

Episode 45: Ketaki Rao, Chief Product Officer, data.ai

Rashmi:

Ketaki, first of all, welcome to Women In Product and we are really excited to know a lot more about your career and your journey that would just not help folks like me but many other folks who are just like me looking for more guidance and for more thoughts about how you really carve your career. Thank you so much again for your time. Let's probably start with one of the basic things since we are all Women in Product, how did you get started in product management and did you always wanted to be a chief product officer?

Ketaki:

Yes, I will definitely openly, candidly say I did not know what a chief product officer was when I started my career so I didn't aim for that. I got into a product because I started in engineering and engineering is about building products. What I found is my gap was I didn't know why I was building the product. I knew what I was building and how to build it but not why, and that led to some early setbacks in my career in which products I had worked on really hard, poured my heart and soul into didn't launch. It just made me take a step back and say, "I need to be able to connect the dots better." That's when I transitioned into product management because I felt it was a good balance between understanding the business and the why, but also empowering the engineers who were in a situation like me so they knew why we were doing things and they could make smarter decisions too. That's how I started in product management.

Rashmi:

That's awesome, that's awesome. During this process, did you make more attempts to explain to them the why because that was something you were missing when you went on the other side of the fence and how did that evolve as a leader?

Ketaki:

I must say, I don't have to ask them because they typically ask me. Never had a problem with an engineer being shy about the why because it's a lot of work to create a product. There's many hours so it's only fair that they understand why. I strongly encourage it but different people are different. Some people like to go deep and understand a particular part of the technology, some people go wide, but I find overall people are asking more and more in engineering, especially compared to my time, 20 plus years ago. More and more people want to get closer to the customer. They want to sit in on customer calls or even help customers solve problems. That's a really good change in how we are doing technology.

Rashmi:

Completely agree with that. In this process, what detours happened or what pivots did you probably undertake to really get to this state of being a chief product officer

currently?

Ketaki:

It's really address me. When I look at it back now it's like, "Yeah, I made the right changes to be here but it wasn't planned at all." I did what was interesting, what I thought would be fun and some of the unexpected pivots were that I went from a large company like Amazon to creating my own stuff, which was the other extreme, really funding it myself with my co-founder. That was one unexpected pivot. That startup was not a success but it was a great learning experience. I was forced to see all aspects of the business and really appreciate things that you take for granted, like marketing in a big company. Marketing is really hard. We really underappreciate marketing and sales. If you have to do it yourself then you really feel the pain.

That was one pivot that I think really helped me. Not only did I understand it in theory, I tried doing it. Not successfully, but I tried doing it. The next big pivot for me was working for someone who had done multiple startups. His name was Diaz Nesamoney, he's the co-founder of Informatica, Informatica of course startup that became a billion dollar company. He created another startup after that, sold it through multiple hops through IBM. He really knew how to run it and I reported directly into him as his first product hire. Really built the product team but learned from him how to build the product team, how to run a product organization. I consider that a key part of my journey, working for Diaz Nesamoney. Then I went back to Salesforce, which is a large company, another pivot that is unexpected, but it was for a specific purpose, which is to learn how to scale the product.

Salesforce has an army of 5,000 people selling your product. If you want to get your product to customers, you've got to evangelize with the sales team and I really learned to do that at Salesforce. Then I think my final pivot here, data.ai, I couldn't be more excited for this opportunity to come in and execute on the company's corporate vision, really take the corporate vision and translate it into product strategy. That's a little bit of my journey. Really didn't plan individual steps, but along the way picked up expertise and mobile apps, self-serve platforms, enterprise software and that is actually a perfect fit for data.ai.

Rashmi:

That's pretty awesome. I think we'll definitely get to a little more of the translating these experience across these journeys in a bit. One of the questions I had when you were describing the pivots was you talked about Diaz and how he was instrumental across some of these areas for you. How would one kind of approach or get in touch with such kind of folks that you really want to work with and how did you come across working for him basically? What was your approach to really working with folks like that, that could help you build a big part of your career?

Ketaki:

It's a great question. There's definitely some luck involved, but I do think you can prep for it. One of the key things is just building up your expertise. I'd of course done product management at Amazon, which was one of the best places to start with for product management and the customer obsession, but while I was doing my

startup, I got in really deep on all aspects. I knew how to build the platform really well. I knew how to sell it, not very well, marketing decently. That breadth of experiences made me a really good fit for someone who could manage the expectations at Diaz's level because he's a senior executive, he needs someone who can take a charter and go run with it. He cannot be there to help you do every day of the work.

You have to build your competency up to that point and then you will find the person who will trust you to take the next big step. But the competency comes from you, so build your own experiences, your own skillset so you can do that job, and then the opportunities come. You have to look for them, you have to look for them. In this case, Diaz was looking, he had publicized that he was looking for this role and I really just reached out on LinkedIn. I said, "I'm interested."

Rashmi:

Thank you. I was going to ask for the example and that was a perfect example there as to how you would approach. Fast forward now, how did you land in this position with respect to being a chief product officer at data.ai? Was it something that you approached or were you recruited for this role? Tell us about that.

Ketaki:

So, data.ai is a much bigger company, close to 150 million in revenue now. The search process is a little different typically at this company, this size and this level of executive. It's not a public search, you won't see this on their job posting so I wouldn't know. In this case it was more through recruiters. I wasn't actively looking, I was at Salesforce, not doing decently there, but when recruiters would reach out, I would tell them, "I'm not looking, but if it is a CPO role, I'm willing to chat." I was very clear that if I leave Salesforce, it needs to be worth it. It needs to be a significant change in my career trajectory, because I'd already created and led a product team at Jivox with Diaz. It was just that. I just made it very clear and then one of the recruiters reached back out with this opportunity. We had a good chat, lots of conversations, lots of work and then here I was.

Rashmi:

Congratulations for that and we'll talk a little more about that part and prep as well. Coming to the next kind of understanding about the preparation as to become a CPO, even though probably didn't intend at the beginning of your journey. What skillsets did you actively seek to actually acquire over the course of your time in order to become a CPO person? We talked about scale from a Salesforce standpoint and some of your startup experiences, the breadth of experiences. Were there anything else that you kind of added to your list of skills that really helped your position as a leader for you to be as a CPO for data.ai?

Ketaki

Rashmi, you're picking things up very astutely. Definitely the breadth was important. The ability to go deep, so depth is also important. You should be able to go deep if

you have to because as a CPO you're responsible for the whole product. If there's a problem in engineering, I need to be able to go deep with the engineers, there's a problem in marketing I do need to also be able to look at the plan and go deep there. You're absolutely right, scaling the product was also critical. The one other thing I think was pivotal, especially for me, I'm an introvert by nature, so I really had to teach myself, was the communication, the presentation.

People call it executive presence. I really never knew what that was like, what is this executive presence? But that was very critical, to learn how to be able to take command of a room, to learn how to be able to get people to listen to you but also engage with you because today is not the day of me giving a one log. No one will listen to me for 30 minutes. It's really about getting them engaged so we are doing it together. That was key learning, but the communication I think is one of the key things. I was always strong with written, but verbal communication I worked quite a bit on and I thank Salesforce. They train us really well.

Rashmi:

Completely agree on that, looking at the lineup of women and the kind of leaders we've got from Salesforce. Narrowing down the question a little bit more, what skills should someone acquire if they're just, let's say, a step or two away from being a CPO or they aspire to be in that position?

Ketaki:

That is actually the trickiest one. I find that's when it gets really hard because there's so many people who want to get there and so few CPO roles. You really do have to go wider with your influence. When you are solving problems for the company, you have to come out of, "I'm getting my team to do something," versus saying, "The company needs to do something." The more you can work on things that are across different functions, different teams, the better it is for that step. I'll give an example from Salesforce. One of the last initiatives I worked on was cross-functional, across marketing cloud and what we call the core team. It was the product teams, it was the marketing teams, the enablement teams, sales, engineering, so really wide in its breadth and of course one of the Salesforce VPs was leading that.

Even just being part of that initiative and seeing how he coordinated it, how he got people to move in the same direction across so many different functions was an eyeopening experience. Raise your hand when things like that come up. It does take more effort, it was multiple meetings a week, some extra work from my day job, but really learned a lot. Just what questions to ask, what are you looking for across teams? That's the kind of opportunities I would look at because then when you are talking to people about CPO opportunities, your vision is brought that way. Your responses will not be about, "Here's my roadmap and I will fix it." It'll really be like, "What's important for the company? What's the company strategy and how can I map the work of my BU to that?"

Rashmi:

Well, that's amazing. You've articulated really well. Thank you for that. I think that's really key there. Since this was your first CPO role as such, how did you know what

the CPO role entails and what are its responsibilities and things? Especially as I said, you are the first time CPO, so how do you prepare for this just beyond the skills? How did you know what really was the role about in the first place?

Ketaki:

You can never really know till you do it and it will differ by company, just like product manager. Product manager, even within the Kindle team in Amazon was they were doing different things. It will depend on what the company needs from you and that should be a key question, "What does the company need from the CPO and am I the right person to do it?" For example, when data.ai, when we were discussing, I asked them that question and their goal was, "We are the standard for mobile performance. Everybody trusts us for creating mobile performance estimates, but we want to go beyond to all digital data. We want to go deep with AI so we are not just giving data, we are giving prescriptions, we are giving execution. That means hiring a new team, building a new team, building a bigger team, building a program that can deliver reliably."

That was aligned to my skillset so it was the right opportunity for me, versus someone had said, "Got a great business, it's running really smoothly. Just want you to come and manage it." It wouldn't have been so exciting for me, maybe exciting for somebody else. You have to find out during the process what do they want you to do? Do they want you to keep it stable, change it, change it in which way and am I the right fit for it? I would also look at company dynamics, sales led, product led, marketing led. Is that right fit for me? All of those are important. In terms of what can prepare you for it beyond skillset, it's really mindset. You do have to be open to, it's new, it's going to be difficult.

My current CEO, Ted Krantz is one of my greatest mentors as well. I felt comfortable he would take me to that next level in my first six months. He spent an immense amount of time with me helping me learn and really the first six months were climbing up very steep mountain. I will not lie, it was not easy. It was very hard, but I really wanted to do it and when you really want to do something, the hard work is actually fun. Find the right environment, the right opportunity and the right leader who will support you and grow you. I really appreciate Ted for this. Ted brought me in saying, "I will grow you and then I will let you go." And now he does, he's completely hands off, but he guided me in the right direction to help me be successful and that was critical. The right mentor makes a world of difference.

Rashmi:

Got it. that's awesome. I know you spoke about some very nice tidbits here. One follow up question there, while you were having these conversations, probably not just with data.ai but other companies as well, did you feel at a point where you were kind of coaching the company as to what a CPO role would probably be versus the other way around where they exactly had a mindset of these are the skills that you... this is the kind of position this would be for a person to come take in? Did you have those kind of experiences? Because CPO is a new role, it's probably been around for less than three, four years I think at this point.

Ketaki:

It's a good question. Some companies know better what they want from the role and like I said, it will vary by company. Sometime the CPO reports into the CTO, sometimes the CTO into the CPO, sometimes engineering is part of CPO, sometimes it's not. It will vary and that's why you should just ask. They will typically have in mind something in mind for the structure. It wasn't at data.ai, Ted was very clear what you wanted from the role and that was great. Some of the other companies I talked to weren't always so clear. It's like, "We don't have a product market fit. We need a CPO to come and solve it."

That's not very reassuring because product market fit will take time. You may never get it right. The CPO needs to come in and execute a strategy, at least for me. A different CPO will be more interested in product market fit. When it comes down to things like product market fit or an earlier stage of the company, you don't... often don't know what you need and that's okay because you're growing the company so you'll learn and know together but a bigger company like data.ai is pretty clear when we came in. You have the conversation and you do influence and adapt together. Again, with Ted, he had some ideas and we discussed and did make some changes and I thank him for giving me the opportunity to voice my point of view and also making some changes based on that. It has to be collaborative.

Rashmi:

That's an awesome insight of how different stages of the company view this role very differently and the functions are also different based on that. Any resources or learnings that you can probably share or any trainings that you would recommend that would help you get closer to this?

Ketaki:

Yeah, it's interesting. I don't know if I did any training. There isn't too much research out there because like you said, it's a relatively new role. I would say just talk to people. What you're doing is amazing, Rashmi, getting this series together so others can learn. I wish I had that when I was starting out, but really in the interim, just talk to people, what does it mean? What are you responsible for? You are an officer of the company which does mean something different. You have a fiduciary responsibility to the board and that's one of the key things to learn and understand. What does that mean, your primary responsibilities with the board? I don't know actually. I don't know if any great researcher training, but if you want one, once this is done, I will point to this podcast as the source.

Rashmi:

That was great. In this process, what barrier do you think was the hardest to break to become the CPO and why was it hard and what did you do to overcome that, if there was any?

Ketaki:

Getting that first opportunity is hard Rashmi, I won't lie. Someone is trusting you with running product for their company. You've really got to prove you can take it and run with it. That was very hard for me to first convince myself that, "Yes, I can do

this," but then convince others. I know Ted won't mind if I share this but sometimes when I'm talking about the product I'm very animated, but if you ask me to talk about myself, I'm like, "Oh yeah, yes, I'm excited." At one point he said, "Do you really want this role?"

I didn't know what to say so at that point I said, "Yes, and I can sign a letter in blood to prove I really want this role." That really convinced him, because at this level that for a CPO role you have to really be hungry for it. You have to really want it because it's hard. Some days are really hard. Some days I'm, "Why did I get myself into this?" You should really love it and want it. That's what he was asking and looks like I convinced him, but it is hard because you're going into these meetings to understand what the role is. You're also convincing the team that, "I can do this." It's a very key role that can make or break the company type of role.

Rashmi:

Totally agreed. Were there any specific challenges you faced as a female leader during this path to be a CPO?

Ketaki:

Yeah. It's always been a hard thing for me to know whether it's because I'm a woman or because I'm an introvert because both of those are traditionally not associated with leaders. I always struggle with that, is it just because I was a woman or I'm an introvert and I don't express my feelings that openly. I mean, just marketing yourself, being able to talk about yourself has always been difficult for me. I've found my way. The way I do it is I do it through LinkedIn. I publish things that my team is doing. Earlier in my career I would get a lot of recommendations on my LinkedIn profile so others could see that, and hearing from someone else that you did something well is helpful. It's very easier for me. I hate talking about myself. I think that was the hardest part for me. But again, I don't know if it's a woman or introvert, but I always find it very hard to say, "I am so good at this."

Rashmi:

That's an amazing tidbit as to how you would explain yourself or your team or what it does through a channel such as LinkedIn or any means, and that has been your way of expressing that. That's a really good insight there. With respect to a CPO, especially at these companies, board approval is one of the key things. How did you learn or equip yourself on board approval? I know you did your own startup and even you were part of other startups and a big company like Salesforce, but because this is a crucial part, especially for these kind of roles, how do you equip yourself for these board approvals?

Ketaki:

Yeah, no you absolutely right. The earlier experiences did help. The more you can get both exposure earlier in your career, it may not be approval but just presenting to boards, observing boards is always critical. At data.ai, again, Ted was instrumental in preparing me for those conversations the first few times. It was part of my interview process too, so I did get interviewed by the board for the role itself and they head of

people, Remy Bleijendaal, was very instrumental in helping me with what are their expectations, what are they looking for, what should you emphasize as part of your experience?

If someone doesn't tell you, you should ask, "Hey, I'm coming up for this. What do you think I should emphasize? What are they looking for? What can I help with?" Asking the questions is always great, finding the mentors. But really you have to also trust that the board wants the right thing for the company. If they don't approve, don't take it as a personal thing. It's that you're not the right fit for the company and it's better for both you and the company. You want to come into a place where people want you in and believe your skill set is what will make the difference. It's as much you interviewing them as them interviewing you as well.

Rashmi:

Got it. That's very true. In that sense, for people who are at the director VP level, how do they seek such opportunities early on to get some place time with the board across that? How do you think one should approach that or what kind of opportunities should they look for?

Ketaki:

First of all, ask for them. My team for example, and I've got many directors and VPs in my team, I'm always looking out for when I'm reporting things to the board, "Can I have them do it instead of me?" Keeping that in mind. When you're accomplishing something in the team, make sure you pop it up to your CPO so they can watch out for those opportunities for you. Also, be very open to feedback. If you've not done the board round before, you may have always done something a certain way and it worked really well for you or works really well for an internal or even customers. It doesn't always work the same way for the board. I'll give you one example from my life. I've been talking to customers forever and I've even presented to the boards, Jivox, Diaz and so on. At data.ai, the board expectations were a little different.

They didn't want a conversation. It was like a quick readout, as Ted calls it netted out, in and out. You don't go in there and start explaining all the nuances and all that, like headlines. What are the three things you want to tell them? I'll typically do things, like I'll have a Post-it note with three things and I will just say those three things, let them ask the questions. If they don't have questions, we just move on. That was key for our board. Every board is different, so you have to figure out what's right for your board but take that feedback. If your CPO is saying, "Hey, your presentation's really good but I need you to do X, or Y, or Z," take it because one, it'll give them confidence that you can handle this. They will be embarrassed if you don't do well. And two, you will succeed.

It doesn't benefit your CPO to have you fail in front of the board. They are saying it for the right reasons and give it a try their way and you can then next time come back with suggestions and discuss it with your CPO. But you are really going together. Don't try to do something one off or surprise them in that meeting. That meeting is really for the board. The board's responsibility is on behalf of the shareholders, so they are looking to make sure you're doing the right thing for the business. It's very easy to misinterpret some of the execution details. It needs to be a



well curated, well thought out experience for the board.

There's always opportunities. We bring in people at data.ai from different parts of the company if they are leading certain critical initiatives.

Rashmi:

Got it. I think you are really taking that, give back in a big way across everything that you do, which is pretty awesome and thank you for that.

Ketaki:

Thank you.

Rashmi:

One of the big things about being the leader, especially on the product side, is being able to build those right product teams, again, based on what the company is looking at, what it's doing and where it needs to be. How did you look at really building those right product teams?

Ketaki:

It's a really, really critical part. You are only as good as your team is. There's nothing you can do by yourself. It's important to align at a higher level with what are you looking for, what is the team, what are the characteristics of the person that you're looking to hire? Because skill set is easier to engage. You can give a case study, you can look at past experience references and you're like, "Yeah, this person can do the job." But to be truly successful they need to fit in the culture. I'll use data.ai As an example. We have identified that our ideal team player is humble, hungry and smart. It's not something we made up. Patrick Lencioni from the Table Group actually wrote a book about this, but it just fit us really well. We want people who come in and who want to do things.

It's not, "Let's relax and things will come to us." We want to do big things. If we bring in someone who doesn't want to do big things, they get stressed out or their teammates get stretched straight with them. It just doesn't work out well. It's not me, they don't succeed well. Being hungry is very, very important. Pushing the envelope is very important for us. Being humble is important because we're all very opinionated. We all like to share our thoughts and we do it with radical candor and we encourage it. We love it, we love it that we can come in there and just say, "No, I don't think this is right across all levels." The humility to accept that. You know may be an expert in your field having worked in it for many years, but you have to be humble enough to hear another point of view, or you won't succeed here. That was key for us.

Then thirdly, is smart. That's working across different teams. We are a very tightly knit group of people. You can't go into a zone and say, "I will only talk to engineers." It just won't fit with our culture. I actually look for that while hiring, so people do all of the skill interviews. We are still small enough, we're about 500 people and I personally do the last cultural interview to check on this because I don't want to bring in the wrong person and have them be unhappy. Skillsets, I trust my team to trust test the skillset. But that cultural interview, I do a final check and everybody

across the team does look for it. That's really make or break. You can learn one thing you're missing, but you can't change who you are that dramatically.

Rashmi:

That's awesome. Have there been, not necessarily failures per se in building these teams, but any learnings that you've had from the past while trying to build the right teams, therefore?

Ketaki:

I would be as blunt, I'd say failures too. I don't always do everything right. It's really hard to gauge these, the humble, hungry, smart. It's hard for people to know if they're humble, hungry and smart, especially hungry because Hung varies so much across companies where people come in and say, "Yeah, I want to do it, I can." But then they come in and... I've had it a couple of times now where people said, "This was more than I expected. This was way more than I expected." It's very hard to tell, Rashmi, I don't... Even in retrospect going back, I don't know how I could have done it differently.

There is a little bit more where adding in terms of process to reduce some of the, should I say changes, frequent changes, so that helps a little bit. But hunger has been always been the hardest one because people were like, "Yeah, I talked to my family and I can do it." Then after they join like, "No, it's too much. I can't." I respect that. You have to do what's right for you. But yeah, I've definitely had some failures and hiring across all levels. Right now I have the best team I have ever worked with in my life. I'm so proud of them and so happy and privileged to work with them.

Rashmi:

Oh that's really candid of you, thank you for that. Would you kind of change anything with regards to the approach that you had to become a CPO if you had a chance to go back in time perhaps?

Ketaki:

Yeah, always right. You always look back and say, "I could have done this better." I think I would've volunteered more for other things. Sometimes you're, "I have so much going on, I don't want to take on one more thing." One example comes to mind, I remember at Salesforce, the head of product for Marketing Cloud, she asked us, "I really need someone to go look at this competitive aspect and summarize it for me." We were in the middle of building the CDP, three full days and I just didn't have bandwidth to do it, but in retrospect I was like, "I should have done it. I really should have done it. I would've gone so wide with the industry, I would've gotten closer to her and her point of view." You always look back at there are things that could have accelerated my learning, but again, you have to do the right thing for you, your family and work balance, your mental health. Yeah, they'll always be some regrets, but you have to pick one path and go.

Rashmi:

That's true, that's true. Thank you again for being so open about that. Really

appreciate that. I think now this is my most interesting part, I think of the interview, at least for me and hopefully for other folks as well, is translating your experiences. You moved from Jivox, which is a platform for delivering personalized digital experiences, advertising, marketing experiences to Salesforce, leading identity and consumer rights as a part of your CD platform, and now data.ai, which again is a platform for consumer and market data. Across these, walk us through how you were able to translate some of your experiences, especially since you had leadership roles across each of these companies.

Ketaki

Yeah, absolutely. I think Jivox was the hardest one to translate because I was coming out of Amazon, which is very consumer-focused. Jivox was B2B, so it was enterprise business to business, digital creatives, which is very exciting and personalized creatives. That was the hardest one, but was a smaller company and really Diaz was willing to take a shot of me. That's what it came down to. He was comfortable that I understood product well, I could go deep with engineering and that I'd be willing to learn as he guided me. I think those were key there. Actually I was at Jivox when I met my future manager from Salesforce. That's how I transitioned into Salesforce. I worked in the marketing cloud, so it was related in advertising as part of marketing. I started with the data management platform at Salesforce and then transitioned into the CDP.

For the data management platform I was a lead for all of it, so I saw all parts of it. CDP was, and that new platform so that I was focused on identity and consumer rights, but it was still marketing. Then coming to data.ai, what they were looking for is someone who understood big data and someone who had some experience with mobile apps, which I had from Amazon, so that was that. It was very ironic, but our CEO also came from marketing and advertising. He was previously at Sky at Kechil and he was looking to move the company in a direction of audiences and solving marketing use cases. It just fit in well in that I had big data, I knew where... I could really understand where he was trying to go and then I could map back and bring the rest to the company to head in that direction.

That's how it came about. Data.ai is actually really unusual. There aren't a lot of competitors, so it's always been hard for us to hire someone who has the exact same experience. I also believe personally that product people get bored working on the same area over and over again. If you give someone the same job in another company, it's not as much fun for them. I've personally switched it around between eBooks, Tablets, digital experiences. I've had a blast doing it, learning new industries. I don't place as much emphasis on, have you done this before? But have you done something similar enough before?

Our head of paid intelligence right now, for example, was previously at Workday, which is HR software, right? Doesn't matter. He's doing really well. He's the point of contact for everybody in the team and it's really that he understood big data, he understood enterprise customers and he understood how to work well with the enterprise sales team, which made him successful there. That's my personal philosophy and I think Ted shares that too. He didn't look for someone who has the exact data.ai skillset and made it fun for me, fun for him.

Rashmi:

Got it, got it. Then definitely a common theme for you across these has been the big data experience.

Ketaki:

Big data and I would say in marketing. With marketing, what happens is you're not building the end product that's going to consumers. It's the B2B, so you're building products for marketers that want to talk about their products. You get a breadth of verticals, which is really fun. That has been common as well. You're right, big data and enterprise B2B.

Rashmi:

Got it, got it. What has been your superpowers across these areas apart from the technology piece?

Ketaki

Now you're talking like my nephew, he is always talking about these characters and games and their superpowers. I would say listening, maybe because I'm an introvert, but listening is something I do really well. I get more from a conversation than most people because I really pay attention. Also makes me really tired because I pay attention the whole time. If I had to pick one I would say listening is my superpower. The one that I had to work really hard on is communication but now I feel that is one of my stronger capabilities as well.

Rashmi:

Got it, got it. That's awesome. As a CPO, just moving a little into the present now, could you describe anything else that you want to add with respect to how the role is different between a VP of product, let's say, and the CPO at large? I know you talked about how you have a wider influence there, but any other advice that you would give to these director or VP level folks in their journey towards the chief product officer?

Ketaki:

It's really the mindset, Rashmi. I can't tell you how big a difference that makes. It's not thinking about your product and how you can make your product more prominent. It's thinking about what's best for the company, sometimes to the detriment of your product. You sacrifice resources for your product or you deemphasize the positioning of your product because that's the right thing for the company. It's really, really hard to do, but that's the change you have to make. And you have to do it in a way where you start influencing the other teams. It's not just like, "Oh, I'm not going to work on my product because it's not important." It's, "What else can I do? Do you need help on sales?" At Salesforce, one of the things I did is I raised my hand for Dreamforce said, "My part of the product is actually stable. We need engineers to move to a different part. I agree. I buy in and I fully support it, but I have time so I'll help on a Dreamforce. I can talk about all of these different parts because I have the time to train myself."

Find those opportunities where you can spread out and learn more as well and then people will see that. People notice, people notice that you're not narrow. You're not always talking about your product, you're talking about the whole thing. You're talking at the company level. That's key, that mindset of it's not about my product, my team, the person reporting into me. It's about the company. Are we doing the right thing for the company? Because at the end, that's good for everybody. It's good for every individual of the company does well.

Rashmi:

That's an awesome example and insight. Thank you for that. In this process, did you think you had to make any personal or professional sacrifices to become a CPO? How do you even view them? Do you really think about them as sacrifices or how do you view them?

Ketaki:

Yeah, I was just going to say exactly that. If it's a sacrifice, don't do it. In way, it is learning. To me, learning is a privilege. It's an opportunity. It does mean that you have to, I won't say sacrifice, you have to prioritize just like your product roadmap. You're going to do everything. Everything is fun for what time I give up. For example, I don't cook that much. I make sandwiches, I make salads and that's okay with me. I don't consider it a sacrifice. It's less important for me than having time with my people or being able to do what I need to do.

It's really just ruthless prioritization. You've got to make time for things. Even at work, someone last week brought up a topic and said, "I really want to discuss pricing and packaging and some optimizations I've thought of there... that's very important, but this quarter that is not my priority. My priority is something else. Let's talk about it next quarter." Even the half an hour spent talking about it distracts you and the rest of the team from what you really need to do right now. You just have to be very clear in your words and your actions.

Rashmi:

That's awesome. Thank you. Fast forward, let's say five years down the lane, how do you think this role will change, if it does?

Ketaki:

I hope this role does change. I will be very bored if I'm doing the same thing five years from now. I joined data.ai Last year, so it's been close to two years now. I've just got the team on board, the best team I could hope to have so five years from now, I think things will be running very smoothly. They will need less and less of me and I think I'll be spending more time grooming the next person to take over and finding out what's next for me in the company.

I think it'll be that time. You always have to have the next person who can back you up because again, you are a CPO and officer of the company. For the company, it's the right thing that if you need to step away for some reason, I won't say get hit by a bus, I would say if you have to go on vacation someone will be able to step in and keep it running. Five years from now, I would expect that I have that strong



person ready to take over the reigns if I need to move on. I hope I'll find something that's equally fun to do as the next step. I don't want to do the same job forever. I do find four years as my limit, so I do plan for that.

Rashmi:

That's again, really candid you. Thank you for that. That was actually my next question to say, "What headline would you make next beyond the chief product officer?"

Ketaki

I don't know. I'm an introvert. I don't want to make any headlines. I want to hide behind the curtains. My job that makes me make headlines. I'm very happy that the product makes more headlines than I do. That's a good thing. Actually, I don't want to make a headline. I don't want to be a good person. I really want to have that feeling that I did the right thing. It's very important to me that I had the best intent, I did the best I could, I did the right thing and I was fair to people. That's very important to me. Won't be headline, but it will help me sleep better at night.

Rashmi:

Awesome. Thank you so much for that. This is great.

Ketaki:

Thank you for doing this series on behalf of everybody in the product community. Thank You.