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i write on things.

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Advice for the world's future product managers

A few weeks ago, I read [Lulu Cheng's post](#) on the technical clout needed to “level up” as a product manager and [Merci Victoria Grace's post](#) calling out to women in product.

Both of these messages reminded me that I know quite a few people that have moved into (and out of) product roles. I asked them if they wouldn't mind sharing a few sentences of wisdom to anyone considering taking on a product role. Here's what they said:

Listen—*Working on a product, new or old, requires a holistic understanding of every piece involved. When first entering a product organization, before you identify one single requirement, the most strategic thing you can do is listen, learn, and understand as much as you can about its history and inner-workings. Take your time with this process. It impacts all that follows.*

Communicate & Motivate—*You will begin to shape a perspective around the product that is all your own. But your team may not see things your way all the time—people see the world in different shades of opportunity and risk. Your prime task will be to convince your team that the direction you have identified is the right one to pursue, and to motivate them to join you on the journey. There's a good book by [Tory Higgins](#) and [Heidi Grant Halvorson](#) that details these differences, and how they can be both understood.*

— [Brian](#), Lead Product Manager

Before I became a product manager at Kickstarter I expanded my community role to include managing the support team, liaising with the product and dev team, and mocking up wireframes for internal tools. I proved myself as someone who could manage a team, troubleshoot

problems, and communicate effectively with engineers and designers. When I noticed that some of the minor work I was sending to product could be done by me and save everyone time, I learned how to do it myself. I proved myself as curious and proactive, and down the road, after moving to the product team, I studied CSS, Ruby, and SQL so I could do my job better. Had I continued in the role, I would have worked to improve my technical skills.

— Daniella, now teaching high school math & coding

I found being a PM very uncomfortable when I started. It wasn't clear to me what work I should be doing, where I should offer guidance to team members, and when I should get out of the way. On top of that, very little of my job resulted in tangible output so it was hard to get a sense of what I had accomplished, let alone whether I was doing good work.

If I could send a message back in time, I'd tell myself not to stress; it takes time to understand the ways in which you can be helpful to a particular team and organization. I would also tell myself that once I understood the needs that existed, I shouldn't bother resisting areas that I don't want to be part of my job. Ultimately, anything I can do to help get the right product out the door in a timely manner is part of my job. I can't choose what those things are, I can only choose whether or not to learn to do them well.

— Nigel, Product Manager

Customer support is one of the best roles you can do before transitioning into PM. You already have a ton of empathy with the customer. The important part is figuring out how to shape a vision beyond responding to what customers ask for. Be curious and ask why so you can learn more—ask about why previous product decisions were made, ask why something would be difficult technically. All of that helps you build your own intuition for a great strategy.

On the execution side, Making Things Happen has a lot of great advice for managing technical projects and schedules.

— Ellen, Director of Product Management (and currently teaching the fundamentals of Product Management over at Skillshare!)

When it's imperative that you solve a problem, you're forced to find clever solutions. Budgets guide us to spend less and save more. Deadlines help minimize waste and maximize productivity. Many artists leverage constraints to enhance their creative process. Find what works best for you and get started. You are the only thing holding yourself back.

— Ian, Product Manager (This quote is an excerpt from his recent piece on limitations.)

“I enjoy working with Product Managers that ...”

At the recommendation of my friend Ian (quoted above), I also asked a few people that work in roles outside of product to complete the sentence above. Here's how they responded:

I enjoy working with Product Managers that...

“...aren't satisfied with an easy answer.”

— Marissa, Community Support Technical Operations Manager

“...take the lead on projects, but delegates and collaborates well. A good PM gives ownership over parts of the project where I can contribute well, shields me from things that don't concern me, and coordinates my efforts with everyone else on the team so we're all moving in parallel.”

— Ryan, Engineer

“...inspire and innovate.”

— Katherine, Director of Community Support

Have something to add? Want to “complete the sentence”? Talk to me and my WeSupport pals over on Twitter! And thanks to the fine folks that contributed their words of wisdom to this article. :)

