existing solutions.
- Perfect world description (that matches what your company does)
- Value - organize the features around your differentiated value.

Notes:
Buying is Hard
Selling is hard. But buying is also hard.

Most things people buy in businesses are difficult to buy.

Buying a toilet can be hard, especially if you're not familiar with selecting a toilet. Buying your product can be way worse.

Before prospects buy, they need to figure out what matters so they can make a short list.
Buyer asks for a demo and sales puts customers in the wind tunnel of features.

If the buyer makes a poor choice, bad things happen.

The easiest, lowest risk decision is to do absolutely nothing when shopping for software. "What we have is fine."

40% - 60% of B2B sales purchase processes end in "No Decision" (some would say the number is as high as 80%)

It’s not because the status quo was better. It’s because the person who is trying to decide couldn’t figure out their options.

How to make buying easier
People buying software don’t want a salesperson that walks through all the features. They want a guide that helps you narrow down the choices.

Buyers want our help. In a sales meeting, they want perspective on the market and help navigating alternatives.

Want to build a pitch that answers the question, “why pick us over the alternatives?”

Positioning answers the question “Why Pick us?” so strong Positioning = strong sales pitch.

Strong position has 5 components:
- Competitive alternatives
- Distinct attributes
- Differentiated value
- Best-Fit customers
- Market Category

Most great positioning does not survive the jump to sales so we need to translate positioning into a sales pitch.

Sales Pitch Structure
In the Setup, start with Market Insight, describe the alternatives and then paint a picture of a perfect world.
Then, with the follow-through, you explain how your product meets the perfect world setting which is your differentiated value.

Example: Help Scout Customer Service Software
Specifically designed for digital products. Insight: for Digital products customer services is important because it’s one of the few times you interact with customers. Help Scout built their sales pitch around how their product helps you interact with customers.

Example: leveljump
Leveljump is a sales enablement software. Their main differentiating feature is that they’re built on top of SalesForce, which allows you to track the results of your sales enablement efforts based on SalesForce data.

Leveljump targeted their sales narrative toward the head of sales enablement. Their insight is when your reps aren’t enabled, it costs you money. So in their comparisons to alternatives, they pointed out the alternatives don’t help you track results, then focused their discussion of features on this point of differentiation.

Structure your sales pitch as a narrative
Most sales pitches are a product walkthrough that lists a bunch of features. The new sales pitch offers a sales narrative.

Structure of the Sales Narrative

- Insight: Identifies something we've identified about the market
- Alternatives - describes the pros and cons of existing solutions.
- Perfect world description (that matches what your company does)
- Value - organize and filter the features around your differentiated value.

Inputs to each of the above come from positioning.

If you get agreement that your description of the perfect world matches their expectations, you got them if you can show that your product brings the perfect world.

See How to Ensure Success
Sales needs to be heavily involved, but you don't want to include the entire sales force or take them away from selling for too long.

Test and tune with **one sales rep first**, then roll out to the others

If it fails–go back to your **positioning**

The pitch changes only when the **positioning changes**

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Positioning:
Obviously Awesome: How to Nail Positioning so Customers Get It, Buy It, Love It.

Sales Pitch:
Sales Pitch: How to Craft a Story to Stand Out and Win

CONFESSIONS OF A FIRST HEAD OF PRODUCT

Gabrielle Bufrem, Product Coach
Product Leadership Coach & Advisor
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Session Overview:
When Gabrielle Bufrem started as a head of product a few years ago, she started the first day mapping out her journey, documenting her learnings and progress. Her intent was to share those notes out so that others could learn from her successes and mistakes.
In this talk she shares those successes and mistakes and ands in a bit of perspective that comes from not being in it, and coaching other product leaders.

Key Points:
Gabrielle Bufrem learned eight lessons as a first time head of product.
Lesson 1: Everything will be broken, and it's fine
Lesson 2: A lot of people won't know what you do
Lesson 3: When you come in, people already there have less control.
Lesson 4: The best onboarding is talking to your customers
Lesson 5: There's a weight to what heads of product say, and you can't take that away
Lesson 6: Get people comfortable with building the thing that works for now, instead of the best thing
Lesson 7: Your hopes for process will clash with the level of scrappiness required
Lesson 8: Making decisions out of desperation costs you money

Notes:
Lesson 1: Everything will be broken, and it's fine
When you start as a head of product, it will feel like everything is broken. And while this may seem counterintuitive, that's a good thing, because the company wouldn't have hired you otherwise.

Think of it like building an airplane while flying it.

Gabrielle on her first day noted: "everything is broken, but we somehow still make money."

You can also take comfort in knowing that this is the state of every early stage startup, actually every startup… ok every company. Your organization is not the exception.

Lesson 2: A lot of people won't know what you do
When you join a company as the first Head of Product, people will not know what you do.

This has been a problem that product managers and product leaders have faced for years.

Engineers build things. Designers create designs. What does product do?

The problem is even bigger for product leaders.

Product people have to be good communicators

As a product person., you need to be a great communicator:

- You have to tell people what you do.
- You have to teach people how to work with you
- Don’t assume what people know and don’t know break down those assumptions and find out what they do and don’t know
- Speak the language of the people you want to reach and communicate with them in the way they want to be communicated with
- In many cases you’ll need to say something at least 7 times for it to stick.

It’s also helpful to place yourself within two things people already understand.

What product does

So, to explain what product does, try this:
Engineering represents technology. They’re considering feasibility: how do we build this?

Design represents the customer. They're considering usability, thinking about how someone is going to use the product and if it’s valuable to the user.

So it follows that product represents the business. They’re thinking about value and viability - what’s good for the business.

After all, a product without a business is a hobby.

When those three work together in that way, Magic happens which results in features that people choose to use and that are good for the business.

What the Head of Product does

Sets the vision for the product:
Paint the picture of where we are and where we want to be 3 - 5+ years from now.

Works on how we get there:
You have to work backward from your vision to figure out how to get there: What’s the first thing you build, the second thing, the thing you rebuild, or the thing you completely rebrand?

Getting to the vision is hard, which is another reason you were brought in as Head of Product.

Grows the product team:
Because as Head of Product you're not a one-person solo act you have to grow and develop the product team.

Lesson 3: When you come in, people already there have less control.
When you are the first Head of Product, you're filling a role that didn't exist before.That means you'll be doing things that a group of others may have been doing before

People don't like losing that control, losing that responsibility and no longer having a say or a feeling like they were involved.

When Gabrielle came in and explained what the Head of Product did, she brought clarity, but people weren't happy.

If you're used to being liked and move into a Head of Product role, you're going to have to get used to not being liked and you'll need to make decisions that are right for the business.

How to address the situation
Have the hard conversation (individually) with the people involved. Tell them you realize that your arrival means they will have less opportunity to get involved in the product.

Note: Saying what everyone's thinking is a good negotiation technique.

Make it clear you want to leverage their learnings and experience to build a better product and ask them how they'd like to be involved.

In some cases, people may want to be more involved than what the organization needs them to be.

You'll need to overlay what they want with what the business needs. Circle back with them and communicate: "X is what you wanted, we can't do that. This is what we'll do instead and here's why."

They may not like it, but if you do it the right way, they'll respect it and they'll feel included in the conversation, which will build trust.

Lesson 4: The best onboarding is talking to your customers
When you come into a new Head of Product role, there are so many places inside the company to get information: docs, meetings, getting to know teammates. It's

tempting to focus on those relationships.

The danger is that you start to create a view of your customers through proxies and you start making assumptions about your customers.

That doesn't mean that you shouldn't spend time with your team or learn the business, but the best use of your time initially is to talk to your customers.

To build products your customers love that also work for the business, you need to meet your customers (otherwise, how will you know what they'd love).

Starting in a Head of Product role gives you the perfect opportunity to send an email to your customers introducing yourself as the new Head of Product. Add a survey to get a pulse on the product, and ask who wants to share their experience.

Lesson 5: There's a weight to what heads of product say, and you can't take that away

You may be used to giving your team as much context and information as you can.

When you become a Head of Product, what you say becomes more than observations, it becomes direction that people think they need to follow.

That could mean you mention something and people jump to start working on it, even though you were just throwing out an idea.

So you need to be very intentional about how you communicate.

Consider how you talk about the different items on your roadmap.

- Now - provide as much information as possible.
- Next - everything that we know, what we don't know, and stress they should not work on it.
- Later - communicate to inspire people. Make it clear it's not a "them" problem. You need to figure it out.

Lesson 6: Get people comfortable with building the thing that works for now, instead of the best thing

In early stage companies, people are always thinking about the awesome end result.

- great engineers are notorious for wanting to ship extremely high quality code
- designers want to make the most incredible user experiences
- stakeholders (as usual) want it all

Everyone has the best of intentions, but it’s not their job to think about the next thing. It’s your job.

You need to have a story to tell about what people had before, what they have now, what they’ll have next, and vision to represent what they’ll have later.

You need to keep your team focused on what you need to deliver now. Get them excited about solving a seemingly boring, but important, problem now, so you can get to the vision down the road.

Lesson 7: Your hopes for process will clash with the level of scrappiness required

When you come in as a Head of Product, you may have a lot of energy around setting the process, picking the tools, and having complete ownership over how you do product.

What you’ll find is that you won’t have time to create the perfect process and find the absolutely perfect tool.

Instead there’s a lot of “just in time" process to do whatever it takes to get your product over the finish line and move the metric you care about.

It’ll be uncomfortable, but that uncomfort will drive a lot of innovation.

And remember to take a step back and think about what actually matters: Shipping really good product and building the right thing.

You’ll have time later to clean up your processes.

Lesson 8: Making decisions out of desperation will cost you money

When you start as a Head of Product, you need to separate yourself from the feeling that everything feels like a fire and is super urgent.

Not every decision is created the same. Allocate the right amount of time proportional to the impact of the decisions. High impact decisions deserve more time, while low impact decisions don’t require as much time.

When you make decisions out of desperation it will only cost you time and money in the long run.

Examples of high impact decisions:
- **Hiring**
- **Choosing a vendor**
- **Buying a tool**

Being part of the leadership team as Head of Product at an early stage startup at an early stage startup means thinking about budgets and money all the time.

Making decisions, that you know are suboptimal, because they save you money in the short term usually cost you more money and time than you saved in the long run.

Money and time are two things that an early stage company needs to value, so think about the impact of each decision to determine how much time you'll devote to making it

Things to remember when you're "in it" (a Head of Product Role)
It has to feel chaotic before it feels like things are in order
running product is one of the hardest but most rewarding jobs
it's okay to ask for help

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BUILDING 'GOOD ENOUGH': EMBRACING MINIMALISM IN PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Sahil Lavingia, Founder, Gumroad
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Session Overview:
Drawing from his own journey of building Gumroad in his spare time and transforming it into a platform that empowers creators, Sahil shares his insights on the virtue of simplicity in product development: starting small, focusing on what matters, and growing organically. This session will offer practical advice on how to approach your MVP (minimal viable process) — with an emphasis on building something that's not just viable, but valuable — and embracing minimalism as you grow past the MVP stage.

Key Points:
Before you build anything you should be clear on who your first customer is.

Once you identify that customer, put yourself in their shoes by freelancing doing that job and learn the pain points of that job.

Then build a product that addresses the pain points you identify.

When you need help building your product, a minimalist approach is to hire free lancers rather than hiring staff.

Notes:
Sahil described his journey of building Gumroad and Flexile, both of which are tools targeted at digital entrepreneurs. Gumroad provides a platform for them to sell their products, Flexile provides a platform to help entrepreneurs build a flexible team without the overhead of full time staff.

Sahil’s journey in ten steps, which may be a good path if you’re interested in being a digital entrepreneur instead of working in an established company.

Stop Building Stuff
Identify who your first customer is. It’s difficult to judge if your product is successful if you don’t know who you’re building for.

Start Freelancing
One way to find out about the challenges your first customer faces is to start freelancing in the same job as your customer.

For example, if you want to help designers, start freelancing in web design.

The idea is to help someone do something, find out what problems exist, and look for ways to solve that problem.

Charge $1/Hr
When starting out, charge low fees to get some paying gigs, realizing you'll be learning on the job.

You're not really charging $1/hour, but you may charge $15 for a project that will take you 15 hours to learn how to do the task, do it, and deliver the result.

The goal is to get experience and learn how to do the task.

Charge $10/hr
After you get some experience under your belt, you can start to charge more.

Charge $100/hr
Once you get proficient and get in the top 10% of people providing this service, you can do it faster and better, and charge more.

Hire People for $10/hr
Once you're at the point where you can charge a lot and have a lot of work coming in, find people who are a little bit behind you in this progression and have them do the work. You pay them $10/hour and keep the rest.

Pay Taxes on $90/hr
Once you're at the point where you're able to hire out some of your work to others you're starting to arbitrage on other peoples labor. An even though you're not doing the work, you can continue to identify the problems you can solve along the way.

Also, be sure to pay taxes on the amount you keep. If the idea of paying taxes feels painful, look at it as a success metric.

Teach People How to Make $45.hr
Next teach people what you did and make $45/hour. Then you can wrap this information into product and content. People follow you to figure out how to do it without having to pay you.

Help People Charge People for 10%
Build a product to help other people do what you did. That's effectively what Gumroad is, as are Paypal, eBay, Amazon, Stripe, Uber, and AirBnB.

Issue Dividends
If you don't want to build a large staff, look for ways to build a team of freelancers and then give them an opportunity to participate in the success of

your business via dividends.

This is what Flexile is intended to help you do.

This route may be helpful if you're looking to build a product that produces a steady cash flow and aren't interested in taking your company public.

For More Information
Book:
The Minimalist Entrepreneur: How Great Founders Do More With Less

Gumroad:
https://gumroad.com/

Flexile:
https://flexile.com/

LEVERAGING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN PRODUCT LEADERSHIP

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Session Overview:
Quincy Olatunde shows how you can use Emotional Intelligence to significantly enhance product leadership. If you're able to do that, it will result in: better team dynamics (especially in a cross-functional and matrixized environment), improved customer (community) understanding, and more effective stakeholder management.

Key Points:
Leveraging Emotional Intelligence

- Enhances team dynamics and collaboration
- Deepens understanding of customer needs
- Strengthens stakeholder relationships & management

Core learning: Leveraging Emotional Intelligence in product leadership is good business

Adopt EI practices and continuous learning to become more effective leaders

Notes:
Emotional Intelligence is a unique accelerator to your career

If you have a product that you can't measure, you can't grow it.

Quincy is a Product Humanist: He helps build People-Centric Products, and use data to drive, grow and scale them.

Quincy's Philosophy: The level of continued success you are able to achieve will correlate with your depth and practice level of Emotional Intelligence

What is Emotional Intelligence?
Leverage: The ability to influence situations or people so that you can control what happens.

This doesn't mean manipulating people and situations - it's influencing them.

Emotional Intelligence: Understanding one's own emotions and the emotions of others

The components of Emotional Intelligence are:

- Self-awareness
- Self-regulation
- Motivation
- Empathy
- Social skills

You have to learn how to lead by influence, and get people to work with you.

The ability to influence people becomes more important the bigger the company you’re in.

Product Leadership: The act of championing a product within the company. Deciding what the focus will and won’t be.

In simple terms: The ability to Connect, Understand, and Act sets apart great product leaders from good ones.

Connect with people, understand where they’re coming from and where they want to go and then act on that.

Focus on progress rather than perfection.

Why do we need Emotional Intelligence?
The evolving workforce demands a more empathetic and understanding leadership style shift. The younger workforce will hold companies to account for their brand value. Business as usual won’t work going forward.

Your expected to maintain the same if not higher productivity levels with ****smaller budgets, and fewer resources.

The need for a **Global Strategy focus**, requires better market and cultural understanding, collaboration and tolerance - you have to move into different markets, and moving into those new markets requires building your understanding.

EI is a key to **better retention** (strategy) - Helps you keep those great people you’re growing in your org

The move to remote/hybrid Ways Of Working - To attract the best talent, you need to know how they want to work and how to meet those desires.

EI in the wild

- Better team dynamics and collaboration
- Improved customer (community) understanding
- Effective stakeholder management

Thinking about output and outcome means not only thinking about what you need to do, but also whether you should do it.

Leadership through influence is important in cases where we don’t control the budget so we need to know what motivates the people who do control the budget.

How do we Apply Emotional Intelligence?
Outward application - core areas

Team
Empathy = Better Team Dynamics - Use of emotional awareness to navigate and resolve disagreements effectively

Conflict Resolution EI helps navigate and resolve conflicts - understand what’s driving people and holding them back.

Emotional Resilience - Enhance EI technique to help cope with stress and challenges (this is also an inward application)

EI Contributes to more informed & empathetic Decision Making (this is also an inward application)

EI Feedback mechanisms helps improve product management practices (this is also an inward application)

Integration within an Agile Framework (scaling) - how can you incorporate EI when you grow your team. (this is also an inward application)

Stakeholder

Stakeholder management - Managing expectations and relationships

Customer|Community

Customer Empathy - Understanding emotions help leads to customer-centric products development

The inward application - Self
- Self Awareness - Understanding our own leadership emotions and reactions
- Driving Innovation In Product Development
- Remote/Diverse teams - Adapt EI strategies in a remote and/or culturally diverse environment

In addition to four of the outward applications noted above.

Examples in Practice
Recognizing and addressing stress in your team

Situation
Increased signs of stress:
- Irritation
- Decreased engagement
- Longer working hours
- Tight deadline

Action
- Conduct individual Check-in to understand emotional state and concern
- Reevaluate the project timeline & reallocate resources to ease the workload

Result
- Adjustments led to improvement in team morale
- Open communication fostered a culture of support & collaboration = successful on-time project release

Learning
Recognizing emotional cues and taking proactive steps to address underlying issues, ensured both team well-being and project success

Improving product feature through customer feedback

Situation
Customer feedback from a new feature launch indicated user confusion, not intuitive, leading to frustration

Action
- Interview session to understand customer's emotions and experiences
- Analyzed feedback to identify specific pain points
- Initiated series of test sessions to explore solutions.

Result
- Session insights led to significant improvements, resulting in a more user-friendly feature design
- Positive feedback, with increase in satisfaction and engagement

Learning
Leveraging EI to empathize with customers uncovered valuable insights, driving product enhancements that resonated with users' needs and expectations, making it more intuitive and emotionally engaging

Navigating crucial negotiation with stakeholders regarding their support for a new platform.

Situation
Facing a pause at a critical time in Enterprise development, we needed to renew cross-org/brand interest to continue build

Action

- Identified and acknowledged stakeholders emotional motivations, focused on building rapport, addressing concerns empathetically
- Presented data in a compelling narrative, aligning with stakeholder values and goals.
- Re-engaged with proactive communication and a stakeholder strike team embedded in the process

Result
This approach

- Solidified waning trust and alignment
- Resulted in new commitment and secured additional funding

Got more money because they were able to help the stakeholders see the challenges they had with the budget they were trying to work with.

Learning
EI is key in negotiations, enables leaders to connect on a personal level, align objectives, and achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

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HOW TO DRIVE CHANGE MANAGEMENT (WHEN NO ONE WANTS TO CHANGE)

Zoia Kozakov, Product Lead, Digital Wallets, JPMorgan Chase
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Session Overview:
Zoia Kozakov shares her experiences, both successful and not, with driving change in organizations and explains five lessons she's learned for effective change management.

Key Points:
Change management is hard when people don't want to change.

Keys to successful change management:

- Develop a storyline for both the problem and solution
- Repeat, present, and campaign the vision in a multitude of ways, styles, and formats. Always come back to the vision.
- The real meetings are the pre-meeting(s)
- Design the change management effort to align with and reward the goals of the involved stakeholders (and their leaders).
- Create momentum with small and big wins and give credit repeatedly.

Notes:
Change management sounds fun but can be less fun when people don't want to change.

How not to manage change
There are lots of ways not to manage change, such as:

- Controlling the Figma - in large companies, everything took a long time so got access to Figma and edited the design teams designs.

- Dont you get it? - Stakeholder who couldn't get the need to change. So she finally said "Don't goyou get it, we're changing the history of bankking

- Sending a to-do list to all stakeholders on what they need to do to change the future.

- Airing the dirty laundry - spreading the word that ****if only that team would do what they're supposed to

- Crying in silence

So if change management is so hard, why do people keep trying it? Because building and launching something meaningful requires… wrangling, convincing, tension, dialogue, compromise and change.

Poor Change Management is pretty common
Turns out there are a lot of people struggling with change management

- 74% of leaders say they involved employees in creating a change strategy
- 42% of employees say they were included
- 31% of CEOs get fired for poor change management
- 83% of workers suffering from change fatigue say their employer has not provided enough tools or resources to help them adapt. (they were suffering from change management)

In other words, most change management efforts fail.

Why do people resist change
Mistrust in the organization
Fear of the unknown
Lack of awareness around the reason for change
Exclsuion from change-related decisions
Change of the job role
Bold ones are the two biggest.

What can we do?
Develop a storyline (”the why”) for both the problem and the solution.
It’s important to mention both the problem and the solution
Just because a solution is sexy at the outset, doesn’t mean that will sustain the change on a long term basis.

If you have a story just for the problem, it can create a sense of urgency, but if you don’t also focus on the solution, the team will get scared or feel they’re in a hopeless situation.

You want your team fired up about fixing the problem and excited about the way you’ve chosen to solve it.

Repeat, present, and campaign the vision in a multitude of ways, styles, and formats. Always come back to the vision.

If I tell you X, but you hear Y, the person doing the communicating failed to convey the message.

You need to vary your form of communication to fit how people absorb information.

The real meeting is the pre-meeting(s).

In big companies when you’re driving a big change you have to get people on board. That requires setting the stage ahead of time.

Figure our who your stakeholders are
Will they support or detract?
What are the risks of them derailing?
Based on that, prioritize who you talk to ahead of time.
That helps you know where to focus or to preemptively address risks

Design the change management effort to align with and reward the goals of the involved stakeholders (and their leaders).

When you face a disagreement in approach, make sure you make each others goals clear and then align on the right approach.

Create momentum with small and big wins and give credit repeatedly.

(You’re not the main character)

When you celebrate others’ wins, that will help your change management effort gain momentum.

Sometimes you need to start with small wins to build a flywheel to get the big win.

One more thing:
Failed change management can reveal the fundamental innovation culture of a company. If the culture doesn’t align with your beliefs and priorities, there may be more to it.

Remember your “why” :)

Sometimes your view of change management may not fit into an organization, which means you may need to change your organization (ie find a different one)

MANAGING PRODUCTS WITH A MIND OF THEIR OWN: LESSONS LEARNED FROM MANAGING AI PRODUCTS

Zane Van Dusen, Global Head of Risk & Investment Analytics Products, Bloomberg
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Session Overview:
Recent advances in AI are creating countless possibilities for new and innovative products. However, to truly harness the power of AI, product managers need a radical shift in mindset. Before the introduction of AI, product managers could dictate and predict every action and behavior of their products. With AI, that predictability breaks down and product managers must apply a different lens of critical thinking to understand and react to sometimes surprising AI-driven outputs. Hear from Bloomberg's head of Risk & Investment Analytics products about the team's experiences developing AI products over the past decade and best practices they've gleaned.

Key Points:
Guiding principles for AI Product Managers
- Adopt a new mentor/coach/parent mindset for AI products
- Learn how to identify problems where can add significant value AI and where it doesn't
- Go deep with the data not with the models
- Build stories and narratives - the 'right' answer will not be the one that makes your clients happy
- Empathize with the machine
- Build a team of data geeks

Notes:
The AI Boom
Rapidly changing product landscape
- Significant increase in AI accessibility since 2022
- New products will increasingly incorporate AI
- Many companies are rushing to AI due to FOMO
- They're about to learn a lot of lessons.

Understanding the types of problems AI can solve
Square Peg, Square Hole

Prediction & Estimation
- When to Use – Data is missing or not available
- How AI Can Help – Discover complicated relationships between important factors and target behavior: "When I see X, Y should happen"
- Examples – Weather forecasting, companies' greenhouse gas emissions

Classification & Tagging

- When to Use – Identify a set of categories/tags and where new data points belong
- How AI Can Help – Efficiently assign categories/tags with high accuracy and consistency
- Examples – Spam detection, classifying controversial news articles

Information Retrieval

- When to Use – Extract key information from unstructured data sets
- How AI Can Help – Scan through the available data then find and summarize relevant info
- Examples – Search engines, identifying supply chain relationships

Generative AI

- When to use - To generate new content based on a large body of existing content
- How AI can help - Quickly summarize a complex topic, or propose an initial idea/draft
- Examples - ChaptGPT, BloombergGPT

Generative AI is still trying to find it's true calling. This will evolve over time.

Learning how to lose control

From product owner to product manager

- Unlike traditional products, you can't have full control of AI products
- They have a mind of their own...by design
- Re-position yourself as a coach/mentor/parent
- These are new skills for PMs

If you want a product that does exactly what you want and expect, AI is probably not the right tool for you.

Domain and Data Knowledge

Stay out of the weeds

Quants & data scientists will naturally think about problems mathematically

Product Managers need to bring an intuitive understanding of the problem

- How would the end user do this without an AI model?
- What data is important? What data is not important?
- How do I normalize the data? Don't forget the obvious!
- What will your solution be benchmarked against?
- Where do we need to be good? Where can we be OK?

Think a lot less about how the product works and instead use a clear understanding of the problem to determine what data the AI is trained on. You have to be very careful about your input.

You can’t test every single scenario.

Ask All the Questions
Be the dumbest person in the room

Don’t be afraid to ask the ‘dumb questions’
Be the proxy for the end-user
Translate answers into a story
Focus on the ‘why?’ rather than the ‘how?’

Don’t stop asking until you explain it to
Your parents
Your kid
Your boss’ boss
Your end-user

Example: the graph on the slide was a chart provided by quants. Zane asked the group to ask a series of questions about the chart:

- What do the axis stand for
- What’s the scale of the axis.?
- What do the colors mean
- What does a good chart look like?
- Why is there so much what space

Befriend the Machine
Get Cozy with our Future Overlords

AI algorithms are not black boxes – the explanations are just not satisfying

Product Managers need to be therapists not neurologists

Understand how it behaves, not how it works
- What are the key inputs?
- What is it sensitive to?
- What tends to change over time?

Troubleshoot with empathy not based on how you think
- What data does it have?
- What has it seen?
- How can it come to a logical conclusion with the info it has?

You have to spend time and communicate regularly with the model. Putting it in “stressful” situations is helpful. You also want to get “weird” with it - test out edge cases.

Models will do weird things, and you want to understand why.

If a model has something that works for it, it’s usually too expensive to retraining the model.

Set Expectations Upfront

Avoid going down the rabbit hole

Define the testing strategy

- Where should the focus be?
- What should change and how?
- What should not change?
- How long do we need to measure stability?

Ensure explain-ability is a requirement and balance with accuracy

Building Your Team
Finding the right people

Skills to look for

- Data analysis and troubleshooting
- Database design
- Data wrangling
- Documentation

Building AI and ML models is often < 20% of the job

Super sophisticated quant and AI experience are not necessarily required for less specialized fields

Most of the work on AI Models is getting a real good understanding of data.

SETTING YOUR TEAM UP FOR SUCCESS WITH THE PRODUCT SCIENCE PRINCIPLES

Holly Hester Reilly, Continuous Product Discovery Coach, Product Science Group
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Session Overview:
What do high-growth product teams all have in common? After 15+ years in product management, Product Science Group founder Holly Hester-Reilly believes that there are three principles to product management that the best product teams apply - in other words, there is a science to building high-growth products.
We often hear people say it's luck or intuition, but she thinks it's more than that. She believes the startup founders and product leaders who have good intuition are applying principles that everyone can learn.
In this talk, Holly shares the three Product Science Principles and goes into detail on what each one means, why it's important, and how to make sure the principles are in practice at your organization. Come learn how to use the product science principles to launch successful products, develop top teams, and build a sustainable, scaled organization.

Key Points:
There is a science to building really great products.

You can describe the science based on three Product Science Principles:
- Evidence-Based product strategy
- Continuous Discovery and Delivery
- Empowered Teams

The best products are made when the risky decisions, from stories to strategy, are backed by evidence.

Notes:
Most organizations think they are building valuable features that people are willing to pay a lot for. In reality most customers aren't really excited about the features those companies are building.

Holly believes that truly effective organizations follow product science and its three principles.

Principle 1: Evidence-Based Product Strategy

What is it
A plan for how you will win in the marketplace by focusing on a specific customer segment with a specific user pain and desired outcome.

Why is it important
It ties our hypotheses to a business outcome based on qualitative and quantitative evidence.

How to instill it
Find the reliable, foundational piece that will be there no matter what. Start on that while gathering evidence to form a segmentation and define a strategy.

Say “Yes and”: I’m going to build what you wanted, and I’m going to do design research to develop a hypothesis about the desired outcome.

Evidence at every level
Leadership - Should make decisions about Vision & Target Market

Testing methods

- Quantitative & Qualitative
- Behavior-Based Research
- Competitive Landscape
- Market Trends Analysis

Management - Should make decisions about Pains & Outcomes for the Target Market

Testing methods:

- User interviews
- Competitive product reviews
- User surveys
- Usage data

Example on Shutterstock - put on interstitial to find out what they were using the image for and compared the results to email surveys. Different sampling methods led to different results. Interstitials helped the team identify a new target market - people working on social media.

Teams - Solutions (designs, features, technologies)

Testing methods:

- Design research
- User interviews
- Usability testing
- Feasibility research
- Usage data
- A/B tests

Product discovery loop: Pain | Outcome | Solution | Market repeat

This loop helps you identify what you should do next.

Principle 2: Continuous Discovery and Delivery

What is it
Every sprint, gathering evidence and learning new things in addition to building.

Why is it important
Everything we do has assumptions baked in, and learning which of those assumptions are false by shipping is expensive.

How to instill it
Practice a Built-Learned-Planning Demo.

How do we know:
- Users will act on this pain?
- Users will want this outcome?
- Users can use this solution?

How much research is enough?
We're not writing a research paper, we're making a business decision.
Rule of thumb: talk to 3 - 5 customers per sprint.

Built-Learned-Planning Demo
It's not enough to be right. You also have to be persuasive.

Change your sprint demo to cover:
- What did we build
- What did we learn
- What are we planning

Incorporating these small notes about what you learned and what you're planning in each sprint demo will

Principle 3: Empowered Teams

What is it
Align on outcomes, then train and support the teams with the tools and context they need.

Why is it important
When teams are told what to build, there's no room to evolve the plan based on insights gained.

How to instill it
Write outcome goals and agree on measurement of success (could be OKRs, but doesn't have to be)

Outcome Roadmap:
Tool to help you Communicate Vision | Align on Outcomes | Train & Support Teams

At each phase, point out what Target Segment you're focusing on and the user outcome.

The first one may be a little disappointing, but it helps you get started and start testing with customers.

In next phase, expand to another market segment

The Anticipated Feature set explains what you think you're going to build. Emphasize that the segment and the outcome is key.

Also important to go back to the business outcome.

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THE ART OF THE PIVOT

Dennis Crowley, Founder, Foursquare
linkedin.com/in/dpstyles

Session Overview:
This session explores what it truly takes to execute a successful business pivot, where rapid shifts in consumer preferences, technological advancements, and competitive landscapes demand agility and strategic realignment. Learn firsthand from Crowley's experiences with Foursquare, a classic case of a successful pivot from a location check-in app to a leading enterprise tech giant, leveraging machine learning for groundbreaking insights — along with experiences from Crowley's newer ventures, Living Cities and Street FC.

Key Points:
Dennis builds products that make the cities "easier to use".

When Foursquare hit a plateau, the leadership team was able to view new opportunities and Dennis realized he was not the right CEO to lead that effort.

Often the biggest hurdles CEO's face is their own psychology.

A CEO's perception of product managers depends a lot on whether they want to be a Product CEO, a Sales CEO, or a BizDev CEO.

Notes:
What's fueled Dennis throughout his career
Dennis likes to think of himself as a maker of things. He get ideas for things he want to make that others may or may not be a good idea. There are some of those ideas that just keep hanging around and he can't sleep until he makes it happen.

The really good ideas start out as an idea, some turns into a project, and then turn into a product and then into a company.

Dennis carries a notebook around to capture the ideas that come up as he walks around New York City.

What led to Foursquare
Foursquare is the sequel to Dodgeball, best described as Foresquare with text messaging. thos apps were inspired by the idea of having a magical item that told you where everyone was.

The driving challenge behind both ideas, and really all of Dennis's ideas: Can we make software that makes the city (New York City) "easy to use"?

In other words, how might we make it easier for normal people to use the city?

Foursquare started as consumer app, then turned into data power house. How did that pivot happen?
Between 2009 - 2014 Foursquare was growing a lot.

Then the growth stopped at around 50 million users, and the team couldn't figure out why. Did they do something wrong, did the world change, or did they just get to scale where growth wouldn't happen?

The board realized they weren't going to hit the scale of a SnapChat but they had to figure out how to make Foursquare work.

The board realized they had a lot of data powering Foursquare and the idea came up that they could ask businesses to start paying for the data they used.

When someone objected that the businesses wouldn't pay for something that was currently free, one of the board members observed that it would be easier for those businesses to write a check than assign 10 engineers to switch to a different data provider.

Around roughly the same time, an employee pitched the idea that they could use foot traffic data into Apple Stores on iPhone release day to predict how many iphones were going to be sold.

At this point, Dennis had the realization that if all best ideas don't come from execs or the board, then they needed to empower the people with the idea to make them happen.

The ability to sense market movements based on foot traffic trends showed value of data assets.

Foursquare then had to figure out what type of people they should hire. They switched from 90% B2C skill sets to 90% B2B skill sets. It was a slow switch. When it became clear that Foursquare was becoming enterprise B2B, Dennis decided it was time for him to step down.

This move was a Leap of faith because Foursquare leadership had to put their trust in the hands of other people in the org.

What does the process to step away look like?
Dennis considers himself a strong leader of B2C and inventing in consumer side.

When the job became enterprise, Dennis realized it wasn't his thing.

He got advice from others to put others underneath him and change the whole company. He decided to change it by putting in a whole new leadership.

He put himself in Foursquare labs to focus on consumer research and became the Foursquare “spirit animal”.

With any pivot there are risks. How do you balance the risks?
Dennis underestimated how hard it would be to change the DNA of the company. There’s all the institutional knowledge that you have to change.

It took years to change perception of the company.

It had stopped growing and they broke the core app into two pieces - City Guide and Check in. It was a crazy product decision that saw the numbers tank for a while and made the transition harder than it needed to be.

When going through that process and numbers dip, did it impact morale?
When you’ve been growing for a while and you plateau, you start second guessing yourself. Ben Horowitz wrote article What’s The Most Difficult CEO Skill? Managing Your Own Psychology that talks about how you learn to trust yourself when you doubt yourself.

Foursquare took all sorts of morale hits. As the company was reinventing itself there were a lot of questions.

Dennis got himself out of the way and got people that were strong enterprise business leaders and they built teams around them.

What is the communication process going through the pivot to get everyone in lock step?
The process to replace Dennis was a 2 year process starting with meeting with the board to identify they needed to make a change. From there it was rebuilding the team, bringing in new leadership (COO), make sure they fit, then move COO to CEO.

A lot of things have to go right along the way.

Building a company is the same sort of task as building a product or building software. You have to be intentional about the org chart, messaging, and communication.

How did you maintain customer loyalty with the pivot to enterprise?
Foursquare had this data because people used the app. As they started to pivot away from B2C app, questions came up whether the data still good.

The data was still good because Foursquare built developer tools, api, and sdk and were getting data from other sources that the B2C app. The problem was Foursquare didn’t initially communicate that very well.

If a company has all of its engineers as contractors, it's probably a sign that the company doesn't understand the role of engineers.

Engineers need to engage in discovery work with product designer and product manager. They need to be in the room where it happens. Nothing is more important than an empowered engineer. Engineers are not just there to code. They're there to come up with the right solution.

Product Leadership
Product Leaders are the manager of Product Managers, manager of Product Designers, and manager of Engineers.

Product Leaders enable and empower the product teams with coaching and strategy.

The product operating model depends on product leadership. Product Leaders address the challenges that Andy Grove pointed out "What gets in the way of good work? There are only two possibilities: The first is that people don't know how to do good work. The second is that they know how, but they aren't motivated."

Empowered product teams need to have a strategic context in which they make informed product decisions. Netflix understood this when they established the principle of Lead with context, not control.

5 Product Concepts:
Product Strategy
Product Strategy is the most impactful concept to a company. This is where you decide which problems to go do discovery on.

To create a proper product strategy you need to Immerse yourself in insights from:

- Customers
- Data
- Technology - things that are just now possible.
- Industry - what's going on in your particular part of the world that you can use to help solve customer problems

Product sense - recognition that you've immersed yourself in insights.

Product Teams

- Small
- Durable
- Cross Functional
- Empowered with problems to solve
- Accountable with results

The nature of how people work together is important. Innovation relies on Product Manager, Product Designer, and Tech Lead working to solve a problem together.

What does PMF for a pivot look like
Dennis doesn’t know the PMF answer.

When the iPhone sales and Chipotle prediction happened, it was not PMF, but it indicated there was something to the idea.

Instead, he looks for things that “feel like magic” and he searches for how to get that magic experience for 100,000 people?

Foursquare has been lucky at bringing people in who can turn ideas into PMF.

Recent ventures
Dennis left Foursquare in 2021.

Since then, he’s been working on other projects such as StreetFC - how to make it easy to play soccer in a city. This is]another example of making cities easy to use.

He’s also been working on City Guide for AirPods. It’s an app that’s in your ears and shares information tidbits about thing you walk by.

It’s an app you don’t have to go to your phone to use.
Foursquare has been lucky at bringing people in who can turn ideas into PMF

What are some core lessons from past experience that influence your current activities?
Founder self doubt is a real thing. Dennis is still haunted by the thought “I made this thing and it sucks. Will people think its stupid?”

Since he’s done enough stuff he’s realized you have to just power through that.

He has Long ideas that go on for 6 years before they come to fruition. He tracks those ideas in a series of notebooks.

There’s something good in there. He doesn’t know what it is yet.

His decision filter for ideas is How do you make the magical feeling when walking through the city?

What’s exciting Dennis about the future
Dennis is burnt out on algorithmic feeds.

He wonders what an endlessly scrolling feed look like if you don’t have to look at it?

Siri Google are genies. They only come out when you call. What if you have an app that represents an angel and devil sitting on your shoulders. Something that tells you things based on your context.

He's also contemplated using Open AI to be a City Guide, but it's really bad
When you chose to split B2C app, was that part of the pivot strategy? If so, what was the premise? If not regrets?
The split to City Guide/Check In was not directly related to enterprise, but happened at roughly the same time.

They were getting feedback that people weren't sure what to use the app. At the same time, there was a trend toward smaller, simpler apps. So they made the change, but didn't communicate the change well.

They Had to so something because they were struggling with retention.

The strategy for the change was to keep people using it, and make it simpler. because it hallucinates stuff.

What's your reaction to the Humane AI Pin?
He hasn't played with it, but saw the reviews.

Applauds people who take a swing with hardware. He also admires the swing at non screen interface, but it may be too early.

His thought is you'd be better off using ubiquitous technology - how do you leverage stuff people already have?

What's your perspective on the role of the Product Manager?
It varies from company to company and what you're building and the audience and the personality of the leadership.

If you're going to be a CEO you have to decide what type of CEO you're going to be: Sales CEO, Product CEO, Biz Dev CEO, etc.

Dennis was a product CEO. He worked with PM's to come up with ideas, then the ran with it.

It comes down to what type of CEO is running the company and how much autonomy PM's have in that role.

How do you decide when to go down the path of making the bet?
A moment of realization came that what they were doing was not going to work.

Dennis had to say "I don't know what the answer is. We have to figure that out together."

Foursquare is around today because leaders after Dennis have been empowered to take data and technology and run with it.

Are you using data or intuition to make decisions.
Dennis has no patience for people who pretend they know it all There's power in the moment of honest and vulnerability when you allow people to step up and run with things.

Some people can't admit that they don't know what the right answer is.

What are some of the greatest challenges you've faced?
Dennis's biggest challenge is his Own psychology: Am I doing a good job?

When you're a CEO, you get in a reality distortion field because everyone is telling you you're doing a good job. That relates to self doubt cycles between excitements and bummer.

How do you Integrate technology/AI, how will that lead to addiction to tech and do you detox from tech?
A lot of tech companies make stuff that distracts people. Dennis even went down that path looking for software that would make people keep one AirPod in.

He know aims to make software respectful of your attention. He doesn't want to be an app that demands attention.

Dennis feels like he should do tech detox, but hasn't been successful in doing that.

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NOTES

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