

## Episode 17 - Conference Preview Edition

Elizabeth Ames

It's the end of April and our annual conference is right around the corner.

We're busy preparing speakers and putting together all the details to make it a special experience for each of you.

Recently I had the chance to talk with this year's keynote speakers - and I'd like to share some of the things they had to say about what really helps them thrive at work, what they hope you'll get from hearing their keynote, and that one piece of advice they want women working in tech to hear.

So joining me today are: Deb Liu, CEO Ancestry; Deboshree Dutta, CEO & Founder, Criya; Jennifer Lopez, VP, Product Development & Head of the Innovation Lab at Capital One; Mamuna Oladipo, VP, Product at Shopify; Sally Thornton, CEO & Founder of Forshay; Tulsee Doshi, Head of Product for Responsible AI & ML Fairness at Google

Welcome to the Women In Product podcast everyone. It is great to have you all here. I'd like to start by asking "What aspects of your work really help you thrive?" because these days we are all looking to rediscover that spark in our work.

Mamuna would you like to start things off?

Mamuna:

The most re-energizing. For me, I find energy in the unknown, which is backwards because it can be very stressful at times when you're in the thick of it and you're all the pieces are falling apart and you're trying to quickly glue them together and come to a solution. But actually I think that's when I find myself feeling the most alive, where I'm just trying to really solve that problem and get to the root. And when you get there and you're able to communicate it and everyone sees it and understands, it's like, "Aha." This is why I do what I do. And that's what energizes me.

Jennifer:

One of the things I love about being a product manager, working in the lab and just working in the product management community is making space for all the different types of people and experiences that folks have had. I run an innovation lab at a company where we mainly do software and technology, but I come from a physical background, a physical design background, and there are all these different folks that I work with that have such varied backgrounds. And that really helps me just show up inspired and excited and allows us all to problem solve in new and inventive ways. And that really feels quite special and not necessarily something you encounter in every field you're in.

Tulsee:



For me, my passion for product comes from that end experience of seeing the user interact with something that I've built or seeing the impact of something that I've built. And so for me, often what actually restores passion is resetting myself to what the goal is actually of what I'm working on. What is the end user experience that I am trying to work towards, what is the change that I'm trying to make, what is the impact that I'm trying to have.

Deboshree:

As much as being a CEO gets me pulled in many different directions, at the core of it and being a solid true to the art product manager. And that's what really helps me thrive; talking to users, really understanding and immersing myself in their lives, understanding their problems, and trying to come up with creative ways to make their lives a little bit better. That's what really drives me.

Deb:

The thing I love about my work is that it's really creative. It is no two days are the same. You wake up in the morning and you are solving problems, you're creating. And that's the wonderful thing about being a product leader in tech is that you never have the same day twice. You're always working on new problems.

Elizabeth Ames

We are a little less than two weeks out from the conference. You're each doing a keynote. What would you like attendees to walk away with from your talk?

Tulsee would you like to start?

Tulsee:

I want attendees to walk away from my keynote with hopefully excitement and actionable ways that they can think about inclusion and building for everyone as a part of the product development process. So I'm hoping that with this keynote and with others like it, we bring together more actionable ways of actually bringing product inclusion into that process.

Deboshree:

I think one of the biggest lessons that I have learned, being a woman, being an immigrant, being someone who has oftentimes thought twice before taking the leap, I've only wasted precious time thinking about things versus just taking the leap. Go ask for what you want. Go do what you want to do. I feel like the world and the forces align itself to enable you to go figure the next step out. So I think, as a takeaway from my keynote, I would say, go ask for that raise, promotion, support, job, opportunity. Go ask for that. You deserve it.

Jennifer:

I hope that the attendees of the keynote that I'm hosting this year at the Women In Product conference, walk away knowing one, they're super powerful. Two, that they can be creative and inventive anytime they want. And that the reality is anything that they're passionate about, whatever it might be, is part of who they are and what's going to give them their edge and you should totally invest in exploring the things that you're really passionate about. But then also know that giving you your edge is not just things you love, it's everything you encounter. So take every experience you have and use it and reinvent it in the future. That's your power. That's going to make you unique. That's going to allow you to meet the moment in a way that no one else can.

Sally:

I would love everyone to walk away with one thing that will help them feel stronger in their body, use their power to live their most full life.

Deb Liu:

I think sometimes we feel like the world isn't fair and it's not. And I wrote an entire book about this, which is it's difficult being a woman in a male-dominated field. It's challenging. But I think we have so much more power than we think we do. We just, there's so many circumstances where we could have asked, where we could have stepped up if we raise our hand. Where we could have crafted a new path. We could have tried something different. And that's what I want people to walk away with. It is yes, we can't change the system tomorrow. I wish I could. I wish I had that magic wand. But even without that, every single day, we have the opportunity to make things a little bit more fair, to take, to change our ourselves a little bit better to make, to do our job a little bit better, and to do more.

Elizabeth Ames

I know that each of you has been involved with the Women In Product community in one way or another over the years. What has that community helped you discover or rediscover?

Deb, as one of the founders of Women In Product, maybe you'd like to start.

Deb:

The thing about Women in Product is a lot of people thank me for creating it, but it's given me so much more than I've ever given it. In some ways the organization is reminding me that there is this group of people who care about each other, who love each other, who support each other, even though they've never met. That this is a community of people who met virtually, sometimes in person, and have created opportunities for each other. So many people tell me they found a job or a mentor or friend in the community. And that's what's really heartening because it reminds me that so much of what we can achieve is what we can achieve together, and that we're not alone.

Mamuna:

When I first started in my product career, there were not a lot of... Well, product wasn't even defined, but there weren't a lot of women in tech generally, and there weren't a lot of women in products specifically. And so having a community of women who are ambitiously trying to learn, grow, and develop, you pick up a lot in terms of different experiences that folks are having, and you're able to apply that to your own, or you're able to give back into the community. So I find that, in that you have this coaching mentorship, but you also have this ability to absorb based on other people's experience as well.

Jennifer:

Women In Product is such an important community. And it helps me recognize the number of people around me that support what I do, and also that I support what they do. And also from a rediscover perspective, just rediscover the tenacity, the excitement, the passion that all of the different women in our community have. And that brings me inspiration in everything that I do.

Elizabeth Ames

All right. And lastly, what's one piece of advice you would give to women working in tech currently?

Jennifer:

I think that for so many people, their concern is to seem smart, to be successful and who doesn't like being smart and who doesn't love being successful? But I always say to a new hire that joins my team or I encounter, it's like, this is a fantastic time. You feel the permission to, societal permission, to not know anything and ask lots of questions. And the best thing you can do is hold onto that. Best thing you can do is ask the hard question, ask the question that seems simple, that you don't understand because frankly, most people in the room probably also don't understand it. And when you fully understand everything around you, that's when you can contribute.

Sally:

The number one piece of advice I have is listen to yourself. You are the best guide for your life.

Deboshree:

I think once I started building my own company, one of the biggest things I realized was how every decision we make can have magnitudes of impact on real people's lives. So my learning so far has been how connected we are with actual users. There are real problems and the impact we have, and it just reinforces the true principles of product and how important they are when you're building anything that actually impacts users lives.

Tulsee:

One piece of advice for women in tech currently is your voice has a lot of power, and to find the mentors and the champions who can actually help you identify the next steps for you and the way to champion and channel that voice.

Deb:

The opportunities from here are endless, but only if you're allowing yourself to see them. Sometimes it's very easy in the tech field, especially to feel stuck. To feel like you're powerless, to feel like in some you got passed over, you didn't get the promotion you wanted, you didn't get the job you wanted. But I'm here to tell you that you have so many more options than you think you do. You have so many more options to have mentors and sponsors to open doors. You can do so much more than you ever imagined. And if I look back at the 20 years I've spent in tech, I think that that's the thing is that I always believe that there was something better, and that I could strive for that. And it's that hope that has led me through my career. And I hope that women see that hope for the future as well.

Elizabeth Ames

Thank you to all for joining me. Deb, Deborshree, Jennifer, Mamuna, Sally and Tulsee. I'm so excited to hear from each of you at this year's conference.

And I hope all of you - the entire Women In Product community will join us May 10 and 11 to hear all of them and many more outstanding women in product management today.