

Episode 18 - Conference Keynotes

Elizabeth Ames

Today is the final day of the Women In Product Conference 2022. It has been an amazing two days of connection, ideas and inspiration. If you were able to join us, I hope you will be inspired again to hear clips from our keynote talks. If you were not able to attend the following is a taste of the inspiration and insight we heard from our keynote speakers - women who are leading the way in product.

We started off yesterday with an opening keynote from Deb Liu, the CEO of Ancestry, board member of Intuit, Founder and Board Chair of Women In Product, and author of the forthcoming book, "Take Back Your Power: 10 New Rules for Women at Work."

Deb Liu

When you think of the word power, when I say women and power, what's your reaction? What are your feelings? The truth is we're really uncomfortable with the idea of women who seek power. Women are supposed to be polite, allow power to come to them, not seek it out.

And yet, if you think about the definition of power, the ability to affect the things around you, it seems innocuous, almost simple. Why is that?

The truth is life is unfair and anyone who says otherwise is just not telling you the truth. I mean, we live in a world where for every a hundred men promoted or hired in management, only 86 women are. We live in a world where only 20% of the Russell 3000 company board seats belong to women. Where women earn six out of 10 degrees in colleges, and yet still make less money when they get out. Where women ask for raises as much as men, but they're 25% less likely to get them.

I say these stats to disappoint you, upset you and frustrate you, but also to inspire you to push against them, to push back on these boundaries, to speak up even when it's uncomfortable, to help us take back our power together.

One of the ways to take back your power is to chart your own course.

The truth is, we're always going to fail at one point or another. The only decision we get to make is what to do with that failure. Career paths are not linear. They always will take detours. There's failures, there's obstacles. So even if your ultimate goal and your dream is no longer possible, you get to decide what to do from there

But rather than letting your first no turn into the end of the road, see it as a start of something new and beautiful. The moment you hit that wall might be the impetus you need to change direction and be the jumping off point for something new and precious

The second tip that I have here is to not give yourself a free pass.

A free pass is the act of giving yourself permission to actually give away our power when we need it most. There's an old adage, you miss a hundred percent of the shots you don't take. And that's the heart of the free pass.

How many times have you just not raised your idea, because maybe people would judge you. Or how many times did you not ask for that raise or promotion? Or how many times did you let that colleague interrupt you and chose not to speak up? Each time you do one of those things, you give up your power by giving yourself permission not to take the shot

Another way is to build a learning mindset. Sometimes we think we have to be the expert, the best person in the room, the smartest, the person who's always right. When I started my career and throughout my career, I have always been the imposter. I actually stumbled into product management.

I said, "You know what? I am not going to be the expert. I don't know how to do this, but I am going to work hard and I'm going to learn"

In 2020, I was approached to interview for a public company CEO position a well known Silicon Valley recruiter said that he thought I'd be perfect to interview for this job. As we were discussing this opportunity at dinner, I asked him, "Why me?" And his response surprised me. He said, "Why not you?"

I decided to apply. It was a grueling process and I learned so much about myself and what boards were looking for in a new CEO. And though I was turned down from that opportunity, Jim's encouragement showed me that I had gotten to the mindset that I wasn't good enough. That because I am not what a CEO looks like, that I wasn't qualified to do the job. By the time the role of the CEO of Ancestry came along and they reached out, I was ready.

Finally, you cannot have a successful career without balance at home. So being intentional and thoughtful about how you set up your marriage is important at how you actually evolve your career over time. Life gives us different opportunities, challenges, and raw talents and we can allow our experiences to be setbacks and hindrance, or they can turn into fuel to take us further than we ever thought we could go

I hope you remember that while you can't change everything, you have way more power than you think. You can and should affect the events around you. You have allies, opportunities and you have a difference to make in our world

Elizabeth Ames

Deb's opening talk was followed by Mamuna Oladipo, VP of Product at Shopify, whose keynote dove into the challenges of mastering a new role in the age of remote work.

Mamuna Oladipo

I found myself in this company where I had been introduced via Slack and went through this lovely onboarding program. I had a buddy, they had made us intros, but it's really nothing like walking around the office. I had known about relationships, but now you really think about

establishing relationships, which for me is key because I didn't want the first time I was working with someone to be us working through an issue. So, I needed to develop that trust early on. So, I set out on that journey and I'm still honest to be honest and that first week I made a list of about 10 people that I had recommendations through my manager and folks around me that would have virtual coffees with. In these coffees, I'd ask where they're based, how long they'd been with the company, some tips and tricks they had picked up along the way, what they like to do for fun. Types of problems that they solve for and where they consider themselves experts.

And, then most importantly, I would ask for the name of two to three people they would recommend I meet and why. That last question was critical, because I would ask that person then if they're comfortable making an intro for me to that person. And, I found myself doing something around 20 virtual copies a week and they were all very useful. In those conversations, not only did I feel like I was organically bumping into someone, but I was also learning great company context that I wouldn't have gained via Slack or another method. So, every two to three weeks I would check in with folks I previously met and I'd just say hello or reference something we had discussed.

Of course, it's not better than bumping into a person in the hallway, but it works really well. And, now I make sure to continue those virtual copies with new folks, as well as keeping up with people I have spoken with in the past. So, another consideration here is in the same way, you're getting to know others you need to spend time deliberately connecting and letting others connect or get to know you. Building relationships remotely is hard. And, a foundation here really helps with that trust. So when you have that trust, you can have those authentic conversations to understand and align or any around any wins and goals.

Elizabeth Ames

Tulsee Doshi, Head of Product for Responsible AI & ML Fairness at Google closed our first keynote session with insights on what it means to build for everyone

Tulsee Doshi

I want to start with Bridgerton season two. If you're like me, you've been watching the second season that just came out. As a south Asian woman who has always loved a good love story, to see someone who looks like me represented on screen and to see rituals that I've grown up with be a natural part of the story, that really to me is representative of what representation and inclusion is all about, right? It's all about feeling seen. And that's really the feeling we want to bring into our products.

Just like feeling seen is such an important part of representation, so is reducing your exposure to harmful types of misrepresentation that may exist on the web. So to me, what product inclusion is really about is about making better experiences, and those better experiences often, by thinking about those who are often left on the margins, can actually improve the overall whole.

Building inclusive products has to be a core part of building a good product experience. With that, I want to talk about three lessons that I've learned in the process of doing this for me personally as a PM and hopefully they'll inspire you as you think about your journey in product inclusion as well. One, number one, every decision is an opportunity.

The decisions we make as product managers, they matter, and they affect experiences that we may not even be thinking about in the moment. That leads me to my second lesson, design for and with. Because we each have our own lived experience and we each have our own conscious and unconscious biases, we also don't know the experience of everyone nor do we have that expertise. Often as a product manager, the strength really is not in having the answers yourself but in bringing together the strength of other voices, both internally and externally, who have diversity of expertise

Lastly, I think one thing that has been really powerful for me is don't underestimate your own voice.

Elizabeth Ames

This morning Jennifer Lopez, VP, Product Development & Head of the Innovation Lab at Capital One shared her take on the unexpected inspirations that drive innovation.

Jennifer Lopez

If you, like me over these last two years, have been hit really hard, maybe you're in need of rediscovering that power, maybe you're a little confused about your power and your purpose as a product manager. I know I have been. So I want to also take time to think about how you restore yourself, how you allow yourself to be inspired, creative, and full of innovation potential, so you can, in turn, use that to make.

I recognize that when I talk about innovation, which is part of my craft, I often understand that other folks don't know what I mean by that word, particularly my definition of innovation.

So here's my definition. Innovation is the intersection of two or more disparate things that come together and when they combine, they make a spark. And that spark allows you to see the world differently in some way.

What is required of that is your story. It's your passions, it's your curiosities, your experiences that fill your creative well, because if innovation is the intersection of two or more disparate things, one of which is often the problem you're trying to solve, the other is, well, I don't know. And that's the thing. I don't know what that other thing will be. All I know is that when I'm confronted with having to solve a problem, the first place I turn to make that spark is my creative well.

So today, I want to talk to you about nourishing your creative well at all times so you can draw from it in the moments you need to. That allows you to be more innovative, more creative, more open, and I'd argue more human.-There's no special academic requirement for what enters my well. There's no expiration date for what goes into my well, and my well can never be too full.

To be innovative, to be your very best problem-solver, to be the very best human, you need to have full wells of creative musings which you can draw from. And in my well is every season of Love Is Blind, the spoken word poetry show I went to, the Afro Future show I went to, the documentary on The Donut King of California, really fascinating if you haven't seen it.

And my well and your well and their well will be fundamentally different and that's the point. That's your edge.

No one else can meet that moment in the manner that I can. They can meet it from their perspective from their well, but if that other person doesn't actively feel their well or rather, they don't even think they have a well or they need a well, or when granted the opportunity to be curious and open and intrigued by life and said they sit back, they tune out. They surely are not prepared for this moment and no spark will be had.

So here's my pitch. In your life, in your career, you'll be with confronted with countless moments or one spark, one idea can change everything. You can hope to have a good idea when those moments come or you can ask yourself if you're prepared right now, today, with the curious mind and heart and creative well.

My well's got to be deep and profound and rich and full, and that's good for me. But when your well is rich and deep and well funded and full, that's for all of us and that's how change happens.

And to make sparks common, we need to make refilling our well very common. Every day something's got to go in there, every single day. And push yourself to make your well look very reflective of you, but also push yourself to make your well into something that's beyond who you are today because inspirational fodder, creative fodder does not need to be something you love, does not need to be something you like. It simply needs to be something that allows you to think differently.

Innovation can come from anyone at any time inspired by anything. I am far more excited about what you all will do, what creative spark will come with you here at Women In Product with the experiences and passion that you have.

Elizabeth Ames

Jen definitely made sparks fly!

Our next speaker, Sally Thornton, CEO & Founder of Forshay had the unenviable task of following Jen but she met the moment by helping us find the balance we seek.

Sally Thornton

I'm so excited to be with you today. And we're going to be talking about how you have a demanding career and a full life, because it's totally possible. But the first thing that we have to do is throw out the myths.

So as we live this full life, these are the key elements that work together. The main thing is wellbeing, but it also matters who's on your team and how you think, and are you watching the way you're thinking, and your story and identity. ~~So let's dive in.~~ So the first myth is that work basically consumes the middle part of your life, and you really have no time to play. That's really not true. It means learning's throughout your life, work is throughout your life, and the thing that we tend to not focus on is this shade of gray, which is play, oxygen mask first, taking care of ourselves.

We tend to put ourselves last, as we know, right? It's like the oxygen mask first is a reminder that these things are important. The second myth is more work is better. We really believe this. We really think the harder we work, the more we should work. And yet the science tells us over and over again, that's not true. When teams have time constraints on how much they collaborate, creativity goes up, burnout goes down.

The other one is the ideal worker. So the ideal worker is a social science term about prioritizing work above all else. When we try to be that ideal worker where we prioritizing work above all else, we're not living actually the life we want to live.-The true superhero is where wellbeing fuels your creative work, where boundaries support you, boundaries are a good thing. They give you focus and impact. That to me, is the ideal worker of future.

When it comes to your health, the number one correlation to long health is actually relationships. And it's often the thing I hear from women that they don't prioritize. They prioritize their family, their careers, and somewhere down below is relationships.

The other important pillar for your wellbeing and feeling like this is a full, beautiful life is taking care of your body.

NASA did an experiment that showed that a nap, I think it was even just 26 minutes, raised your productivity, raised your creativity, but we still have this bias against sleep. Like, that's lazy or self-indulgent, but actually it's crucial for creativity, it's crucial for your brain health, it works for work, it works for your life.

If you walk for just five minutes or do wall sits or whatever, walk your stairs if it's raining inside. That actually lowers your blood sugar and it has the most positive impact on your body.

Who are the five people you spend the most time with at work at home? These are the people that actually impact your happiness more than a raise. Science proves this. So if we hang out with people who are eating healthy, we tend to eat healthier. If we hang out with people who are smoking, we're more likely to smoke. So consider in your community, in your herd, in your inner circle, who are the people that raise you to live this fulfilling life in both work and in your personal life?

And another thing I want to bring back into our world is more play, right? Play is not the opposite of work, right? Without play, we'll feel depressed. The key is releasing old myths of like, what is best. What is best is what you define, right? And bringing in the science of what's true versus what you've been told.

The point is humor matters, right? We know humor matters at home, but humor also matters at work. It builds your leadership competencies, it enhances creativity, it releases all the good hormones in your brain. I want you to know how much power you have over not only your story, but potentially someone else's story, because many of you are leaders. How are we giving permission to both ourselves and to the people that we lead, that we trust, that we love to lead lives that make the right decisions around blending work and family in new ways? Because I want you all to live beautiful, full lives doing work that you find amazing and have a fulfilling life with no regrets. It's totally possible. Embrace the science.

Elizabeth Ames

Take those changes one at a time but know that you can build the life you want and need. Last but definitely not least we heard from Deboshree Dutta, CEO & Founder, Criya, who shared the challenges and rewards of pursuing her passion as an entrepreneur.

Deboshree Dutta

I'm the Deboshree Dutta, I go by Deb, and I'm the founder and CEO of Criya. At Criya, our mission is to empower millions of creators turn their passion into a business.

I'm Indian-born, a first generation South Asian immigrant, I did my Master's in Computer Science from Carnegie Mellon. And the last four years, I was Head of Product Management at PayPal, leading our entire AI-driven customer success agent experiences. I have over 12 years of experience, leading and building technology at companies like Microsoft, Cisco, Nokia.

But fun fact, I'm also a fashion and interior design influencer, with 150,000 followers, and I've been sponsored by over 250 global brands. You can find me on Instagram @deesignplay.

This didn't happen overnight. Especially while having a demanding day job, it's taken dedication and discipline, every day, to pursue my passion. It's taken over seven years to build a network, the knowledge and experience to establish myself as an influencer. And as a technologist and as a creator, I knew someday I'll be building a solution to marry my product and technical expertise to empower more women embrace entrepreneurship.

While a lot of my friends and family have encouraged me to start building on this dream, starting a tech startup is a beast. And given my background as a female immigrant, with limited resources, influence and connections, I didn't know where to start.

So I decided I'll do what I can with what I have, and what I have is courage, resilience, experience, technical skills, and a real problem that needs to be solved. And most importantly, a belief that I am the person, I'm the best person, with my background and experience, to go solve this problem. I took a bet on myself and I did something I hadn't done in years, I started coding. And I coded and coded til I had the first version of my product

I did what PMs do, talk to users. So I invited my fellow creatives from Instagram, about 10 of them, and asked them to try the product and give me feedback. The reason I share this is because being a product manager is really what has prepared me for this journey. And I didn't even know it.

As a product manager, I implore you to really take a deep look at your journey, what you're learning, and what you're amazing at, because you have the power to alter the course of real businesses and real lives. Being a founder and CEO, your key role is to constantly ensure you're building something that people want.

Don't hold back. Your next idea may be the next big thing that changes lives. Your next hello might be the boss who listens to you and enables your dream career. It's not just about becoming a better product manager, it's about pursuing what you love with intention.

Elizabeth Ames

I hope you've enjoyed hearing these clips from our Women In Product 2022 keynote speakers.

I could not be more impressed with the wisdom and generosity of all our speakers. And I'm grateful for the support of our incredible community and generous sponsors. We could not do any of this without them.