

# OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES TO YOUR PRODUCT MANAGEMENT GREATNESS

ProductCamp Portland 2015

Discussion Leader: Miki Tokola

A special thanks to our volunteer scribe: Susan Tait

## AGENDA

This is a group discussion, not a lecture, so please contribute your thoughts

1. Brief discussion of what makes a great PM
2. Identify some of the major barriers
3. Suggestions on how to overcome the barriers

## WHAT MAKES A GREAT PM?

Spent a whole hour on this at last year's ProductCamp, not going to repeat  
Notes from that discussion are available at our ProductCamp website under 2014 sessions

### Product

Creates the whole product (core, expected, augmented, potential)

Thinks of the product based on customer value, not features or benefits

### Market

Understands how to conduct market and customer research and competitive analysis

Understands the market at the macro level

Deep insights into the targeted customers' current and future needs and wants

### Business Perspective

Ability to uncover disruptive opportunities and create concrete plans to take advantage of them

Knows where the long-term revenue is going to come from

Cross-functional and holistic

### Communication

Speaks many languages: finance, engineering, sales, marketing communication

### Leadership

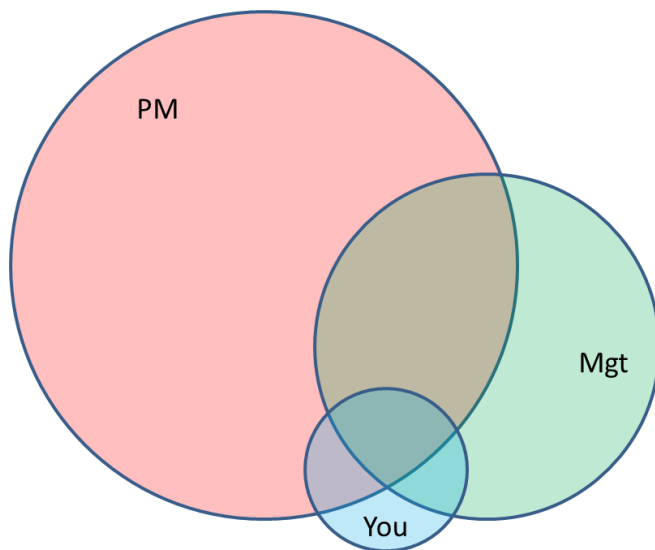
An ambassador, evangelist and champion for the product/market pair

Executes – grinds it out, consistently delivers

### Personal skills

Thinks disruptively, inquisitive, passionate, humble, proactive

## BARRIERS TO BEING A GREAT PRODUCT MANAGER



The Venn diagram represents three areas of product management understanding: what the experts say product management consists of, how your management defines product management, and what you know about product management.

### Notes from our group discussion

Turnover in management

Ignorance about product management

Organizational structure – an executive focus on sales won't let you focus on the market

Organizational politics – relationships inside

Too many strengths – “weight these?”

PM as SME – demand for time; stretched thin

Silos, dependencies – shared resources

Lack of authority (but has responsibility)

Market experience – domain versus discipline expertise

Roadmap integrity versus opportunism

Do we even need a PM?

Unwillingness to estimate – executive resistance, no clear model

No clear understanding of method (Agile) – expectations and understanding

PM “thrown in” without training, experience and management doesn't know either

Company definition of PM versus the PM discipline definition (false dichotomies)

Great PMs don't get to stay there long. This is a grooming position

## **Miki's Facilitation Notes**

Not having the training, experience, skills to do the job

Difference of opinion between you and management about your role and responsibilities

CEO Prod	Janitor
Market	Product
Biz	Technology
Strategic	Tactical
Inbound	Outbound
Value	Features
Problem	Solution
Roadmap	Implementer
Proactive	Reactive

Lack of resources to get the job done

Getting spread too thin

Unclear strategy and target market

Getting lost in the weeds – too tactical

Constant fire-fighting – too reactive

Having the wrong or unsupportive culture

Product or sales orientation

Weak information infrastructure

Place in the organization

## **HOW TO OVERCOME THE BARRIERS**

### **Notes from our group discussion**

Set expectations, affirmations, priorities, time, strategy

Recap the communication thru the life cycle

Prior agreements and what I'm not working on

Speak in management's language

Keep speaking. Repetition is important. May need 4-5 times to get your point across

Have confidence in the role: what are you trying to do

Meet and mix with experienced people, especially for new people

Communicate across and within silos and levels

Express empathy with your own organizational silos and stakeholders

Chameleon – talk in their words

Why does what the PM say matter. Put things in context

Right place, right time

Don't wait. Be proactive about what to do

Do your own marketing – show your value

VOC analysis relevance, value of your deliverable  
Build relationship and trust with the Scrum Master. No hidden agenda  
Believe in your ability  
Explain opportunity costs and damage control  
Delegate! Excite other to pass on energy  
Leverage your tools  
Have a nickname, tagline, memorable short phrase for what you're working on  
Know your definition of success  
Be SME in your market  
Analyze your business  
Learn to convey new plans in their language  
Go to a different company – bloom where you're planted, if you can

### **Miki's Facilitation Notes**

Professional PM development outside of your company

- Seminars, reading, networking

- MBA program

Strengthen critical skills

- In most cases, you have to take charge of your own professional development

- Market research, customer research

- Finance

- Marketing communications

- Communication skills

- Leadership

Learn to read your senior management

- What is their definition of product management?

- What is their definition of success for your role and how will it be measured?

- Where are their priorities and how do you fit in?

Become an expert in your market

- Problem to be solved

- What do your targeted customers value?

- Trends and upcoming strategic inflection points

- Untapped opportunities – high priority, unmet needs

- Back it up with data, not just your opinion based on previous experience

Analyze the business of your products

- Financial – revenue, margins

- Customer satisfaction

- Loss order reports

- What's off plan and what do you recommend to correct it

Learn how to create and present a compelling business proposal  
Learn how to translate your programs into business enhancers  
How are you enhancing nurturing leads, closing sales, margins, customer satisfaction, and competitiveness?  
Create a vision, a roadmap of where to go  
Demonstrate strategic thinking  
Where will the market, your customer and the competition be in 2-3 years  
Increase cross-functional communication  
What can you do to help make them more successful?  
Engineering, sales, mar-comm, manufacturing  
Go to another company  
The PM role is very specific to each company  
You won't learn the breadth of PM from one company, just their definition of PM

## **SUMMARY**

To become a great PM

1. Continuously grow your skill set through training and experience
2. Strike a balance between:
  - a. Problem and solution
  - b. Business and technology
  - c. Strategic and tactical
3. Become a valued catalyst making everyone more successful
4. Find an environment that supports the PM discipline

Thanks to everyone who attended the session and contributed to the discussion.  
If you have questions or additional thoughts on the subject, you can reach me at  
[miki@pcamppdx.org](mailto:miki@pcamppdx.org)