

Episode 13: Recruiting Great PM Talent, Part 2

Elizabeth:

Diana and Michelle, it's a pleasure to have you joining me here today on the Women In Product podcast. I thought maybe, Michelle, you could start, and we could talk a little bit about what you look for in product management talent and how does that show up in a resume?

Michelle:

Sure. Happy to address what we look for particularly when we first get a resume. When we look for product managers at Google, we really want somebody who can embody the culture and the values of Google, and sometimes that can be hard to come across in a resume. And so we want to understand how collaborative you've been. And so having being able to pull team collaboration through in a resume, and then talking about your process of building product, if there are nuggets that you can pull through and how you thought about creating a product, what's your creative process was at your company, how you engaged user experience team, how you engaged with engineering, how many engineers and user experience people that you worked with.

If you can pull some of those nuggets through in your resume, that's really helpful for us to understand what your process was at your company, because the process can be a little bit different.

And then also we know that product managers have a pretty broad range of experience. And we love seeing that experience come through. One of the things that we look for at Google is people who can bring their diversity of experience into the company. We build products for billions of people. And so when we're looking at product managers, we want people who can bring those different experiences to Google, to help make sure that we are building products that represent the community that uses our products.

And so when you can bring that forward in your resume to show the different types of products you've worked with, the different types of teams that you've been in, the different ways that you've thought about things that is also really valuable to us to be able to start to pull apart while this person has something different and unique and seems like it would be a great fit at Google through the resume.

Elizabeth:

So you're looking for what's their add. What all have they done, but what do they add Google perhaps?

Michelle:

That's a great way to put it. We talk a lot about culture add. We talk a lot about experience addition. We see ourselves a lot of times as talent scouts, being able to go out and look into the industry and say, "Wow, that person, they come from a really nontraditional background sometimes. What is that unique thing that they've done that could be a great fit at Google?" And so we're always on a lookout for that. And so pulling that through in your resume, it's important. Pulling that through in your resume is really important for us and being able to make your resume pop in that way is I think something that will help it stand out amongst the many resumes that we do get to see.

Elizabeth:

Now, does that change by level? And that also brings out the question of, do you guys hire at all levels or is there a sweet spot that you're looking for?

Michelle:

No. We hire at all levels, obviously straight out of school all the way up through. The VP level, Diana and I tend to be, I think probably a little bit more in the middle level, I go up through... I'll interview other direct as candidates, but our sweet spot's probably more in, mine's probably more in the middle, the people that are in the midrange of their career, but that applies absolutely at every level that we're looking for. So if you're coming straight out of school, but you've done some really interesting extracurricular things in college that show us teamwork and collaboration, whether it's through sports or community service or something like that, that pops on a resume, if you are mid-career and you've done some really unique product work, a first to market product or a really unique product, or you've been in a situation where you've had to do a turnaround, that type of thing starts to get really interesting for us.

And so I think that's, we look for that at every level. And then as you progress in your career, it's really great to see what that progression looks like. And a lot of times I get fascinated by people. Who've done a number of different things, at Google. I mean, this is just such a fantastic place to be a product person because we have a lot of really great products. We have products that are fun for people to work on. And as a result, we have a lot of mobility between products inside of Google and that's encouraged.

And so to see somebody's resume where they've done a number of different things where they have worked on throughout their career, a number of different types of products is great, because that indicates that that might be a good fit for Google, who being a company where you do have the option to work in maps for a couple years and work in ads for a couple years, then work in hardware for a couple years.

So it shows us different things. That's not to negate the fact that some people have gone deep in a particular career area for 10 years and they are the indisputable expert in that area. And we love that as well. Right? We have folks that have been here and been working in certain areas for 10 years and they are the expert in their particular area. And so, there's room for everybody at Google, and we look for a wide variety of things, but I think it's important to pull that out, whether you're a fantastic generalist or you are the hands down expert in your area through your resume.

Elizabeth:

That's great. So Diana, what is the process for reviewing resumes at Google? Is it an automated process? And if so, does that affect what resumes get selected or how does that process work?

Diana:

Yes. What it comes to reviewing resumes at Google, you might not believe this, but the process is not automated. In fact, we have a team that reviews every applicant that comes through, what they look for is the minimum qualifications. Once they meet that they're actually sent for further review to a recruiter or product manager or hiring manager that can take a look and further explore that. So I know that we're moving towards a place where automation, but this is not a place. We still have humans that are actively reviewing every resume.

Elizabeth:

I find it fascinating that you guys are reviewing every resume. And your comment about that first screen really being what's required for the job, brings up another question for me, which is that we typically see men apply to jobs that they're not necessarily entirely meet all of the requirements and women who only apply to the ones that they meet 100%, I think often that's compounded by the fact that job requirements are often stuffed full of things, right? So sometimes it's hard from the outside to figure out all of those things that are listed as requirements, are they really requirements or are they sort of requirements, some of the more important requirements than others? How do you guys handle that?

Diana:

Yes. I can take that, again. Going back. The team reviews, the minimum requirements that you're right, the job descriptions could be very long. A lot of nice to have as a recruiter. One way that I tackle that they work with hiring manager is to really work closely to describe what are the negotiables and non-negotiables, and who are we trying to get in the door by putting those requirements? Are they really necessary? What talent might we be keeping out? We're not trying to be talent gatekeepers, we're trying to be quite the opposite, right? Bringing as many product managers through our doors.

Diana:

So one way to think like a recruiter, when you write your resume is to take the recruiter on a journey. We are the user. So how do you craft your story to be one succinct. Two, factual, and then compelling enough that we want to read more, whether is going to your LinkedIn and we're trying to find more information there, whether it is trying to get on a call with you and understand your story. But the key is when it comes to what I look for in a resume and similar to what Michelle said, we want to see a variety of experiences beyond the core skills of building a product. I like to look for evidence of depth and breadth. So what I mean by that is for breadth, that large variety of experiences, our products are not just for users in the United States that speak English and maybe have a 4G network.

We build products for users across the world. So I want to see those experiences. Like are you able to empathize with a user, show me how you build products that you taught about it from a different perspective. And then when it comes to depth, I look for a lot of evidence of entrepreneurial spirit, curiosity, and then combining with persistence, building products from zero could take a lot of a toll on as a product manager. And how do you not give up and power through to become an expert on it? These are a couple of the things that make resumes stand out for me as a recruiter personally, but not just stand out. I want to get on a call with a candidate and learn more and hear the story. And how could I bring that story to Google and to hiring managers that would ultimately find the value, beyond the core set of skills they can bring to the table. What's that added on piece that you're able to bring to Google?

Elizabeth:

One of the things that I think would be helpful and people get stuck on a little bit is resumes, should the resume be customized for that particular job? How does that fit in with my LinkedIn? Do I really need a cover letter? How do you guys think about that stuff?

Diana:

One way I personally think about it and I've seen a Google is that it's not one type of resume that fits all. It goes back to, we're looking for a variety of experiences. Personally, I have my own preferences the way I like to read a resume, but I can tell you that I read a variety of resumes and it's more about the story. I say, focus more on accomplishments rather than laying out all the responsibilities than everything you've done in your job. Focus on scale and impact and we like numbers or metrics.

I think that would help me really craft, understand the way you've crafted your story, but help me understand your scope and previous roles to make sure that I present your roles that are aligned with what you're interested in. And also the scope you can take on coming into Google. I know that there's a lot of blogs in different guidance on, should it be one page, two pages again, I think it's personal preference and we're not looking for one specific resume. We're looking more for reading the story that's on the resume.

Elizabeth:

You bring up a thing that I hear a lot and often don't see in resumes, which is focus on the impact that you've had, and also the scale. And I would say here scale can be... You might be in a startup and the scale might not be a lot of people, but it might be a huge impact for the business and whether the business, the startup will take off. So that that's in a way scale, I guess, in a way, right? Being able to scale it for the business, those types of things.

I think the one thing that I was a little surprised that you mentioned was looking for entrepreneurial things, because Google's a huge company, right? And you don't necessarily think of it as being an entrepreneurial place just because it's a large organization. And so I don't know, Michelle, you might want to speak to that, but that popped out as something that I wouldn't have expected you guys to be looking for the persistence for sure. Because I think that people... at least I have a perception that when you're in a large organization, persistence is a really important thing. Like you have to be pretty dogged at making sure that things happen, but not necessarily entrepreneurial. So I don't know Michelle, if you want to tackle that or Diana?

Michelle:

I can speak to it. We're a very, I mean, not as much as I think we used to be, but we're still a fairly bottoms up company. We're very product led very obviously technically engineering led and a PM, can come up and be working on their product and go, I see a market need. Like I see this thing and I know customers would love this. I just know customers would love this and they on their own, this is so not uncommon at all at Google, on their own with a couple of maybe a UX designer and a couple of engineers, they'll go do a prototype of a thing, right? A feature, not usually a huge new product, but a feature or something like that, that they want to compliment their product with and they'll do it from the ground up.

And then they'll go take it up the chain to their management. And that will become a very, very popular feature. So that is that entrepreneurial attitude that we just love to see in candidates because that's what creates great product at Google is this passion from individuals and really, truly great product

people who see, "Wow, I think we can really solve a user need, a gap in the market, whatever it is, if we build this." Right? And have that persistence, as Diana said, and frankly, the leadership and teamwork to get a group of people together to say, "Let's just pull this thing together and test it a little bit and then see if we can get approval for it."

I can't tell you the number of products that we've seen at Google that have started that way. So that entrepreneurial spirit is absolutely something that we do continue to look for at Google.

Elizabeth:

I think that's a really interesting insight. And I think it says a lot about that environment because there's definitely places that would not work very well. Right?

Michelle:

Yeah.

Elizabeth:

And so, being able to step into a product role and have that perspective of looking out for where are all of the opportunities there, regardless of the particular parameters of what I'm working on specifically. That is really great. So one of the things that I see a lot is it seems like most employers out there want someone who has done the job previously, right? So if you're looking to advance your career through a job change, is there anything you should do differently on your resume or speak to in the interview? Michelle, do you want to try that one?

Michelle:

Sure. I think... So we see a lot of folks that want to get into product and you typically don't want to get into product unless you've done a little bit of product experience. You may be in program management, you may be in engineering, you may be in strategy and operations, but have done a lot of product work. And you're like, "How do I get into product from here?" And being able to in your resume show the product work that you've done, even though you've been in a different type of role and have that pop on your resume, I think is really important. So that sets the hook, right? You can get enough information and Diana should weigh in this as well, because they do, there's a screening process for these resumes as well.

So she should weigh in on what do those things look like on the resume? I think for us, once it gets to the product people, when we're looking at that in an interview, we're very willing to pull in on those nuggets of the product work that they've done, even though your title may not have been that. And I'd be explicit on your resume and say, this is the product work that I've done in the past. And I wouldn't hesitate to have a couple of different types of resumes. I remember in the past I've done both, a lot of product management and product marketing, especially way back in my career. And those things can be a little bit interchangeable depending on the company that you're at. So I had resumes that were oriented towards product marketing, and some that were oriented towards product management.

I think you can really craft your resume in a way that your product experience pops out, highlight those actual things. And as Diana said, really talk about the impact of what you did. You may have been in a program management role, but define a new product, in your company, come up with this new product, this new feature and driven that to release, even though your title is different, make sure that is

explicit on your resume. And then when the recruiter calls you, talk directly to that experience. So I'd just be very clear and crisp on pulling that out.

I think the other part of it, if you're looking to do the job change, maybe not so much on the resume, but in an interview, tell me what's motivating that job change, right?

Let me understand what your core motivators are, why it is that you get passionate about building product, the best product people are really passionate about the products that they're building. And so let that come through. That's sometimes hard to pull through on a resume, way easier to come through when you're talking to somebody. So make sure that to your interviewers, you're expressing your motivation for getting into product. And then, I think the final part is both in the resume. And when you're talking to somebody, make sure those core product skills pop through.

So you may be in program management or strategy operations or something like that, in your resume have those keywords. We did the user experience. We built prototypes. We went through the design flow. We beta tested this, pull through those things and the results of those things in your resume so that even though your title looks different, both Diana through the interview or through the resume process and the initial interviews, and then the product folks that you talked to in the interview, understanding can pull out more of what you've done in those areas. Because those are the things we're going to look for.

Elizabeth:

Yeah. Diana?

Diana:

The only thing that I would add is this is when writing a competency based resume could come in more handy than writing a chronological based resume and highlighting those projects. And at Google, for example, we look for product design skills, we look for analytical skills strategy and then some technical. So highlighting what projects have you worked on and putting them under these skills and say, this is what I've done. On top of that, again, a coach candidate that are not in a product role and how to come into a product role is you also have a lot of opportunities outside of work, outside of your core job. What are your passion projects?

Again, going back to that entrepreneurial spirit. You might not be able to switch to a product manager role between your company, but what are some other things that you've been exposed to outside of work? And we as recruiters love to see that on the resume and that's where the passion comes from. And it's again, tying back to the story and it helps me to bring that story to a hiring manager and explain why I'm showing a resume that might not have the product manager title on it.

Elizabeth:

In that process of that first set of interviews, what are your expectations from the people that you're talking to? I mean, how does that go? I know a lot of times people feel like that first conversation is, it's a high risk conversation. It's like, "Do you get further in the door where you can really share more?" So do you have a set of recommendations for people for that, that first conversation that they might have with the recruiter? What are the things that they should be prepared to talk about? What should they you to the table?

Diana:

Yes. I can take this one. I'd say treat that conversation as a way of telling me more about your story. Again, tying it back to those core competencies, but also things that you might not be able to put on a resume. So I'm not looking for our product managers to really prepare, I'm looking just to have a conversation, to really understand their core set of skills, and what's beyond that. Often that conversation is more of building their relationship. And sometimes we build coaching plans. Like, will you be needing maybe for me to connect you with a product manager at Google to better understand what's needed from the future interviews? What is that added piece or what are some core skills that you have, but maybe you might need to work on before you go to the first round of interviews.

So it's more of a relationship building, me understanding what core set of skills they have, and then them understand if a role at Google is also a fit. So I try to share as much information as possible in terms of what the process could look like. What does it mean to come into Google as a product manager? So I would say my suggestion would be not to prepare too much, but also think about it, like just telling the story and how does that tie to why you want to come into Google?

Elizabeth:

One of my questions around this is, and you can talk about this, and where in the process this makes sense. But I find a lot of times that people are intimidated by the interview process and it feels very high stakes. It feels very intimidating. And so a lot of times I feel like they talk a lot about themselves, but they don't necessarily really get a feel for whether that's the right job for them. So sometimes I'm always encouraging them to ask questions so that they have a better sense of is that really the job that they want. Right?

And I know sometimes people feel like, "Well, get the job offer, and then you can decide if it's the one you want." And I get that. But it also seems to me that that interview process even starting with the first conversation is a way to start to really understand what might this be. Right? So I don't know if you guys have any recommendations on that and how that may be perceived as a part of the interview process.

Michelle:

I can chime in here. So at the end of every interview, I try to leave five to 10 minutes for the person I'm interviewing to ask me questions. I can't tell you how many times I get the generic. "So what's it like to work at Google?" And I am so not impressed by that question. I got to be honest with you. Right? Because you can go online, you can go on the Quora, go on LinkedIn, and find out. I mean, we're going to Google's great. Ask me about the role that you're interviewing for, right? What's my team like, can you tell me about this? What does success look like in the first 90 days in this role? If you're not, we do a lot of general interviews, so I may not be the... You may be interviewing with me just in general and not for that specific role.

So you may not ask me that, but you can ask me specific questions. Like when you're developing product at Google, what's the relationship between the UX designer and the, typically between the UX team and a product team and engineering team. What's your most important teamwork aspect? How do you guys think about doing prototypes? Ask me about the craft of how we're doing it instead of asking me this big broad general question, right?

Bottom line is this is in your hands. You're not, we want to have a conversation with you. This shouldn't be this big scary thing. And none of us come into interviewing with the intent to intimidate somebody at all. Right?

Elizabeth:

The other thing that I hear from what you guys are saying is, be really clear on what your story is, go and talk to other people and tell other people your story. And I know it sounds a little weird, but practice it, it's not so much that it's practice. It's just that it will help clarify it. The more you say it, the more you will get clear about what it is that you're all about. And the other thing that I hear you guys talking about and different organizations are structured in different ways. And the thing that I am hearing from you guys is that when you're in a PM role at Google, you have many, many touch points. Some organizations, you just work with engineering, some organizations you are spending more time with the marketing and the UX people and the research people, theories based on the role.

And so, it's I think a smart thing for somebody who's interviewing for a role to understand how that's structured in that particular company. Is it broad? Is it deep? Is it... How many touch points do you have? What things do you absolutely own versus other people own? How does that fit all together? So I think that's a good point to make for people who are interviewing to try and understand that as well.

And as you say, Michelle, some of that you can learn by talking to people who are already at Google, if you know them, certainly within our community there're plenty of women who work at Google, if you're in the community, you could always go talk to them. I'm pretty sure. So there are ways for you to understand what you're stepping into and feel a little bit more confident about it.

Michelle:

Can I also touch on something you said on the story, telling your story too?

Elizabeth:

Yeah.

Michelle:

It's super important. Have your story down, practice it on your friends, practice it on people ahead of time. I can tell you personally, I was bad at this a long time ago, when people would say, "Tell me your story," I tell my whole story. And it was long, that was a long time.

Elizabeth:

Like more information than I was looking for.

Michelle:

I probably like, "Oh Lord." And it's one of my most cringey things I've ever done. And then I thought about, "Okay, what are the three things that define me that my story backs up," right? "What are the three things I want somebody to know about me, that's going to define me as a product leader so that they got to understand me." And I identified those and then I back them up with backs from my past history. So go into it that way and definitely you're right Elizabeth, test it on your friends, test it on other product people that you know, colleagues that you trust, run through it. A couple of times, video yourself

doing it and see how it comes across. Right? And then if you get nervous in the interview, have your little bullet notes next to you and just refer to those that you can see on track.

Elizabeth:

I think also that practice makes it so that when you do get nervous, you already know it. Right? And it will come out, if you've been practicing it, even if you're nervous, you can go back to that. I don't know. It's almost muscle memory, it's built into you now because you've practiced it often, you know where to go with it.

Diana:

To add to this as recruiters, we see ourselves as more the coaching side working with candidates. And one thing that we offer every candidate is to speak with a product manager at Google informally and help craft this words, helping crafting the story, or whether it's asking interview questions of how to prepare or just asking about everyday life at Google. But we offered that to chat informally as not part of the interview process. But part of that discovery period of is this the right role for me before I engage on a long process of interviewing. So we've been doing that for quite some time at Google.

Elizabeth:

That's great. That's great. So we're well into the time here and I really appreciate you guys spending the time with me and I thought it would be great if we could close and talk a little bit about your top recommendation for people that are looking for new jobs in the current market for PMs in particular, but Diana, do you want to start your top things that you would tell to people who are considering applying to a job at Google or any job really?

Diana:

Yes. I would say, to any job, start with your research, really understand is this the space that I want to go into, is this the company culture could right? Make it or break it for you. So do your research before you're going to put in a lot of effort. That's number one, two, again, going back, craft the story, make it very succinct, make it compelling for recruiters to want to get on the phone with you, to give you the chance to learn about more about the company and the job.

And then three, I think you touched on this Elizabeth, how often men and women apply the jobs qualified and less qualified. Just take a chance and go out and apply, right? Remove all those prefer qualifications and there's nothing to lose when it comes to applying. So those would be my top three things to tell everyone that's looking for a product manager and job.

Elizabeth:

And Michelle?

Michelle:

I will just add on to that because Diana has hit on most of the key points. I would say, one thing I would say is realize that going up looking for that next like, "Oh, I've got to get to senior product manager, whatever." Isn't necessarily the fastest path to success. Sometimes going lateral, making a lateral move, same level, but into a product area that you absolutely are passionate about can be the next way that

you accelerate in your career because let's face it. If you land in an area that you absolutely love, work is just so much more fun. Right? And so we see a lot of progression that way. So you don't always have to look for that next ladder jump as part of your next move. I many times have looked at what's the next skillset that I need to build for myself to really flesh out that part of my career.

Especially if you're looking to get to more of a general management type of role, or CEO role, which is a logical progression for a PM. What are you missing in your personal portfolio of work? Do you need more something that's a little bit more consumer facing in your skillset? Do you want something that's more analytically driven? Is there a new area that's really coming up and is exciting for you? Like AR&VR, you have any experience in it, but you think it's going to be the next big thing. So you're going to need to come at a slightly lower level because you don't have as much experience, but you think that's what you're really passionate about getting into. So a linear career path is not always the fastest way to get to where you want to go in your career.

Elizabeth:

I think that is a great recommendation. I think that people get a little obsessed with this notion that our careers are very... It's the up and to the right progression. And I just don't think that life ever really works that way. And as people, we have usually a broader set of interests and developing a full set of skills that are of interest to you and that apply to what you want to do is really valuable. So anyway, thank you both really, really wonderful advice for our listeners. And I appreciate you taking the time to talk to us today.

Michelle:

Thank you, Elizabeth. Thanks for having us.

Diana:

Thanks for having us Elizabeth.