

Tips for the new product manager: your first week

You have exactly one shot at listening to your customers with fresh ears – don't waste it!



BY EVAN MICHNER

BROWSE TOPICS

- Agile manifesto
- > **Scripts for new product managers**
- Roadmaps
- Tips for presenting product roadmaps
- Requirements
- How to prioritize features using NPS
- Product analytics
- Remote product management
- > Agile at scale
- > Software development
- > Design
- > The agile advantage
- DevOps
- > Agile Teams
- > Agile tutorials
- > About the Agile Coach
- All articles

Here's my new favorite interview question for product managers: "How would you spend your first week on the job here?" And here are some of the answers I've gotten:

"Hunker down and study the platform and architecture."

"Probably call a few meetings with the team and figure out who my stakeholders are."

"Build relationships with the developers and designers. Take them to lunch. Buy them a few beers."

"Dig through the data. Start looking at what analytics are in place."

"Talk to your best customers and ask them about what they like about the product."

Some great answers! But at the risk of giving every future interviewee the answer we're really looking for, any product manager's first week should include directly engaging and talking with users.

You've got a team of problem-solving engineers and designers, and they're looking to you to prioritize problems. How can they be confident in your decision making if you're more comfortable talking about the tech stack than engaging with your users?



Your job as a PM is to find the right problems – then work with your team to solve them.

If you don't have time to talk to your users (especially in your first week!), you are not the right person to be prioritizing the problems for your team.

Don't get me wrong. You should definitely carve out time to go over data and analytics. Any good product manager makes decisions based on the numbers. But, in case it's been a while since you've talked to an actual user, here's a gentle reminder: **users aren't numbers.**

Data report on the number of users who clicked on the

RELATED TUTORIAL

Learn scrum with Jira Software

[Try this tutorial →](#)

SUBSCRIBE

Sign up for more articles

Email

[Subscribe](#)

button. Usability testing reveals why users had trouble finding your button. But informal conversations with users can show you that they'd rather have a 1-800 number instead of a button! You just never know what you'll find out.



And yes: definitely get familiar with the technology during your first week. Talk to the team about the platform's limitations and their gripes with it. Get to know the basic architecture. But your job is not to write code, as tempting as that might be. Your job is to find problems to solve. I mean, if you're a product manager and you haven't talked to a user in a while, you may want to rethink your job title.

And for the PM who is joining a company with plenty of resources to do formal usability studies, watching interviews behind a one-way mirror is super cool. You can learn a ton from those (and from the interviewer's techniques). But don't let that stop you from having an actual conversation with a user. An interview behind a one-way mirror is not a replacement for a chat with someone using your product.

So if you're joining a new company, go ahead and reach out to a few of your users. Even the ones who were unhappy and left. Actually, *especially* them.

Not only will you end up learning a few things about the product and user base, you may just be the touch point that user needs to stick with your product. Think of it as the cheapest investment in customer satisfaction you can make.

Remember: you only get one chance to have a fresh perspective. Use it wisely and get into your users' heads.

Good luck with your first week on the job!



EVAN MICHNER

With a background in creative writing, I faced a steep learning curve when I got into product management in 2006! Since then, most of my work has centered around iterative testing, working with users, and shipping products in agile environments in startups and larger companies alike. Find me on Twitter: @evanmichner

TUTORIAL

Learn scrum with Jira Software

A step-by-step guide on how to drive a scrum project, prioritize and organize your backlog into sprints, run the scrum ceremonies and more, all in Jira.

[Try this tutorial →](#)

ARTICLE

Agile roadmaps: build, share, use, evolve

A roadmap is just as important to an agile team as it is to a waterfall team. We'll talk about how to build an agile roadmap, how to use it, and evolve it.

[Read this article →](#)

Agile Topics

Agile project
management
Scrum
Kanban
Design

Software development
Product management
Teams
Agile at scale
DevOps

Sign up for more agile articles and tutorials.

Email

[Subscribe](#)



Up Next
[Roadmaps →](#)