



Episode 54: Successful Job Searching, Executive Edition with Nic Amos

Elizabeth ([02:05](#)):

Nic, welcome to the Women in Product podcast. So I wanted to start, I know this year has been really kind of a tough job market, but you landed a new role as product manager leader, consumer privacy at Kohl's. So I wanted to start by talking a little bit, if you could tell me about the role, because it's kind of a unique title, so it makes it a little bit hard to figure out what is that role exactly. So could you help us understand that?

Nic ([02:49](#)):

Yeah, so I work at Kohl's, a very large retailer here in the United States for consumer privacy. It's really focused on empowering our customers, our consumers, to really control the way that their data is used. So that is a role that I was originally hired for 60 days in. My boss said, Hey, how do you feel about fraud? And I said, okay. And so that is how I am a product manager for consumer privacy and fraud.

Elizabeth ([03:30](#)):

And so you're over this fairly good size area of things that need to be done that are fairly complex, some involving UI in front of the customer, some of it sort of more behind the scenes probably.

Nic ([03:46](#)):

Yes, and similar to this role as well as my previous role, I was working for the Department of Defense. I think this role lies heavily in strategy but also a little bit of legal and policy.

Elizabeth ([04:02](#)):

Excellent. Okay. So how did you find and then land this role?

Nic ([04:13](#)):

I love telling this story. It's nothing too extravagant, but whenever I meet people or I'm in a Facebook group and someone asks, does LinkedIn really work? And I'm like, yes. Let me tell you how LinkedIn works. I have received my past three or four opportunities from LinkedIn and with this role in particular, I'll tell anyone, not every company has the budget or they're actually utilizing all the features for LinkedIn. So sometimes an individual will just post a role that's located within their company. And so I was just doing a search for hiring product manager. That's a good search to a bullying search to do with LinkedIn and it'll just pull up wherever someone has posted. I'm hiring a product manager in my company and I saw this opportunity at Kohl's. I reached out to the individual that posted it and maybe two days later the recruiter was wanting to schedule an interview.



Elizabeth ([05:22](#)):

That's a really interesting approach. It's not like you went through all the job listings and looked at them. You took a completely different approach to finding your way through the data that was there.

Nic ([05:35](#)):

Yes, because I have worked in retail previously. I worked at Home Depot for almost five years. I never thought I would come back to retail, so Kohl's was not actually on my radar, but I'm a Kohl's shopper, so when I saw it I was like, okay, sure, why not?

Elizabeth ([05:52](#)):

There you go. I love that. That is a great story. So the role that you're in is a pretty senior role within the team. So how did you approach that? Did you do something substantially different in looking for a more senior level job or is it more just accumulation of knowledge over time?

Nic ([06:17](#)):

It's been an accumulation of knowledge over time, but actually a bit of a combination. So an accumulation of knowledge, which is me learning things on my own through independent studies, a huge proponent for courses on Udemy and Coursera and YouTube University is my favorite because it's all free. I actually became a product manager because of a \$10 Udemy course. I took it five or six years ago, and that is how I was able to transition to become a product manager. So the accumulation of knowledge, my roles have been in just hopping around to different companies because I don't have this one specific industry background. I'm really open to different industries and trying new things. And so for some people that looks like you don't have expertise, but for some people that is a huge positive because they can see that you're not afraid to make changes and learn new things and new industries and new technology.

Elizabeth ([07:25](#)):

Yeah, it's interesting that you say that because one of the things that we heard numerous times when we did the path to CPO series was women who are now CPOs who had jobs that looked like they didn't quite fit, they didn't all fit in one industry or one category kind of thing, and all of them said, I really learned a lot by stepping out into a different field. It gave me a fresh perspective. It made me think about things differently. But also part of the reason that I did that was that there was something specific about that job, whether it was scale or a part of the stack or different things like that that they got to work on that they hadn't had in their past per se. So it really can serve you very well to move around that way. And sometimes you move around that way and then in retrospect you can see how it added to your stuff.

Nic ([08:34](#)):

Yes, when you're on the path, sometimes you can't predict the future, so you don't know where something will lead to. But because of the work I've done in the past working on bug bounties, so I report to someone who runs security now. So we were able to connect over those things, but previous that I didn't have an experience with running bug bounties, that was just something I learned. So I always like to remind people that a lot of the technology piece that can be learned and then each company you're at will have a very unique way of doing it, their own flavor of it. So those are things that can be learned. It's more of those, I know we call them soft skills, but really those more human skills that I've spent a lot of time really honing and mastering throughout my career

Elizabeth ([09:28](#)):

Kind of gives you the chance to look at different approaches, what works, kind of add things into your toolbox in different ways.

Nic ([09:38](#)):

Yes, because what works at one company may not necessarily work at another company, which can kind of get you into not necessarily trouble, but it makes you second guess when you want to be very disciplined in a certain approach or a certain methodology when really it's like, I've learned this piece, what can I take from this that applies to this new opportunity?

Elizabeth ([10:04](#)):

Yeah. So when you were looking for this position, were you very specific about the type, not the domain, because you said you weren't actually looking for retail, but there it popped up. But were there specific things that you were looking for? Did you just cast a really wide net, any advice there or share what you did and then how that worked for you?

Nic ([10:33](#)):

Yes. So I know on a previous episode someone talked about your job search council and never searching alone. So I was a part of that and it's very detailed and I like the exercises, but again, you sort of take from that what you need and put your own spin on it. What I found easier to do is to define what I didn't want instead of this is my ideal dream list of all of the things. And so that allowed me to have somewhat of some constraints, but also a wider net. So the things that I did want, I didn't want to work for a startup. I have a background in B two B, so B two C type things. They're just not necessarily, that's not my strength. So I like B two B or things that are like B two, B two C. So that sort of narrowed things down even more, but it still left a lot of space to search for various things. So not necessarily focused on a specific industry.

Elizabeth ([11:38](#)):

I think it's such a good point because I think for some reason it's so much easier for all of us to say what we don't want than what we do want. And sometimes, I don't



know, don't make that knowledge as valuable as it can be for us, which it's nice that you used it that way. That's a great thing to do. I can at least say, yeah, not that stuff for whatever reason. Yeah, it's awesome. So because this was a more senior role, did you tailor your resume for a senior role or for that specific role at Kohl's, or were there any specific elements or achievements that you kind of went back and highlighted for the particular job?

Nic ([12:35](#)):

Yes and no. I'm such a huge, another one of your guests was talking about the power of networking. I'm such a huge proponent of networking that quite often in many roles, I've made it through the interview process and someone says, oh, by the way, we actually need you to go in and apply, technically, apply for the role and send us over your resume. And that's very common with the way that I've done things because my LinkedIn profile has everything you would really need to know. So that's that sort of personal branding, that personal branding piece. It's there, you know what I'm about. You can easily send that over to a hiring manager. Then when it was time to actually send over the resume, I've given a women in product talk about using AI tools, and the one that I love the most right now is teal, TEAL.

Nic ([13:31](#)):

And so you can add the link to the job that you're applying for and it'll pull up your most current resume that you've highlighted, and then it will highlight a lot of the key words in the job description that'll repeated. So it'll be like a frequency tracker of it. So you just ensure that those words stand out in the resume that you are applying to. So it really became more of a workflow. So I had my main resume, and then so for each job that I was actually sending in a resume for, I loaded up to teal, look at the keywords, ensure that those keywords with the highest amount of frequency were really highlighted in the resume download send over time. This took me about 10 minutes,

Elizabeth ([14:19](#)):

Pretty darn good use of your time.

Nic ([14:22](#)):

Yes, it's putting the initial investment upfront of getting your main primary resume satisfactory to you, and then it's just altering it for the specific roles.

Elizabeth ([14:36](#)):

Yeah, that's great. I love that because I think sometimes people think about tailoring it for a particular role and then they're doing it all by hand, and it's kind of a nightmare and it takes forever. And then you're sort of like, what resume did I send for what? And at least that's been my experience. I sort of threw in the towel on that at some point in time. I'm like, I just can't keep track of all of that stuff. So



Nic ([14:58](#)):

Yes. And then also if the roles you're applying to, again, not necessarily the same industry, but there's some common trends to them. So for me, there's a lot of operations and strategy, perhaps some marketing and leadership involved in it. It don't have to change a lot, it just might be the frequency of certain words.

Elizabeth ([15:17](#)):

Yeah, that's great. So you talked a little bit about networking and connecting with other professionals, but let me first just say you are obviously, at least from my standpoint, an extrovert, somebody who likes to connect and talk. And you're a connector, right? Am I right

Nic ([15:39](#)):

Almost? I'm actually an introvert. I do so many things like being out and being social, but my friends know, okay, by 10 o'clock it's time to be home and in the bed and don't talk to me just for maybe a day or so afterwards. But being a connector, I loved this. This is something I learned. I learned from my parents, particularly from my mother when I was maybe 14 or 15, we were in the grocery store and the district manager was there flirting with her, and the whole time he was trying to flirt with her. My mother was like, great, my daughter needs a job. And so he was continuing to try to flirt with her and she's like, yeah, I hear you, but I don't see you getting her an application. So he just continued to do this, and my mom just sort of followed him, got the application, sat there with me and filled it out while they were chitchatting, and he handed it back. She handed it back to him and she was like, what's the starting rate and when can she start? So from there, I just learned one being bold, asking what you need and just being a connector. You never know who you may know or who you might've encountered in your lifetime that will be of value to someone you'll meet in the future.

Elizabeth ([17:01](#)):

That is such a great story. I really admire your mother's persistence too. A lot of people would have not gone all that way and where's the application and when can she? I love that. That's so great. That's awesome. So I love the fact that I totally miscategorized you as an extrovert, but the reason that I say that is because I think that people who are introverts think that they can never that that's it. It's beyond to them. And I always try and encourage people, there are skills that you can learn that will make you better at that, right?

Nic ([17:52](#)):

Online communities have been my best and favorite. The best thing, I could go through the longest list. This is something like a side thing. When people are like, I'm interested in this. I'm like, well, let me see if I can find you an online community so you can get connected with people. So women in Product, again, fabulous. I joined Women in Product when I was a very baby junior product manager after I took that



\$10 course. And from there I was just obsessed with the community because I would ask a question and not only were people willing to help me, the women in the community, they went above and beyond. They were like, let me help you with your resume. Let's do some mock interviews. Let me introduce you to some people. And so because of that, I'm just a huge proponent of women and product first, but then there's so many other online communities. I think communities is a way to scale your networking. So it's one way to be like one-on-one, but it's like a funnel, a sales funnel. I can talk one-on-one to people, but I need to get a large mass of people to, we have something in common. And so going to a men product, the special events I was a part of, one of the leadership mentor circles. Right now I'm leading a mentorship circle. So I always think of communities as a way to scale your networking. You're going from a one-to-one to a one to many.

Elizabeth ([19:31](#)):

Yeah, I think that you're right. And I think the other thing is when you find the right community, it's a safe place. You don't have to worry about, oh, I said the wrong thing, or Oh, I put my foot in my mouth, or, oh, I look like an idiot in front of people who are going to judge me. Because generally, especially I think in women in product, but I've seen this in other communities that are similar, that people are like, don't worry about that. We all had that stupid question. It's not stupid, don't worry. It just really helps you get your footing a little bit and then feel more comfortable. I think once you have that practice, it's like speaking in public. It's really hard. The first few times, and I remember I had a speech coach at one point in time who said to me, are you nervous? And I was like, yeah, I'm really nervous. And she was like, good, you're always going to be nervous when you speak, but if you do it enough, you'll learn how to channel that energy so that you're projecting what you're saying to the crowd and giving them your energy and they'll give it back. And that's true. And so you might be nervous, but you still can be confident and comfortable. And I think it's the same thing with networking. It's a muscle, you use it, it gets stronger.

Nic ([20:55](#)):

And I will use this word of being bold again. I know we may have this perception that our immediate network that I worked with Sally and I worked with Tom, that is my network. That's a piece of your network. But actually I want people to think of their network as complete strangers. I've received the majority of assistance from absolute, total complete strangers from Facebook and Slack communities, and then just reaching out to strangers on LinkedIn. So I might listen to a podcast and I'll send a request message to one of the guests just letting 'em know what I learned. Thank you so much. And then they're like, well, whatever you need, feel free to ask me to reach out. Do you want a coffee chat? So be bold.

Elizabeth ([21:48](#)):

Be bold. I think that's a great comment. So to kind of go back to your job search, tell me a little bit about the interview process. I loved that you go through the whole

process and then people have to remind you to actually apply. But tell us a little about that interview process and was it different from earlier roles? I mean, did you feel like as you advanced higher up in the organization that what the interview involved changed in some way?

Nic ([22:28](#)):

Yes. And also I definitely wanted to acknowledge that the things that I had to prepare for in 2023 were 10 times more challenging than what I had to do in 2020 or 2021. So when people are saying, this job market and the job search is different, they're not wrong. I experienced the same thing, but once I got past that initial shock, I just needed to realize what was being expected of me. I felt that the interviews were following more of a big tech type process. So even from friends who were saying they were interviewing for very junior level roles, they were like, I feel like this is a fang, a manga type interview process. And so I would say that was a change. Take home assignments were more common. And then also really speaking to metrics, I think now more than before, your ability to run experiments and speak to the metrics that you've completed throughout your work in your past experience was really crucial. So I needed to be able to explain what I did and what was the outcome for it.

Elizabeth ([23:58](#)):

Yeah. Yeah, that's good to know. I mean, boy, I have heard this from quite a few people about how much more difficult the process is and that at every level, they're asking people to kind of dig deeper, I mean to do higher level things, to do more of them in detail, et cetera.

Nic ([24:24](#)):

Yes. Again, with that boldness, but also if you're with a company and you're on round six, round seven, and no one is giving you feedback or you feel like they're stalling on the process, just email 'em. And this is where we are. This is what I've demonstrated in the interview process as well as in my previous work experience. When do you intend to make a decision?

Elizabeth ([24:57](#)):

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I like that a lot because it's asserting that your time is valuable and that you're not just a passive participant in the process. And actually, from the point of view of hiring people, it's like you want people who are willing to take charge of things, I guess, or not just drift along with whatever's going on.

Nic ([25:29](#)):

Yes, I made that mistake. This is why I'm telling people, I was maybe in two different companies. I think I had gone through six or seven rounds and I was like, wait a minute. This feels excessive.

Elizabeth ([25:44](#)):

Yeah, it is. And sometimes it's a little bit of a warning sign about that organization in some way, shape, or form, right? Either they're not clear on what they're really looking for, and so they're internally discussing that or that they have disagreements on different things or maybe they don't have the money for the position or whatever. I don't know. It always seems a little like, yeah. So you did talk about the work that you did, projects, et cetera. Are there questions that candidates should anticipate or how can they prepare, be better prepared so they're not at the last minute kind of jumping through cramming the night before the exam?

Nic ([26:39](#)):

Oh my gosh, yes. Well, when I met a fellow pm, a good friend through one of the leadership cohorts from Women in Product, and we both purchased this really great product manager sort of interview course, and this is what we did every week, we would go through different examples and we would quiz each other. And so I had to pull up some of our notes. The thing that everyone's going to ask you about, of course, are your behavioral questions. So tell me about yourself. Tell me a time you failed. Tell me about dealing with a difficult stakeholder. How have you used data or AB testing to form a decision? So that's the first level of questioning to sort of get through. And then from there, you'll move into product sense or product design. So they may give you an example or a scenario. And then I like to tell people, pick a couple of user segments for this.

Nic ([27:41](#)):

Identify their pain points, what metrics are you going to use to measure it, and then show that you can prioritize. And then some additional ones might be, tell me about your favorite product. Tell then this sounds like a really easy question, but you should go into explaining some of the features, why you use it. Do you think there is an alternative use case for it? And then the follow-up question to this nine times out of 10 is how would you improve this product? So be prepared to address that. And then maybe an execution question. So then understanding what's happening in the market, what's your mission, what's the customer's user journey going to be like? And then going back to identifying some key metrics that you can measure, and then how would you prioritize those?

Elizabeth ([28:35](#)):

That is a great list. Everybody rewind now and play that again and write those things down because I think that will come in super handy. Not complicated, but these are all things that if you have done a little bit of preparation, you can just say them like that. And it makes a huge difference.

Nic ([28:57](#)):

And I can recall these because I have 'em in a Google Doc. I know I've met many people and they say they've got plenty of notebooks, they make post-Its, that's not

the best process for me. So I like it that it's just all in one place. It's pretty well organized. So when someone asks you a question about estimation, which I rarely get at this stage, you can just do a control F and start typing out estimation and pull up your example right there. You don't have to scramble or turn pages or look through various things.

Elizabeth ([29:30](#)):

Nice. I like it. I'm a big proponent of having somebody ask you that question and having you have to say it because it is always different the first time you say something versus the 10th time you say it where you're very succinct and right to the point and have it in control.

Nic ([29:54](#)):

Going through the course, it's good because the other person, whoever it may be, you get to partner with you, you get to the end of your example and you ask them to ask you some probing questions. So why did you choose this segment over the other? Why did you choose this metric? What would you have done different? These are some questions. And then eventually there were only about four or five true questions that I found as a pm. All of the rest of them are variations on about maybe five or six key questions. So if you could answer these five or six key questions, these various spinoffs of them will still feel familiar to you.

Elizabeth ([30:39](#)):

Yeah, I love that two of you bought this course and then worked together. That's a genius idea. I would never have thought of that, but I totally love that idea. It's like having a preparation buddy and everything always seems better when you have a buddy working with you on it. I always say to people, I have to pay a trainer to work out with me because I will never go to the gym on my own. But if it's on my calendar and I have to pay somebody, I will show up every single time. And so it's kind of like when you have responsibility to somebody, it kind of forces that like, yeah, I actually have to do this. I have to show up. I have to do the work. I can't dole it. Waste time stuff. Yeah. Anyway. And you get the benefit of their insight, what you're doing, right? It's not just you thinking it in your head, somebody else is listening to you and saying, eh, doesn't make sense. Can you do that again?

Nic ([31:47](#)):

Yes. And it's nice to ask your family and friends, but it's totally different when you ask a fellow product manager to do these things with you.

Elizabeth ([31:59](#)):

Yes. Yeah. They're going to hold you to account. They're not going to let you run some baloney by them. Yeah. There you go. So A, it's been great talking to you. You've had so many good ideas. I'm like, oh my gosh, that's a good one. But what advice would you give to, I would say in particular those people who are sort of going for more



senior roles, but it could be across the board. What advice would you give them in this current job market?

Nic ([32:40](#)):

I think about that book I had to read a bazillion years ago of going from Good to Great. It was basically the things we've done so far. That's good, that got us what we needed to do, but what are the things we need to do in this next phase to be great? And just from talking to other PMs and other just professionals in tech in general, I meet so many incredibly talented people that have a level of fear of just putting themselves out there. And so again, I'm going to repeat myself of be bold. So when you're reaching out to people, tell them what you need. So Elizabeth, if you had an opportunity at Women in Product, I would say, hi, Elizabeth. I'm Nic Amos. Previously I've done X, Y, and Z. That led to a hundred percent growth. I see that you're currently hiring for a product manager role. I would love the opportunity to interview for this. Are you available next week to talk about this?

Elizabeth ([33:53](#)):

I love it. I am with you. Ask for what you want, right?

Nic ([33:58](#)):

Ask for what you want. Often what I see is people will just send a connection request on LinkedIn. I'm like, okay, thank you. Do you need something? Can I help you? Or something else I'll add. I know I'm telling people to reach out and be bold, but that doesn't only mean to bombard the hiring manager or the recruiter. There are probably 10 other groups or a hundred other people within this company that you can reach out to. I often reach out to people in titles mean nothing to me. I'll just say this. So my career started in the call center. So I reach out to people in the call center and I'll talk to them because they know about the product, they know about the company very well Reach out to salespeople. Salespeople love to ask them for a demo on the product. They're more than happy to give you a demo, let them know interviewing for this role, but I would love a demo on this particular tool or this feature. And so when you're talking to people, when you get to the hiring process or you're reaching out to someone at a higher level, you can say, I've already had a demo of the product, or I've spoken to so-and-so in the contact center, and I'm very familiar with some of the pain points that you're currently experiencing.

Elizabeth ([35:19](#)):

It's a good way of getting the landscape, doing your homework, understanding what their challenges are, but also kind of digging into understand the organization and giving you a leg up in terms of knowledge, insight, et cetera.

Nic ([35:37](#)):

Yes. This also gives you insight if this is a company that you actually want to work for.



Elizabeth ([35:43](#)):

I am so with you on that one. I think especially in this current environment, and I don't want to dismiss people who really urgently for economic reasons, need a job. But it's easy to get in that mode of like, well, I'll take whatever job comes along. And sometimes, that just gets you into deep trouble. But even if you end up taking it, at least you'll know what you're taking. At least you'll understand what you're stepping into, and that gives you a leg up in dealing with whatever comes your way. It's been great talking to you. You had so many great suggestions. I love it.

Nic ([36:30](#)):

Thank you. I'm honored.