

Problem Statement

Describe your product challenge in detail

Our Sales VP demands a fixed 12-month feature roadmap with specific dates so they can close big enterprise deals. My engineering team refuses to commit to dates that far out because 'things change.' Who is right, and what do I give the Sales VP?

Convene Council

Brian Chesky

Design & Experience

This is a classic tension between the need for certainty in sales and the inherent uncertainty in product

Marty Cagan

Process & Empowerment

This is a classic tension between sales-driven organizations and product-led teams. However, the approach

Elena Verna

Growth & Metrics

This is a classic tension between sales and engineering in a product-led organization. Each side has valid points, but

development. From my perspective, when it comes to creating extraordinary customer experiences, adaptability is key. Here's how I would approach this:

1. **Embrace a Rolling Roadmap:** I'd advise against a fixed 12-month roadmap. Instead, adopt a rolling roadmap that allows for flexibility. At Airbnb, we have a two-year roadmap that we update every six months. This allows us to adapt to changes while still providing some level of visibility into the future.

2. **Set Clear Priorities and Themes:** Rather than committing to specific features and dates, focus on setting clear priorities and themes for each quarter. This gives your Sales VP a narrative to share with clients without locking engineering into rigid deadlines.

you're facing is indicative of a feature team mentality, not an empowered product team. Let's break down why this is problematic and how you might address it.

First, the idea of a fixed 12-month feature roadmap is rooted in a commitment to output rather than outcomes. It's about delivering features on a schedule, which can lead to a disconnection from customer needs and market changes. It also undermines the agility and flexibility that empowered product teams thrive on.

Your engineering team is right to resist committing to dates that far out because "things change." Market conditions, customer feedback, and technological advancements can all shift priorities. This is why strong product teams focus on continuous product

the key is to find a balance that respects both the need for flexibility in product development and the requirements of enterprise sales.

Let's break it down:

1. **Sales VP's Perspective:** They need confidence in the product roadmap to close enterprise deals. Large clients often require commitments on future product features as part of the deal.

2. **Engineering's Perspective:** Committing to a rigid 12-month feature roadmap can be risky because it limits the team's ability to adapt to new information, market changes, or technical challenges.

Who is right? Both are. Sales needs commitments to

It's about telling a compelling story that aligns with your product vision.

3. **Create a Shared Consciousness:** Foster a continuous conversation between your sales and engineering teams. This ensures everyone is rowing in the same direction and understands the trade-offs and constraints each side faces. At Airbnb, we created a shared consciousness where top leaders had ongoing discussions, which helped align the whole company.

4. **Reserve Resources for Flexibility:** Make sure to keep some resources in reserve for unexpected opportunities or changes. This way, you can pivot quickly if necessary. As we did when housing 120,000 refugees, you can still adapt and respond to emergent needs

discovery alongside product delivery.

Here's what I recommend:

1. **Shift the Focus to Outcomes:** Instead of promising specific features and dates, work with your Sales VP to understand the customer problems they are trying to solve. Translate those problems into business outcomes that your product team can aim for. This will help align sales and product goals.

2. **Implement Continuous Discovery:** Encourage your product teams to engage in ongoing discovery practices. This means regularly interacting with customers, prototyping solutions, and iterating based on feedback. This approach will better inform what can realistically be delivered and when.

close deals, and engineering needs flexibility to ensure quality and innovation.

What to do:

1. **Define Clear Strategic Priorities:** Instead of a rigid feature roadmap, define strategic themes or priorities for the next 12 months. This provides direction without locking in specific features.

2. **Introduce Growth Loops:** Focus on growth loops that can be used to drive engagement and retention. For example, if you're using a product-led growth strategy, ensure that features align with your activation and retention metrics. Prioritize loops that can demonstrate value to enterprise clients, like collaboration features or integrations.

3. **Communicate Iteratively:**

without derailing your overall roadmap.

5. ****Communicate Vision and Craft:**** Trust in your vision and craft over rigid metric-based plans. Your Sales VP should communicate the vision of where your product is headed and the extraordinary experiences you're aiming to deliver. This can be more persuasive than a list of features and dates.

By providing a flexible yet clear strategy and ensuring everyone is aligned on the overarching goals, you can meet the needs of both sales and engineering while staying true to your product vision. Remember, it's about creating emotional resonance with your customers, not just ticking boxes on a roadmap.

Sources

3. ****Communicate a Strategic Vision:**** Rather than a detailed 12-month roadmap, provide a high-level strategic vision and a set of prioritized problems to solve. This demonstrates a clear direction while allowing flexibility in how you achieve those outcomes.

4. ****Educate on Agile Principles:**** Help your Sales VP understand the benefits of agile and lean methodologies. Emphasize how empowered teams that focus on solving problems can lead to better products and happier customers in the long run.

5. ****Negotiate Realistic Commitments:**** Work with your engineering and sales teams to define shorter-term commitments that are feasible and valuable. This might involve quarterly objectives or rolling

Establish a regular cadence for roadmap updates (e.g., quarterly). This allows you to adjust based on new insights while providing sales with a near-term view that they can communicate to prospects.

4. ****Set Expectations with Sales:**** Train your sales team to sell the vision and the value of your growth loops rather than individual features. Encourage them to focus on how your product's evolution aligns with the prospect's business goals.

5. ****Cross-Department Collaboration:**** Foster a close relationship between sales, product, and engineering. This ensures all teams understand each other's constraints and goals, facilitating better alignment.

6. ****Leverage Data:**** Use data to prioritize features that impact

Brian Chesky's new playbook · 00:05:56

Brian Chesky's new playbook · 00:16:08

forecasts instead of a rigid annual plan.

By addressing these points, you can move from a feature factory mentality to an empowered product team approach, which will ultimately lead to better solutions for your customers and more sustainable business

key metrics. If retention or activation is your goal, identify which features drive these metrics and focus your efforts there.

In my experience at companies like Dropbox and Miro, aligning teams around strategic growth loops and metrics, rather than

PM High Council

Strategic advisory from product leadership

Product management theater | Marty Cagan (Silicon Valley Product Group) · 00:21:01

Product management theater | Marty Cagan (Silicon Valley Product Group) · 00:24:58

evolves in a way that supports both long-term growth and immediate sales goals.

Sources

10 growth tactics that never work | Elena Verna (Amplitude, Miro, Dropbox, SurveyMonkey) · 00:56:20

Synthesis

Strategic recommendations balancing all perspectives

Points of Agreement:

1. **Flexibility Over Rigidity**: All three advisors agree on the importance of flexibility in product development. Brian Chesky and Elena Verna advocate for strategic themes rather than fixed roadmaps, while Marty Cagan emphasizes outcomes over outputs.
2. **Continuous Communication and Alignment**: Each advisor stresses the need for ongoing dialogue between sales, product, and engineering teams to ensure alignment. This is reflected in Brian's "shared consciousness," Marty's continuous discovery, and Elena's cross-department collaboration.
3. **Vision and Strategic Priorities**: They all advocate for maintaining a high-level strategic vision. This includes setting strategic themes (Brian and Elena) and focusing on solving prioritized problems (Marty).

Creative Tensions:

1. **Outcome vs. Features**: Marty Cagan emphasizes a strict focus on outcomes and empowered teams, while Elena Verna acknowledges the necessity of feature commitments to close enterprise deals, creating tension between ideal agile practices and real-world sales needs.
2. **Growth Metrics vs. Emotional Resonance**: Elena focuses on growth loops and metrics, which are data-driven, while Brian emphasizes emotional resonance and storytelling, which are more qualitative and experience-driven.
3. **Adaptability vs. Predictability**: Brian and Marty prioritize adaptability in the roadmap, whereas Elena recognizes the need for predictability in sales to secure enterprise commitments. This tension highlights the challenge of balancing flexibility with sales certainty.

Recommended Actions:

1. ****Adopt a Rolling Roadmap with Strategic Themes**:** Implement a rolling roadmap updated quarterly, focusing on strategic themes rather than detailed feature lists. This aligns with all perspectives by providing flexibility, maintaining strategic direction, and offering sales a narrative to communicate.
2. ****Facilitate Continuous Discovery and Growth Loops**:** Encourage product teams to engage in continuous product discovery, integrating growth loops that align with key business metrics. This approach balances Marty's focus on outcomes and Elena's emphasis on growth metrics.
3. ****Create a Shared Vision and Communication Framework**:** Develop a shared vision that clearly articulates the product's strategic direction and aligns with both sales and engineering goals. Establish regular cross-departmental meetings to ensure ongoing alignment and address emerging tensions.
4. ****Educate and Empower Sales Teams**:** Train sales teams to sell the broader vision and strategic priorities instead of specific features. This aligns with Brian and Elena's guidance to focus on storytelling and long-term client value rather than immediate feature promises.
5. ****Reserve Resources for Unplanned Opportunities**:** Allocate a portion of resources to remain adaptable to emergent opportunities and changes, as suggested by Brian. This ensures the ability to pivot quickly without disrupting overall strategic goals, accommodating both engineering flexibility and sales needs.

By embracing these steps, the organization can navigate the tensions between sales predictability and engineering adaptability, fostering a more cohesive and strategic approach to product development.

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