

# One Knight in Product - E30 - Jackie Bavaro

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## SPEAKERS

Jackie Bavaro, Jason Knight

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Jason Knight 00:00

Hello, and welcome to the show. I'm your host, Jason Knight, and each week I'll be having inspiring conversations with passionate product people. On tonight's episode we'll be speaking about cracking not only the PM interview, but also cracking your entire PM career. Alongside that, I'd really appreciate it if you could help me to crack my download figures by subscribing to the podcast on the podcast app of your choice and sharing it with all your friends so they can be inspired too. Tonight we'll speak to my guest about how she got started in product management, how she met her co author and why she decided to write two groundbreaking books on how to get started and how to make it as a product manager. We'll also get some great free advice about how you can make a difference in your product career, why it's important to punch the biggest guy in the prison yard out as soon as you arrive, why you should look for inspiration outside of your own product bubble and why you should use TikTok even if you're too old for TikTok. For all this and much more, please join us on One Knight in Product. So my guest tonight is Jackie Bavaro, passionate product professional who started out at Microsoft before tearing it up with Google and was then the first product hire at a little known productivity startup called Asana. I wonder whatever happened to them. Jackie's a TikTok lover and also loves a good puzzle hunt and has turned her puzzling skills to solving the product manager career by co-writing two books, Cracking the PM Interview which got people around the world estimating the number of light bulbs in Manhattan and a brand spanking new Cracking the PM Career, helping people get good at their jobs once they've gotten them. Hi, Jackie, how are you tonight?



Jackie Bavaro 01:39

I'm doing great. Thanks for having me.



Jason Knight 01:41

No problem. So the new book Cracking the PM Career literally came out this week. In fact, I think it literally came out yesterday. So... so how are you feeling? Was it? Was it pedal to the

metal up to the last minute? Or were you just kind of sitting there in a massive beanbag waiting for it to come out?

J

Jackie Bavaro 01:57

It's been a little bit of both people kept asking me like, oh, how does it feel to be done. And you know, until like, the day before, I was putting in last minute tweaks and little edits, making it just a little bit better, bit by bit.



Jason Knight 02:11

So we'll look at the book and in fact, both books in more detail in a minute. But before we do that, I'd like to go back into the mists of time and see how you started out. So way back when you started out at Microsoft as a programme manager. Now that's a product manager at any other company. And actually that's my first question. Why do they call product managers programme managers at Microsoft because to me, a programme manager is a project manager?

J

Jackie Bavaro 02:39

Yeah, great question. So, Microsoft was one of the first companies to have product managers. And at the time, there was a job title called product manager that sat in the marketing department. So when they decided to add this role that sat with the engineers, they couldn't call it product manager, because they already had a job called that. And so they came up with a new title programme manager.



Jason Knight 03:04

But doesn't that put people off? So for example, if I was looking for a job and wanted to go for work for Microsoft, I'd look at the classifieds and be like, programme manager, I'm not a programme manager! I mean, do you know if that's something that they have to contend with?

J

Jackie Bavaro 03:19

It's been several years since I've been at Microsoft. But I do know that when people from Microsoft apply to other companies, they sometimes switch the title on their resumes.



Jason Knight 03:27

Ah well you got to keep up appearances, right? So you started at Microsoft as a programme / product manager, stayed there for a couple of years working on SharePoint, I believe. You then went on to Google. So another small company that no one's ever heard of to join their Associate Product Manager programme, then you were there for three, four years. And then after that you were the first product hire for Asana and led the team there for quite some time.

So I guess one question is, you've gone from what I assume is a relatively structured programme at Google. And I'm assuming fairly structured at Microsoft as well, and then thrown yourself into startup life. How did that transition go for you?

J

Jackie Bavaro 04:11

So my first week on the product... on the team at Asana, I told my team that I was surprised because it was just like being on my team at Google, except there was nobody else outside of the room. So it was it was actually a really delightful experience, because the... working directly with my engineers and designers was very, very similar to the skills I had at a big company, very similar. But at a large company, you get your whole team in a room, you make up your plans, you decide what you want to do. And after everyone on your team is finally aligned, you then take those plans out of the room to the more senior leaders at the company and now you have to convince another set of people and bring them up to speed with all of your thinking. So it was it was a bit of a breath of fresh air to join a startup, and all the people that need to be convinced had been in the room the whole time.



Jason Knight 05:05

Yeah, I guess that's one of the benefits of being small and having those clean lines of communication. Now, from what I've heard, and I've never worked for Google, but I understand that Google and companies like Google are trying to maintain as much of that as possible as they scale, but it's never going to be quite the same thing. I'm sure they're not as bad as some of the big traditional companies with big corporate structures, but it's not going to be quite the same as an urgent startup. But do you feel that was where you really, for want of a better word, flourished, then? Or do you think you had your most effective time in product management there? Or do you feel that you were still pretty effective and got lots out of your previous roles, but just in a slightly different way?

J

Jackie Bavaro 05:43

Yeah. So one of the things that I found really interesting is that different people are motivated by different things. And, and that's why you so much, so often see people move from big companies, to startups, or from startups to big companies. So when I was at Google, I was working on a product, I was working on Google search. So there were, you know, a billion users. And the queries that I was responsible for would touch, you know, maybe 100, hundreds of millions of users. So I was having a gigantic impact in terms of number of users. But the type of impact that I was having at the company, I was helping people find their specific type of search results a little bit faster. If you add up all the seconds, I saved people together, it's, you know, millions of years, which feels great. But if I think about any particular person, I didn't really change their day, their day wasn't really that much better, because they got their search results faster. And so for me, that kind of impact wasn't as exciting for me as moving to a product with many fewer users. But those people who did use the product felt like it had changed their whole lives. We talked to customers who had, who had been struggling at work because of challenges in their in their personal life taking care of a sick family member. And when they discovered Asana and started using it for project management for their marketing

team, they were able to be more productive at work, even with additional time spent taking care of their relatives. And that kind of large impact on somebody's life, for me was incredibly motivating.



Jason Knight 07:17

Yeah, it's that whole thing about trying to make a positive impact in a really big way. And actually one of the itches that I still have, in my mind that maybe I can scratch one day is maybe working in like EdTech or HealthTech and, and making a really positive impact in... maybe one day. But before all of that, before you became a product or programme manager. How did you get into product management in the first place?



Jackie Bavaro 07:43

I was... it was a bit of a surprise for me. So when I went to college, I majored in computer science and economics. And I thought I would grow up to maybe work in some kind of an office. And I would be the person who knew how to code and I use that to automate part of my job and seemed like I was a really good employee. I didn't have a very clear picture of what I was going to do. But I'd never heard of a product management. And when I was I was looking for jobs I, I at one point applied to all of the like, coding jobs that I could find, all of the different engineering jobs. And while I was, you know, waiting to hear back for them, which I don't think I ended up hearing back from them... my friend said, Jackie, "you should apply to the PM internship at Microsoft". And I said, "I don't, I don't think I can be a manager. I'm a sophomore in college". And he said, "you're not managing people, you're managing the product, or maybe the programme", he said, and I, he's like, "just go just go apply". And he, he said a little bit. I was like, "Well, what do you do?" And he said, "Oh, well, you write white papers" and I was like, "Well, what's a white paper?" And he tried to explain it. So I really, I really went for the interview, having no idea what the job did. And it was through the interview questions that I got asked that I started to form any idea of what the job was itself. I was like, I guess you have to kind of job where you estimate how many light bulbs there are and how to design, you know, this kind of thing. And I love the questions. I thought they were kind of like the kind of brain teasers, you know, I would love to solve, you know, on my free time. So I was very excited by those questions. And so that made me want to take the job.



Jason Knight 09:22

And do you remember the estimation question you were asked in that interview? What you were specifically asked to estimate?



Jackie Bavaro 09:27

I do. But I wouldn't give it away it on the podcast, because I'm not sure if that hiring manager still uses that question.



Jason Knight 09:35



Jason Knight 09:35

Fair enough. So you were the Head of Product for Asana?



Jackie Bavaro 09:41

Yeah, Head of Product Management



Jason Knight 09:43

Head of Product Management. So, what's the difference between Head of Product Management and the Head of Product?



Jackie Bavaro 09:49

Yeah, the difference is that Head of Product includes responsibility for designers and user researchers as well.



Jason Knight 09:57

Okay, so you were more responsible for the the execution and managing the PMs and the product strategy. Okay, fair enough, but you're not listed as Head of Product Management anymore. So you're now listed as an advisor. So does that mean that you've basically parted ways with Asana and are just advising them on an ad hoc basis? Or are you advising lots of companies? I mean, I'm assuming you've got lots of additional work to do now with writing books and promoting books and publicising books. But how does that work?



Jackie Bavaro 10:29

Yeah, I've been taking up advising a few companies, and I left about a little bit over a year ago decided to take some time off and then spent most of my time writing this new book.



Jason Knight 10:39

Yeah. And we'll go into loads of detail about that book in a minute. But before that, let's let's go back to 2013, when you and Gayle McDowell wrote the first book, Cracking the PM interview. First question, How did you meet Gayle? And why did you want to write a book with her?



Jackie Bavaro 10:58

So to kind of back up a little bit, there was a time when I was at Asana, and I signed up for an email mailing list from a life coach. And she sent this amazing worksheet that basically said, think about, you know, what would you be doing if you could be doing anything in the world, if you never had to work for money again? If you could do anything you wanted? And she's like,

write that down. And then she says, how would you feel if you if you had achieved that? Write that down. And then she said, write down what's one little step you could take today, that would, that would move you in that direction, that would help you feel the same way that that would feel or that would help you work towards that longer term goal. And so when I went through this, I was thinking, you know, I would love to help more people become PMs, I would love to like maybe do a product manager school or start like teaching this, how can I go around the world and get everybody to understand what an amazing job this is. And when I got down to what's the what's the little step I could take today, I said, maybe I could I could start a blog. Maybe I could start a little bit of writing about this. So that's what inspired me to start writing on Quora about product management. And I started with interview questions, partially because of my experience with interviews. So I had gotten rejected from Google the first time I applied. Yep. And then, when I joined Google, I was very quickly put on the interview loops, and I interviewed more than 100 people there. And I started to see what kinds of things influenced whether somebody seemed to do a good or a bad job on the interview. And I noticed that there, some of it was content, but some of it was the way they communicated that content. And I thought that would be really easy to explain to people how to communicate better there. And some of it was just like misinterpretation of what the questions really were getting at. So I started to think that if I could talk about what the question... what the point of the questions were, what the purpose of them was, and what kinds of structure helped people do better, that I could sort of democratise product interviews and interviews and help more people have a chance to do well on them. So that's where I started writing my blog. And after I had few posts, I got a very long Quora message from Gayle suggesting that we write a book together. And I was convinced, and that's how it happened.



Jason Knight 13:22

Yeah, so Gayle wrote some other books without you, for example, Cracking the Coding Interview? So was that a book you're aware of? And she was just someone that you wanted to collaborate with? Because of the books that you'd seen, or how did that how did that work?



Jackie Bavaro 13:37

Yes, yeah. Cracking the Coding Interview is an incredibly famous book. It is like the go to manual for anybody going for any kind of engineering role. And she had had... she, I think, was on our sixth edition or so of the book by then. So she is very well known in the industry.



Jason Knight 13:55

Ha, so a little bit of reflected glory, then do you think?



Jackie Bavaro 13:58

Yes!



Jason Knight 13:59



Jason Knight 13:55

And how does that work then with the two of you writing a book? Is it almost the same as like paired programming where you're collaborating on bits at a time? Or do you kind of divvy it up and take individual chapters each and come together at the end? How does that process work for you?



Jackie Bavaro 14:16

So for the first book, on both books, we work together on the table of contents. So really thinking about the outline of like, what topics do we think this book should cover? And for the first book, we divided chapters, and for this, this newer book, I took the lead on all of the chapters, but then for both books, we reviewed each other... what each other had written and built on top of it and helped make it better.



Jason Knight 14:40

Okay, so very collaborative, and just working together across the board to just sense check each other and make sure it all hits home.



Jackie Bavaro 14:47

Yeah.



Jason Knight 14:48

Now, one of the things you said in the first book quite early on was that it's absolutely not a guide to faking it in the interview process. But on the other hand, it could be considered quite an easy way to fake it in the job interview process, because you're giving so much insight into their hiring methods and the types of questions that they're going to ask and all of that stuff. Did you get in any trouble with Google or Microsoft or any of these other places when the book came out? Did they give you any feedback? Or did they not really say anything?



Jackie Bavaro 15:20

Yeah, great question. I was very nervous publishing this book, I thought that maybe I'd become an outcast among all my friends, for giving away the secrets. And I got no negative pushback, I was... a very big surprise to me. But people were thrilled that the book had come out. All of these people who are hiring managers also are mentors. And so they had been mentoring people and sharing this information. So people really were glad that this information came out. And I also had been worried because as a hiring manager myself, that that the book would make it so that people who weren't going to be successful PMs would pass the interviews, and we would end up hiring worse people. But I found and I heard this from other hiring managers, as well, that it did not have that problem... that it actually made it a lot easier to

interview people, because people started giving more structured answers. And so if you have a structured answer, it's a lot easier to follow along. And so it's a lot easier to tell if the content is actually good or not.



Jason Knight 16:26

Yeah, that's a very good point, actually, the whole idea that you can kind of control for and equalise and kind of come up with a baseline that everyone's going to start from so that you can really be sure who's actually going to be any good. Which is, which seems like a thing that they should be, should be up for. So up till now, once people have got their product manager jobs, as far as you're concerned, they're on their own. But now, you and Gayle have thrown your hats back in the ring with Cracking the PM Career. What made the two of you go back to your typewriters?



Jackie Bavaro 17:00

Great question. So I think one of the things that made now good time to write this book, is that I've had time to grow in my career. And so when I wrote the first book, I had interviewed people and I was sort of the lead PM, maybe making some of the decisions on hiring PMs, but I wasn't, I wasn't the manager yet. And since then, I've become a people manager become Head of Product Management, built a team of over 20 PMs. And I've written career ladders, and I've promoted people and I fired people. And, and so I've seen from both sides, what that career success can look like and what it can mean to be a great PM. So I've had my manager try to explain to me what I need to throw into. And I've faced, you know, trying to explain to people on my team of how they needed to develop.



Jason Knight 17:52

So the book only came out literally yesterday, as we said, so I've not got much past the foreword, really, but one thing I'm now curious about based on what you just said was, whether there's any section in the book about how to effectively fire people,



Jackie Bavaro 18:05

We have a little bit about it. Yeah, there's there's definitely a bit about how to tell... how to tell if, if somebody can improve, whether it's worth investing more on somebody, or if it's time to let them go. There is a section on how to let them go. But it mostly says like check with your HR department, there should be a process.



Jason Knight 18:27

So I guess there'll be a Cracking the HR Process book coming out at some point then. But you didn't, when you started, have a book like this available to you. I mean, obviously, partly because you hadn't written it yet. But also there was a lot... the ground was a lot thinner back then... even Inspired only came out a few years ago in real terms. I'm assuming that Google's

APM programme, and probably even Microsoft's programme management programme was fairly well structured, and you had a lot of on the job learning there. But when you were coming up, did you have access to any resources or mentors or anything like that? Or was it just the structure?

 Jackie Bavaro 19:07

So yeah, so I'd be remiss if I didn't mention Joel on software, who is Joel Spolsky, who is founder of Stack Overflow and Trello, and Fog Creek bugs. He was a programme manager at Microsoft a long time ago. And his blog was the earliest content on product management that I ever saw. So definitely one of my role models. And beyond that I learned so much, yeah, from my mentors, my managers, my managers' managers, being in a team being at a company with other great PMs, I think is an incredible way to get started as a PM. And then a surprise for me was when I when I moved to Asana is that I was sort of worried about losing all those resources that you have at a company like Microsoft or Google, but what I soon learned that was amazing is that the startup ecosystem is very collaborative. And I found that even though I no longer had a lot of product managers within my company who I could learn from, I was able to talk to product leaders from other companies. And they were often very willing to have conversations with me about how they had built their career success guides or how they had handled a reorg, or what they did for internationalisation. So I've relied a lot on other peers.

 Jason Knight 20:28

Yeah and I guess you'll probably in the right part of the world for that sort of thing. There's, there's more than a few tech companies around your neck of the woods. But there are a number of other books out there on product management and product management careers. If I could be so bold, why should people read yours?

 Jackie Bavaro 20:45

Yeah. So yeah, there are lots of great books out there. And like you mentioned, Inspired, I absolutely love it. I haven't read Empowered yet, but I'm planning to

 Jason Knight 20:53

It is very good

 Jackie Bavaro 20:55

I'm really looking forward to that. I think that this book, I really and in fact, I wondered when Gail mentioned to write a sequel I was like, well, Inspired exists, like, is there really room in the market for a book like this? And as we talked about it, what I really thought about is that there isn't a book... a lot of the books that are out there are geared at the heads of product organisations and like how do you build a strong product organisation with the right product processes, and like, it's so important to make space for product discovery on your team. Not

that many of them are geared directly at the product managers to help them understand how do you grow as a PM. And the target audience that we kept in mind when we were writing this book is that we want this to be the book that mentors recommend to the people they're mentoring. And that by doing so, the mentors will be able to free up their time not spend as much time talking about generic best practices, but instead be able to spend that really valuable one on one time, and mentoring people on the specifics of their situation to give them the unique feedback and the unique guidance that will really help them succeed.



Jason Knight 22:01

Right. So it's, it's kind of like making product management itself, not a thing, and leaving them the headspace then to go and tackle all of the idiosyncrasies and oddities within the companies that they work in, and work on all the politics and all the history there, which, which again, makes a lot of sense. So one of the things you do mention in the book, and it's not obviously an uncommon complaint is there's quite a lot of variability between product management roles and, and product companies and how they operate. I think in the book, you say yourself that if you asked five different people what product management meant, that they would give you six different answers. So that seems like a tricky thing to write a book for, because there's so much variability that... that everything is not going to be applicable to everyone. So how have you tried to square that circle? Is it very much a book designed to almost propose a best practice that everyone should aim for? Or is it designed to really focus on all those different types of implementations of the product manager job?



Jackie Bavaro 23:06

So when we're researching for this book, I went out and looked for the the job ladders from many different companies. And I found some people put them online, sometimes I had to ask people, the company that, you know, show me what they had behind the scenes. And I saw two things that were really interesting. The first is that at the surface level, the success guides looked entirely different. The top level categories are just very different from company to company. But then the second surprise was when you look one level down, you look at the bullet points inside each section, they were remarkably similar. And so different companies will weight the different products skills very differently. Like some really weigh heavily towards business skills, some care a lot about collaboration, some care a lot about customer insights, some are more data oriented, but the set of skills is the same across these. So we broke it down. We did our own grouping into product execution, strategy and leadership. But that's not the only way you can group them. But if you look at the all the chapters inside of there, I think we touched on all of the different skills that PMs at different companies use.



Jason Knight 24:16

So is it the kind of book that you recommend people read from front to back? Or is it more like go to the index, find what you need and use it as kind of a playbook?



Jackie Bavaro 24:24

Yeah, so we have a little in the Getting Started section, we have a little bit of like when you're

Yeah, so we have a little in the Getting Started section, we have a little bit of like when you're short on time, you know, what's the best way to go through the book. And so depending on your goals, there's a few ways to read through it. So, for example, we have we have a lightning bolt to signal the skills that are used at the more senior career levels. So if you're, if you're a senior PM or above, you can look for the skills that have one lightning bolt or two lightning bolts next to them. We've broken down within each skill into the responsibilities, the practices, best practices and frameworks. And so if you're new to the job, you can read through all the responsibilities and see like, what am I supposed to be doing? What am I responsible for in terms of, you know, project management? Or what are my responsibilities when it comes to a launch or when it comes to strategy? Or if I'm trying to improve my skills, let's look at those practices and see, you know, how can I develop my skills and get better and better and what does getting better look like? Or if I'm looking for a quick framework, I can go to that section. So I do think that it's... it's a long book, I'll expect people to use it as a reference, hopefully, they'll use it as a as a reference guidance and switch to the appropriate part. But I think that skimming the responsibilities and practices would be would be helpful.



Jason Knight 25:39

Yeah. And on that, I mean, like you say, is a really big book, it's something like 800 or so pages, so I've definitely not had chance to plough into it too much so far. I'll definitely get back to you once I've had a chance. But for now, it would be really good. If we could just touch on a few topics, in some kind of a quick fire round. One of the things I know that you cover early in the book is how product managers can really make an impact when they start a new job. So I wondered if you could tell me one key thing, or the most important thing that a product manager should do in their first 90 days?



Jackie Bavaro 26:16

Just one!?



Jason Knight 26:18

Well, yeah, just just the main one, I don't want to ruin your book, or just give it all away.



Jackie Bavaro 26:23

Pick one, I'll say, I will say get in a win early. So find something that your team has wanted somebody to do, even if it's grunt work, even if it's, you know, hand coding a spreadsheet with, you know, a few 100 responses, and just do something so that you show up and your team is like, thank goodness, you're here.



Jason Knight 26:45

It's almost like going into the prison yard and knocking out the biggest guy you can find in the yard, huh? Another common complaint for product managers is getting sucked into the dreaded feature factory and concentrating only on delivery. What are some of the warning

signs of that? And what are some of the ways that you can address that slide?

 Jackie Bavaro 27:06

Yeah, so I think that strategy is one of the most important parts of Product Management. And what I mean by strategy. And I think this tends to be a major differentiator when people are moving into what at some companies will be called the Senior PM role. So in the earlier stages, you might be focused on a feature, you might be told, like launch this thing, and you get it out there. And you might even be told, like, here's the goal, you know, launch this feature and hit this goal. But at some point in your career, and the earlier you do this, the better. We move from trying to ship a great product that hits the goals that someone told you to hit to being the person who defines what goals you want to... you want to hit what goals you think will be important for your product, your team and your company. And one of the ways to do that is to define a long term vision. So an important part of the strategy. When I write a vision, I like to think of an infomercial in my head. So I like to think about, you know, "oh, it's so hard to do things today. Like, isn't it tough to open up cans", and you really emphasise the pain of, you know, the pain point that people are feeling today. And then paint the picture of this beautiful future when things are better when it's easy to open cans, and all of your shirts have, you know, have been bedazzled and, and get people excited about it. Because if you're able to, to paint a picture of this exciting future that people are inspired by, and they want to get there. And they believe that it's meaningful and impactful. And by people here, I mean people on your team, people across the company, executives and customers. So you're designing a future that people are excited about, they think that this would be a good future to go to. And then you can start working towards that, then you can work backwards and figure out what's the small steps we can take today that will get us in the right direction. And that way you ensure that you're not launching features just for features' sake, but you're launching features and any kind of product work because it's getting you closer to that long term vision.



Jason Knight 29:09

Yeah, that's a really common theme these days is all about having a strategy not getting obsessed in the small details having a feature based roadmap. But not all companies seem to get that. And some companies seem to almost be structurally unable to get that, falling victim to highest paid person's opinion or just responding directly to customer requests via sales and stuff like that. Now I'm sure there are some companies where you probably just have to give up and leave but but there are going to be some companies which are somewhere in the middle. Are there any approaches that you've tried or that you've advised people to use to try and break that cycle? You know, maybe get into the, the head of the exec team and try and persuade them that some of this stuff makes sense?

 Jackie Bavaro 29:55

Yeah, so I think what you're getting at sort of is stakeholder management. And I think this is such an important area. And I maybe... maybe surprisingly, tend to come down on the side of the stakeholders most of the time when there's a conflict. Because what I really believe is as a product manager, the best way to handle stakeholder management is to really, really deeply understand your stakeholders. So that means understand, what are their goals? What are their

constraints? What are they afraid of? What are they looking forward to? Why do they believe the things that they believe? So when you get an disagreement with one of your stakeholders, it's really important to figure out is our disagreement because we have different information? In which case, you can just share information with each other and resolve the conflict. Is it because we have different assumptions? In which case, you might be able to, like run a small experiment or try to validate those assumptions cheaply, and that resolves the conflict. Or is it because you have a difference in values? And the difference in values, I think, is the most interesting kind of disagreement. And this is a place where I'm really digging deep trying to understand where their values come from, try to respect where those values come from. So as an example, sometimes product teams get a little elitist, and sort of disrespect roles, like customer support or sales and think, you know, they're only out to try to be as lazy as possible, or only to try to make as big of a commission as possible. And that's rarely the case, I think a lot of the time, what might look like laziness from a customer support rep is really a useful value in responding to customers as quickly as possible. And having a customer service rep serve as many customers as they can in the day. Because if they take an hour to respond to each ticket, that's fewer tickets being responded to. And it means as a company, you're going to have to hire more customer service representatives, which then eats into your costs, makes it harder to become profitable. So there are ways to look at this and take this bigger picture view of not just thinking that, you know, the product is the most important part, but that every bit that company has an important role and is contributing to value and understanding exactly how do they fit into the company strategy. Same thing for sales teams, you know, yes, they might be trying to get a big commission. But they're the reason that they're compensated that way is because these large enterprise deals are the ones that are the most important and they do require developing relationships. And the way that a decision maker at a large company might decide whether or not to purchase your product might come down to some small details that don't seem important to you for the idealised customer you have in your mind. But if you can't sell to that person, then your their end users are never going to get a chance to use your software. So yeah.



Jason Knight 32:43

Yeah. And I think it's fair enough, you know that there needs to be a certain level of pragmatism, especially when you're selling B2B or enterprise B2B and stuff that, I guess the big problem is when there's too many of those types of requests. And that's where it feels like you might start to drift a little bit.



Jackie Bavaro 33:00

Oh, yes, I can talk to that, too. So. So once you once you have this deep empathy for your stakeholders, you have an... you really understand where they're coming from, and why what they care about is important for the whole company. Now you can start building a strategy. And I tend to call the written part of my strategy, the strategic framework, but we can start thinking about how do all of the different stakeholder concerns contribute to our strategic framework? So for example, let's say that we have the sales team. And they are... they're really passionate that there are certain features that they think you need to build, and you like, you hear why they want that. But you think that they're going after a kind of customer that you don't really care about as much you're trying to aim at this new target audience that you want to move your product towards. And they care about the current customers who, yes, they're paying the

current bills, but you don't want to get over focused on those customers. So what you can do is set up a strategic framework that lays out, you know, how you're going to balance those two competing goals. And one of the ways I like to balance competing goals is by treating my roadmap like a portfolio. And instead of saying that every single feature request from the sales team has to, you know, get stacked ranked against every single, you know, new product feature I want to build for a new target audience. Instead, I take a step back and say, overall, I think it makes sense for our company to invest 20% of our team's resources towards supporting our current customers and 80% towards the future customers. And now, you can stack rank the sales teams requests against each other, and let them fill up their 20% and separately stack rank your things you want to build for the future customer and let them pick up their 80%



Jason Knight 34:39

Yeah, and a lot of that, I think rings true especially when again, if you're selling into B2B or into enterprises, complicated product, stuff like that. There needs to be some level of balance between between all these different areas. It's like so much of what you see online in all their opinion pieces and blog articles. It's all mass market B2C. Oh, you've got a million customers, it doesn't matter if you annoy a couple of them, you've got loads of others but actually, that isn't quite how it works when you're selling, again, complicated products, B2B enterprise models where you're maybe waiting, like nine months in a sales cycle or something like that. So one piece of advice you've given is to look outside of your own world and take inspiration from from other products, so that you're not just sitting there stuck in your own world and can take a wider view. Have you got any examples of times you've done that in your career where maybe you've done that in any of the products that you've managed? And how did that turn out?



Jackie Bavaro 35:36

Let's see. So um, so we definitely study lots of different products, we would do regular product tear downs, which despite the name, it sounds like you're tearing them down, like you're criticising the products. Really a product tear down is about sort of tearing it apart and seeing what makes it work. Like somebody loves this product. What are they doing? That's interesting that we could we could copy



Jason Knight 35:57

Be inspired by not, copy?



Jackie Bavaro 35:58

Yeah! What can we be inspired by? And so I remember, you know, Asana as project management software, but we, we spent time we looked at Snapchat, we looked at Tinder, we looked at all kinds of consumer goods products to, sort of, consumer apps to see what do they do well, and especially thinking about, what are the design standards that our customers might become accustomed to? And so this one I'm not gonna take personal credit for, but one of the ones that I was really glad about is when we added the like button to Asana, because we saw

that people are used to, you know, liking comments on Facebook. And that is a very quick way to let people know that you've seen a comment that someone else has had or that you agree with it, and being able to do those reactions to people really improved communication, even though it was a metaphor that you more frequently saw in consumer apps.



Jason Knight 36:53

So I'm assuming there's lots of swiping around in Asana these days after the Tinder example. But hopefully, no Asana dating,



Jackie Bavaro 36:59

No, but we did do a April Fool's joke once where we had snap tasks that disappeared 30 seconds after you've viewed them.



Jason Knight 37:08

I guess that could also be a really good way to solicit direct feedback from the sales team as well. So you said before this, call that that back at school, and actually in college as well, you were in the debating society? Do you think this has helped you with stakeholder management skills?



Jackie Bavaro 37:25

Very much so. And the first kind of debate I did was called Lincoln Douglas debate. And very much the idea there is that each side needed to have a value proposition, a value that they were trying to uphold. And if you, if you cared about the same value, you had to debate whether your side or their side would be better for that value. But if you disagreed you debate whether or not your value was a better value than the one they had. So you'd have you know, talk about constitutional right to privacy, or sorry, to, like, first amendment right to protect a journalist confidential source, you say, is it more important to protect freedom of speech or to, to uphold, like, justice? So, so one part of it is really identifying the values and having sort of a keen ear for that. Another part is that the way that debate works, or the parliamentary and Lincoln Douglas debate works, is that you need to listen to the points that your opponent makes, and you need to have a rebuttal for those points. So as a debater, doesn't matter how smart your arguments are for your side, if you don't hear what the other person says and respond to that you won't win cases. And I find that listening and responding is such a critical skill for PMs.



Jason Knight 38:39

Now, that's really interesting, because one of the things that I assume is that you'd have to have some kind of stock responses to certain types of question, because you're not going to be able to make everything up on the spot. So like, you might expect some questions, and prepare and rehearse responses to them. And that makes me think of a section at the back of the book,

which has a selection of stock phrases, and what they really mean. Now, I've had a good chuckle of some of those, because because some of them are very relatable. But that also seems like the sort of thing that could be the genesis of an ongoing series, is that something that you're planning to keep up to date?

 Jackie Bavaro 39:15

If I think of more ones, I'll probably add them on Twitter. But I included that because those a lot of those were sort of the secret phrases, I would tell people when I when I promoted them to management. And I'd be like, Okay, great. You're going to now be sitting in a room with your report. And sometimes they will ask you something and you won't know what what to say. And just like when you hear that, just take a deep breath and say like, "Oh, thank you. That's interesting. Let me think about that and get back to you". And just having those phrases at the ready can really help you in these put on the spot moments that PMs find themselves in so much of the time.

 Jason Knight 39:49

So sit there and practice them in front of the mirror or something like that. Yeah. Now you also said that you really love TikTok. Now I'm a bit too old for that sort of thing but what is it you specifically love about TikTok and then based on your earlier infomercial discussion, should we expect to start seeing some infomercials on there from you soon.

 Jackie Bavaro 40:10

I've sort of been thinking about you know, once I'm done with all the book promotion, if maybe I should start start doing some TikToks. But I, I love it, especially. And I would recommend to anybody, I'm also too old for TikTok, but I would recommend anyone who's too old for TikTok to try out the app, the thing that I think is so special about it. And I actually use this as an example of studying other products and how they can be great. So YouTube existed for a long time. And Reddit has existed for a long time, and Reddit, So YouTube has user generated videos, and Reddit has a homescreen that is algorithmic, but you don't need to log in to access it. So when you first show up, you can just start interacting with things and you'll start getting good content, and YouTube, combine those two, to give you an algorithmic screen of videos. And because it's videos, and they can tell just by how long you spend watching a video, even if you do nothing else, and what you like and what you don't like, their feed very, very quickly learns what kinds of content you like and don't like. And so you know, within five minutes you're getting, you're getting content that is incredibly delightful and incredibly tailored to your particular interests. And so it can be it can be very fun. Whether you end up you know, learning about sourdough bread baking, or my TikTok is filled with interesting linguistics facts right now. So you can get very niche interesting content very quickly.

 Jason Knight 41:32

Yeah, so my YouTube feed is primarily filled up with Sopranos clips at the moment, which seems to be a bit much. It's like, it's not really recommended me anything new. It's just stuff that I've already watched, so they could definitely do some work on that. I think

that I've already watched, so they could definitely do some work on that. I think

 Jackie Bavaro 41:45

I did a little bit of time at Google working on video searches, specifically, like if you search on Google, and when should we show you a video search. One of the things that I was really impressed with with TikTok is how they handled recency. So when Hamilton came out on Disney plus, I very quickly got my feet entirely filled up with Hamilton clips. And a few days later, I got kind of tired of and they very quickly, you know, faded away.

 Jason Knight 42:09

Oh, there you go, someone's doing their job somewhere.

 Jackie Bavaro 42:11

Yeah.

 Jason Knight 42:12

So the the book's out now, I'm assuming you've got a packed schedule of promotional events. And you've been very kind to come on this podcast, I'm assuming that maybe you'd be going on some other podcasts. But what else have you got on what's next in the the promotional rollercoaster of the book?

 Jackie Bavaro 42:30

In terms of the promotions, I've been trying to find, you know, different communities that I that I can reach out and talk to. And then once that tapers off, I don't really know what's next. Relax a little.

 Jason Knight 42:43

Relax a little, think about the third book, start writing the third book. So I normally ask people on the podcast to describe product management or explain how they describe product management to another person. But there's obviously a big section in the book on that. And I don't want to give away any secrets. But I also know that you've got a young son. And I wondered how you would explain product management to your son?

 Jackie Bavaro 43:07

Yeah, I tell him that my job is to help people solve problems, which is a little bit different than how I would probably describe it to other people where I'd say that the product manager is supposed to define the problems

supposed to define the problems.



Jason Knight 43:22

So I've got a son who's exactly the same age as your son. And I guarantee that if I told him what I do, he would be spectacularly unimpressed. And where can people come and find you if they want to find out more about the book or get some more of your great advice about product management?



Jackie Bavaro 43:37

Yeah, so I'm pretty active on Twitter. So my Twitter is JackieBo, J-A-C-K-I-E-B-O. And my DMs on Twitter are open. So I'm happy to answer any questions there.



Jason Knight 43:51

Now, I always assume that when a woman in technology says her DMs are open on Twitter that that is the beginning of a horrible car crash.



Jackie Bavaro 44:00

Product Managers are a great community, I haven't had any problems yet. On Medium is where I usually post longer form things. You know, I slowed down there obviously, while I was writing a book because that was taking up all of my long form energy that I'll probably eventually get back to that.



Jason Knight 44:16

There you go. That can be the the proving ground for the the next book about how to fire people in product management. Well that's been a fantastic chat and obviously really wish you the best in the upcoming promotional activities. And obviously wish you all the best for the book. Let's keep in touch. But for now, thanks for spending the time.



Jackie Bavaro 44:34

Thank you so much.



Jason Knight 44:37

As ever, thanks for listening. I hope you found the content inspiring and if you did, then, I'm sure you'll be interested in some of the other inspiring conversations we've had in the back catalogue. So please go and have a look. Subscribe and the podcast app of your choice and

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