



Speaker 1 Hey Naba, welcome to Women in Product and we are so excited to have you here.

Speaker 4 ([00:04:31](#)):

I'm excited to be here. Thank you Rashmi.

Speaker 1 ([00:04:34](#)):

Let's kick off with just understanding a little bit about your career in product management and what do you think have been some of the pivotal moments for you across all your various positions?

Speaker 4 ([00:04:48](#)):

One value that has always driven me is curiosity. Curiosity is at the heart of every good product leader and leader per se. So I've been in the industry now for close to 24 years. I still remember at the time when I was@walmart.com I knew nothing about supply chain and I was on this project to launch the first e-commerce warehouse for them. I saw that the product manager was making all the decisions and I was the QA engineer on the team. I had so many questions that sitting where I was sitting I didn't have answers to and I was fascinated by how the product manager connected the dots between what the customers needed, what the business wanted and what we needed to do. And that's when I fell in love with the job with the idea.

Speaker 4 ([00:05:44](#)):

And along this whole journey there have been mentors and leaders who have taken chances on me. I have continued to be curious, asked questions from supply chain. I went to running product for all of Sams club.com, which was my first time doing homepage cart checkout growth, pricing. And even though I did not know exactly how to do the job, I had my curiosity, I had my mentors, I asked a lot of questions, learned on the job and grew mobile conversion by triple digit on that job while launching many, many pivotal products there. And from there when I got interested in machine learning and ai, someone took a chance on me and I was the VP of search@walmart.com leading all of search for.com, grocery jet.com. In every job I brought my curiosity had someone who trusted me and the rest has been history to my present day at Airbnb where I lead all of trust and safety. It is the foundation on which Airbnb has been created and this team is the closest to the mission of the company to create belonging and connection in the world. It's been truly a great journey.

Speaker 1 ([00:06:58](#)):

That's amazing and I really resonated with you when you said, as a QA engineer, when you actually sit with a product person, then you realize how things are actually connected, whereas you are so much into the silo by just doing your own thing on that front. I truly resonated with what you said there, Nava and yeah, let's kind of move on to your current position as tell us about what a trust and safety team does



for Airbnb and you being the GM and leading all of this effort for the entire Airbnb. Tell us what products fall under this category and maybe a little more about your team organization.

Speaker 4 ([00:07:41](#)):

If you and I can take a moment and imagine two young boys, Brian and Joe in their apartment on Rouse Street, welcoming three strangers into their house and these three strangers, the guests walking into the apartment of two complete strangers. They must have been nervous, they must have been scared, but as we know, they created a friendship for a lifetime and that led to the creation of Airbnb, which is a noun and a verb as we know it today. This would not have been possible without a foundation of trust that was created within them. That foundation of trust has led to over 7 million homes on Airbnb over 1.5 billion guests that we have welcomed till date and just this beautiful way of connecting people across the world every single day. The trust and safety team sits at the heart of that foundation of trust and I have the honor of leading this team along the entire customer journey.

Speaker 4 ([00:08:49](#)):

Every step of the way, we use a combination of machine learning models, products, operations to help create peace of mind for our community. Some of the product examples that we have created are global identity verification for all guests and hosts in 220 plus countries. The first ever AI-based reservation screening system that detects and tries to minimize the risk of parties. Most recently we announced AI-based verified listings that will give you a peace of mind as you are booking on Airbnb that's launching soon. You will hear announcements coming soon. Brian just talked about it in September of last year and many such products and that's what my team does.

Speaker 1 ([00:09:36](#)):

That's awesome. As the spring break is nearing, I'm definitely looking forward to the AI-based verified listing for all the Airbnb services there. And focusing or zooming into one of the big things that we wanted to talk about as a part of this podcast was your actions on things on the partying per se, the problem that Airbnb had. So I know your team has been known as you and your team has been known as the party poopers even though it sounds awful theoretically, but this has been such a humongous achievement for Airbnb, right? So tell us more about this and what really was the problem that Airbnb was looking to solve?

Speaker 4 ([00:10:22](#)):

First of all, the official party pooper title, I wear it with a lot of pride. Our design team, as you know, Airbnb is a very design led company. Even mocked up a baseball cap with the party pooper written on it and we had so much fun with it. Love that title. And I am a mother of teenagers. I have five teenage kids. So my 18-year-old before she turned 18 was talking to me one day and saying that mom, my friend is about to have her 18th birthday party and she was thinking of booking an Airbnb to have that party because she doesn't want to have it at home. But she had heard her mom talk



and obsess enough about our AI-based anti-party system that she immediately came and asked me, mom, you're not going to let that happen, right? Your system is going to stop that, right?

Speaker 4 ([00:11:15](#)):

I was like, thank you my dear. Clearly I'm doing something right. If my daughter is now an advocate and is talking to her friends and saying that you should not be using an Airbnb to throw an unauthorized and disruptive party. So imagine these 7 billion listings, people like you and me opening our homes up to strangers. We can only do that if we are confident that our homes will be treated by people like their own homes and not be trashed and not be disrupted. It's a problem that I'm very close to being the mother of teenagers and being an avid advocate for our community. So the way this all started is imagine 2020, we were in the middle of the pandemic bars and hotels shut down and people who were used to going out and partying every night suddenly found themselves scooped up inside the house.

Speaker 4 ([00:12:08](#)):

There was a real lockdown and a literal lockdown happening for those who wanted to throw parties. And unfortunately we started seeing some of them booking Airbnbs. Our first step was not to use AI right away. We first spent a lot of time just understanding the data. We set up workshops with cross-functional stakeholders, looked at everything and we started seeing some patterns. We were finding that young people who lived a few miles away from were booking their Airbnb were booking at the last minute an entire home, especially during party prone weekends such as Halloween and New Year's Eve. And being the mother of teenagers, your radar is extremely strong and you're like, this probably looks like a party if you're booking an entire Airbnb just for one night on Halloween Eve. So we built rules right away, flagging bookings that had these symptoms and we stopped them, which gave us a lot of learning.

Speaker 4 ([00:13:11](#)):

We soon found though, that really motivated people are very smart. They started getting an older friend to book for them instead of one night they would book for multiple nights or they would sometimes make it look like they lived much further away than where they actually lived. And we knew that we needed a system that kept up with the evolving trends of the incidents that we were seeing and we always had planned to build an AI-based system, but it accelerated our thinking and our experimenting. And so fast forward to today, it's not just one thing, it's always a holistic system that works in tandem. We have our global party ban that doesn't allow anyone to throw parties on the platform. Then we have our AI-based anti-party system. We have also built a calendar. We know when these various holiday events come up in the year and we have a playbook in place to increase our defenses during those times specifically. And then there is also community feedback. We have created channels like a 24 by seven safety line, a neighbor support line, a portal where law enforcement and police officials or city officials can contact us with any



concerns that they have. And we have partnered with various experts in the trust and safety space to constantly learn and get better.

Speaker 1 ([00:14:44](#)):

That is so amazing. And I think a big part of what you mentioned was going so much deeper into the and the problem and then trying to find what's the right technology. And it was amazing to see how you said you first built a rules-based system and then you had to scale it and make it more continuous and that's how you landed up with using machine learning models to do that. That's amazing. And I think in this process we talked about seeing this problem, especially during the pick of the pandemic. It took you some time and during this you had this approach of what could be done right now to solve a problem, what should be done within a year and in the general future. That's how I think you do. You handle the whole problem. Tell us more about this and tell us your thinking behind how you came up with those ideas.

Speaker 4 ([00:15:42](#)):

Yeah, my leadership philosophy, not just in the trust and safety team, but even when I ran search@walmart.com has always been that every successful team operates in three timescales. There is the now timescale, there is the near timescale and then there is the far timescale. Too often teams end up being very reactive or feel burnt out when everyone is trying to do everything. When I ran search, we would always get escalations about a certain query that is not working. Some executive or some customer is complaining about a certain share with wheels, they cannot find it on walmart.com. And then we had, depending on who the escalation came from, we had all the VPs running around trying to figure out what happened. Is it a catalog issue, is it a search issue, is it a front-end issue? And that pulled engineers and product managers away from the annual roadmap that they were working on and forget about innovation and thinking about the future.

Speaker 4 ([00:16:43](#)):

So one of the things that I started to do even during my time at search was carve out spaces. There was a team that was just working on the, now you can call it crisis management, you can call it short-term problem solving. They have a lot of power. They use it carefully. They're not afraid to put in rules in place, short term stop the bleeding solutions in place. Then you have the annual team that should ideally not get distracted and they work on the annual roadmap. They constantly learn from the escalations and the day-to-day stuff that's coming so that can influence what they're building. And then you carve out space for the team working on innovation that can think about how do I scale what I'm building today? How is this problem going to evolve in the future and what do I need to put in place today so that it can make us future-proof?

Speaker 4 ([00:17:38](#)):

The same philosophy that we used in the trust and safety team. And it's even more relevant because unlike an e-commerce leader or a regular healthcare product or education product, when you are leading a trust and safety team, you are constantly



under attack. You just don't have Airbnb customers, you have fraudsters and bad actors who are probably trying to break your defenses down. You have to have a system and team in place that is working on that, taking care of it and not pulling away the team, working on the annual roadmap. It is hard to keep that watertight compartment, but you have to put in the discipline and the systems for that and then you have to carve out time for the team that's working on, okay, long-term, the five-year vision, where are we going? What technologies are we going to try that may or may not work, especially in the AI ML space as gen AI is becoming more and more prominent and LLMs, which require 40% less data and are twice as effective in terms of decisionmaking. So we are making sure that teams are there experimenting with how these technologies are going to improve the solutions we have today while not disrupting the annual roadmap. So that has been my biggest learning and my biggest leadership philosophy that I would like to make sure I pass on to anyone listening to this podcast.

Speaker 1 ([00:19:02](#)):

That's just amazing. And thank you for walking us through the philosophy that was very enlightening and I know there is a lot to unpack with what you mentioned, but starting with talked about the noun near and far kind of philosophy with respect to that. So how did you think about the different KPIs or the different goals for each of those phases When you are at the thick and thin of that situation then

Speaker 4 ([00:19:31](#)):

I think does it matter what phase of the product's lifecycle you come in? If you don't understand what is the problem that your product is trying to solve, who your customer is that you're solving this for and what would success look like once you have solved it, you are not doing your job. So one of the first things is I was onboarding into my role in trust and safety while in the middle of the pandemic. And with this party problem just starting, my first goal was to understand let's look at everything. Let's look at all of the incidents that have happened in the past that are happening right now. I personally looked at every escalation. I personally looked at the data and it was interesting to see that less than 0.09% of trips on Airbnb in a year actually result even in a safety report.

Speaker 4 ([00:20:25](#)):

When we investigate those reports and try to understand out of those reports where has actual harm happened, that's a fraction of a fraction of a fraction. It's very, very rare and yet one bad incident is probably too bad. So in a situation like this, it's not like a typical product where you have conversion metrics and counter metrics. What we just started doing is let's take a look at both qualitative and quantitative metrics, which is how do people feel about the brand and then what's actually happening on our platform. Understand that, look at the year over year trend and see if we can deploy not just one thing, there is no one silver bullet, but look at the cumulative effect of our policies, our products and our processes as well as some of the channels that we created like the 24 by seven safety line neighbor support line and understand how are they together and individually making the platform safer every



year. So it's always trying to be better than yourself. Understanding where you are right now, look at how your customers perceive you qualitatively measure the metrics that show your performance year over year and just keep getting better because trust and safety is not an area where you even compare yourself to others. You just get better compared to yourself every year. And we have been great because now over the last two years there's been a 55% reduction in safety incidents and it feels really good, especially as a mother.

Speaker 1 ([00:22:04](#)):

I can totally resonate with that even though I don't have kids who can book the parties now. And that was so insightful, Nava, with respect to how you brought in a lot of the qualitative metrics because a lot of times as product managers and leaders, you harp so much on the data and you forget the qualitative aspect of it, which is so important as well to just understand the problem itself. So that was very insightful. And during these spaces, when you decided to move away from just a rules-based system to a more dynamic, a machine learning model, what was the playing field for you from an experimentation perspective in terms of the number of experiments you were trying to run? And this started with Australia I think, right?

Speaker 4 ([00:22:56](#)):

That's absolutely right. This was a tricky one because we had put in a rules-based system. Imagine the covid time while the scientists were finding a vaccine, we were all put on lockdown. And in some ways though not as drastic as that, our under 25 rule was kind of like a lockdown, which is if we see these signs, if we see these data points, we are going to flag that reservation, we are going to redirect that reservation, which tends to be blunt. It also tends to be something that can eventually be circumvented if someone is very motivated. But we didn't want to take it away till we were sure that we had an alternative solution that was as effective as reducing safety incidents and yet had a better impact on our good users who probably like you and me, may be looking for a quite weekend away and booking a listing and had no intention to throw a party whatsoever.

Speaker 4 ([00:23:56](#)):

So it was good for us to think about which other place in the world where we do see some party incidents being reported, could we potentially build a different solution there and then compare what we have in us to that solution. And so in Australia, we started experimenting with one part of Australia having the solution, the other part not. And we saw a 35% reduction in party incidents in the cohort that had this AI-based solution versus the one that did not. That made it clear to us that we were in the right direction. And so with that, we came over to the US and were very deliberate to make sure that we used US training data for our US AI solution, whereas the Australia one had been trained with Australia data as we have rolled out the solution globally now we have been very deliberate and thoughtful about what kind of training data we use, how do we take into account regional nuances as we roll out the solution.





Speaker 1 ([00:25:03](#)):

That's amazing. That's a good point to bring up saying you found a 35% better quality when you actually had the experiments running without it. How did you gauge that 35% is actually really good because number is a number, right? It's greater than 10%, 20%. But then how did you really gauge from a qualitative perspective that hey, this is really good, 35% we would call it as a success to roll out further?

Speaker 4 ([00:25:38](#)):

That's a great question. We are the first company in the industry that has created a solution like that. The solution doesn't exist anywhere else. We are the industry's first company to create an AI-based anti-party system. So there was really no precedence for us to know what is better. What we knew is that we wake up every day thinking about peace of mind for our community and trust and safety is paramount for us. Unauthorized and disruptive parties that take away peace of mind for our community are absolutely unacceptable. And so we had to make sure we build a solution that is smart, that can keep up with the evolving nature of bad actors who try to circumvent our solution and it gives better results. And we wanted to see what would better look like. We had actually not expected it to be 35% better. That was very encouraging.

Speaker 4 ([00:26:37](#)):

And what has been even more encouraging is to see this 55% stat of just year over year reduction party reports. And I constantly tell myself that it's usually never just the AI system that's the silver bullet. It is probably a combination of the number of things that we have done in partnership with our policy team that continues to tune our global party ban, our experts who keep advising us on how to make our solutions better, the local communities, law enforcement teams that work with us when incidents happen. So it's the continued and combined effort of all of these teams that are making us better and that's what keeps us going.

Speaker 1 ([00:27:21](#)):

That's awesome. I think there are so many things that I didn't know about from an Airbnb standpoint now I think I have a better appreciation of what everything goes on behind the scenes when we go book a vacation with the Airbnb. That's really insightful. And during this process, what kind of ethical issues did you face, especially when you were training the model and things and how did you kind of look at addressing some of these biases in the system?

Speaker 4 ([00:27:51](#)):

My advice to anyone who's getting into the AI ML space is not to think about AI as dangerous or bad. It's never the technology that's bad, it's who is using the technology and for what intention. And the second thing that I ask people to think of is do you have the right checks and balances in place to make sure that you're measuring not just the intended effect of your model, but any unintended consequences per se? So as far as governance is concerned, we abide by two sets of principles. One is our privacy principles where we make sure that data is always used



with the consent of the user. We are very transparent about how your data is being used. We never sell your data. And lastly, we protect your data. Any data that you willingly share with us is always used for your benefit, never for sale, and it is protected when you do that.

Speaker 4 ([00:28:55](#)):

You've taken care of the foundation that drives ai, which is user data, behavior data i data. And then secondly, we have a dedicated anti-discrimination team and the product team that works on anti-discrimination is also part of my remit at Airbnb. And we are constantly working on in-house technologies to be able to measure the impact of our models. We measure it even before a model has been built. We actually have them as part of the discussion group for really critical models thinking about if we use these particular signals, what do you predict might be the impact? And then when a model is already in production, we continue to work with them to measure the impact of that model so that we can, before we scale that model to a hundred percent of our traffic, we have taken care of certain signals that might be creating any disparate impact for any race per se. So it's been wonderful to have these partnerships with the anti-discrimination team, our legal team, our finance team, and our AI council that is putting in place the right governance before we implement any ai.

Speaker 1 ([00:30:06](#)):

That's amazing. And are there any risks that you see from when you're building AI products and any ways to mitigate them? I know you've talked about a bit about the governance part of it from biases and ethical standpoint, but any other risks that you see that you saw during this time? By building the party part of it?

Speaker 4 ([00:30:34](#)):

My remit is imagine the entire customer journey, right? When you're creating an account on Airbnb, my team has models running that are checking for bots or account takeovers or fake accounts getting generated on Airbnb. Then when you're searching for a listing, we are trying to make sure that all the listings that you see are genuine and that they're not fake and that you have a great experience and we are verifying your identity. Then during booking we are checking for party risk and other kinds of safety risk. We are checking for reviews and review fraud. So there are all of these AI models that are running. My worry, and this is not an AI risk per se, is that we have great ai, the fraudsters have great AI too. Everyone has access to ai and my biggest worry is that how do we always stay a step ahead of everyone who has the same technology that we have and while we are using it for good to create peace of mind for our community, how do we anticipate how AI might be used for the reverse effect and how do we position our platform so that it can be protected against that?

Speaker 1 ([00:31:47](#)):

That's very well said with respect to as how good we are, so are the threat actors as well. So we all have access to the same information.



Speaker 4 ([00:31:58](#)):

And to directly answer your question, I would encourage product managers especially who are building products, is that we are living in a world where AI is going to be everywhere. We often ask ourselves this question that when should I use ai? When should I not use ai? This question is going to be irrelevant pretty soon because everything, every surface we touch, at some point your blender is going to have AI in it to tell you how exactly your smoothie should be made. And so think about how will your product be used by the people you intend it to be used by, and those you do not intend to be used by, but who will try to take advantage of your product using potentially better AI than you. So thinking of those counter cases, those negative cases is important and that's where a product manager skills come in.

Speaker 1 ([00:32:51](#)):

That's an excellent advice. And yes, that was my question as to how you would select choose AI as a technology for a particular use case or not. And I think you said it really well that that's not a valid question anymore or as we go along, so loved it. Let's look at some of the best practices from everything that you've learned, not just from Airbnb, but your curiosity that has actually led to do this over the course of several years. What have been some of the best practices for someone to actually develop products using ai? Now

Speaker 4 ([00:33:26](#)):

Can I tell you a story?

Speaker 1 ([00:33:27](#)):

Yeah, absolutely.

Speaker 4 ([00:33:30](#)):

It's a story about how I met my husband. Actually, he hates it when I tell the story, but I have to share it of course in a Women in Product podcast, which is I was in Walmart, I was a new product manager and I was so proud of the fact that I knew exactly how the supply chain systems worked in walmart.com. I was considered an expert and I was sent to do onboarding for new architects, new engineers, new product managers who joined the company. And he was not my husband back then, but he had just joined as the architect for the area that I was product managing. And I was telling him about how all the systems worked where it was a very technical backend system, and I was explaining to him how the files move from one point to the other. And he just started asking me, do you know how many back orders happen in this system? And for those of you who do not know, it's when a customer places an order and the site will tell you that yes, we got your order, it's going to ship. And then later says, oops, sorry, we took your order, but we didn't really have inventory so we are not going to ship it,

Speaker 1 ([00:34:39](#)):

Right?



Speaker 4 ([00:34:40](#)):

And here I am talking about the supply chain system that receives orders, reserves the inventory, ships it, and I was like, well, I don't really know. I can tell you how the back order system works. And he's like, aren't you the product manager? And this was back in the day and I think I thought the product manager's job and I had just moved over from engineering was to know the systems really well. And when business within air quotes tells you to do something, you know exactly how to get it done, there was a list of priorities we used to get from our senior officers in Walmart and we would just stack rank them, get them done. And as long as we shipped all this stuff, we were very successful. And when he started asking me, what do you think the customer wants? What do you think the customer pain points are?

Speaker 4 ([00:35:27](#)):

What are the metrics that show you whether your systems are actually working for the customer or not? I did not have good answers and I had to marry him to shut him up, of course, but he has been one of my inspirations. He's a great product leader, he's a supply chain startup founder now, but it changed something in me. I knew that there had to be more to what I did than knowing your systems really well and just shipping products. You really had to be the voice of the customer in the room. You really had to know why we exist, what is the problem that we are here to solve and what will the world look like, which is what people call as a product vision and we have solved the problem. How will it feel qualitatively and quantitatively? And interestingly, everyone thinks the product manager goes off in a room and comes up with the sparkly solution and implements it and everything is great.

Speaker 4 ([00:36:25](#)):

It doesn't work that way. The job of the product manager is to know the problem really well is to know what the world will look like when success happens, what the metrics will be qualitative and quantitative. The solution can come from anywhere. It's their job to get all the smart people together, whether it's the engineers or it is the data scientists or the designers or the program managers, the business stakeholders, get everyone's understanding, create a shared fabric of customer understanding, problem statement, success measurement, and then try various solutions, experiment, iterate, but keep marching the team towards the north star. And ultimately that's what success would look like. You are the glue between the customer and the business and the team that is implementing it. That is your job. So I learned it the hard way, which has led to me today being my best possible self because this realization happened pretty early on.

Speaker 1 ([00:37:33](#)):

That's amazing. I'm so glad you shared the story, your personal story, especially with all your audience. That was actually very insightful of how there are so many instances of how you discover some of the blind spots. And in that we have our product and the business metrics while we're building all different kinds of products. But now when you've started using AI as a technology, do you think there are any



additional metrics now that you need to start looking at apart from some of the already set business and the product metrics that you have?

Speaker 4 ([00:38:20](#)):

When I first started on my AI journey, I remember what had really helped me was this course that I did from MIT, which is around the application of AI and ML in business. You can do a lot of courses to actually learn how to code in Python and create AI models. It is great to create that awareness, but that course I highly recommended. It really helped open my mind because I got an example of so many different industries that were using machine learning and AI to solve problems that had not been solved using AI before. It just opened my mind after to the art of the possible.

Speaker 4 ([00:39:04](#)):

But what it also reminded me is that great product managers are great product managers regardless of the technology being used to solve the problem. Those principles don't change. You still are the chief articulator, you're the chief problem articulator, CPA, that's what you are, and you are the chief success determiner. You have to figure out what success would look like. Those success metrics definition, those goals belong to you, the solution, you collaborate and you figure out that solution, you experiment and iterate the hell out of it. That doesn't change whether you're using an AI or a non-AI product. But of course, just like in any product you have the customer facing metrics, the financial metrics, you have to also understand platform health metrics. In the case of AI products, there are classification metrics. There are regression metrics where you are measuring recall, you're measuring accuracy or measuring precision of your models to see are they degrading over time.

Speaker 4 ([00:40:09](#)):

You're also measuring regression metrics like the error rates that are happening. You're also looking at the data pipelines and the signal libraries that are being used in addition to the customer facing and the business facing metrics. I encourage my teams to talk about these more backend metrics. And something else that I have also been pushing my teams for is leverage, because now with the gen AI boom, everyone seems to be working on their own thing. More silos are getting created in the company. How can we get product managers together to say that, Hey, you are solving fraud this way. I'm solving fraud this way. We are both basically using the same features, the same signals, but we are reinventing the wheel. Can we do this together? So that's another thing that I highly encourage, especially product leaders to look at, which is in addition to just to recap your customer facing and business facing metrics and your infrastructure health metrics, look at leverage metrics, and of course there is the bias measurement too, which is ethical metrics. These are the three categories that I would say keep an eye out, especially in the world of AI in addition to your regular metrics.

Speaker 1 ([00:41:21](#)):

That's really insightful. Thank you for sharing that.

Speaker 2 ([00:41:45](#)):

It was really good. Yes. I just really loved how you focused on, it's not a matter of choosing to use AI because it's going to be used. It's more a matter of thinking about how you are using it versus other people are using it. Who that? I didn't really think of that until

Speaker 4 ([00:42:07](#)):

You Yeah, there's no cookie cutter formula really. It depends on your domain. And what has really opened my mind is talking to other product leaders in this space and I'm like, you are doing what now? Or most people would ask me that you used AI to do that. How did you do that? And so I keep asking my team and there are no dumb questions, so my curiosity has never failed me guys. I was like, I'm just going to ask it. Is this possible? Can we do this? Another great product we built was we found that there was collusion happening on the platform. Interestingly, you would ask your friend to book for you or we would see multiple people trying to book the same listing on the same night, same time. And we are like, how is this listing so popular? Suddenly? And then you find out they're all working with each other.

Speaker 4 ([00:42:59](#)):

And I was like, how can we use AI to start to detect collusion? And so we have now incorporated that into our party detection system as well, which is brilliant, but I would've not thought of this if I didn't ask my team that first. This is the problem statement. This is how it's showing up. This is the data. It's big enough that we now need a solution and can we incorporate that into our toolkit? And then the team is like, yeah, let's do it. So we try it and if we fail, we try again or we pivot, but we always learn something in the process.

Speaker 2 ([00:43:33](#)):

I just love what you're saying because I think that it seems like with AI now is the time where we should all be talking to one another about how we're using it, what we're seeing, what's unique, what's different, what's a problem, isn't a problem because we can all learn so much at this stage and that learning can help all of us. It isn't necessarily like, oh, it's my proprietary learning and I have to hold onto this because it seems like the learning has bigger implications

Speaker 4 ([00:44:09](#)):

And especially women. I am looking at some of the numbers out there on the number of women in AI jobs, and I believe it is less than 30% right now in the industry. And AI is only going to be as good as the people who have a seat at the table influencing the direction that AI takes. And so the more we can encourage women product managers to not shy away from exploring how AI can help in their job directly or indirectly, they will be impacting the future of ai.

Speaker 2 ([00:44:43](#)):



Yeah, I think you bring up a really, really interesting issue there, and one that is part of the reason that we are doing this series is because I think a lot of people think of AI as like, well, I need to know all the technical details. And what we've heard relentlessly is no, in fact, you don't necessarily need to know all the details engineering's job, but what your job is is to really be able to think about what the customer issues and the customer problems are. So it's really double down on your product skills because that's where you really add value. Don't worry about duplicating other people's skills out there. You're never going to out engineer the engineers

Speaker 4 ([00:45:30](#)):

And you shouldn't. If I could tell another story, Rashmi, which you and I discussed sometime back, is when I first went to the search team, I was looking at the customer feedback that was coming in where our customers said, the search is not working. Whereas I was looking at the technical measurement of search that we were doing. And in the world of search, there is a metric called NDCG where you measure the relevance of your search or algorithm, and we measured it query by query, and we had really high NDCG scores for certain queries and for those same queries, our customers were saying, it's not working. And I was caught in this tension between our engineering team that were like, it's working, it's great to our customers saying it's not working. And the value add that me and the product management team brought in was we said, let's do some user research.

Speaker 4 ([00:46:25](#)):

And typically in an ML AI team, the last word you will hear is user research. I was like, no, let's actually watch our customers searching. I distinctly remember they searched for water bottle, which was one of our highest, most relevant queries based on our score, the internal score, which clearly nobody knows what NDCG means, and I saw the customer typing in water bottle and the search results clearly showed water bottles, rows and rows and rows of water bottles. And then I saw this customer in front of me scroll past the first page and the second page and third page saying, yeah, it's not working. And then the researcher asks them why, what happened? And then this customer is like, the images are kind of blurry. I'm looking for this specific brand and that is not showing up over here. And so it just dawned on me that our customers were just typing water bottle and we were not giving them a good pictures, which is very important in the world of search.

Speaker 4 ([00:47:26](#)):

Second, we were not showing them the ability clearly understand that these are high-end brands, these are okay brands, blah, blah, blah. Yeah, sure. It was tucked up in a filter somewhere. It was not working for our customers regardless of how well we thought we were doing. And so I realized the way we were measuring search was not good enough. It was one way to measure and we needed to fundamentally change the way we measure. I also had to bring different teams together, the frontend team, the algorithm team, the catalog team to say, look, we are all working individually. It's not working for the customer. Let's all look at them searching and let's create a joint



way to measure true customer success. That changed the trajectory of how we worked, and that's what a product leader can do, and that didn't require an understanding of deep neural networks.

Speaker 1 ([00:48:16](#)):

Right, right. That's such an amazing example actually.

Speaker 4 ([00:49:11](#)):

Product managers don't give themselves permission to create a product vision. They often get so enamored by the day-to-day, JIRA stories and running the sprints and program managing that. You just don't see them taking the bold step required to say, even if I own a tiny product or an area of, even if I'm a platform product manager, I can create a vision. If I know where the company is going, I need to know how my product is going to power even a small portion of it. What will the world look like when I've identified the key problems my customers have and I have solved them?

Speaker 1 ([00:49:51](#)):

That's very well said. Yeah,

Speaker 2 ([00:49:53](#)):

I think that's a great comment. And one to help focus people.

Speaker 1 ([00:49:57](#)):

Yeah. Maybe one last question, Nava, what opportunities do you see specifically from a product management function in the future? Actually the future is probably now with all the AI advances, but how do you see this shape the product management function? Pretty much

Speaker 4 ([00:50:19](#)):

I think the fundamental thing that product managers do cannot be replaced by ai. Sure. And AI can spit out A PRD probably at some point of time. They can probably create detailed technical specs. They can probably even run a sprint for you and write user stories for you. But the role of the chief problem articulator the role of truly understanding, listening to customers, understanding what they're feeling, touching, seeing, what are their unmet needs, what would product market fit look like. That requires a human, and I should tell product managers that you should feel very proud that you chose this profession. And a product manager is the ideal. CEO is the ideal gm. If you have done product management, you can do any of these jobs. You are a leader, and at this point you can do anything. I have seen that from my career. I'm the GM of trust and safety.

Speaker 4 ([00:51:15](#)):

I have my p and I, I have program management, product management, operations. I even have a team that is Secret Service, some folks who are doing critical life safety





cases. It's a fantastic role. And my product management roots helped me get to this role. So the future is that you are the future leaders. Don't be shy to own that, create these lofty visions. Be curious about what technologies are out there that can help you accelerate to get to that vision. The beauty of Gen AI is going to be that a lot of the mundane tasks that our product managers live over that takes time away from actual strategic thinking can now be automated. So devour the tools that are out there, use them and move faster than ever to this glorious future that awaits you.

Speaker 1 ([00:52:15](#)):

That's awesome. Thank

Speaker 2 ([00:52:17](#)):

You. That is a great place to end. And one of the things that I would just add on the top of that is that I think that there to kind of go back to our thing about women working in the AI space, it's like have that curiosity and believe in yourself. Don't hold back from asking questions because you're afraid of how that's going to look. Or if you feel that way, go someplace that feels safe, like women in product and ask your peers that question. That will give you a lot more confidence to step forward. And I think that that confidence is really important right now, right? A

Speaker 4 ([00:53:04](#)):

Hundred percent. This is one of the most supportive communities that I have met. I have been associated with women and product now, gosh, for

Speaker 2 ([00:53:11](#)):

A

Speaker 4 ([00:53:11](#)):

Long time. I feel like you thought from the beginning. I feel like I am so grateful that this community exists. I have personally just gotten such phenomenal connections and mentorship from senior leaders here, and I feel like I still have PMs who are just starting on their journey, reach out to me because of the Women in Product Forum, and I'm able to pay some of it forward. I want to make sure that people who are listening to this podcast, they take this as an invitation, reach out. I am pretty active on LinkedIn. I'm happy as part of my 2024 resolution actually to set aside at least an hour in my week dedicated to mentorship for those who need it. Would love to make that happen.

Speaker 1 ([00:53:56](#)):

That's awesome actually.

Speaker 2 ([00:54:28](#)):

I want to be respectful. And just say thank you so much.



Speaker 4 ([00:54:38](#)):

Oh, you're most welcome. And it was totally my pleasure.