Product Management Crash Course for Data Leaders

Part 1: Core PM Fundamentals

What Product Management Actually Is

Product Management is the discipline of guiding a product from conception to market success by:

- **Identifying customer problems** worth solving (not solutions looking for problems)
- **Prioritizing ruthlessly** what to build and what NOT to build
- **Aligning stakeholders** around a shared vision and roadmap
- **Measuring success** through outcomes, not outputs

Key Insight for You: As a data architect, you've been doing PM work when you gathered requirements, prioritized platform features, and aligned stakeholders. The difference is PMs own the "why" and "what," while architects traditionally own the "how."

The PM Triangle of Constraints

Every PM decision balances three forces:

1. **Viability** - Will it make money/save money/drive growth?
2. **Feasibility** - Can we technically build it?
3. **Desirability** - Do users actually want/need it?

Your Advantage: Most PMs struggle with feasibility. You inherently understand it, giving you more time to focus on viability and desirability.

Types of Product Managers

- **B2C PM** - Focuses on consumer experiences, engagement metrics, user psychology
- **B2B/Enterprise PM** - Focuses on contracts, integrations, compliance, ROI
- **Platform PM** - Builds tools for other teams (your sweet spot)
- **Technical PM** - Deep technical expertise, works on infrastructure/APIs
- **Growth PM** - Focuses on acquisition, activation, retention metrics

For Zillow: You're interviewing for a Platform/Technical PM role serving internal teams.

Part 2: The PM Toolkit

1. Product Strategy Frameworks

Jobs-to-be-Done (JTBD)

- Focus on what job the customer is "hiring" your product to do
- Example: "When I [situation], I want to [motivation], so I can [expected outcome]"
- Your data platform example: "When I need to analyze property trends, I want accurate public records data, so I can make informed pricing decisions"

North Star Metric

- Single metric that captures core value you deliver
- For data platform: Could be "Time to First Insight" or "Data Quality Score"
- Everything ladders up to this metric

OKRs (Objectives and Key Results)

- Objective: Qualitative goal (WHERE we want to go)
- Key Results: Quantitative measures (HOW we know we're getting there)
- Example:
  - Objective: Become the trusted source for public property data
  - KR1: Achieve 99.9% data accuracy
  - KR2: Reduce ingestion latency to <5 minutes
  - KR3: Support 100% of downstream use cases

2. Prioritization Frameworks

RICE Scoring

- **Reach:** How many people/systems affected?
- **Impact:** How much does it move the needle? (3=massive, 2=high, 1=medium, 0.5=low)
- **Confidence:** How sure are we? (100%=high, 80%=medium, 50%=low)
- **Effort:** Person-months required
- Score = (Reach × Impact × Confidence) / Effort

Value vs. Effort Matrix

- Plot features on 2x2 grid

- High Value + Low Effort = Quick Wins (DO FIRST)
- High Value + High Effort = Big Bets (PLAN CAREFULLY)
- Low Value + Low Effort = Fill-ins (MAYBE)
- Low Value + High Effort = Time Sinks (AVOID)

Your Context: You've likely used similar frameworks for technical debt prioritization. Apply the same logic to feature prioritization.

3. Discovery Techniques

User Interviews

- Don't ask "Would you use X?" (everyone says yes)
- Ask "Tell me about the last time you tried to [solve problem]"
- Follow up with "Why?" five times to get root cause

Data Analysis

- Funnel analysis: Where do users drop off?
- Cohort analysis: How do different groups behave?
- Usage patterns: What features are actually used?

Your Strength: You can actually query the data yourself rather than waiting for analytics team.

4. Roadmapping

Now/Next/Later Framework

- **Now** (0-3 months): Committed, resourced, specific
- **Next** (3-6 months): Defined, likely, may shift
- **Later** (6+ months): Directional, exploratory, will change

Theme-Based Roadmaps

- Instead of feature lists, organize by themes
- Example themes: "Data Quality," "Ingestion Speed," "Self-Service Access"
- Shows strategy without over-committing to specific features

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Part 3: PM Communication Patterns

The Product Spec

Standard Structure:

1. **Problem Statement** - What problem are we solving?
2. **Goals** - How do we measure success?
3. **Non-Goals** - What are we explicitly NOT doing?
4. **Solution Approach** - High-level approach
5. **Detailed Requirements** - User stories and acceptance criteria
6. **Risks & Mitigations** - What could go wrong?
7. **Timeline & Milestones** - When will we deliver value?

User Stories

Format: "As a [persona], I want [feature], so that [benefit]"

Example: "As a data analyst, I want automated anomaly detection on property records, so that I can trust the data without manual validation"

Acceptance Criteria:

- Specific, measurable conditions for "done"
- Example: "Anomalies detected within 5 minutes of ingestion with 95% accuracy"

Stakeholder Management

RACI Matrix

- **Responsible** - Who does the work
- **Accountable** - Who owns the outcome (usually PM)
- **Consulted** - Who provides input
- **Informed** - Who needs updates

Your Translation: You've managed stakeholders as architect. Now you're the accountable party for business outcomes, not just technical delivery.

Part 4: Metrics That Matter

For Data Platform Products

Health Metrics

- Data Quality Score (accuracy, completeness, consistency)
- Ingestion Latency (time from source to available)
- Query Performance (P50, P95, P99 response times)
- System Uptime/Reliability (99.9% = 8.77 hours downtime/year)

Usage Metrics

- Daily Active Users (DAU)
- Queries per Day
- Data Coverage (% of use cases supported)
- Time to First Query (onboarding efficiency)

Business Metrics

- Cost per Query
- ROI of automation (hours saved × hourly rate)
- Revenue enabled (for customer-facing data products)
- Compliance incidents avoided

Leading vs. Lagging Indicators

Leading (predictive):

- Code commits per week
- User story completion rate
- Data quality at ingestion

Lagging (results):

- Customer satisfaction scores
- Revenue impact
- Adoption rates

Part 5: Agile for Product Managers

Ceremonies You'll Own/Influence

Sprint Planning

- PM brings prioritized backlog
- Team estimates effort
- PM makes tradeoff decisions

Daily Standups

- PM removes blockers
- Adjusts priorities based on discoveries

Sprint Reviews/Demos

- PM frames business context
- Gathers stakeholder feedback
- Celebrates wins

Retrospectives

- PM participates but doesn't dominate
- Focus on process improvements

Backlog Management

Hierarchy:

- **Epic** - Large body of work (quarters)
- **Story** - User-facing value (sprints)
- **Task** - Technical work (days)

Your Job: Maintain healthy backlog with 2-3 sprints of refined stories ready.

Part 6: PM Interview Patterns

Common PM Interview Types

Product Sense

- "How would you improve [product]?"
- Structure: User segments → Problems → Solutions → Prioritization → Metrics

Analytical/Metrics

- "Usage dropped 20%, what do you do?"
- Structure: Clarify → Hypothesize → Analyze → Test → Implement

Technical

- "Explain how you'd architect [system]"
- Your strength! Show product thinking alongside technical depth

Behavioral

- "Tell me about a time you disagreed with engineering"
- Use STAR: Situation → Task → Action → Result

PM Interview Framework for Each Question Type

For Strategy Questions:

1. Clarify goals and constraints
2. Identify user segments
3. Prioritize which segment to focus on
4. Brainstorm solutions
5. Prioritize solutions using framework
6. Define success metrics
7. Discuss risks and mitigations

For Metrics Questions:

1. Clarify the metric and timeframe
2. Ask about segmentation
3. Generate hypotheses (internal vs. external causes)
4. Propose investigation method
5. Suggest solutions
6. Define how to measure success

Part 7: Your PM Positioning Strategy

Your Unique PM Strengths

Technical Authority

- Can't be BS'd on feasibility
- Understand true effort/complexity
- Can prototype solutions yourself

Systems Thinking

- See downstream impacts others miss
- Understand data flow implications
- Balance local vs. global optimization

Cross-functional Experience

- Already worked with legal, compliance, operations
- Understand enterprise constraints
- Know how to navigate organizational politics

Your PM Growth Areas

Customer Discovery

- Practice user interview techniques
- Build habit of "why" over "what"
- Separate problem from solution

Business Metrics

- Learn unit economics
- Understand growth models
- Connect features to revenue

Product Marketing

- Positioning and messaging
- Competitive analysis
- Go-to-market strategy

Part 8: PM Vocabulary You Should Use

In Interviews

Instead of: "I built a data warehouse"
Say: "I delivered a data platform product that enabled 10x faster insights"

Instead of: "I gathered requirements"
Say: "I conducted discovery to understand user needs"

Instead of: "I designed the architecture"
Say: "I defined the solution approach balancing user needs with technical constraints"

Instead of: "I managed the project"
Say: "I owned the roadmap and drove cross-functional execution"

Key PM Terms to Weave In

- **Product-Market Fit** - Your solution perfectly solves customer problem
- **MVP** (Minimum Viable Product) - Smallest thing to test hypothesis
- **Pivot** - Change strategy based on learnings
- **Technical Debt** - You know this, frame it as product decision
- **Feature Velocity** - Speed of shipping new capabilities
- **Customer Journey** - End-to-end experience across touchpoints
- **Adoption Curve** - Innovators → Early Adopters → Early Majority → Late Majority → Laggards
- **Network Effects** - Product becomes more valuable as more people use it
- **Platform Play** - Building ecosystem others build upon

Part 9: Resources for Deeper Learning

Essential PM Books (Start Here)

1. **"Inspired" by Marty Cagan** - Silicon Valley PM bible
2. **"The Lean Startup" by Eric Ries** - Build-measure-learn cycle
3. **"Hooked" by Nir Eyal** - Building habit-forming products

PM Blogs/Newsletters

- **Lenny's Newsletter** - Best tactical PM content
- **Product Coalition** - Medium's PM publication
- **Stratechery** - Strategic product thinking

For Data PMs Specifically

- **"Lean Analytics" by Croll & Yoskovitz** - Metrics for different business models
- **"Data Teams" by Jesse Anderson** - Building data products
- **"The Data Warehouse Toolkit" by Kimball** - You know this, but frame it as product

Quick Wins for Zillow Interview

1. Read Zillow's recent quarterly reports - understand business strategy
2. Use Zillow's products extensively - note friction points
3. Research property data challenges - form opinions on solutions
4. Practice explaining technical concepts without jargon

Part 10: Your 30-Day PM Transition Plan

Week 1: Foundation

- Read "Inspired" by Marty Cagan
- Practice RICE scoring on your current projects
- Reframe your resume accomplishments in PM language

Week 2: Discovery Skills

- Conduct 3 practice user interviews (even with colleagues)
- Write user stories for your current work
- Create OKRs for your current role

Week 3: Strategic Thinking

- Build sample roadmap for your current platform
- Analyze metrics for products you use daily
- Write 1-page strategy doc for imaginary product

Week 4: Interview Prep

- Practice 5 product sense questions
- Practice 5 analytical questions
- Mock interview with PM friend or coach

Daily Habits

- Read one PM article daily (10 min)
- Analyze one product you use through PM lens (5 min)
- Write one user story for work you're doing (5 min)

Your PM Elevator Pitch

"I'm a technical leader with 20+ years building data platforms, now focusing on product management to drive greater business impact. My unique value is combining deep technical expertise with product thinking - I understand both what users need AND what's actually possible to build. I've led cross-functional teams, managed stakeholder expectations, and delivered products that generate real business value. Unlike traditional PMs who rely on engineering for feasibility assessments, I can make faster, more informed product decisions."

Remember: You're Not Starting from Zero

You've been doing product work throughout your career:

- Gathering requirements = Discovery
- Designing architectures = Solution design
- Managing stakeholders = Product leadership
- Measuring performance = Success metrics
- Leading implementations = Driving execution

The transition is about reframing your experience in product language and shifting your primary focus from "how" to "why" and "what."

Your PM Superpower: You can have authentic technical discussions with engineering while maintaining product-focused conversations with business stakeholders. Most PMs struggle with one or the other - you can do both.

Part 11: Progressive Exercises

Exercise Set A: Foundation (Start Here)

A1: Problem Statement Writing Write a clear problem statement for this scenario: "The data team spends 3 hours every morning checking if overnight data loads completed successfully."

A2: User Story Creation Convert this technical requirement into a user story: "Implement automated email alerts for ETL pipeline failures"

A3: Basic Prioritization You have three features and one engineer for next sprint. Prioritize:

- Feature A: Saves 10 hours/week for 5 analysts
- Feature B: Prevents one production outage per month
- Feature C: Reduces query time from 30 seconds to 5 seconds

A4: Metric Selection Your new data quality dashboard launches next month. Choose 3 key metrics to track success.

Exercise Set B: Intermediate Application

B1: RICE Scoring Score these four data platform features:

Feature	Description
Automated anomaly detection	Catches data issues automatically
Self-service data catalog	Users can find data without help
Real-time ingestion	Reduces lag from 1 hour to 5 minutes
Data lineage tracking	Shows data flow and dependencies

B2: Stakeholder Mapping You're building a new property data ingestion pipeline. Create a RACI matrix for:

- Data Engineering Team
- Legal/Compliance
- Analytics Team
- Customer Success
- Your role as PM

B3: OKR Creation Write OKRs for improving data platform reliability. Include 1 objective and 3 key results.

B4: Trade-off Decision Engineering says you can have fast, cheap, or accurate data. Pick two and write a 1-paragraph justification for stakeholders.

Exercise Set C: Complex Scenarios

C1: Discovery Interview Design The analytics team complains "the data is always wrong." Design 5 interview questions to uncover the real problem.

C2: Roadmap Conflict Resolution Three teams want different things next quarter:

- Sales: Real-time dashboards
- Finance: Historical data corrections
- Operations: New data sources

You can do one. Write your decision memo.

C3: Metric Diagnosis Daily active users of your data platform dropped 30% last week. Create a diagnostic plan with:

- 5 hypotheses
- How to test each
- What data you need

C4: Sprint Planning Simulation You have 40 story points capacity. Prioritize:

- Critical bug fix (8 points, affecting 20% of queries)
- New feature requested by CEO (21 points)
- Tech debt that will save 30% processing costs (13 points)
- Compliance requirement due in 3 weeks (15 points)
- Small UX improvements (5 points each, 4 requested)

Exercise Set D: Real-World Platform PM Challenges

D1: Build vs Buy Decision Scenario: Need data cataloging solution

- Vendor option: $200K/year, 3-month implementation
- Build option: 6 months, 2 engineers, then 20% of 1 engineer ongoing

Create a decision framework and recommendation.

D2: Platform Adoption Strategy Your new data platform is ready but teams won't migrate from the old system. Design a 90-day adoption plan.

D3: Technical Debt Prioritization You inherit a platform with:

- 40% of code untested
- 5-year-old dependencies
- Manual deployment process
- No documentation
- Performance degradation

Create a 6-month roadmap addressing technical debt while delivering new value.

D4: Executive Communication The CEO asks: "Why is our data platform always broken?" Write a 1-page response that:

- Acknowledges the concern
- Explains without being defensive
- Proposes solutions
- Asks for what you need

Exercise Set E: Zillow-Specific Practice

E1: Public Records Strategy Design a plan to improve property tax data quality from 85% to 99% accurate.

E2: Stakeholder Alignment Legal wants data removed for privacy, Sales wants everything accessible. Write your mediation approach.

E3: AI Implementation Pitch Write a 1-page proposal for using AI to automate data quality checks on public records.

E4: Cross-functional Success Metrics Define success metrics that align data platform goals with:

- Consumer app team goals
- Analytics team goals
- Compliance requirements

Part 12: Exercise Answer Key

Answers Set A: Foundation

A1 Answer: Problem Statement "Data analysts waste 15 hours weekly on manual pipeline monitoring,

causing delayed issue detection, reduced productivity, and increased risk of SLA violations. They need automated monitoring to focus on value-adding analysis instead of operational tasks."

Key elements: Quantified impact, user affected, consequences, implied solution direction

A2 Answer: User Story "As a data analyst, I want to receive automatic notifications when ETL pipelines fail, so that I can address issues immediately without manual checking."

Acceptance Criteria:

- Notifications sent within 5 minutes of failure
- Include pipeline name, error type, and affected data
- Sent via email and Slack
- Configurable per pipeline

A3 Answer: Prioritization

1. Feature B (prevent outages) - Existential risk to platform trust
2. Feature A (save 50 hours/week total) - High measurable impact
3. Feature C (performance) - Nice to have but system works

Reasoning: Reliability > Efficiency > Performance when building platform trust

A4 Answer: Metrics

1. Weekly Active Users (adoption)
2. Mean Time to Detect Issues (effectiveness)
3. False Positive Rate (trust/noise)

Avoid vanity metrics like page views. Focus on value delivery.

Answers Set B: Intermediate

B1 Answer: RICE Scoring

Feature	Reach	Impact	Confidence	Effort	Score
Anomaly Detection	100 users	3	80%	5 sprints	48
Self-Service Catalog	200 users	2	90%	3 sprints	120
Real-time Ingestion	50 users	2	70%	8 sprints	8.75
Data Lineage	100 users	2	60%	4 sprints	30

Winner: Self-service catalog (broad reach, moderate effort)

B2 Answer: RACI Matrix

Task	PM (You)	Data Eng	Legal	Analytics	Success
Requirements	A	R	C	C	I
Technical Design	C	A,R	I	C	I
Privacy Review	R	C	A	I	C
Testing	R	R	I	C	I
Launch Comms	A,R	I	I	C	C

PM is Accountable for outcomes but rarely Responsible for execution

B3 Answer: OKRs

Objective: Become the most trusted data platform in the company

Key Results:

1. Achieve 99.9% uptime (from current 98.5%)
2. Reduce data quality incidents to <2 per month (from 8)
3. Increase platform NPS score to 70+ (from 45)

Note: KRs are measurable, ambitious but achievable, and user-focused

B4 Answer: Trade-off Decision

"I choose fast and accurate over cheap. Our stakeholders depend on data for critical decisions where accuracy is non-negotiable - wrong data costs more than infrastructure. Speed enables real-time decision-making, creating competitive advantage. While infrastructure costs will increase, the ROI from trusted, timely insights far exceeds the additional spend. We'll optimize costs after establishing reliability."

Answers Set C: Complex

C1 Answer: Discovery Questions

1. "Walk me through the last time data was wrong - what specifically happened?"
2. "How did you discover it was wrong?"
3. "What was the impact when the data was incorrect?"
4. "How often does this happen? Is there a pattern?"
5. "What does 'correct data' mean to you? How would you verify it?"

Focus on specific examples, not generalities

C2 Answer: Decision Memo

Decision: Prioritize Finance - Historical Data Corrections

Rationale:

- Compliance risk: Incorrect historical data affects regulatory reporting
- Foundation building: Clean historical data improves all future analytics
- Broader impact: Sales and Operations both benefit from accurate baselines

Mitigation:

- Q2: Quick win for Sales (basic dashboard with current data)
- Q3: Operations data sources after historical cleanup

Always explain what others get and when

C3 Answer: Metric Diagnosis Plan

Hypotheses:

1. Deployment broke something (check deployment timeline)
2. Seasonal pattern (compare to previous years)
3. Specific team stopped using (segment by team)
4. Upstream data delay (check pipeline latency)
5. Authentication/access issue (check error logs)

Data Needed:

- Deploy calendar
- DAU by team/geography
- Error rates by type
- Query patterns by user segment
- Recent communications/announcements

Start with highest probability and easiest to verify

C4 Answer: Sprint Planning

Selected:

- Compliance requirement (15 points) - Non-negotiable deadline
- Critical bug fix (8 points) - Platform stability
- Tech debt (13 points) - ROI justifies inclusion
- One UX improvement (5 points) - Team morale/quick win

Total: 41 points (slight overcommit but manageable)

Not selected:

- CEO feature - Schedule demo of what's possible, negotiate phased delivery

Always do compliance, usually do critical bugs, negotiate everything else

Answers Set D: Real-World

D1 Answer: Build vs Buy Framework

Recommendation: Buy

Framework:

- 5-year TCO: Vendor = $1M, Build = $1.4M (opportunity cost)
- Time to value: 3 months vs 6 months
- Core competency: Data cataloging isn't our differentiator
- Risk: Vendor proven vs build uncertainty

Conditions to revisit:

- If vendor raises prices >30%
- If we need highly custom features
- If we hire dedicated team for data tools

D2 Answer: Adoption Plan

Days 1-30: Build Champions

- Migrate one eager early adopter team
- Document their success story
- Address all their issues first

Days 31-60: Create Pull

- Show metrics proving new platform superiority

- Offer white-glove migration service
- CEO/leadership endorsement

Days 61-90: Apply Pressure

- Announce old platform deprecation date
- Stop adding features to old platform
- Make new platform the default

Carrot then stick, with clear communication throughout

D3 Answer: Technical Debt Roadmap

Month 1-2: Stop the bleeding

- Add monitoring to know what's broken
- Document critical paths
- Automate deployment (highest ROI)

Month 3-4: Build confidence

- Test critical paths (20% coverage on vital flows)
- Update most vulnerable dependencies

Month 5-6: Accelerate

- Refactor highest-impact performance bottlenecks
- Add testing to new code only

Principle: Make tomorrow better than today, not perfect

D4 Answer: Executive Communication

TO: CEO **RE:** Data Platform Reliability Plan

You're right to be concerned. Our platform reliability is below acceptable standards.

Current State:

- 2-3 incidents per week affecting business decisions
- Root cause: 3 years of deferred maintenance while scaling 10x
- Impact: ~$200K weekly in delayed decisions and rework

Proposed Solution: 90-day reliability sprint:

- Month 1: Automated monitoring (see issues before users)
- Month 2: Fix top 5 stability issues
- Month 3: Preventive maintenance system

What I Need:

- 2 engineers dedicated for 90 days
- Pause on new features to focus on reliability
- Your support when stakeholders complain about feature delays

Success Metric: From 2-3 incidents/week to 1/month by Q2

Ready to discuss trade-offs at your convenience.

Answers Set E: Zillow-Specific

E1 Answer: Data Quality Improvement Plan

Phase 1: Measure (Month 1)

- Identify which 15% is wrong (by county? type? age?)
- Root cause analysis on errors
- Cost of quality issues vs fix

Phase 2: Target (Month 2)

- Focus on highest-impact errors first (likely recent sales)
- Implement anomaly detection for obvious errors
- Add human review for edge cases

Phase 3: Scale (Month 3-4)

- ML model to predict likely errors
- Automated correction for known patterns
- Feedback loop with county assessors

Success Metrics: Accuracy, correction time, user trust score

E2 Answer: Mediation Approach

Framework: Privacy-Utility Matrix

Data Type	Privacy Risk	Business Value	Decision
PII	High	Low	Remove
Aggregated	Low	High	Keep
Anonymized	Medium	Medium	Keep with controls
Public Record	Low	High	Keep

Process:

1. Classify all data into matrix
2. Default to privacy for high-risk/low-value
3. Implement controls for medium-risk/high-value
4. Create exception process for edge cases

Legal gets veto on high-risk, Sales gets input on value

E3 Answer: AI Automation Proposal

ML-Powered Data Quality for Public Records

Problem: Manual quality checks catch only 60% of errors and take 40 hours/week

Solution: Deploy ML model to identify anomalies in property records

Approach:

- Train on 5 years of historical corrections
- Start with tax assessment anomalies (biggest pain point)
- Human-in-the-loop for low-confidence predictions

Expected Outcomes:

- 95% error detection rate
- 30 hours/week saved
- 2-hour detection vs 2-day current state

Investment: 1 engineer + 1 data scientist for 3 months

ROI: $200K annual savings in manual effort + reduced downstream errors

E4 Answer: Cross-functional Metrics

Shared North Star: "Time to Trusted Insight"

Consumer App Team:

- Data freshness: <5 minute lag
- API response time: <100ms p99
- Uptime: 99.95%

Analytics Team:

- Query success rate: >95%
- Data completeness: >99%
- Schema stability: <1 breaking change/quarter

Compliance:

- Privacy compliance: 100% (binary)
- Audit trail completeness: 100%
- Data retention adherence: 100%

Each team has their view but ladder to shared goal

Study Progression Guide

Week 1: Foundation

- Complete Exercise Set A
- Review answers
- Apply to your current work

Week 2: Core PM Skills

- Complete Exercise Set B
- Practice RICE on real decisions
- Create OKRs for your current role

Week 3: Complex Scenarios

- Complete Exercise Set C
- Focus on areas where you struggled
- Get feedback from PM colleagues

Week 4: Platform Specific

- Complete Exercise Sets D & E
- Mock interview practice
- Refine your PM narrative

Remember: The exercises get harder but build on each other. Master each level before moving up. The answer key shows ONE good approach - yours might be equally valid if well-reasoned.

Part 13: 10-Day Interview Prep Plan

Days 1-5: HR Screening Prep (30-minute call)

Day 1: The Basics Morning (1 hour):

- Memorize Zillow's mission: "Turn dreams of home into reality"
- Review their values: Customer obsession, Turn on the lights, Own it, Include and empower
- Prepare your 2-minute intro (see template below)

Evening (30 min):

- Practice your intro out loud 5 times
- Record yourself and refine

Your 2-Minute Intro Template: "I'm a data leader with 20+ years building enterprise platforms. Currently at ROR Partners architecting their next-gen data platform. Throughout my career at companies like UKG and Oracle, I've focused on making data accessible and actionable for business teams. I'm excited about Zillow's PM role because it combines my technical depth with product thinking to solve real problems at scale. I'm particularly drawn to the public records challenge since I've worked with similar property and compliance data throughout my career."

Day 2: Why PM, Why Now Morning (1 hour):

- Craft your PM transition story (see script below)
- Prepare 3 specific examples of product thinking from your past

Evening (30 min):

- Practice behavioral answers using STAR format
- Focus on collaboration and leadership examples

Your PM Transition Script: "After 20 years building data platforms, I've realized the biggest impact comes from product thinking - understanding not just how to build, but what to build and why. I've been doing product work throughout my career - gathering requirements, prioritizing features, managing stakeholders. The PM role formalizes what I've been doing informally. My technical depth means I can make faster, better-informed product decisions."

Day 3: Why Zillow Specifically Research Deep Dive (90 min):

- Read Zillow's latest quarterly report (focus on data strategy mentions)
- Study their recent tech blog posts about data infrastructure
- Understand their business model: IMT, Homes, Mortgages

Prep Your Answer: "Three reasons: First, scale - billions of property records requiring sophisticated data management. Second, impact - your data directly affects millions of home-buying decisions. Third, timing - Zillow is investing in AI/automation for data quality, exactly where my experience with Universal Data Models and pattern-based automation can add immediate value."

Day 4: Salary and Logistics Morning Prep (1 hour):

- Confirm your $220K ask with confidence
- Prepare explanation: "Based on my experience and market research for Platform PM roles"
- Review remote work setup and availability

Common HR Questions to Practice:

- Current compensation: "Targeting $220K base for my next role"
- Timeline: "Interviewing with several companies, hoping to decide within 3-4 weeks"
- Start date: "With appropriate notice period, approximately 4 weeks"
- Remote work: "Fully equipped home office, experienced remote collaborator"

Evening (30 minutes): Team Topologies Chapter 3 - Team-First Thinking

- Understand the philosophy behind team organization
- Foundation for why teams should be organized around flow
- Sets context for the four topologies you'll study next

Day 5: Final HR Prep Morning (1 hour): Question Battery (practice all):

1. "Tell me about yourself" (2-minute intro)
2. "Why leaving current role?" → "Seeking product leadership role to drive greater business impact"

3. "Why PM?" → (transition script)
4. "Why Zillow?" → (3 reasons)
5. "Questions for me?" → See list below

Your Questions for HR:

- "What's the team structure for this role?"
- "What's the typical interview process and timeline?"
- "What are the biggest challenges facing this role?"
- "How does Zillow support PM career development?"

Evening (1 hour): Team Topologies Chapter 5 - The Four Fundamental Team Topologies

- Understand where platform teams fit in the organization
- Learn the language of modern team structures

Days 6-10: Hiring Manager Prep

Day 6: Platform Foundation (Team Topologies Focus) Morning (1.5 hours): Team Topologies Chapter 6 - Choose Team-First Boundaries

- How to design platform boundaries
- Cognitive load and team responsibilities
- Apply to Zillow's public records domain

Team Topologies Chapter 7 (start) - Team Interaction Modes

- X-as-a-Service model
- Collaboration vs. facilitation

Afternoon (1 hour): Product Sense Foundation Morning (2 hours): Study and practice the product improvement framework:

1. Clarify goals and users
2. List user segments
3. Prioritize one segment
4. Identify pain points
5. Brainstorm solutions

6. Prioritize solutions (use RICE)
7. Define success metrics
8. Discuss tradeoffs

Practice Question: "How would you improve Zillow's data ingestion pipeline?"

- Segment: Data engineers, analysts, app developers
- Pain: Manual quality checks, slow ingestion, unclear lineage
- Solution: AI-powered quality checks (your strength!)
- Metrics: Ingestion time, quality score, user satisfaction

Evening (1 hour):

- Write out 3 product improvement answers
- Focus on data platform examples

Day 7: Technical Depth + Product Thinking Morning (1 hour): Team Topologies Chapter 7 (complete) - Team Interaction Modes

- When to use collaboration vs. X-as-a-Service vs. facilitation
- Platform evolution patterns
- Apply to your UDM philosophy

Afternoon (2 hours): Prepare stories that show both technical knowledge and product judgment:

Story Bank to Prepare:

1. **Build vs Buy Decision:** Your UDM vs vendor MDM philosophy
2. **Technical Tradeoff:** Choosing between perfect and good enough
3. **Stakeholder Conflict:** Legal vs Sales data access at ADP
4. **Scale Challenge:** NielsenIQ 500M records optimization
5. **Innovation:** AI automation at ROR Partners

Framework for Each Story:

- Situation: Business context and constraints
- Analysis: Options considered and tradeoffs
- Decision: What you chose and why
- Result: Measurable business impact

Day 8: Metrics and Analytics Morning (45 min): Team Topologies Chapter 8 - Evolve Team Structures with Organizational Sensing

- Signals for platform evolution
- When to change interaction modes
- Measuring platform effectiveness

Afternoon (90 min): Master the metrics diagnosis framework:

When They Say: "Our data quality dropped 20%, what would you do?"

1. Clarify timeline and segments
2. Form hypotheses (internal vs external)
3. Identify data needed
4. Propose investigation plan
5. Suggest solutions
6. Define monitoring

Practice Metrics:

- Data platform: Uptime, latency, quality score, DAU
- Business impact: Cost per query, time to insight, decision velocity
- Team health: Velocity, tech debt ratio, on-call burden

Your Metrics Superpower: "Unlike most PMs, I can write the SQL to investigate issues myself. At NielsenIQ, when usage dropped, I queried patterns directly and found a specific team's auth tokens expired - fixed in hours instead of days."

Day 9: Zillow-Specific Scenarios Deep Prep (2 hours):

Scenario 1: Public Records Automation "How would you use AI to improve property tax data quality?"

- Current state: Manual checks, 85% accuracy
- Your approach: Pattern recognition on historical corrections
- MVP: Start with one county, prove ROI
- Scale: Automate 80%, human review 20%
- Metrics: Accuracy, time saved, cost reduction

Scenario 2: Platform Adoption "Teams won't migrate to your new platform. What do you do?"

- Diagnose: Fear, training, or actual gaps?
- Early adopters: Find champion team
- Incentives: Show 10x performance gain
- Deadline: Deprecate old system

Scenario 3: Cross-functional Alignment "Legal wants to restrict data, Sales wants everything open. How do you mediate?"

- Privacy-utility matrix
- Classify all data types
- Default to privacy for high-risk
- Exception process for edge cases

Day 10: Mock Interview Day Morning (2 hours): Run through complete interview:

Part 1: Behavioral (20 min)

- Recent challenging project
- Disagreement with engineering
- Failed project lessons
- Leadership example

Part 2: Product Sense (20 min)

- Improve Zillow's data platform
- Prioritize roadmap with constraints
- Design new feature

Part 3: Technical/Analytical (20 min)

- Architecture tradeoffs
- Metrics diagnosis
- Scale challenges

Part 4: Your Questions (10 min) Questions showing strategic thinking:

- "How does the data platform strategy align with Zillow 2.0 vision?"
- "What's the biggest technical debt in the current platform?"
- "How do you balance platform stability with feature velocity?"

- "What keeps you up at night about data quality?"
- "How does success in this role lead to broader product leadership?"

Afternoon: Final Polish

- Review your story bank
- Practice transitions between topics
- Refine based on mock performance
- Get good rest for tomorrow

Interview Cheat Sheet (Print This)

Power Phrases to Use

- "Let me understand the constraints first..."
- "I'd validate this with data by..."
- "The tradeoff here is..."
- "Success looks like..."
- "My hypothesis is..."
- "I'd measure impact through..."

Your Differentiators

1. **Technical Depth:** Can assess feasibility instantly
2. **Scale Experience:** Billions of records at Fortune 500s
3. **Modern Stack:** Current with Snowflake, dbt, Databricks
4. **Business Impact:** Saved millions through smart architecture
5. **Harvard + Experience:** Academic rigor + practical delivery

Red Flags to Avoid

- Don't get too technical (you're interviewing for PM)
- Don't say "when I was an architect" (you're already product-minded)
- Don't criticize current employer
- Don't seem uncertain about PM transition

If Stumped

- "Interesting question. Let me think through this systematically..."
- "I'd first want to understand [clarifying question]"
- "In my experience, the key is usually [principle]"
- "Let me approach this from the user's perspective..."

Closing Strong

"I'm excited about this role because it combines my technical depth with product thinking to solve real problems at scale. My experience with public records and modern data platforms means I can add value immediately while growing into broader product leadership. What questions can I answer to help you assess fit?"

Daily Schedule Summary

Days 1-5: HR Screen Prep

- Day 1: Basics and intro
- Day 2: PM transition story
- Day 3: Why Zillow research
- Day 4: Logistics prep
- Day 5: Full HR rehearsal

Days 6-10: Hiring Manager Prep

- Day 6: Product sense frameworks
- Day 7: Story bank creation
- Day 8: Metrics mastery
- Day 9: Zillow scenarios
- Day 10: Mock interview

Time Investment:

- 1-2 hours per day core prep
- 5 hours Team Topologies reading (integrated throughout)
- Total: 20-25 hours over 10 days
- Focus on practice, not just reading

Team Topologies Integration:

- Day 5 Evening: Chapter 5 (Four Team Types)
- Day 6 Morning: Chapters 6 & 7 (Platform Boundaries & Interactions)
- Day 7 Morning: Chapter 7 completion (Interaction Modes)
- Day 8 Morning: Chapter 8 (Evolution & Sensing)
- Weekend: Review and optional deeper reading

This plan front-loads the easy stuff for HR and builds to complex scenarios for the hiring manager. By Day 10, you'll be speaking fluent PM while leveraging your technical edge.