

Episode 39: Jen Taylor, Chief Product Officer

Rashmi:

So Jen, welcome to Women In Product and really appreciate your time, how did you get started with product management, Jen in the first place?

Jennifer:

It's really interesting. I started my career in product management longer ago than I might care to admit. And I came out of university expecting that I would be a lawyer, but I had a bunch of friends or graduated his lawyers and decided not to be a lawyer. And then I started of discovered kind of who I was and who I wanted to be through a process of elimination. I worked in consulting and found that I really loved collaborating and meeting with customers, but I wanted to have a more sustained and strategic point of view.

I worked in banking and I realized that I loved spending time with customers thinking about their strategy, but I wanted to be a part of executing it. I worked in venture capital and I found that I like working with entrepreneurs, but I wanted to be in it. And so a lot of that sort of passion for customers, passion for building businesses, passion for collaboration, sort gradually led me to product management. And so really after I graduated from business school, I came out knowing I wanted to do product management, managed to secure an internship during business school. And it's been largely in product management ever since.

Rashmi :

And did you always wanted to be a chief product officer when you started out? Or somewhere in the mid of the journey?

Jennifer:

Honestly, I didn't know when I started as a product manager, that there was a role of chief product officer. I feel like it's kind of a role that I've sort of discovered or maybe has evolved over my 20 plus years of working in product. I think for me, as I grew in my career I found... For me personally, my growth and my career in product management has just been a journey of discovery and experimentation and things I like, and don't like failing fast and learning.

And I think for me, as I grew in product management, I started to realize that I once loved building product, but I also really loved building teams. And I really loved being part of a leadership team within an organization. And I really loved that sort of cross functional collaboration that came as a leader. And I think that's what sort of drove me to want to continue to grow within the organization. And really I found myself in the chief product officer role.

Rashmi:

Awesome. And during this process you mentioned experimentation, lots of elimination and things. Are there any examples that you can give us as to how one even figures out how to do this? What do you like? And what's most thing that you're passionate about? Any examples from your experience that you could probably state?

Jennifer:

Yeah, I think there are a couple... There are kind of two different angles that I... Or maybe three we'll think about it as we talk through it and maybe we can count them at the end. But I think for me, some of the kind pivotal moments for me came with failures. So when I started my career early in product management, I was responsible for a release that was a flat out failure. And it was a really interesting moment for me to step back and learn about what we could have done and done differently.

And then it was a journey of sort saying, "Okay, hold on a second. If this is what is going to be required to help this product be successful, is that something I want to do? Is that something I feel capable of doing? Is that something that's going to bring me joy?" So there's sort that angle to it. I think there was lots of also experimentation and reflecting on who am I? And what are my superpowers? Early in my career, I'm like, "Am I a B2C product manager? Or a B2B product manager?" And they're very different pieces of DNA that are required to really find joy in either of those journeys.

For me, B2B was about building relationships with customers for the long haul. And I was like, "That's what I want." B2C was a lot more about experimentation, which I love is just not my natural jam. And then also being aware of what strengths that I bring to the table, right? There are lots of different types of product management.

I was actually looking at a leadership team of a company I admire today and looking at the bio of their chief product officer and that person has 50 patents and a degree in computer science. And I think sounds like they're very involved in the day-to-day deeply technical decisions. Whereas I think for me, my sort of superpower is coming in and partnering deeply with technical teams and figuring out how to help them operationalize and scale and build teams and really draw those strengths out of other people. So there are lots of different ways to skin it. And I think that's kind what guided me and helped me think about each one of the roles as I went.

Rashmi:

That's awesome. I do have a follow-up question, but a little later with respect to the technical aspects that you just mentioned, that you're already curious about. So while in this journey, what kind of detours or pivots did you undertake to actually get to this? And picking up the different skills that you have to in order to be where you are today as a chief product officer?

Jennifer:

Yeah. No. It kind of builds on some of the things we've even started talking about already. I think for me, moments of failure and reflection, I think were pivot moments for me of what do I do or do differently. I took a moment where I actually left product management and I went into product marketing and I was like, "I'm a product manager, not a product marketer." I spent some time at a B B2C company and I realized I'm a B2B person.

I spent a bunch of time working with really innovative technical founders. And I'm like, "That's my jam." There's a combination and a chemistry there that we can use to unlock value. I started coaching and building teams and I was like, "This brings me joy." And it seemed to work for the people I managed. So there you go. That worked out too. So it was these sort of moments of experimentation and trying stuff.

I think the interesting thing... And I think one of the things I really love about product is there's no linear journey. Going back to when I was an undergrad I thought I was going to be a lawyer. And at that point it was like, "Okay, graduate from university. And then you go to law school and then you get a job at a firm and then you are a partner track and..." There's a very... Or you an academia and there's a tenure track.

Product is actually completely different. And at moments I will be honest, that's been scary for me when I kind of look over the precipice of the next career move or my next step is as a product manager. I'm a little like, "Ah, I'm not sure." But it's also been really fun and I've learned a lot and I've had the opportunity to build some amazing products and work with some amazing people.

Rashmi:

Well, that's amazing loved your way of experimentation and how you figured out in that process is what things you love and what things are not just meant for you. So really love that part. And in the position that you are with CloudFlare, was this something that you landed with? Or was this something that you were approached versus you being recruited for?

Jennifer:

Kind of a little bit of both, to be honest. And I'll be honest. I got very fortunate with the role that I'm in now. I feel very grateful to be a part of the team. I'm a part of now. Basically where I was, is I had been at Salesforce for about four years, I was transitioning off of leading a project there and looking at other opportunities within Salesforce. And I started thinking that maybe it was time for me to leave the larger organization and go into a smaller organization.

And so just a place where I felt like I could potentially spread wings a little bit more as a product manager and as a leader within the organization. I'd never done a smaller company so I was kind curious about that. So I started chatting with people, I started talking to recruiters and actually I got introduced to CloudFlare through a mutual friend who knew one of the co-founders and had been chatting after a panel or something and said, "Hey, how can I help?" "Oh, we're looking for a chief product officer." "Oh, I have somebody you should meet." And it was that connection... That's kind of how I made that connection.

Rashmi:

And that's awesome.

Jennifer:

Yeah.

Rashmi:

So in this journey value where kind of looking out, spread your wings, as you mentioned, what were the kinds of places you wanted to be? And harnessing your superpowers, could you elaborate a little more on that?

Jennifer:

Totally. Well, I think by the time I'd gotten to this point, and again, I'm 20 plus years into my career in product at this point so the gray hair is earned. There are a couple of things I realized, I think as I mentioned before sort of that epiphany that I'm more of a B2B person than a B2C person. I really am more of a mid to later stage company. I'm probably not the kind of person you want to put on a two or three person founding team because of my sort passion for operationalizing and scaling, I'm really the sweet spot for me is after an organization had found product market fit, kind of how do we amplify that? And then how do we extend the product line and grow and scale the business and the team.

My training by nature... I am not a technologist by nature. I'm not the kind of person you want to bring into your organization to write or review code, but I partner really closely with the technical leaders and I've found that there's a really nice synergy and chemistry and balance of skill set there. And so I knew that I wanted to go into an organization where of what I was going to offer was what they needed. And that there were really open and honest conversations as we walked in about what I was looking for, what they were looking for and really the interview process of getting to know each other and really figuring out that chemistry and that fit.

Rashmi:

That's awesome. Loved your thought process of, again, I think a lot of things is about elimination. Sometimes if you don't don't know what you want, but you know what

you don't want. And that really helps. Love that. Now pivoting a little bit more talking about the preparation itself to become a chief product officer. There are lots of people, at least who are, let's say one or two steps away, be it senior most director position or a VP of product position and who aspire to be a chief product officer. What skills do you think someone should be acquiring at that stage in order for them to get to the chief product officer?

Jennifer:

Yeah, that's a tough one, right? Because I even see that now, which is like, "Hey, we'd like to recruit you for a chief product officer role because you've been a chief product officer." And it's like, "What are you looking for in chief product officer?" "Oh, we're looking for somebody who's been a chief product officer." The circular reference where you're like, "Oh my God, no." Honestly, I think part of what ends up starting to happen as you move from that VP of product to chief product officer, for me, the things that were really different were complexity. And that's often about the complexity of the product lines that you're managing. So if you're a VP of product, you're maybe working with a smaller portfolio, as you get to a chief product officer, you're likely going to need to demonstrate the ability to or the skills or the aptitude to handle multiple product lines.

For me, the transition of a product leadership role to a chief product officer was also responsibility for additional disciplines, right? So in the past I grew up in product management and my whole career was really as a product management leader, as I stepped into this role, it was product management, building the product experience and design team, building pricing, building content, building program management and starting to demonstrate the ability to build and scale teams and higher leaders for things you yourself have never done, which is a really interesting sort of chicken in the egg. And a lot of that is drawing upon that network. I think a lot of it too, is taking a little bit of a risk when you walk in the door.

When I walked in the door at CloudFlare, I'm like, "I'd like to be the chief product officer." And they're like, "Well, we don't do chief product officers today. We do head of product. But our goal is to grow the organization and grow in that direction." And I think it was a process of building that relationship and that trust that as that role became available within the organization, there was an understanding that we were growing me into that, which I think was also really important. Almost always have to do the work before the title and you have to sometimes take the risks.

I will also add that one of the hardest things that I see for people who are VPs of product that want to get into these other things is like, "Great. How am I going to have an opportunity to create a design organization?" Great. "How am I going to have an opportunity to demonstrate complexity?" And I think a lot of that is taking almost voluntary rotations or additional responsibilities in organizations you're

already in one to taste task. Do you like it? Does it bring you joy as sort of my mantra there? And then also being able to then parlay that into how you position yourself within the industry as you're starting to look more broadly.

Rashmi:

That's amazing. So in that context, when you took on these additional disciplines, such as design and product program management and the others pricing and things, which prior to you were necessarily running those functions, how was the change or how did you prepare yourself? Because this is just going beyond just the skill sets there. So new areas, new risk there. How did you prepare yourself for that?

Jennifer::

Well, I think first growing up as a product manager within the organization, I had phenomenal examples throughout my career and phenomenal partners that I'd worked with from design and program management. And so I had kind of blueprints or understandings of what that should look like, but I'll be honest, I picked up the phone and I called those people and I said, "Hey, listen. I'm standing up a design team. I've never stood up a design team before. What should I be thinking about?"

Or when I went out to build our product content team, I recruited very specifically for somebody who I felt like had been there, done that, but had the aptitude and passion to come in and build it and do that in partnership with me. And that I think has been... They've built a phenomenal team and I feel really fortunate to be learning from them. So it's a lot about asking for help and really looking to find ways to build your team with strong leaders.

Rashmi:

Well, that's awesome. That's very important. It's a combination of... From your experience, the blueprint that you had plus your network that you could rely on for both of them to come together. That's awesome. Are there any other resources or training or learnings that you would actually recommend some of these VP level director level people apart from their experiences in order to grow into a chief product officer? Any recommendations?

Jennifer:

Well, of course. Participating in Women In Product is probably at the top of the list.

Rashmi:

Yay. Absolutely.

Jennifer:

I say that almost, it sounds almost tongue in cheek as we're sort of doing this conversation, but it is about community and it is about network. And it's about

finding... One of the things I talk a lot about when people are like, "How do you build your career?" It's a lot about finding mentorship and finding advocates within the organization that will help give you feedback and help you find ways to grow.

It's also about finding community because I mean, I'll be honest a lot of what I do now as a chief product officer is talk to other chief product officers, which is sort of like, "How do you do this?" There's no manual for it, there's no product management board examination. It's a lot of how do you do it? How you tried this? This isn't working. How do I get that perspective? And I think a lot of that is about community. I mean, I will also say earlier in my career, there definitely are some foundational types of training that I did that I think set my bid in terms of how I think about product and how I approach it. I did a lot of synchronous product development and a lot of learning about interviewing customers. They did a lot of product management, product marketing training kind of out of the gate, but that for me was really about rounding out skill sets and building frameworks and ways and of reference points.

Rashmi:

Well, that's awesome. That's awesome. And in this whole journey, what barrier probably was the hardest to break in order to become a chief product officer? And why was it hard and how did you overcome it?

Jennifer:

Honestly, the hardest part for me was that first step in my career from going an individual contributor to being a manager. And it was hard. One, to convince the organization that I was ready and to work with the organization that I was working at the time to create that opportunity, because it's like, "You're doing such a great job as an individual product manager. Why would I want to take you out of that?" Right?

Rashmi:

Yeah.

Jennifer:

And working with and this is where mentorship and advocacy becomes important, really kind thinking about how do I make that move happen? But then also once you're in the saddle, building and managing a team is a completely different skillset then building and managing a product as an individual contributor. And it was a really steep learning curve for me. And I think part of it was learning to let go a little bit of the day-to-day product management and finding ways to recruit and hire great people and really find ways to delegate and empower them and find ways to motivate and grow them. That is a really transformational shift that I think was probably the biggest hurdle for me.

Rashmi:

I see. And in the process was feedback some of the things that you really seeked from your team that you are managing and things? Or how did that play into you becoming a really good people leader?

Jennifer:

Well, I have my good days and have my bad days as I'm sure my team will tell you but I think that's part of being human. I think part of it, it is seeking feedback from my team. It's also seeking feedback from the organization and constantly looking at how am I doing? How's my team doing? How's my organization doing? And failing fast and probably nothing is a more fatal mistake as a leader like mis-hiring. And if I look back and I'm like, "Oh. Some of the biggest difficult moments or missteps in my career have largely been hiring in somebody who's phenomenal, but not the right fit for the role or the organization and finding ways to bring that to the surface and make that change as quickly as possible." Both for them and for the organization.

Rashmi:

Got it. And so did you learn to equip yourself for the board approvals because being part of Salesforce, you are exposed to the executive team, but in a startup you have the board approvals for such leadership positions. So how did you set yourself up for that? How did you really prepare for these unwritten agendas especially from a board approval perspective?

Jennifer:

I think I was fortunate in that as... And I think if I look at it and I talk to the other of product leaders in my position now, as you grow in your career, you have more and more exposure to the leadership teams of your organization. And if I look back at some of the organizations I've been at really pretty impressive with leadership teams, and I think that as I grew up with that, it kind of gave me an understanding of how do they think and how do I present myself. And so I think the experience of growing up in these organizations of created that foundation.

I think the other for me is by the time I got to really the board conversations from the hiring process, it was pretty clear to me that I felt confidence that I had the support and the partnership of the organization that I wanted to join. And so for me, it was more sort leaning in and following my natural curiosity, talking to the board member about being like, "What encouraged you to invest here? What are you seeing at the board level? How can I be helpful to you?" And using that frankly as another... That's kind of how I thought about it. As more using the data point to fold myself into how do I help myself and the organization be successful?

Rashmi:

Awesome. That's a very different way of working with the board to understand what they need and how it fits with what you want. What would you change regarding

your approach to becoming a CPO? If you had a chance to go back in time, do you want to undo something? Or everything that you did just made sense to you?

Jennifer:

I love my job, right? I love my job and I love the company I work for and I love the people I work for. And really now is of head of products/CPO for nearly five years and being part of this sort of phenomenal rocket ship journey of 300 people to 3000 multiplying the product lines and just the personal growth that I felt and the sort of impact and I've felt in the organization is just amazing. I think if anything, I maybe wish that I had gone to an earlier stage company earlier in my career, simply because I think there's been a huge amount of personal growth and satisfaction for me. And there are a variety of reasons why I didn't feel like I personally was in a place where I could potentially take risk earlier, but I think I probably could have and I probably would've really loved it.

Rashmi ([22:50](#)):

Well, that's awesome. Now, coming to the next part, which is I think one of the most crucial parts that I'm very looking forward to is you're translating your experience, right? So you moved from Salesforce, which is a leader in the CRM software to a web performance and security company like CloudFlare, which is a completely different and a very technical domain place. And you also didn't have, I think a formal engineering degree or were an engineer before. So how were you able to translate these experiences to be a CPO at CloudFlare?

Jennifer:

So I think it comes back to what is my superpower? And what am I about? And does the organization need? I think for me started my career in web development software. Worked for a social network, worked for a CRM provider, worked now for a network provider, they're all really different. But the common thread for me and part of why I love each one of the companies I've ever had the opportunity to work at is they are all customer obsessed. And for me, my true north as a product leader are the conversations I have with customers and prospects about what they're trying to achieve in those problems that I can then bring back into the organization and use to kindle the innovation and be a part of that cross functional collaboration to deliver product. That's kind of what I do.

I've kind of known for a long time. I'm not the kind of person that's going to sit down and be like, "I know we need to write this specific." That's not who I am and not frankly what the organization needed from me at as a product leader, within the context of CloudFlare. It's the caliber of engineers that I have the opportunity to work with on a daily basis is phenomenal and staggering. What I bring to the table and what I think my team really brings to the table is the perspective of how do we apply some of this innovation and technology in really meaningful ways to the problems that the customers in the industry face.

Rashmi:

Oh, that's amazing. I think drawing that common thread across your superpowers, going back to it, I think that's been super critical. Thank you. Now, as a chief product officer, could you describe your roles and responsibilities? I know it's probably a very hard one to put down everything that you do, but at least for folks like us on a daily basis, weekly places are from a strategy perspective. How do you describe your responsibilities?

Jennifer:

Yeah. First and foremost, it's customers. Kind coming back to that customer obsession, really making sure that we as an organization are connected to customers and really bringing that voice throughout the entire sort of organization. So really reaching out to customers, personally spending time with customers and encouraging my team to do the same. That's kind of one. The second is building and scaling my team. I am privileged to have an amazing organization that I work with here at CloudFlare and I really am very proud of the team that we've been able to build and I'm even more proud of the work that the team is accomplishing and all that we're learning together.

And so for me, I spent a lot of time recruiting. I spent a lot of time coaching and working with the team so that's sort of the second bit of it. And then the third is really being a part of the broader community, right? Continuing to remain connected to other product managers, other organizations. Kind of keeping my head above the waterline, looking out across the horizon about what are ways that we could do things or do things better or do things differently?

Rashmi:

And while being a CPO now, or in the process of it, do you have to make any personal or professional sacrifices? And if so at the end of the day, do you think the role is still worthy of the sacrifices that you made?

Jennifer:

I think there are sacrifices we all make. I think everybody talks about work life balance, but we all forget that balance is not static, balance is dynamic and changing. And I think for me, what I've needed out of balance and what I've needed out of that sort of combination of career and work and family and hobby and stuff, and volunteering it's changed and evolved over time. I try to make choices that fit with the portfolio of the life that I'm trying to lead for me personally [inaudible 00:27:24] a little different right now, we're in the pandemic, nobody commutes. But I like to commute so I'm going to live pretty close to my job, I like to be home for dinner so I'm going to work for an organization or I'm going to manage my workload such that I can be home for dinner with my family.

It's about making those choices. It's about... My portfolio of hobbies is a little smaller now than it was earlier in my career, but I get a lot more satisfaction out of the work that I'm doing professionally and it satisfies me in the same way that many of my hobbies might have satisfied my curiosity before.

Rashmi:

And how have other opportunities such as now being a board member for FreshWorks really helped you in your CPO career? Was that after or before? Or how has each one played in your role?

Jennifer:

It's a phenomenal honor and privilege to be on the board of FreshWorks. It's been, I think really great for me as a product leader to have the opportunity to do the building and the growing that we've done together at CloudFlare. It's now a great opportunity to be a part of a phenomenal leadership team at FreshWorks as they think about and their journey and how they're build going to build and grow and scale.

There's a lot that I also learn by being on the board of how organizations operate and operate differently. Or how they maybe facing similar challenges, but are taking different approaches. And it's one of those things where it's really it's eye opening, but it's also really satisfying because there are ways in which I feel like I'm able to pull upon the experiences I've had and potentially offer them up as ways to help an organization think through a moment or a challenge or just get a different perspective. And it's a great learning process.

Rashmi:

And has there been any examples of how you've brought back some of the things of what FreshWorks does in a different way? Maybe say solving the same problem in a different way back to CloudFlare?

Jennifer:

I think it's hard to attribute one way directionally or the other from one organization to another, but I do. I think it's just for me, it's the kind of constant curiosity I have of sort of, "How do organizations work? Or how do teams work? Or how do people relate to customers and what are different ways that we could try things? And I bring the experience I had from Adobe into the work that I'm doing at CloudFlare. And so all of these things build on top of each other.

Rashmi:

Awesome. And in this journey of first of all, working successfully with your CEOs and other stakeholders, what's the key there that you think, especially working for the CEOs in particular and the leadership team at large?

Jennifer:

I think for me, it's mostly understanding the chemistry and how we're going to work together? And it's one of the questions I have asked when I've interviewed for positions and it's a conversation that Matthew Prince, our co-founder and CEO had when I interviewed was, "Who holds the vision? How does the organization work in terms of vision?" So I can understand, "Okay, where do they need me to fit relative division?" And is that contiguous with who I am? And is there the right space for me to be adding the impact? I think I can end.

How do you make decisions? Because if I'm coming to somebody and saying, I recommend we do this, what's the information they're going to need in order to be able to make that decision. And then part of it is also just looking at the chemistry of the whole leadership team and thinking about really, how do we play as a team and how who's on offense, who's on defense or how do these things fit together and how do ideas flow and how do we build on each other.

Rashmi:

And were there any kind of examples you can share with us as to how you went through this process of how do I really understand what the person is? And how should I interact with the person in a way that's useful for all of us and for the company? Anything that you share?

Jennifer:

Yeah. I mean, think part of it is throughout the interview process. You start to understand, as you're talking to different people within the organization, how does the organization operate? I may ask a senior executive, how do you make decisions? But I'm going to ask a member of my team, how do you think decisions are made here? And do these things line up? And where there consistencies and inconsistency? And where places there on my climb? I need to think about that a little differently or there's a piece there that might need some bridging in a way that we might not have thought of or additional care to be spent there.

Rashmi:

And fast forward, let's say five years from now, how do you think this role will change? And do you even think this role will change? Because CPO is not something that's been there for years. It is still a new one and it's evolving. So what's your perspective on that?

Jennifer:

I think it's going to continue to evolve. I think it will evolve as we see the industry and the organizations evolve. What is the shape of innovation? What is the type of stewardship that products need? What is the problem we're going to be looking to chief product officers to solve? What is the shape of the teams and the organizations

we need to build? A big one I've been thinking about over the course of the past two years is we've moved to more distributed work is how do I build and grow and scale my teams?

And how do I help in particular, newly minted college grads who are coming in as product managers? How do I help them get the mentorship and the growth that they need such that they're the next generation of CPOs in the future? And so there are a variety of, I think, different dimensions. I think that there's a lot that's changing right now within the industry that I think will put and put pressures in different demands on CPOs that will change the shape of what we do.

Rashmi:

Yeah. It's very interesting. Any other advice, Jen, to especially our VP level folks who are aspiring, any other advice that you would like to add with respect to what you've already mentioned?

Jennifer:

I think for me, the most important thing here is follow your joy. I think that I sounds simple, but figuring out what brings you joy, that's a whole journey, being in a moment where you don't feel joy and you have to figure out how to get out of it. That's another journey and discovering and developing new aspects and new talents and taking risks of experimentation to kind figure out how you experiment and find those new edges is also something. So it sounds so simple when you say it, but honestly, if you do what you love and you do what makes you happy, you will be successful, you will feel successful, but be patient with yourself in that process.

Rashmi:

Yeah. I think be patient with us and not give up. I think that's the key there. And maybe one last question from me, what headline would Jennifer Taylor make beyond a chief product officer? What do you want to do beyond what you're doing now?

Jennifer:

I think for me a big part of what drives me forward is really thinking about how am I an agent of positive change? My favorite of slogan is be the change you want to see in the world. And so I don't know exactly what the change would be or the impact would be, but it's something about having had an impact and an impact beyond myself to really help build and strengthen a team or an organization or a community that would be exciting for me.

Rashmi

Well, that's awesome. And there's any chance that our paths crossed and we could be a part of it. I think that would be amazing.

Jennifer:

Agreed.

Elizabeth:

It really stuck out to me that in the course of this conversation, you spoke a lot about curiosity of things and it really felt to me that was one of the big drivers for you, this kind of insatiable. "Oh, I'm curious about that. Oh, I need to understand that more." And also I think the other thing that you talked about was being really driven by engagement with customers and that connection with customers. Do you want to comment on those two things as drivers of your work potentially? And then if there are any other things that you think sort fit in that category?

Jennifer:

I think you hit it spot on. I mean, if I think about what gets me out of bed in the morning and what lights me up conversations with customers and my sort of insatiable curiosity and the engagements I have with customers, but also with engineers, right? We talked a little bit about the fact that I don't have an engineering background, but I am so curious about how does stuff work? And why does it work? And why doesn't this work? And I think for me, that's a lot of how I've built my career and my understanding, especially across a variety of different industries.

I think the third for me is probably the importance of team. I cannot even stress that enough as you continue to grow in an organization, the work that you do and who you are and the value you create in your organization is really the team that you build and the space that you give them to have impact within the organization. I mean, if I look out across my organization now there's no way that I personally could be responsible for everything we're hoping to achieve. And if I was, it would be miserable failure. It's really the capabilities of the team that I've had, the fortunate, short fortune of the building.

And also how much I learned from my team. I think everybody sort of assumes that, "Oh, you're hiring people and they're learning so much from you." And I think that it's every person I hire and every person who works in my organization is constantly teaching me things and helping me develop new perspectives.

Elizabeth:

So with that idea of the importance of team and just based on the things that you've said, you've talked a lot about collaboration. If you could give us, what are your top three... I don't know if they're principles or rules or thoughts about building an effective team and team leadership? What do you look for? And what do you personally demonstrate that you think makes a difference in building those teams and leading them to success?

Jennifer:

Yeah. I think that's interesting. For me, I think one of the first tenets of building a team and scaling is learning how to be a good communicator. And I think that's important as you are building your own sort of team and people working for you but also as you're building cross functional teams and people are like, "Oh, good communicators. So you must be great at giving PowerPoint presentations?" "No." It's actually, it's developing the ability to be a good listener. I think that there's a big part of leadership that is listening. And I think listening's actually a skill that's really hard for people to develop in that it's... I think especially as we're more junior in our career and there's a desire to be the definitive and the decider and that's critical, that's one. I think that the second is the curiosity. And I think that it's... I'm fortunate enough to be in a culture where we really lean into and value curiosity but I think there is a lot of curiosity.

And I think for me, a lot of my management style is when I walk into a conversation with somebody it's not like, "Okay, great. So now I think we should do this and this." It's more sort of curiosity of, "Okay, what do you think we should do? Why do you think we should do it? How do you get to that? What other options do you consider?" Educate me and bring me along and it's sort of, I think there's a curiosity that you need to develop in an organization. Which I also think leads to some aspects delegation.

And then just kind of the final thing for me really is the ability to really understand and appreciate and hold diverse opinions and the ability to work with conflict indifference within an organization. And I think that's something that is really interesting. You find yourself in an organization navigating conflict and you're like, "Oh, what is my confrontational style? What is their confrontational style? How to navigate between these things?"

Elizabeth:

Those are great. Really great examples.

Rashmi:

Yeah. I just wanted to comment one thing I think about your listening, Jen, that you mentioned. I don't think if you are not a good listener, it's hard to be a customer obsessed product manager or product leader because a lot of it is listening to the voice of the customer and then that's the 90% of the problem. And then 10% is actually solving the problem.

Jennifer:

Oh, the other skill that I think is really super important is people grow in their career, is getting comfortable making decisions within imperfect information. And as a junior product manager, a lot of it is figuring out how to help teams ruthlessly

prioritize, because you can't do everything. But I think it also is one of those things that you continue to grow in an organization, which is sort of like, you're never going to have absolute certainty, but you do need to make that decision and move the organization forward.

Elizabeth:

Yeah.

Rashmi:

Yeah. That's awesome.