

## Problem Statement

Describe your product challenge in detail

The product manager I am working with is not giving me any clear directions?  
How do I negotiate with him?

Convene Council

## The Visionary

Vision, Intuition, Culture, Founder Mode

In addressing a lack of clear direction from a product manager, it's essential to align on vision and establish a culture of transparency and influence. As Brian Chesky suggests, "The CEO, unless they're not a product person, should think of themselves as the chief product officer," emphasizing the founder's deep involvement in product vision. Start by clearly communicating the overarching company vision, ensuring that the product manager understands this and its implications for the product.

Consider restructuring how product management functions. As Ben Horowitz noted, "The job is fundamentally a leadership job...your actual job is to get a product into market that customers love." Ensure the product manager understands their role in leading through influence rather than authority. Encourage them to build a narrative around the product that aligns with the company's long-term goals and resonates emotionally with customers.

To foster negotiation, establish a culture where clarity is prioritized over consensus. Chesky mentions, "What everyone really wants is clarity and...to row in the same direction." Encourage

open dialogues about expectations, and create shared accountability by involving key stakeholders in regular roadmap reviews.

Lastly, if necessary, consider realigning roles to better fit strengths, perhaps shifting the product manager to a program management role if it better suits their capabilities, as Chesky has done. This ensures that each team member contributes effectively to the company's vision. 🎯 High confidence

#### Sources from the collective

Brian Chesky · Brian Chesky's new playbook · 00:34:53



Ben

Horowitz · \$46B of hard truths: Why founders fail and why you need to run toward fear | Ben Horowitz (a16z) · 0

*"Yeah, so the reason I wrote it when I wrote it was that I had a lot of product managers. And one thing about product management is it's a job that's completely different at every company and there is ..."*

Nikita

Bier · Driving alignment within teams, work-life balance, and the changing PM landscape | Nikita Miller · 00:46:10

Brian Chesky · Brian Chesky's new playbook · 00:34:53



## The Scaler

Strategy, Empowered Teams, Product Discovery

To navigate a situation where a product manager isn't providing clear direction, consider the following strategy, drawing from collective wisdom:

1. **Clarify Strategy**: Begin by seeking alignment on the product vision and strategic goals. As Shreyas Doshi emphasized, "a clear correct strategy should help inform" the team's efforts. Request a session to discuss the overarching goals and key priorities.
2. **Define Outcomes**: Shift the focus from features to outcomes. Ask the product manager about the desired user and business outcomes. As Marty Cagan noted, the PM is "responsible for value and viability," thus these discussions should center around those aspects.
3. **Propose a Framework**: Suggest adopting a structured framework like Google's 70-20-10 rule, which helps in prioritizing efforts. This can provide clarity on resource allocation and project focus.
4. **Empowerment through Discovery**: Encourage the product manager to involve the team in product discovery. As Marty Cagan stated, teams must "have the skills to do product discovery"

to create solutions that work for both the customer and the business.

5. **\*\*Facilitate Constructive Conversations\*\***: As Tomer Cohen suggested, value "strong challenges or arguments" and aim for a collaborative approach. Propose regular check-ins to ensure alignment and clarity.

6. **\*\*Negotiate through Questions\*\***: Ask open-ended questions to guide the PM in articulating the strategy. This can help uncover insights and foster a shared understanding.

By fostering a collaborative environment, you can drive clarity and alignment, ensuring both you and the product manager are working towards common goals. 🌀 High confidence

## PM High Council

Quad-Swarm strategic advisory from collective product leadership wisdom

Marty Cagan · Product management theater | Marty Cagan (Silicon Valley Product Group) · 01:02:40 ▶

Shreyas Doshi · The art of product management | Shreyas Doshi (Stripe, Twitter, Google, Yahoo) · 01:08:51 ▶

### The Scientist

Loops, Acquisition, Pricing, Retention

In the absence of clear direction from your product manager, focus on establishing a growth system that is data-driven and aligned with key performance indicators. As Brian Balfour noted: "Your output is constrained by the slowest part of your system." Therefore, identify bottlenecks and streamline processes to enhance system efficiency.

1. **\*\*Focus on Growth Loops\*\***: Develop and iterate on growth loops that enhance acquisition, activation, and retention. As Elena Verna suggests, allocate 20-25% of your team's time annually to explore new growth loops—this fosters innovation and prevents stagnation.


2. **\*\*Identify Key Metrics\*\***: Establish a north star metric that captures the core value delivered to users, as Sean Ellis emphasized. This metric should reflect product-market fit and guide your decision-making process. Additionally, track retention curves, activation metrics, and engagement rates for deeper insights.

3. **\*\*Data-Driven Negotiation\*\***: Use data to support your case when negotiating with the

product manager. Present evidence of current system inefficiencies and propose solutions that align with business goals.

4. **Cross-Functional Collaboration**: Encourage collaboration across teams to mitigate friction. As Patrick Campbell noted, alignment on what 'good' looks like is crucial to avoid misalignment and resentment.

By presenting a structured plan backed by metrics and fostering cross-functional dialogue, you can negotiate more effectively with your product manager. Cultivate a shared understanding of priorities and objectives to establish a cohesive growth strategy.

 High confidence

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#### Sources from the collective

Elena

Verna · 10 growth tactics that never work | Elena Verna (Amplitude, Miro, Dropbox, SurveyMonkey) · 00:06:36 ▶

Patrick

Campbell · 10 lessons on bootstrapping a \$200m business | Patrick Campbell (ProfitWell) · 00:37:22 ▶

Sean

Ellis · The original growth hacker reveals his secrets | Sean Ellis (author of "Hacking Growth") · 00:08:33 ▶

Brian

## The Architect

Systems, Technical Debt, Feasibility

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When working with a product manager who lacks clear direction, technical considerations revolve around ensuring the engineering team remains productive and aligned with broader goals.

### **Technical Considerations:**

- Clarify Requirements**: Without clear direction, there's a risk of building features that don't align with customer needs. Gather existing data to hypothesize potential requirements and validate them with stakeholders.
- Iterative Development**: Adopt a flexible, iterative approach to accommodate changes as clarity emerges. This reduces the risk of significant rework.
- Prioritize Technical Debt**: Use this period to address technical debt, ensuring future development is more agile and sustainable.

**\*\*Feasibility Concerns:\*\***

1. **\*\*Resource Allocation\*\***: Without direction, resource allocation can become inefficient. Ensure team efforts remain focused on high-impact areas.
2. **\*\*Strategic Misalignment\*\***: Building without clear goals may lead to misalignment with the company's strategy, wasting time and effort.

**\*\*Negotiation Strategy:\*\***

- **\*\*Empathy and Understanding\*\***: Recognize the product manager's challenges. As Will Larson noted, "Sometimes the incentives are misaligned... understanding the incentives" is key to effective collaboration.
- **\*\*Propose Solutions\*\***: Suggest structured approaches, like regular brainstorming sessions or workshops, to collaboratively develop a clearer roadmap.
- **\*\*Influence from the Side\*\***: As Camille Fournier suggested, sometimes you need to "product manage them" by clearly stating the problems and desired outcomes, guiding them toward clarity.

By taking proactive steps to manage ambiguity, you can maintain team momentum while fostering a collaborative relationship with your product manager. 🎯 High confidence

## Sources from the collective

Camille

Fournier · The things engineers are desperate for PMs to understand | Camille Fournier ("The Manager's Path") ·

Will Larson · The engineering mindset | Will Larson (Carta, Stripe, Uber, Calm, Digg) · 00:16:52 ▶

Geoff

Charles · Velocity over everything: How Ramp became the fastest-growing SaaS startup ever | Geoff Charles · 0

Camille

Fournier · The things engineers are desperate for PMs to understand | Camille Fournier ("The Manager's Path") ·

## Synthesis

Strategic recommendations balancing all perspectives

**👉 Alignment**

- All collectives emphasize the importance of clarity in vision, strategy, and communication to ensure alignment and effective collaboration.
- There is consensus on the need for data-driven decision-making and the establishment of clear metrics to guide both product and growth strategies.

### ⚡ Tensions

- **Vision vs. Feasibility:** Founders' ambitious visions may clash with engineering's need for clear, feasible requirements.
- **Scale vs. Quality:** The drive for rapid scaling can compromise product quality and technical integrity, leading to potential technical debt.
- **Innovation vs. Sustainability:** Balancing the pace of innovation with sustainable growth and maintenance of existing systems is crucial.
- **Strategy vs. Execution:** The gap between strategic vision and daily execution needs bridging to ensure coherent progress.

### ✅ Recommended Actions

1. **Clarify and Align Vision:** Initiate a session with the product manager to articulate the company's overarching vision and strategic goals, ensuring alignment across all teams.
2. **Define and Prioritize Outcomes:** Shift focus from features to desired outcomes. Establish a shared understanding of key business and user outcomes to guide product development.
3. **Implement Data-Driven Frameworks:** Adopt structured frameworks like Google's 70-20-10 rule to prioritize efforts and allocate resources effectively, maintaining a balance between innovation and core product integrity.
4. **Foster Cross-Functional Collaboration:** Encourage regular cross-functional meetings to discuss progress, address bottlenecks, and ensure alignment on what constitutes 'good' product development.
5. **Empower Through Discovery and Iteration:** Involve teams in product discovery and iterate on development processes to accommodate evolving clarity, addressing technical debt to support sustainable growth.