

## Women In Product Podcast Episode 6:

Elizabeth Ames:

I thought maybe we could start by talking a little bit about your background because you have this amazing background. You started Eden Bodyworks when you were, I don't know, 11 or 12 and you were an entrepreneur. I'm so impressed.

Jasmine Lawrence:

Wow. Yeah. Thank you so much. I'll just start by saying thank you so much for having me on the show. I'm really excited to chat with you.

You're right. I started my first company when I was 13 years old, Eden Bodyworks, and it was founded based on my need for natural hair and body care products. For me as a kid, I was the pageant girl. I was running for Little Miss Hawaii in 1994 and things like that. So I've been in the beauty space for a long time, and one thing I learned from modeling and pageant-ing was that there's a lot of pressure as a woman on the way that you look, and that pressure led me to lose a lot of my hair to relaxer, trying to achieve straight hair. So I made my products to help restore my hair, grow back healthier hair, and you know, to also empower other women to live their best lives not being caught up by the way that they look.

Elizabeth Ames:

That is great. I love the fact that you were in pageants. I mean, that is a whole world that I know nothing about, but I'm sure you learned a lot being in, I don't know, in that environment, if you will, right?

Jasmine Lawrence:

I did, I did. I learned a lot of things that have probably served me well in corporate America and some things that I'm still working to un-learn, right? There's a lot of etiquette. There's a lot of posturing. There's a lot of playing to the audience, being prepared and knowing exactly what to say, and just having the way that you look really dictate whether or not you belong or whether or not you're aligned with even the category that people are looking for. So today, I try to bring more of my authentic self, more of my culture, more my background into this space as I exist in now, and I think I feel a lot better about it.

Elizabeth Ames:

That's awesome. That is just great.

So some time after you did that, you went to Georgia Tech and got a degree in computer science. What inspired you to pursue a tech career, and a CS degree in particular?

Jasmine Lawrence:

Yeah. Thank you so much for that question. I absolutely loved Georgia Tech when I graduated as homecoming queen, just like representing the values and the principles of the school, which are progress and service. To your question about what made me pursue, what inspired me to pursue computer science, it actually came to me as an eight year old kid. I saw this movie called Bicentennial Man with Robin Williams. I don't know if you've seen it, but it is a fantastic film about humanoid robots and just the way that they can be of such value to people in the world. When I saw that movie, I thought, "I want to do that. I want to create the future and I want to use it to help people."

So choosing Georgia Tech was a no-brainer for me. They have an amazing computing program, a robotics lab, and lots of professors who were passionate, not just about the programming aspect of it, but about the human computer or human robot interaction that is important for these machines to integrate well into our lives.

Elizabeth Ames:

Yeah, absolutely. Wow, what a great story.

So from there, how did you get started in product? What pulled you over in that direction?

Jasmine Lawrence:

So I'll say my first exposure to product was as an entrepreneur. I formulated, designed the packaging, and did all of the business development, in partnership with my mother, of course, as a teenager and then onwards into my teens. Eventually I built up a team who was able to carry on day-to-day operations while I pursued my degree in engineering, but for me, it was actually after my first summer internship kind of working in a more technical role. I went to pursue an opportunity with Microsoft, and Microsoft has this great program, I'm not sure if they do it anymore, called the Explore program and they let you choose to be a software engineer, a product manager, and a designer. So throughout the summer, you get to explore all three of those roles. I thought that was fantastic that that opportunity existed.

I did not do that. On the way over to my interview for an internship of some kind with them, I read this article that, I can't remember who wrote it, but the title of it was the Zen of PM, and they talked about the interpersonal skills, the technical skills, the business skills that live within the role of product management, and I thought, "As much as I have been trying to be a software engineer, what really resonates with my personal stream is this product management role." So I graduated and went full time with Microsoft as a product manager.

Elizabeth Ames:

Wow. Right out of the gate there. You were on it.



Jasmine Lawrence:

It wasn't easy, though. I will tell you that the pressure to be in that same kind of software engineering role like my friends were, like I had studied to have, it felt like a lesser role, you know, in comparison to being a software engineer. It felt like, "Okay, I'm just going to be taking the notes or telling people how things should be," but I realized that the responsibility is greater than that, and my opportunity to be an advocate for the user and a steward of the company's business outcomes is a responsibility that I'm proud of just as much as I would be if I was writing the software that people use day to day.

Elizabeth Ames:

You know, it's interesting that you mentioned that because one of the things that I think often confuses people is that product management gets defined in a lot of different ways at different companies, and there's kind of like the classic Silicon Valley or Big Tech firm model, which really incorporates everything from, you know, creating the product division to managing all the details and influencing everyone around you, the engineers, et cetera, but in some other industries, it can be defined in different ways or in different parts of the tech industry, and so it gets a little bit crazy talking about that role and what people have done, right?

I hear this a lot from companies that are recruiting because they see the job a particular way, and sometimes they don't necessarily get candidates who have done that full job, and sometimes they get candidates who have done much more and they step into the organization, and it becomes a big disaster because nobody else is used to it. So have you ever had that experience? You've worked mostly in big tech companies, but ...

Jasmine Lawrence:

Yeah, I absolutely agree with you. I think the role is different and then the need for the role is going to be different in different organizations. I do think that there are core skills that make a great product manager, but even me, I've done business-to-consumer. I've done business-to-business products. I've done hardware, I've done software. I've worked in operations. There's so many areas that you'll touch. You know, you're not always the one working on big launches and, I don't know, advertisements that are going to be on TV or play at the Super Bowl. That's not always a part of your responsibilities, but you know what? You're not also always reading every single bug or every feedback that comes through on Twitter in your role as a product manager. Sometimes you're lucky enough to have someone who can aggregate that information for you and help you make the right product decision.

So I would say if I can name one thing, it's going to be just like truly being user-centered. If your mission as a product manager is to meet the needs of your customers, you have to understand what those are and you have to be able to advocate for them, and with whoever you're talking to, whether that's an engineer or a legal partner, a marketing partner, whoever it happens to be.

Elizabeth Ames:

Yeah. That's so true. That's great.

So, it sounds like when you stepped into PM, well, you were at a big company. I don't know. Did they train you at all, or did they basically just like say, "Here, have at it?"

Jasmine Lawrence:

It was kind of like a "have at it," but they put me in a bit of a sandbox where it would be tough to mess up, and I think that this is standard for your growth as a new PM. You'll likely get assigned a very, very small and focused scope. For me, the first "product," you can't see my air quotes on a podcast, but my first product was the Xbox One keyboard. Keyboards aren't a new concept, but for us building a new generation of devices, I had to consider, "What were the values and principles for this product, and what did we want to bring into this new generation?"

So learning, I became a subject matter expert in a very, very small scope. I worked with one engineer and one tester, but I ended up working with many designers, right? Anything from the shape of the keys, to the sound that each individual clickety-clack of the key made. I had that depth, and then to grow just a couple of years later to working on clubs on Xbox Live, which was across mobile desktop web, console, live to millions of users that touched every single product surface that we had, and so the number of engineers were in the dozens, if not hundreds, of people who were focusing on delivering this. You scale up pretty quickly, but like I said, if you master the basics, you really just learn to delegate and to kind of grow the impact that you're able to make with those same core skills.

Elizabeth Ames:

That is great. You know, it's great to hear a story from somebody who was put in this environment where it was a sandbox where there was guardrails or there were some guidance or whatever, because so many of the stories that I hear from people are, "It was sort of like 'here, have at it,'" and then people are like, you know, walking around in the dark, trying to figure out how to put all the pieces together. Yeah.

Jasmine Lawrence:

I didn't know exactly what to do, but coming in as an entrepreneur, so when I had my first job, I was almost 10 years into running my company at that point. So in the interview, I remember this, Kevin says to me, "You're going to be the CEO of your feature," and I was like, "Oh, I know how to be CEO. I know how to be responsible for the metrics that drive the outcomes that I want to see for my organization." So I was able to go in with that position of leadership and really lean into it. The other thing I will say that was very helpful to me, that I know is huge to the Women in Product community, was having a mentor, and I'm still in close contact with the same mentor that was sitting by my desk on my first day of work.

Elizabeth Ames:

That is a very unusual story. Tell me more about the mentor and tell me, like how did that relationship come to be? I mean, obviously proximity was part of it, but I'm sure there was more than just proximity.

Jasmine Lawrence:

It's true. They were also new to the team. They'd been there maybe a year or two before me and they were assigned to me as a part of the onboarding process, right? So it was kind of like, "No one has to do this alone," which is what I really love about the product community, is as much as people say it's competitive, there's a lot of support and camaraderie when you have that kind of team mentality. We're not competing over who's going to get the resources for this quarter's projects or that. We're all focused on, you know, "What are the top ways that we can actually make progress together and really support us?" So my mentor, Rob, we met one-on-one every single week and honestly, first it was just like, "Where's the bathroom?", "Where are the snacks?", "How do you fix this?", "How do you use this piece of software?", "Do you guys write your PRDs in docs or in decks? Like what templates exist?", "How can I see what's already been done?", and really learning about the history of the organization and the product that I'm working with.

There were times when there were product design decisions where I'd say, "Hey, these are my two options and this is what I'm thinking about. Tell me your perspective," or, "Tell me all the risks that I'm missing and not considering," and it even expanded into just like social dynamics. So like, "Hey, these two engineers don't seem to be getting along," or, "Hey, these two GMs don't seem to have the same view about 'how do I navigate the politics as someone,'" and I think one thing that I appreciated about this mentor in particular was that they were about like, just like a few levels above me. Not so far away that they'd forgotten what it was like to be an IC, to be boots on the ground, but far enough where I could aspire to and really look to them as a role model that showed me kind of, "What does the next level of being a product manager look like?", and just showed me how they've been in the trenches.

Elizabeth Ames:

Yeah. You know, I mean, what you're describing is what is sort of classically defined as a "near peer mentor," right?

Jasmine Lawrence:

Exactly.

Elizabeth Ames:

And in all the work that I have done over the years, I have seen those near peer mentorship relationships as being the most productive, right? Because if you're in college, you really want to talk to somebody who's like two years into their career, like, "How did you make that jump from

here to there?", or if you're a manager and you want to get to be a senior manager or a group manager, they can help you and lead you, tell you about those next steps, right, in a way that is practical and helping you get there

Jasmine Lawrence:

Absolutely. Probably the most impactful mentor that I've had in my career as a product manager, but because I am extremely ambitious, they also opened it up and said, "You know what? I don't know everything," "You know, I've never had that experience," and they encourage me to meet not just with my skip or, you know, the general manager of my group, but with the execs and to get that exposure into what leadership looks like at a level that I couldn't even imagine. That, I mean, I definitely see myself in a C-suite somewhere. I'm looking at what some of the leaders of Women In Product are doing and I aspire to be that.

So for me, to look even farther out and figure out, "How can the steps I take at my mid and senior level today get me there, put me on that right trajectory?", is something that I also kind of had to step out and do. Now, do I meet with an executive person every single week? No, but do I have quarterlies with men and women across different industries who are leaders? Absolutely, because that exposure really helps me prepare for what the future that I aspire to.

Elizabeth Ames:

Yeah. It also makes you known, like then people know who you are.

Jasmine Lawrence:

It does help.

Elizabeth Ames:

I had a woman that I worked for several years ago and she had this great expression. She would say, "It's not what you know, and it's not who you know. It's who knows what you know?", and I was like, "Oh," because those are the people that can open doors. Those are the people who will say, "Oh, Jasmine, you should talk to her because she could do blah, blah, blah that you need," right? So having that combination and just having them know who you are and what you're interested in is valuable. So, yeah.

Jasmine Lawrence:

Exactly. I didn't have the language at the time, but I found myself creating a lot of sponsors who had the influence, who had the clout to create space for me, to say my name in rooms that I wasn't in, and that's exactly right. They knew what I was interested in. They knew what my skills and my strengths were and they knew what opportunities I was keen to engage in, and then they could check in with my manager or my track record of hard work, of things that I've learned. Yeah, and that's really opened a lot of doors for me.

Elizabeth Ames:

You know, I think that there are so many women, myself included when I was young, that really feel like, "If I just keep my head down and do a really good job, I'll get promoted." It's just not the case, right? It's not that you're doing anything bad, but if people don't know who you are and they don't know what you're working on, and they don't know what you want to work on, then it's hard for them to make those leaps and advocate on your behalf, right? To say like, "Oh, we're doing this project on X. I know somebody who really is interested in that," right? So I just think it's such a good reminder. Like what you have done is such a good reminder to women to speak up, to talk to people, tell them what you're interested in, tell them what you want to do and why, and what the things are that you have done, right? So it gives them some context.

Jasmine Lawrence:

That's so true. I mean, we know this as product managers. If you don't put the marketing out there, they're not going to know about this new feature or this new product. So it's the same deal with the work that you're doing to deliver those things. It's great to be seen, and I would say I have a kind of a two-pronged approach, right? Working with my manager saying, "Hey, what are the opportunities for me to get in front of this person, that person, this group, so that I can get the exposure that's necessary?", right? So leveraging a person who is a partner, not responsible for, but a partner in my career development and growth.

Then on the other hand, getting out there myself, putting on lunch and learns, putting on skill shares and internally to advocate not just for what I'm doing myself, but for celebrating the other engineers and developers and designers that I work with to say, "Hey, we just innovated on a new," my team, honestly, we made a new stakeholder program.

So we, for the platform we're building, we bring in stakeholders from all across the groups and say, "Tell us what you're passionate about, tell us what you need, and we will come back to you with, 'Here's this new roadmap, here's this new vision that you have helped us co-create.'" They're getting exposure to what we've created based on their feedback and feeling heard and feeling listened to, and they also know that they've got a consistent place where they can show up and connect deeply with us to build the relationship. That's given me a ton of exposure, but it's also helping me do great work.

Elizabeth Ames:

Yeah, I totally agree. I mean, it's such a great strategy.

So tell me a little, like you've had a number of different positions and I love that you brought up what motivated you to go to Georgia Tech, and in particular, your passion for robots. So talk a little bit about, like what positions you took and what drove you to take those positions, right?

Like, why? Sometimes we take positions because it's a bigger salary. I'm not dumping on that. That's good, but sometimes you need to be able to think a little bit more deeply than that in terms of getting where you want to go. So how did you drive your own path and how did you make those decisions?

Jasmine Lawrence:

Thank you so much for this question, because I think when some people look at my LinkedIn or resume, they see a lot of great company logos that make them think, "Okay, she probably knows what she's doing", but the journey from working in gaming to AR/VR, to robotics, to social impact, it might not seem like the most logical path to make for a person who wants to be a product manager in robotics, but it made sense to me. Before I go in and explain it to you, which took a lot of self-reflection on my part, I will just tell anyone who's listening that your career and your career path does not have to make sense to anyone. Okay? You're the only one who's living it and so you're the only one whose judgment you should consider when you're making these types of decisions.

But for me, I wanted to work in robotics. I did a lot of research at Georgia Tech in robotics, and by the time it was ready for me to graduate, Google had bought all the robotics companies that I wanted to work at in a major robotics acquisition. So I thought, "Okay, I still want to work in the hardware space, but I want to work at a company that has hardware in millions of homes," right, because I imagine that one day that's where you're going to see robots. So taking that internship with Microsoft and going full-time on a hardware team that I had an amazing summer with, that had helped ground me in the principles of product management, who I knew I would have a mentorship and a sponsoring community, and just a lot of educational opportunities in the Seattle area was how I made that first leap. I'd say, "Okay, it's not robots, but I'm going to lean into this," and so learning about delivering product around the world about what it really takes to go from an idea to a physical product in people's homes and in stores was a phenomenal aspect in the beginning of my career.

I got comfortable. I will tell you I got really comfortable and things got a little automatic for me, and so I made the transition to the HoloLens experience team because I wanted to work on another piece of hardware, but an advanced technology that had not yet found its place in the market. When people think about holograms and HoloLens, they're like, "Yeah, it's a mixed reality headset. I don't really know what mixed reality is, but I'm sure it does something." So to have that experience of figuring out, "Okay, we've invented this. We've had this cool innovation. What can we do in the world?", and to be a part of creating a pilot partner program so that you can discover that hand-in-hand with the users that we were impacting was a phenomenal part of growing my user empathy and just growing my ability to work a lot better with external stakeholders.

Elizabeth Ames:

Yeah.



Jasmine Lawrence:

Then there was a big pivot in my life where my mom got sick. She lives in Southern California, and I knew that I didn't want to be a four or six-hour plane ride away from my family anymore, and I also knew that the Bay Area, outside of like Pittsburgh and Boston, was another hotspot for robots in the US. So I made the leap. I literally applied for any job in robotics in any career path I could, because I just wanted to get my foot in the door and say, "I work in the robotics industry." I ended up snagging a technical program manager job at SoftBank, where I was able to, again, do what I do on the platform side. Streamline processes, you know, ship things, have an amazing demo for my first time at CES, and really immerse myself in that experience of developing human robot interactions at a real company, and that felt, it felt amazing. It felt amazing, but I felt like I got comfortable very soon. To your point, I think I was a quite a bit under-leveled in terms of what they expected of me and the challenges I was pursuing, and so I made the transition to Facebook.

Now, when I went to join Facebook, I had every intention of joining Regina Dugan and joining Building 8, and being a part of Facebook's brand new hardware, or doing, you know, what were they doing? Brain-computer interfaces and all of these kinds of new communications technology to bring people into the future who have been traditionally left behind. That resonated with me. Making products for underrepresented groups resonated with me, but shortly after I joined, the group was disbanded, and then I found myself on a platform team working on Portal. Working at Portal exposed me to working in accessibility and spending a year developing our accessibility program, making sure that this product worked for traditionally marginalized groups was just an incredible experience for me. Also being able to work on the platform's first and third-party experiences, it was a different opportunity than I'd ever done before, and then, like I said, another tool in my tool belt.

With my heart cracked way wide open. I made another leap to working on social impact at Facebook, and I wanted to take a break from hardware. I said, "Maybe I don't really like this. Maybe I should just try something new to be sure I love what I love," and after a year of taking that product from launching in like three to five countries to 50 countries in the middle of a pandemic, I truly believe I can do anything. I felt so empowered, so supported, working with a team of incredible people who were fully focused on changing health outcomes. I'm saving lives. I mean, the energy was electric every single day you logged in, or every single day we went to the office, and in that moment I realized, "Here I am, not living my dream yet again, doing what I'm good at, but not doing what challenges me and what is really aligned with what I've known I've wanted to do for the last 20 years."

So I just reached out to my network for an opportunity in robotics, and I found myself at X, the moonshot factory, working on the Everyday Robot Project, where we're trying to make learning

robots to help people in their everyday lives, and there's never been a more ideal organization for me to be at to pursue the dream that I imagined when I saw that movie years ago.

Elizabeth Ames:

You know, your story's such a great story because it really brings up this whole issue that we all make career choices for a variety of reasons, right? Some of which will be apparent to somebody who looks at your resume and some of which will not be apparent to somebody who looks at your resume, but there's almost always something in your head that connects that thing for you. There's so many pieces of it, right? Like what you got in terms of shipping hardware all over the place, that is incredibly valuable, right? Like hardware is a different animal than software services-

Jasmine Lawrence:

Oh, it is. Oh, it is.

Elizabeth Ames:

It's tricky, right? And you know, also making decisions because you have personal needs, a family or whatever, it's like, I always feel like nobody should ever feel bad about that. Like, we all make some decisions, career decisions at some point in our life, based on those things. It's a reality, right, that we all live with. So kudos to you. Great way of sort of telling the story and linking those things, and it's just great to hear your story and how you found your way from one thing to another.

Jasmine Lawrence:

Thank you. It wasn't easy, but I definitely had a lot of support. Like I said, consulting with my mentor, with my family, and with myself about, "Honestly, what do I want and what do I need?" Having a clear growth plan for myself was also critical in knowing those times where I felt calm too comfortable and not challenged enough. Yeah.

Elizabeth Ames:

So currently, you're product manager at X, the moonshot company, and you're working on Everyday Robot Project. So I think we all know what motivated you to take this role. It's like, it's kind of the culmination of what you wanted to work on when you started it at Georgia Tech. So, that is great. So what I'd love to do, what I'd love to hear from you is to break that down a little bit. Like, what is it about robots that really gets you excited? Like I know you first had that vision when you saw that movie, but this is something that's been sustained over your lifetime for a long time. So there's really something there that speaks to you.

Jasmine Lawrence:

It's true. I think that there's just so much left to do. It's such an untapped or like open frontier, I'll say, like space, which is probably the second place I'd go if it wasn't robots, or space robots. Yeah, definitely. It's just such an undiscovered frontier, right? As a kid, I've said this before. Both my parents were our sergeants in the Army and so I lived a very strict and regimented life. You do what you're told, you respect authority, all those types of principles. For me being in school, we were just learning things that other people had already invented or discovered, and I thought, "That's kind of boring," or like, "What's left? What's left in the world that we don't know?" We know so much about this world and this earth, and in robotics, we're constantly figuring out things. Robots today are so dumb. They're so basic, and they're just such a far leap away from what we dream and imagine in movies, and my goal is to close that gap.

I think we've gotten decades of work, decades of rewarding, fulfilling work to bring these devices to a level of intelligence where they can support us, where they can help our elderly, where they can clean our homes or rescue people, or explore the solar system for us. There's so much impact that they can have, and I want to be a part of it.

Elizabeth Ames:

Yeah. I mean, when you say it, it's like, I can so hear that curiosity and desire to be a part of that in every word that you say, and I can totally relate to that from the standpoint of, there's something really special about working on products that are on that edge of invention and development, right? Because development is a different thing than invention, right? Like development is more of a straight line. Invention is like this crazy zigzag that you don't know exactly where it's going to go, you know?

Jasmine Lawrence:

Absolutely, absolutely. I spent a lot of my career working on zero to one products, working on things that are brand new that no one done yet, or have been giant incremental leaps, like transformations in industries, and I appreciate that because I'm not afraid of chaos, right? I love bringing order. I love to tidy. I'm not afraid of this chaos and uncertainty, and I've constantly found myself with managers who embraced this idea of failure, of discovery, of experimentation. That, that works for me, but I will say like as a new product manager, being able to work on something like the keyboard, which was incremental, something that was kind of understood really did help me hone the basics of what I want to do as a product manager, but then when I think about, "How do I want to apply these skills?", I knew that it was going to be kind of more cutting edge, front end, exploratory research kind of things that we want to apply in the future.

For me, not a growth PM, you know? Not a PM that's going to scrape every ounce of value on an existing platform. Not a PM that's going to like drive hardcore retention for you, like all these types of things, but there are people with that expertise, and I think that there is value in, how

was it characterized? My mentor calls them "farmers" and "Vikings" that are valued and whatever resonates with you, right? As a farmer, you're going to till that land, you're going to go deeper and really know every element in the soil that you can to harvest the best crops year after year, but as a Viking, you're constantly on the move. You're constantly looking for new lands to conquer, to discover, to trade goods with, and things like that. I think it's all really about temperament and not necessarily about kind of visibility the flashiness of the opportunity.

Elizabeth Ames:

Yeah, I think you're really right. I had this conversation with one of our board members and talking about, you know, sort of where you fit the kinds of things that you love, right, and figuring that out and playing to your strengths that way. She was just talking about how much she loved early stage companies. Like she said, "I just love that messiness. I love digging into that where nothing is really known completely and you're inventing things or creating things," and I could totally relate to what she said. I mean, I figured out, not at the beginning of my career, but fairly early that I wasn't really good in a big company because I saw big companies as like, "Oh, it's a big crank, and everybody's turning the crank," and I would get very bored with the crank very quickly and say, "Let's try turning the crank the other way," you know, and it would just wreak havoc on stuff. So I quickly figured out like, "Yeah, that's not really the right place to put me. I'll just cause trouble. Better to put me someplace else," right? And-

Jasmine Lawrence:

Yeah. Knowing yourself as is really fundamental to kind of how you're going to find your opportunity to make impact and to contribute.

Elizabeth Ames:

Yeah. Now, talk a little bit about being ... So you're a project manager, a product manager of something that is intended to have a 10X impact on the world's most intractable problems, right? Not a 10% improvement. So what do you do differently as a PM when you're in that environment versus something that's more incremental?

Jasmine Lawrence:

Yeah. I would say the constraints are different, right? The constraint on kind of how we think about problems, but how big we're able to dream and imagine, and the risks that we take to pursue those are just very different. The one thing that I do like about, I don't know, the mystique or secrecy around the work that we do is that there's a different kind of accountability. We're accountable to ourselves in terms of what we're pursuing and the scale that we're trying to pursue them on. I'm not accountable to, you know, having to have something done by Black Friday, or a holiday season or this conference coming up, or having to show a demo to so-and-so person or, you know, having people saying like, "Oh, well you said you all were going to be done in February and it's March and you're not done." There's none of that, right? We get to decide kind of the risks that we're willing to take and how we work.

I would say also, thinking at this scale, it pushes you out of your comfort zone. It pushes you to do the hardest thing first, right? I know sometimes people want to do an experiment, say, "Hey, let's try this simple case. Let's see how this goes, and then if this goes well, we'll ratchet up the intensity." We've totally flipped that thinking and said, "If we're not going to get to the point of solving this hardest case, it doesn't matter if we can do the other nine out of ten." It really doesn't matter to us because we want to crack that biggest issue first, and if we fail, if we can't achieve it or if we discover that it's not possible at this moment. Astro has said this all the time, "Kill the project. Let's kill the project."

Instead there's a mentality in this more incremental mindset where it's like, "Well, we got to keep this going. This is my job. This is how I get paid." Like I can't just go to you and say, "We shouldn't sell this anymore because it's not worth it." They'd say, "Oh, well let's try and tweak these hundred different things." No, my goal is to come out there and say, These are the things that will help me know whether this is possible or impossible, and the team that I have behind me is courageous enough to pursue that and to poke holes and everything as we aspire to look at the future and create it as we walk towards it together.

Elizabeth Ames:

That is, that is awesome. That's such a great perspective, and one that we don't often see as product managers. You know, so much, well there's different perspectives with different products, but the one that you're talking about is fairly rare.

Jasmine Lawrence:

It's a way of working. I can't say that I've worked with this way at any other place. I really do enjoy this phase of life where I'm both dreaming and doing at the same time and, gosh, just being challenged so much to think farther, to think bigger, and it's less about speed in a sense. It's less about like, "Oh, we need to get this done on a certain timeline," but more like, "What are the milestones? What are the triggers? What are the key things, signals that we need to show that we are truly on this path to the moon?", and that's just a different way of thinking.

Elizabeth Ames:

So as you look forward, what are your goals and dreams as a product leader? There's a big question.

Jasmine Lawrence:

That is, that is. A little personal, but you know, we've shared some management already. For me, so I had my first intern over the summer, and I really loved the experience of just nurturing this person, not in like a mother-y way, but really seeing them and being able to create an environment in which they can succeed. I've had a lot of great managers and a lot of not-so-great managers, and I just can empathize with them more like 10X more than I've been in their shoes. There was so much about investing in them and growing them that challenged

me, as well as the ways that I needed to mature and grow myself. So I definitely see myself in the future as a people manager of some kind, right, and that's something that I couldn't say in the past.

In the past, I thought, "I'll be an IC forever. I always want to be able to have a project and do it on my own," but one thing that I've learned about growing myself and scaling my impact is that when I enable others to leverage their strengths and their skills, how much more can be accomplished under my vision in my leadership. So I see myself growing, you know, maybe one day being a head of product somewhere, or where I am. Who knows? I'd really love to continue to engage in the community like we do at Women In Product, whether it's mentoring or coaching, or even being on a board of a business that is trying to solve problems for communities that are traditionally underserved.

I've just started engaging in the angel community with a group called Pipeline Angels, where we are looking for female founders and founders of color to invest in a whole new generation of entrepreneurs. As you know, entrepreneurship is near and dear to my heart, and I'm really looking forward to the 20 or 25-year anniversary of my company and the impact we'll continue to make in the black community as we expand our product offering and partnerships with other companies whose values align with ours.

Elizabeth Ames:

Yeah. I'm so amazed at how many balls you have in the air that you seem to gracefully manage. I looked at that list and I was like, "Whoa, I feel like a slacker here. I don't do nearly that amount."

Jasmine Lawrence:

I'll summarize it really quickly, right? So there's a personal, there's a professional, and there's a philanthropic piece to my life, and these are just the three P's that I even target my quarterly goals to. "What am I doing to invest in myself?", right? I want to grow as a leader. I wouldn't grow as a manager. So I'm working on that and I'm finding people in my network and outside of my network to support me in that. "How do I want to grow professionally?" Okay. What is it going to take to be a head of product or to join a board? What does it take? Let me find people who are already there and close the gap and that skillset there. Then philanthropic, I didn't get where I was on my own without a mentor, without community, without people giving me a chance, and I need to find places in my life to be that person for somebody else. These are the things that matter to me, so I just shape my life around that.

Elizabeth Ames:

That is great.



So lastly, what one piece of advice would you give to women who are entering product management or early in their careers? You know, there's a lot of women that get in this place where they're trying to get in the field, but it's really difficult to find those early career jobs, et cetera. Any advice?

Jasmine Lawrence:

Yes. I have very much enjoyed coaching people who are transitioning into product management from another field or in another discipline, and my tip will be to know your story. What is it? What is your story? Because that's what an interview is all about. Kind of teasing out, "What have you learned so far? What are you passionate about? What are you good at? What are you going to do for me?", and I feel like people kind of come to a company saying, "Hire me. I'll do whatever you want. Just give me this paycheck," really being like, "I'll be whatever you need me to be."

For me, as a person who's just been through the hiring process, it's not attractive. I want someone who says, "This is who I am, and this is what I've come to do. I feel like your organization is a great place for me to spend days of my life applying these strengths that I have honed through these experiences, and I'm ready to take on this challenge with confidence and with courage." That's what I wanted to see, and that's why I want to see women coming into this industry saying, "This is who I am, and here's what I've come to do," and then just go do it.

Elizabeth Ames:

There you go. Thank you so much. It's been wonderful talking to you today, and I'm just so impressed with all of the things that you've done and hope to see you on the stages at Women in Product and with the community. So, thank you again. It's been great.

Jasmine Lawrence:

Thank you, Elizabeth. Thanks for having me again. Thanks for the opportunity to share my story and to be able to hopefully share the wisdom that I've learned over the last few years with your listeners.