

One Knight in Product - E43 - April Dunford

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SPEAKERS

Jason Knight, April Dunford



Jason Knight 00:00

Hello, and welcome to the show. I'm your host, Jason Knight. And on each episode of this podcast, I'll be having inspiring conversations with passionate product people. If that sounds like your cup of tea, I'd love it if you could head over to OneKnightInProduct.com, and position yourself on my mailing list, or head over to the podcast app of your choice and position this podcast on your subscription list. In both cases, so you can never miss another episode again. On tonight's episode, we'll be speaking about you guessed it positioning with someone who literally wrote a book on it. We'll talk about what positioning is and what it isn't how companies are and aren't doing a good job. Why product market fit is somewhat controversially a myth. And the importance of crafting a sales narrative to help lander positioning around the organisation. We also find out the shocking story of what happened when our guest went to a famous author for advice, the feedback she got and what she did next. For all this and much more, please join us on One Knight in Product. So my guest tonight is April Dunford, an executive consultant speaker and author who helps technology companies make complicated products easy for customers to understand and love. Aside from the official bio, April's a dog loving manga aficionado, and former hay collector has now changed to a different field. But still making hay is the queen of product positioning and author of 2019 Obviously Awesome - how to nail product positioning. So customers get it by it and love it. Hi April, how are you tonight?



April Dunford 01:34

Oh, I'm really good. That's the best the best intro of me ever



Jason Knight 01:39

Put it all into the first minute, all of it. Everything goes downhill after that. So first things first, Obviously Awesome. It's obviously had loads of glowing reviews, I think it's on 4.7 out of five on Amazon at the moment or something like that. Yeah. So those are some pretty good numbers.

When you sat down to write this book a couple of years ago, or whenever it was you started, were you expecting it to get this kind of reception?

A

April Dunford 02:03

You know, I didn't think so many people would read it, that's for sure. Like, you know, it's kind of a it's kind of a narrow topic. And I'll tell you, when I first started talking about the book, I talked to a lot of book people about it. So you know, I got meetings with publishers and things and I said, Hey, I got this great idea. I'm gonna write this book on positioning. And the publishers were all kind of like, it hasn't been written about before, like, doo doo actually made another book of positioning. And I was like, Yeah, none of the books tell you how to do it. They don't tell you how to do it. I'm gonna tell people how to do it. Publishers are not interested in how to do it books, though, all that much. So in the end, I ended up publishing it myself. And I thought it would be useful to me, and maybe you know, my clients, and maybe some other people I have meetings with, and that was about it. So I have a big surprise and how many copies have sold? It's done way better than I thought. And yeah, people like it. It seems to be doing all right. I feel good about it.



Jason Knight 02:58

They got it. They bought it. They loved it. That's it. So you did what you said on the tin.

A

April Dunford 03:04

Yeah. So far, so good.



Jason Knight 03:07

So far, so good. No, Matt, continue. But before we go into the book, let's talk a little bit about the April Dunford origin story. I know you started out working. I mean, you said before this call that you started out in engineering, did an engineering degree. Yeah. Started a database company back in the day. Yeah. And if I remember rightly, from some other podcasts, you kind of stumbled into marketing to some degree, then that's fair to say.

A

April Dunford 03:29

Oh, yeah. And then yeah, marketing chose me. I didn't choose marketing



Jason Knight 03:38

If the shoe fits, right. But then that experience there was what really became the catalyst for pretty much everything that came afterwards, I think, the story around kind of the database stuff that you're working on, and and how you reposition that. So how did your time there become the Genesis and sort of opening your eyes to the power of positioning?

A

April Dunford 03:57

Yeah, so like you said, I had a degree in systems design engineering, I didn't really know what I wanted to do with my life. I got a job at a startup, you know, and that was just serendipity. My friend worked there. She got me a job. It happened to be in product marketing. So I get this product marketing job at a startup. And I assigned to this product that's that's kind of a dog like the company had several products and one one was the cash cow product that made all the money but I got assigned to the new product that was like an experiment that was failing. And what we ended up doing with that product is I got the job of calling all the customers we didn't have that many call all the customers and find out whether or not they're going to be mad if we end up liked it. So I call everybody and it turned out the vast majority of people didn't even know they had it. They paid 100 bucks for it. They were like what I have this thing Oh yeah. No, we don't use that. There were a very small number of customers that loved it. Absolutely loved it, but they were using it for a use case that we had never Imagine. And so what we decided to do in the end was reposition the product around that. And we effectively relaunched it into a new market with a completely different go to market strategy. And pricing was different, and everything else was different that the product stayed the same. And that relaunch the product became totally successful. And so it took off, we sold tonnes, we eventually got acquired by a big company in the valley. I, my boss left shortly after I took my boss's job, I don't know why they even his job, like and so I ended up running marketing for this big division. Meanwhile, this, this product is on fire. And at its peak was doing hundreds, millions revenue. And so what what I learned from that first experience was that you can have a product, that's actually amazing. But if it's poorly positioned, it can look like a failure. And you can take that same product, pick it up and position it in a different market. Now all of a sudden, it looks like hot stuff. So every job I had after that, as a senior marketing person, you know, I was always looking at this positioning, like, is there a way we could shift this to unlock some growth and some excitement in this product that isn't there and the way that it's positioned right now? So yeah, I'm a bit of an accidental marketer. And I got into this positioning thing pretty early.



Jason Knight 06:22

Yeah, I was gonna say, because that was very much your first role, or your first company, at least, maybe not the first role within the company. But yeah, obviously, after that, you've worked in a variety of marketing and sales roles. Yeah, how to spell it, the CEO of project management startup for time. but alongside that, I think as early as 2009, you're also doing some consulting, as far as I can see from LinkedIn anyway. So was that literally a side gig? Or?

A

April Dunford 06:45

Yeah, I don't think I was very committed consultant. So what happened was, is at some point, at some point in my career, I got very senior, and I had been a vice president of marketing a handful of times, and what would happen with me is I come into the startup tool up the team, you know, we get the revenue engine going for this thing. And if I'm doing my job, right, we grow really fast. And what happened to me is, we grow really fast that we get acquired. So then you stuck at the big company for a couple years doing your earnout or whatever. And so what I would do is I would pop out and how I started in consulting is, I pop out from the big company, I

need to find a new job somewhere, I want to go back to the startup, I'm not really sure which one, and I'm senior enough that I'm going to be kind of picky about it. So what I would do is I'd kind of consult for two or three at the same time, and we see how it works out. And then you know, and then I would fall in love with one of them. And then I go be their VP marketing. And that's what I do. So I would say the first. You know, for five years, I was a consultant, I wasn't really a consultant, what I was doing was just, it was jobs. slomo job hunt. But then I would say about five years ago, after I popped out of my last startup, about five years ago, I was like, You know what, I think it's time for change. I think I've done enough of this employee thing, I want to do something different. And I kind of want to manage my own time and my own stuff. And so that's when I really seriously started consulting. And it was at that point where I said, You know what, I'm not like a part time CMO, all I do is this positioning work. And I'm going to be very picky about who I do it with. And there's going to be a very well defined offering, we're going to come in, we're going to fix your positioning, and then we're done. And I'm and then I'm done. And so that's what I do now. And that's that's what I plan to do forever.



Jason Knight 08:35

Makes a lot of sense. So that it does put the initial consulting into into context, I guess, which is Yeah, which is interesting. But I think it's fair to say and you said it yourself that positioning isn't necessarily very on trend. People think it's just marketing, or they're looking for latest growth hacks, and, and so on. It's not something that they initially, maybe think about, or think about probably, you said yourself, your publisher didn't really want to publish or you didn't, we couldn't really find a publisher for the book and had to do it yourself. So it's obviously a tricky proposition to write this book. Was it literally because you were seeing all of this and thinking that no one's getting it that you decided that it was time to write the book? Was that what drove it?

A

April Dunford 09:15

I see there was a couple of things. So one is, you know, when I was working with startups, I would have a meeting with the CEO. And these meetings at the beginning, I would have to kind of explain, Well, here's what positioning is. Here's what it looks like when it's bad. And maybe you you recognise that in your own company. And here's what it could look like if it was good. And then here's what I'm going to do to help you solve it. And so that was kind of a long, complicated conversation, right? I'm talking to people who are not marked, they don't have marketing background. They don't know positioning is so I would have to explain all of that. And quite often CEOs would find me at conferences like I'd be doing a keynote speech at a conference. And the CEO would come up to me afterwards and say, I have that problem. I didn't know it was called positioning, but I have that problem. And so I had, so that was happening at the same time, I had lots of smaller companies come to me, that can't afford to hire a consultant. Like, they're not even paying themselves at this point, they're so small, and you know, they don't have any extra money to pay me. But I'm so I'm doing lots of coffee meetings with these kinds of people. And I'm like, I could tell you how to do this yourself, right. But we need 10 coffee meetings to do. So I'm trying to do like the condensed version of okay, here's what you're gonna do 12345. And I tried to write a blog post about it, but it was just too long, you know, it turned into this long thing. And so I thought, I'll write a book. And it'll serve two purposes. One, you know, when I get meeting with these, with these little guys that aren't going to hire anybody, and I can't help them any other way, I slide that book across the table

and say, Look, read this, this is everything I know, it's, you know, do this. And then with potential clients, I could say, look, here's the methodology, this what we're going to do together, either buy it or you don't, right. If you think that sounds smart, I can help you do that. If you if you don't, then you know, we don't have to have nine meetings to be trying to sell you on it. We can just leave it, just read the book and say, That's crap, and not call me again. So so I thought that's the those are the two things the book was going to accomplish. And so that's why I wrote it in the first place. I do think it's interesting that, you know, when I started doing positioning work, it was really unfashionable, like, you know, I would have this problem with the, you know, I talked to publishers, they weren't interested in publishing it, I have the same problem with conference organisers like they come and say, hey, we'd like to have you come speak at our conference. And, you know, you got any good topics, and I'm like, oh, and then do this talk on positioning. And they're like, Oh, hey, get some cool. Talk about growth hacking thing. That's what everybody wanted me to talk about growth hacking. But I really feel like we have seen in the past three, four years, a real shift away from that. And I think we're coming off of maybe a 10 year stint where companies were really focused in short term tactical stuff, and really focused on tactical execution. And I think the pendulum is swung back a little bit more to fundamentals and big strategic thinking. And, you know, how do we, how do we build the underpinnings of the foundation of something really good, before we get to the tactical execution? And that's really what positioning is all about. So I actually feel it right now. Positioning is having a bit of a moment. But maybe that's just me.



Jason Knight 12:32

It's all down to your book!



April Dunford 12:34

No, I know, I'm not. I'm not. Yeah, I don't have the ego big enough to think that that was me. But I do think these things come in waves, I think we tend to have a period where we're very tactically focused. And that is then followed by a period where we are very strategic focused. And if we fast forward another six, seven years, we will have another resurgence. It's something that looks like growth hacking, except we'll decide that it's new, and we'll call it something else. But yeah, we will swing back over the other way. It's just right now we're not there.



Jason Knight 13:02

Now, we said earlier that the reception for the book has been great. And obviously, that's true, if you look at the Amazon reviews, but I remember you and I had a passing conversation a few weeks ago, about how not all of the reception has been great. And in fact, you got told by a well known author, that it wasn't even a proper book. I'm not gonna ask you to name names. But what was that person talking about?



April Dunford 13:25

Yeah. This conversation, it was really depressing. Actually, this is this was after the book was out. And I sold a rather significant number of books to tell you the truth that I had. So I was

out. And I sold a rather significant number of books to tell you the truth that I had. So I was thinking about, I've got an idea for another book. So I was thinking about, Well, should I self publish that too? Or should I maybe go with a proper publisher, because this one's a different idea. And you know, the last one I could have done with a publisher, too, I just didn't think the publishers could do much for me. So I thought, You know what I should talk to like, proper book author, that don't a bunch of books, and I'll find out what publishers actually do for you. And so I was talking to a friend of mine, he said, Oh, I, I'm really good friends with this person. And they've written lots of books, and you know them because they're famous. And I said, Oh, great. Yeah, I'll have a call with him. So I got the call. And we just, it was interesting. Like, he came with a very, in my opinion, outdated view of what a book should be. And so in his idea of booklets or how to book shouldn't be a book, like, like his idea of a book, his books or ideas in book form. And you should only write a book when you have an idea that's like fighting to get its way out. But it needs to be conceptual. And it is not about helping people do stuff. It's about getting your idea in the world and who cares how people execute on the idea. That was kind of his idea. So he said, he said like your book, you know, he said, that's an That's not a book. It's not a book, like you should have just should have just wrote a thing. It's a blog post, put it on the internet, whatever. And I was like, I don't know, man, there's like, there's like, a lot of people would disagree with you on that, you know, including the 1000s and 1000s of people who bought my book and thought I was pretty good. So yeah, so he Yeah, it was really, it. You know, also, that guy was a dick. Like, let's just say, let's just say that radio also just means not the person that was a bit like, oh, you know, he lived, he literally told me, he said, I don't think you got it in. Yeah, like, he was a bit like that. And yeah, he was like, you know, for me, you know, I have these ideas, and they're fighting it out. And I was like, wow, it must be weird to have that much ego. But anyways, so I so I think that was it was a bit of a weird conversation. But I also thought it was a bit of a window into how traditional book, people think about this kind of stuff, right? Like, it's not for practitioners, it's for, you know, people thinking big thoughts. And for me, I found that very frustrating, because when I started my career in marketing, you know, there was the big idea positioning book already existed, it was by these guys reason trout was called positioning the battle for your mind. I read it, everyone's read it. It's an amazing book, I loved it. But at the end, I was so mad because all it did was get me excited about the idea, but it didn't give me one darn clue about how to go do it. And so that was the problem I was trying to solve. I was like, You know what, like, you're right. I don't think I'm full of bright ideas. But I'll tell you what, I am full of a photon of practical experience, and I'm going to help you actually figure out how to get it done. So I don't know if that's not a book. I don't know why that I think that guy's wrong.



Jason Knight 16:43

Well, I'm looking forward to his next book, failing dramatically. I guess we'll say.



April Dunford 16:48

Well, I was mad. And you know, I was kind of a fan before. And like, I had his book on my bookshelf. And after I got off the call, I was like, oh, man, like, I hate that. Because now I can't even like your stuff anymore. And the bookshelf, and I drew a little moustache on his on his book, jacket, photo, moustache, like curling up. And then I took the book to the used bookstore so that somebody could buy it used instead of giving him another bit of money for a new copy. Yeah. So that's how that went. Don't meet your heroes.



Jason Knight 17:21

So that's what that tweet was about. Clicks into place.



April Dunford 17:27

Now I know. No, I know. Yeah. So I'm not I'm not talking to any famous authors ever again, because I don't want to talk to them and have them read the books for me. Like, yeah, so that's it?



Jason Knight 17:39

Well, that's it a positive. So your book sets the stage, that positioning is one of the most critical things a company can do. And like you said, to be really Practical Playbook on how to do it, right. It's called step by step instructions, and really actionable advice. But so many people seem to just still do like the Mad Libs thing. You know, crank out a positioning statement, fill in the gaps. Print out that done. Yeah. Now, you obviously say that they're not done? Why aren't they done?



April Dunford 18:05

Well, so I think that that positioning statement is, not only is that positioning statement, exercise useless, worse than that, I think it's potentially dangerous. So I learned that like, like, after, you know, after I became a career marketer, I thought I better go back to school, right? So I took a bunch of marketing classes, and I learned this positioning statement and marketing class. And what drove me crazy about it is, you know, you're, you're suspended thing you fill in the blanks, but nobody tells you what's supposed to go in the blank. And so there's a blank that says something like market category. And I'm like, Well, I just repositioned a product that we thought was desktop productivity software, but in fact, it was an embeddable database for mobile devices, those two things are really different. Which one should I filled in the blank? Like, it doesn't give me any idea how to do that. And worse than that, the exercise itself tricked me into thinking that there's only one answer. And the answer, the best answer is whatever the heck pops into my head first. And that's not true. And very often, that's a dangerous way to think about positioning. In fact, I think the biggest mistake you can make in positioning is to fall into this kind of default positioning trap that says, Oh, well, this is email, what else could it be? So I think that's an important thing for people to think about. And so, so again, when I started out marketing, I didn't know how to do positioning, I learned the positioning statement. I was like, well, that's not helping me. So what do we actually do to get this thing done? And that sort of became an obsession of mine for a bunch of years.



Jason Knight 19:39

You also talked about making sure you identify the actual competition and where you're playing. And that's not always just some of the cool four dimensional technology. Could be an Excel sheet. Could be an intern could just be doing nothing. Yeah. So that's obviously a very

common bias that people have. Are there any ways that you can recommend getting people away from That kind of thinking.

A

April Dunford 20:01

Yeah, like I would say a lot of weak positioning stems from a kind of a misunderstanding about what the actual competitive alternatives are. And for me in my thinking, that was a bit of a breakthrough I had in my thinking about this and which came from looking at jobs to be done stuff. So I was going down the rabbit hole of Christiansen and all that jobs to be done stuff. And I, I, you know, and you know, when they talk about the milkshake story jobs to be done. So I read the milkshake story. And I was like, Oh, the problem with this thing is that everybody thought it was a milkshake. And in fact, what it is, is a smoothie, right? Because people are drinking it for breakfast. So that got me thinking about, we often think about competitive alternatives only as competitors. So what are the other folks in the market that have a thing that look just like ours? Instead of taking the customers viewpoint on it, which is more like, you know, if your product didn't exist, what would I do? And that's really different, right? That's really different. And when you when you get it that with customers, they are often like, I spent a lot of time in b2b software and b2b software, we're almost always competing with Excel. And in paper, Word documents, manual processes, get an intern to do it, stuff like that. Or it's like, I could use my ERP or my accounting software, they a little feature, it was never meant to do this, but we can kind of make it work, right. And that's what you see people using out there. And it's important to remember that if you're selling into an account, you're competing with different kinds of competitors. So the first thing you're competing with is status quo. So you know, they're doing it now. They it's not like a problem just showed up yesterday, they're solving the problem now in a way probably sucks. But in order for them to adopt you, they got to leave that so you got to beat that. But then you've also got to be like if it's B to be nice folks, when they do decide, okay, we can't do status quo anymore. We got to go do something different. They're generally making a shortlist and you've got to beat everybody on the shortlist, too. So when we think about competitive alternatives and who we have to position against, I can't just compete against everybody on the shortlist, I actually got to compete against status quo, too. And so in looking at my positioning, I got to think about step one, what status quo, then they're going to make a shortlist, who else is on the shortlist now, all of that is my competitive set. And now once I have that, then I can say, okay, now I know who I got to be, what have I got that they don't got? And that includes like, you know, what can I do that kids that Excel can do, because this is where people fall in the trap of like, Oh, hey, you know, you should buy us because we're really easy to use. And it's like, my dude, Excel, it's really easy to use. The intern is really easy to use. And if you if you don't realise you're competing with that you might fall into this trap of trying to position around things that don't work if you consider the status quo.



Jason Knight 23:00

So obviously, you call out interns a few times, and I've heard you do it before, if you ever got in trouble with the union of interns at any point.

A

April Dunford 23:07

You know, somebody made fun of me the other day because usually if I if I say it, I'll be like, I'll

be like the interns really used to use it. I always use this imaginary intern. And in my mind, my imaginary intern is called Joey I have no idea where that name comes from. I've never had an intern named Joey. But I'm always like, Hey, Joey, get me a coffee while you're at it, fill out the spreadsheet. But somebody somebody messaged me the other day was like, Why isn't always Joey like Mike. Like, I don't know, my imaginary intern is named Joey.



Jason Knight 23:37

He's He's suffered so much.



April Dunford 23:39

Yeah, no, the intern people don't they haven't contacted me, but maybe yeah, no, Joey I feel bad for Joey. I'm always making him get coffee and spreadsheet.



Jason Knight 23:51

Sure, sure. His next job.



April Dunford 23:53

No one will ever intern for me. That's what's happening right now. Everyone's like, yeah, no, don't intern for her... that sucks.



Jason Knight 24:01

You also said somewhat controversially, that you don't believe that product market fit exists. Now, I'm sure there's gonna be a lot of people out there that would disagree with that. Maybe even people listening to this crushing their cups at this very moment? Yeah. Now, at its heart, obviously, if you consider how most people would define product market fit is having a product that satisfies a strong market demand. And that doesn't seem 100 miles away from some of the concepts in your book, right around sort of determining who cares a lot, right. So do you think that product market fit really doesn't exist? Or do you think that it's just used as a buzzword for something, but that the core concept is kind of sound?



April Dunford 24:38

Yeah, like I think what I really believe is that I don't, I don't believe product market fit is like a thing that you can work towards. I don't think it's an operationally useful concept in startups, because, you know, I can't really tell you exactly when I have it. I can't tell you how I'm going to measure it. You know, people have really different definitions of what it is, you know, if people say, Well, you know what, when you have it, you know, like, it's like love or something, then they'll say, and then and then but and then you can also lose it. And we don't know why, but

you can and, and so I think, well, you know, like, that just that just feels really superstitious to me. And and here's what people do agree on, we agree that the reason we want product market fit is because the minute we have product market fit, we're going to step on the gas in marketing and sales and grow like heck, because that's the moment where we're not thrashing around anymore. We've got this thing. Now we can step on the gas grill like heck Now, the reason it bugs me, it may be more than it does a VC is that I'm the vice president of marketing, right? Like back when I was working in a company, I'm the vice president of marketing. So I'm the person that does the stepping on the gas. And I've worked on at lots of companies where I, you know, I walk in and the CEO is like, we got it, we got this product market fit. I just know, I have the feeling I have the product market fit feeling. So you Vice President marketing, get out there and step on the gas. And I'm like, okay, yeah, good. Let's step on the gas. Okay, first thing? No, who exactly? Am I going to build these marketing campaigns for? Because I need a really solid definition of that. And when I when I am building these campaigns, who do we compete against? And how do we win? And we call that in marketing, an actionable segmentation? It is a segmentation with enough detail on it, that I can run really targeted, effective campaigns at it. Now, do I know what an actionable segmentation is? Yes. Do I know how to get an actionable segmentation? Yes. And what you know, so if you come to me as a primary fit, like, I've worked at lots of companies where the CEO had the product market fit feeling, but we had nothing that looked like an actual segmentation. So who the heck cares if I have product market fit? Because I can't step on the gas, because I don't have the stuff that I need to actually do that. So in my opinion, I think that product market fit is a concept for VCs, it represents the moment that is the perfect moment for you to write a check. Because it is the moment where the company has not done this exponential growth yet, but he's just about to do it. And so if I was a VC, I would really want that to exist, right? Like, really? Because that's going to represent this magic moment. But does anybody know how to measure it? Does anyone like if it was easy? All the VCs you know, wouldn't have a problem picking picking companies to invest in this will be easy, we just say show me the product market fit stuff. Got it or not. And then we're going to do it. So I think product market fit is VC magical thinking they want it to exist, because it should exist. And in it and it does, we just can't measure it. We don't know what it is, we don't even know maybe we're gonna lose it all this stuff. And I think that because of VCs are so keen on the idea, you as a CEO of a startup, you got to buy into that too. Like you got to go take the meeting and say absolutely Marc Andreessen, we have product market fit, man cuz I need your money. So the founders have been forced to buy into this and you don't dare go on the internet and say you don't believe in it. Because your investors believe in it. And you got to prove that you got it, even though it's impossible to prove that you have it. So we're stuck in this kind of weird thing. And so whenever I say I don't think it's operationally very interesting. 1000 practitioners come out of the woodwork and say, Yeah, you're right. But you know, we're not allowed to say it out loud if we're if we ever hope to raise any money. So I think it's an interesting idea. But I think it's operationally not very useful. And you would do better to focus on Do I have an actionable segmentation that would allow me to put my foot on the gas, right? Like, what do I need to put my foot on the gas, and let's work at getting clarity on all those things. Once I have that, then I know I can put my foot on the gas and we accomplish the same thing.



Jason Knight 29:10

Fair enough. Well, we'll see if anyone wants to talk about that.



A U D C I 00 10



April Dunford 29:13

Nobody ever argues with me, except VCs, like, it's known as VCs and the occasional founder that's really bought into it that's in the middle of trying to fundraise. But usually it's VCs, like, I talked about it on Twitter, and like 1000 VCs go watch, right? How can you say that anything that, you know, a VC has ever said is stupid. And I'm like, occasionally there's a thing that and I'm not saying it's stupid. I just don't think operationally is very useful, or useful or even further useful at all. That's it that's my rant on product market fit. It's not a thing. It's not a thing. It's like unicorns, it's like, it's like, I want a pony. Like, you know, I want a pony but that doesn't mean that that I get a pony. You know, my backyard is kind of



Jason Knight 29:58

Another challenge you flag is the lack of alignment sometimes across the leadership team around their positioning, which obviously has knock on effects, because you can't expect the company to come together around a vision if the exec team can't. You've mentioned the concept of a market point of view story, something to drive alignment throughout the leadership and beyond. Now, I think that's a new thing. I don't think that was in the book, I might be wrong. Is that something that you can share a little bit of your thought about? How would create such a story? Or is that is that book too?



April Dunford 30:27

Yeah. No, yeah, for sure. So the the first part of that is that people will often ask me who owns positioning like inside the company, like who should be doing positioning. And I feel really strongly that positioning is a cross functional effort, like, in the work that I do with clients, you know, I'm working with the executive team together, because I need to have alignment across sales, marketing, product, customer success, the executive team, across all those folks like we need to be all focused on our positioning needs to be consistent, we all focused on the same goal, we need to be all rowing towards the same spot. So I think when we do positioning, we got to do that all together, then we have this thing of, you know, what do we do with positioning once we've got it? So there's a handful of things that, you know, come immediately after positioning. And what most people want to do right away is they want to go build messaging. So it's like, Okay, we got the positioning, let's figure out what the copy on the homepage says. But if we're in b2b, and we have in particular, and we've got a sales team, we need to kind of build a sales story, like, how do I tell this story, if I'm sitting across from a customer and the customer says, or prospect, I should say, the prospect says, Hey, what do you guys all about? How do you tell that story. And ideally, we have the executive team together, and we figure out positioning, but we kind of need to have a way to communicate positioning in a way that isn't just a document that says, here's what we compete with, here's how we're different, here's the value, etc, etc. So in the best way to do that, is to have a story around that. So in the work I do with clients, we focus on what I call a sales narrative or a point of view pitch, which is like, you know, now that we have the positioning, how do we actually weave that into a story that communicates to a good fit prospect? Why pick us over anybody else, or over any other way of doing this? So in the work I do with clients, that point of view narrative, you know, my thinking on that started with, like, I used to build sales pitches, and I didn't have much of a structure to it. And in fact, most of the startups that I work with don't have much of a structure to how they build pitches, particularly customer facing pitches. What my thinking on that was really influenced by this book called The Challenger sale. Yep.

Corporate Executive Board, b2b people have already shown yourself, yeah, I used it when I was at IBM. And that was kind of our way of building pitches there. But when I went to a startup after using it at IBM, I was a bit like, you know, there's a lot of the stuff feels like kind of overkill it first startup. And so since then, I've been using kind of a modified version of that. I mean, it borrows a lot of the concepts in terms of the structure. But really, what you want to do is, you want to get a prospect aligned with your point of view on the market. Like the first thing you have to understand is any prospect that's going to buy software, if we think about b2b software, if they've never bought this stuff before, and all they see is a big list of competitors. And they're like, I don't know, I don't even know how to make a shortlist like, I have no way of thinking about this market. And so what the point of view pitch does is it gives the customer a way to think about, look, here's the problem, here's all the different approaches to solving the problem. And here's kind of the pluses and minuses of each of those approaches. You know, none of them are bad, they're all fine in certain situations. But for you customer in your situation, like the way I've defined my target market, for people that look like you, there's a gap here. And we've built a product that perfectly fills that gap. And here's why you need to do it a different way. And we've chosen to take this approach because it's the best for people like you. So that idea of getting a customer aligned to your point of view on the market is super important. Because what you're doing is you're given them a rubric for how to think about all the competitors and everybody in the market. It gives them a way to figure out what is my purchase criteria? And how do I make decisions in this market? This is super important because like 40% of purchase processes end and no decision. And the data tells us that they ended no decision because not because the customer couldn't pick the right solution is because the people in the buying team couldn't agree on the approach. And so if you're not selling around that say, look, here's how to agree on the approach. Now let me tell you why mine is the best you know the best implementation of that approach, then I think you're missing a trick. And I think you're likely to lose a lot of deals to no decision.



Jason Knight 35:07

That's the whole thing. The challenge is sail around trying to basically help write the RFP effectively, right? So that you can you can really frame the discussion around your strengths and avoid your weaknesses. That's right. Is it very much an extension of that?



April Dunford 35:18

It's a bit right. But it's, it's kind of it's kind of given people an idea of, you know, here's what we've got right now, like for the longest time, if you wanted to make a shortlist of vendors to look at you, there would be some kind of trusted advisors that you could go to to help you with that. Right? Like you might you might go to Gartner Group or one of these industry analysts. Or you might just do it the hard way by calling up the vendors themselves and saying what you all about and whatever. Now, if you're trying to make a shortlist, nobody does that, like everyone just Googles it, and they end up on Jeetu crowd or Software Advice, or one of these comparison sites. And these sites are literally optimised to increase customer confusion. Because they make money from customer confusion, the longer you stay in the research phase, the more money they make. So they're optimised to grab your eyeball when you're researching and keep you in the research phase for freaking ever. So they get there and they see this quadrant and there's 9000 things in the top right, and the axes don't even make sense. And you're looking at the things on top right? And you're like, oh my god, they all look the same, their rank is all the

same, everything is the same. And it's not getting you any closer to figuring out like, what should I pay attention to here and what shouldn't I. And so I think that leaves a very big opportunity for vendors to fill that hole. If we can do it in a honest and straightforward way that isn't like bashing my competitors. It's like, look, there's different approaches to this problem. And you know, for customers like you, we believe that this approach is the best. And if you do choose this approach, we're the best ones for it for these reasons. But I think there's a lot of opportunity for companies to help customers in their purchase journey, when they're just trying to make sense of the market.



Jason Knight 37:17

Makes a lot of sense. And looking forward to buying the templates at a low low price from Maple Dunford.



April Dunford 37:25

Man, but maybe someday. Yeah, I don't know if I didn't explain this stuff. In the book, I went as far as, okay, here's positioning, here's what we do. And then here's my recommended two, three things you do after you're done the positioning exercise. And the first one is you should write a sales narrative. And you should build a pitch deck, and then you should go and test it with customers. But I didn't get into too much detail on how to write a sales narrative, because there's lots of ways to skin that cat. But companies that come and work with me as a consultant, we always do the sales narrative bit at the end. Because if we don't do that, then I run the risk that the company goes back. And you know, each of the executives goes back to their team, but they struggle with how to communicate with this new positioning is all about. And so we got to do that. But But again, you can't can't write the sales narrative until you have the positioning, you need to have the positioning first, then we write the sales narrative, then we can figure out stuff after that.



Jason Knight 38:19

Sounds good. So where can people catch up with you if they want to talk about positioning or any of the stuff that I've heard on this interview?



April Dunford 38:28

Well, so my website is AprilDunford.com, you could go there. I and I'm not super active on a lot of social media, except maybe Twitter. And I'm not super active there either. But once in a while I have pithy, pithy positioning tweets when I'm not like tweeting cat jokes and things. So that's probably the end. I'm at April Dunford, if you go there, and then then the book is available anywhere you buy books, there's an audio book, there's an e book, the audiobook is great. You get like four hours of my Canadian accent. That's really great.



Jason Knight 39:00

Yeah, I did see that you are the narrator, did you ever audio book

mean, I did see that you are the narrator, did your own audio book

A

April Dunford 39:03

I did... this stupid idea. I'll never do it again. Man. I'm so hoarse. I sat in the studio for like 12-13 hours for four hours and finished audio. Oh my gosh, that is a hard job. And I underestimated the difficulty of doing it.



Jason Knight 39:22

Well get that douchebag author to do it next time.

A

April Dunford 39:24

Yeah, no, he's got big ideas to think about man. He's busy thinking big ideas.



Jason Knight 39:36

Well, that's been a fantastic chat. So obviously really appreciate you taking the time... let's stay in touch but for now, again, thanks for taking the time.

A

April Dunford 39:43

Yeah, well, thanks so much for having me.



Jason Knight 39:47

As ever, thanks for listening. If you liked what you heard, and you'd like to come back for more again, I can only advise you to head over to OneKnightInProduct.com and sign up for the mailing list or investigate some of the other fantastic episodes for pot the podcast app of your choice. live there and share with your friends on social media so they can have a listen to I'll be back soon with another inspiring guest but for now thank you and good night