



Episode 64: Behind the Scenes and Content of the Women In Product Conference with Catrina Patton, Evelyn Chou, Natalie Dixon, and Manaleage Tedemet

Speaker 1 ([01:55](#)):

Welcome to the Women In Product podcast. I am super excited to have you all here today. And I know that all of you were on this year's content committee, but before for the conference. But before we go back and before we talk about that, I want to kind of go back and talk about how did you get initially involved with Women In Product? So Molly, maybe you could start us with that. I know you've been involved with the organization for a while.

Speaker 2 ([02:48](#)):

Yeah, I'd love to speak on that. So for me at least, it was 2019. I had just made a big shift in my career to move from the EdTech at a medium-sized company. And I'd been there for years and I decided to jump into the murky waters of a startup. And I was the first and only product manager. And I knew that I was going to need immense guidance and I really wanted to do the best that I could for the company. I wanted to bring fresh ideas and what I believed our product principles should be. But again, I needed that guidance and the boss that I was leaving told me she was going to the Women in Product Conference and asked if I'd love to attend with her. And I agreed. And I ended up attending the conference with her and I was blown away.

Speaker 2 ([03:43](#)):

And this is I think maybe the last conference in San Francisco at the time, and I just never experienced anything like it. And I still remember the energy in the room, the leadership in the room, and just all of the very accomplished women. And I left so inspired and I wanted to do more for the women I just had met for this community of women. And that same year I had inquired about if there was a chapter in my city and I was connected with the lead and I've been the co-lead for the San Diego chapter ever since.

Speaker 1 ([04:20](#)):

Pretty amazing. Anybody else want to add anything there? So I know that all of you have been involved with the organization in one way, shape, or form or another. And it does want me beg for me the question of why is it important to you to volunteer? And Natalie, maybe you can speak to that because you've all been volunteers, you are volunteers on this committee and I know you've done other things, but Natalie, you want to jump in? Sure.

Speaker 4 ([04:56](#)):



Just helping women grow and thrive in their careers is something that I've forever been passionate about. I used to live in York, was involved in the New York Women product community since around 2017. I started going to the conference, I think the second year it existed. I'm in Atlanta now and helped start the Atlanta Women in Product chapter. Throughout my career, I've regularly been one of or the only women in the room, and that's truly only intensified as I've moved into more of a product leadership role. So helping other women know what to do when they're in that scenario and thrive in that scenario and not have it be something that is holding them back has been something that's always been really important to me. Women in product is a big way that I've done that. I'm also a lead at FanDuel in our women's employee resource group or ERG.

Speaker 4 ([06:00](#)):

So maybe a common theme I would imagine from a lot of us is I tend to overcommit myself. I say yes to everything. And personally, a lot of things have changed in my life this year. And so I've been trying to kind of walk that back and really only do the things that are really important to me in addition to just trying to do my job as best as possible and helping and supporting women in the product community is the one thing that I have tried not to take a step back in because it is truly just the thing I am the most passionate about. I always say for the people that are working for me, there would be no greater honor than to eventually work for 'em. So I'm always trying to support the people, women across the organization and all levels and women in product have been just such a fantastic community for me over the last seven or so years. So I'm trying to create and build that community in Atlanta and just pass that on to the female PMs in Atlanta.

Speaker 1 ([07:01](#)):

When you talk there, it really reminds me that the community offers value to people at every level they are in their career, but the value changes over time. As you move up the ladder, it is more isolating. And so having a community of women at that level that you can reach out to makes a big difference. So yeah. Evelyn, you wanted to add something here?

Speaker 3 ([07:29](#)):

Yeah, I love your answer, Nelly. One addition that motivates me to volunteer is I want everyone to be seen. When I joined as a participant, I felt there's a lot of focus on speakers, everybody focused on the content, the speaker, but I felt the attendees are just as important as the speakers. So when I moderate or host, I always want the people to feel that I see you, your voice matter one day you could become a speaker. So I guess that's a unique angle that motivates me to volunteer.

Speaker 1 ([08:14](#)):

That's a great comment. I love that comment. I think that there are a lot of people that have that perspective. It makes a huge difference when you feel seen, when you



are in a room with people where you can feel like you're a part of it and you have something to contribute. It makes a big difference. Katrina?

Speaker 5 ([08:38](#)):

Yeah. I'll actually add to say that I am what one of the folks that Evelyn is speaking of. I was once an audience participant, a scholarship recipient, and when I first transitioned to become a product manager doing one of the bootcamp programs. And then after that I really excelled and came into leadership. And last year I participated was on one of the senior leader round tables. But I know that possibility will not have happened if I wasn't looking at senior leadership and saying, wow, one day I can be in those shoes. So with that being said, now I'm an advocate and I want to volunteer and spread the word not only as a woman but as a woman of color as well, because the space and making diversity and to show others like you also could be within this seat and being able to give back as well. So Evelyn just headed right on the head, same reason why I volunteer.

Speaker 1 ([09:37](#)):

That's fantastic. Those are great stories. And speaking of stories, I know some of you have attended, most of you have attended previous conferences, whether they were in person or virtual, but does anybody else want to share any particularly memorable experience or stories of past speakers, topics or other noteworthy moments from conferences? Malay?

Speaker 2 ([10:07](#)):

Yeah, so I mean I've attended the conference so many times and there have been so many wonderful speakers, but one that has not left my mind, and I think it was maybe two years ago or so, but in recent years, I think Tulsi Doshi on her topic about responsible AI and building a product for everyone, she had a session on this and at the time it wasn't that AI wasn't big, it wasn't that it wasn't a big topic, it just was different. So I can understand why it was selected that year and there weren't a lot of people talking about responsible AI at the time. And I loved that speaker and the topic because the session focused on product inclusion and how the decisions that we make as PMs matter and affect experiences. And it really is our responsibility to ask the right questions and challenge our biases.

Speaker 2 ([11:09](#)):

And she has this really great quote about building an inclusive product is a core piece to building a good product. And I think we forget that sometimes along the way, a lot of times when you're just building and building, and maybe it's because it could be something that just isn't customer facing or you kind of forget that at the end of this there's someone looking at it and what is their experience going to be and how is it different from what my experience is going to be and what challenges could they be experiencing? And so just helps you ask all of those really important questions and it's just never left my mind. And I thought she was an incredible



speaker simplifying this idea, giving you an example of something that she's currently working on and then actually seeing that come to fruition just weeks after the conference. It was just really powerful full circle moment and it was great.

Speaker 1 ([12:01](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. It is funny how speakers stick in your mind and it's like a little voice back there and everything you do from there on in some way, shape or form. Natalie, do you want to add something here? Sure.

Speaker 4 ([12:20](#)):

In the very first Women in Product conference, I attended, I want to say 2017 out in California. I listened to one of the keynote speakers, it was in the largest room, and I wish I remembered her name and where she was from because she was giving a fantastic speech. She was A-C-P-O-A-C-E-O, someone that was very advanced in her career and she was giving a speech about just being a woman in the workplace in front of, at that point, probably 400 women. And she said that something that has resonated with me for so long, she said, when men get angry or frustrated at work, they typically get angry. When women kind of hit that tipping point at work, were maybe more likely to cry. And that's not saying all men shout, all women cry, but I was in my twenties and early PM at that point and felt that helped me reframe judgment.

Speaker 4 ([13:24](#)):

I felt at times for myself and maybe for other people, other women that have kind of hit their breaking point in the workplace and cried. To me that was just the worst thing you could ever do at work was shed of tear. Meanwhile, you see people get really frustrated and angry all the time and we're not passing the same judgment on them. And just getting that opportunity to reframe how I looked at myself and how I looked at other women was a huge motivating moment for me. I'm still going to try not to cry in the middle of a meeting at work, but just understanding that people might respond emotionally different to really stressful situations. And as long as you're professional about it, one does it make you weaker than another. And that was just so powerful for me to hear as a younger PM from a woman that was more advanced in her career. I quote that all the time to women in,

Speaker 1 ([14:22](#)):

The thing I love about both these examples is they're really about thinking about things differently and being open to understanding things that you're maybe not familiar with or you don't know. One of the things that I loved about Tully's speech, and I remember it quite well, was her openly saying there were things that I didn't think of and people that schooled me on different ways of thinking about those things. And it was great because she was so open to that, she so embraced it and was such a good example of that. And Natalie, I think your example is a similar one, right? Reframe it, think about it differently. See where we have our own judgments



about things and how we can do those differently. I dunno. Molly, do you want to add something else in there?

Speaker 2 ([15:25](#)):

Yeah, I think that just leaning into being a woman and normalizing our reactions to things and removing the shame of how we express ourselves as part of the process. And I think that in our career, as we've probably been told Natalie, to your point, this is probably the right behavior and this is the wrong behavior, or you're embarrassed when you're seeing someone do something that to be maybe have a negative implication. But to me, I think that what I've learned and kind of what you're talking about is really leaning into just our normal reactions to things and reframing our minds to know that these are not negative things. We all react to things a little bit differently as long as we are properly giving other people respect in the room to do these things. But I thought it was just really important just removing the shame and keeping that in mind.

Speaker 1 ([16:30](#)):

Yeah. Did these experiences from past speakers influence or impact you as you thought about speakers in topic selection for this year? Did you think back on people that you had heard or things that stuck in your head when you were looking at that kind of stuff? Katrina's nodding affirmatively, so I'm going to ask her. Do you want to speak to that?

Speaker 5 ([16:55](#)):

Absolutely. I am always motivated by speakers who not only tells a story, that passion that comes across, but also what can be taken away that's tangible. At the end of the day, I can apply to my life very similar. It was a keynote speaker a while back, but it was around that career roadmap and creating that in order to really make sure that you know what direction you want to go with your career. So with making sure that our theme this year is around Excel and evolving and hearing and remembering those, how impactful that was. I'm still remembering that experience and making that lasting impact. And so evaluating speakers in that sense was our direction for sure.

Speaker 1 ([17:47](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. So tell me a little bit about the content committee process overall, Katrina.

Speaker 5 ([17:56](#)):

Yeah, it was a very collaborative one for sure. So for my team, we had a particular theme and ours was around creating the content for people management in the senior level and who was coming from established medium to extra large organization. And so our team basically thought about our persona from net



discoveries lens not only just starting with the theme of what the conference is for this year, but also then taking it and building out that persona from the needs and the pain points that exist today. So with that being said, we came up with some things around upskilling and career growth was important, the amount of experience, understanding the tools and the tips that was important. And then afterwards we all took our time in grouping and figuring out what that looks like and then voting that up really helped us to start to build out what our blueprint was of what was the needs for the different speakers. And then we took our time going through evaluating speakers to make sure from the different formats that exist, that each speaker is really fitting into that bucket which will meet the needs for our persona that we build out.

Speaker 1 ([19:28](#)):

I think that a lot of people who are listening to that are probably having their heads explode. Wow, that sounds incredibly thoughtful, incredibly well structured, very thought through really almost from a product perspective. And I just wondered, you guys do this in a pretty compressed time period. Did it feel a little stressful or did it, or was there a part of it that felt like fun or did you get to the end of it and go like, whew, oh, they got that's done? Anyone want to comment on that?

Speaker 5 ([20:13](#)):

Yeah,

Speaker 3 ([20:14](#)):

I take a step at, oh, sorry, I can take a step at it. I just had a funny anecdote. If reading through 50 plus submission is an indicator of the stock market going up and down, I feel I'm very good at knowing what's going to be really popular for 2024 and beyond. For example, AI to Katrina's point, they are themes, there's the personas, but then they are also overlapping topic that cuts across all the things, all the personas, for example, like ai. So it's definitely stressful going through so many different submissions in a very crunch timeline, but it's also eye opening knowing, oh, my anxiety of not knowing enough about LLM is common across all of these people regardless of where they are at the company, at the job.

Speaker 1 ([21:07](#)):

That's awesome. I mean, I bet you're right when you think about it, we had a lot of submission, you guys were looking at a lot of different things. You really do get a good snapshot of what's going on out in the marketplace, if you will. So yeah, that's awesome. So I want to kind of jump down to another topic here. So when it came to selecting speakers, what drove your decisions? What specific criteria did you consider when you were evaluating potential speakers? And Natalie, do you want to take that one?

Speaker 4 ([21:49](#)):



Yeah. So first of all, the title of the presentation was really important. Did it grab my attention? Because it needs to grab the attention of the conference attendees, especially after last year, there were so many slots where there were three speakers and I wanted to go to all of them and it's genuinely really difficult to speak. So that was the first criteria for me, is it attention grabbing? But then digging a layer deeper into that because of how tough the job market is right now, I put a priority on speakers that would help women transition in their career, potentially find a new job. So topics like upskilling, transitioning companies, stuff like that I felt was important for me. Something that I really focus on as someone that's leading PMs is helping them both succeed within our company of course, but also helping them build skills that will help them get their next job.

Speaker 4 ([22:44](#)):

I want strong PMs that have skills to work anywhere, but they're choosing to work for me because of the way I lead. And so maybe if you're not working for a product leader like that and you're looking elsewhere to try to gain those skills, I felt like the women in Product conference could be one of those places. So things like how to pick, there's tons of fun topics out there about how to navigate your career, how to pivot, how to gain focus on gaining new skills. There were a lot of topics like that fortunately because I think everyone's pretty conscious of the job market right now, but that's really how I honed in on selecting speakers on my end.

Speaker 1 ([23:31](#)):

Molly, you wanted to add something?

Speaker 2 ([23:33](#)):

Yeah, I am so glad, Natalie, that you talked about that and taking into account what's going on in the world today and how finding a job is a little difficult. One of the things that I looked for, and as Evelyn mentioned, there were so many AI submissions, so I was really looking for something not different from ai, but very specific in regards to ai. So anyone that was say, showcasing, these are the prompts that you want to use when trying to update your resume. These are the prompts for chat GPT that you'd like to use. This is what you should do once you get into Claude. This is you should all the things that you need to update your resume or your cover letter to get to at least get your resume submitted and looked at. And so when I was looking at some of the AI options, I did try to make sure that I was finding something that kind of aligned to what Natalie was talking about, helping people find their next career.

Speaker 1 ([24:39](#)):

Anybody else have any other comments on that?

Speaker 5 ([24:42](#)):



Yeah, I do. I was on a team with Natalie, so our team had a lot of dynamic conversations, especially around also focusing on what it mean, the fact that within the product landscape that we're experiencing right now, the fact that that shift and our teams are bringing on and experiencing taking on more responsibilities as the theme the conference. And so looking for those opportunities as well as speakers was really important when it comes to evaluating which one should be selected.

Speaker 1 ([25:21](#)):

So when you guys are doing this process, how do you balance the need for both experienced and emerging voices in the conference lineup? And Evelyn, maybe you could tackle that one.

Speaker 3 ([25:35](#)):

Yeah, happy to. I think both Natalie and Katrina brought up very good point about aligning with the theme and then the persona. And I think there's also anticipating what the demands are. Like Natalie talking about, a lot of people are having a hard time looking for jobs. I'm one of those people right now. Definitely putting my mind in terms of I'm a seeker, what kind of topics I'm looking for in terms of balancing the experience versus new speakers. I would dig into the video. I'm sure everyone on this panel could relate. Some people just have a very scratchy, scrappy, long video and they talk specifically about, this is my talk, this is what I want the audience to take away with. Versus some people just repurpose their previous talk. I remember seeing a submission, the video was an hour long from a past talk, and to me that tells me, yes, this speaker is so experienced, so seasonal, but it's hard for me to grasp what is that three second highlight I want the audience to walk away with. So the video submission becomes a very important distinguisher for me.

Speaker 1 ([26:58](#)):

Yeah, that's really interesting. Some tips for people there, I think you just gave them. What advice would you give to aspiring speakers looking to present at future women in product conferences?

Speaker 3 ([27:13](#)):

So before I even jump right in as part of the submission committee, I host an office hours for aspiring speakers and I get a lot of very good content and I feel first and foremost, women still seek that validation even though their idea is so good, they would say, oh, I've never spoken at this conference. What do you guys think about this ideas? And I know it's a safe space for people to ideate and challenge each other, but I would almost always recommend others to just do it because submitting a proposal is just like a product day-to-day job. I might write thousands of product strategy doc, I won't be launching all of those product I wish. So it becomes very important that exercise really matters, like quantity drives that quality. And then I think a good submission could also be a product market fit. I test the idea if it works, great.



Speaker 3 ([28:28](#)):

If it doesn't, that's fine. And then I think the third component is that there are so many different avenue for aspiring product managers or speakers. Women in product not only has the conference, it also has a lot of resources, blocks, workshops. If a content doesn't get selected for conference, there are all these other opportunities. Not to mention we are going into the conference season. There are so many other conferences out there. So even though this one doesn't get selected, aspiring speakers can submit the same content to all these other places. So that's how I would advise aspiring speakers to just give it a try and think of it as testing or experimentation.

Speaker 1 ([29:20](#)):

I love that approach. I have to say that I so often talk to women. Some of 'em are very senior level and they're like, oh no, not me. I couldn't have possibly talk. And I'm like, are you kidding me? Of course you can talk. Of course you have knowledge you can share. And I always try and say to them, this is the place that is going to love you no matter what. Not that we don't have standards that we want the quality to be, but this group wants you to succeed. They're going to try and help you in every way to make that step forward. It's the best possible place to get feedback on what you're thinking, help formulate ideas with you, cheer you on as you take those steps and encourage you. And that's really important in getting that under your belt. So yeah, I loved your ideas. I love the test product market fit one in particular. That was great. So with all that said, which conference sessions are you most excited about? And Evelyn, I'm going to start with you, but I'm going to ask everybody. So everybody else, put your thinking caps on right now.

Speaker 3 ([30:46](#)):

Yeah, I'll make it short. I think everyone already set a lot of wonderful ideas. I think there's a balance between emerging trends versus age old topics, what Natalie was talking about, managing our emotions versus breaking into the glass ceiling or glass door. So I think that's some of the topics that's still so relevant for every woman in the workplace, but it has very unique landscape. I remember one of the submission was about influencing people, but in a written form because a lot of times I think about influencing stakeholders in spoken forms like product strategy meetings and all that, but being a very good and concise writer is just as important. So I would say those are some of the things I look for and excited about.

Speaker 1 ([31:38](#)):

Natalie.

Speaker 4 ([31:40](#)):

Yeah, I'm really excited about Stephanie Hum. She has some great product experience. She submitted a topic called Choosing Your Next Adventure, the Ted Lasso framework. Almost everyone in our group chose that as an initial selection. I



talked earlier about a catchy title that's a catchy title that's going to get people interested in, but also her video, she was super engaging and the topic is just timely choosing your next adventure and figuring out where you want to go. If you're at a point where either you want to make a career pivot or maybe you're being forced to make a career pivot, I know I personally will be attending that session.

Speaker 1 ([32:20](#)):

Yeah, that's a great one. I mean, I think that there's always so many layers to careers and making career decisions, and especially in times when it feels very important. So how do you think through that and how do you make those choices? Yeah. Malay, you want to jump in there and

Speaker 2 ([32:50](#)):

Sure. Yeah. I can't remember the exact title, but I'm very excited about it. And everyone in our committee actually put it on it as well, but it was about technology's impact on the environment, and I thought it was just such a unique take on just our past conference topics and really talking about something that we should all be very concerned about, where technology has come a long way, but what are the impacts that we're making on the environment and what does this mean for us and what decisions should we be making? So looking very much forward to that session.

Speaker 1 ([33:28](#)):

That sounds really good. And Katrina?

Speaker 5 ([33:31](#)):

Yeah, great question. I am a workshop girl. I love to do some things practice and some tangible things. Like I participated in the elevator pitch last year and that was really fun. So this year I'm really looking forward to, there is one by Michelle Kelly, it's called Learn Life of Death, listening from a former FBI hosted a negotiator, and I'm like, yes, because currently right now in my career transition, working more with the federal agency and doing a lot of negotiating, especially with funding. And so I'm really excited to learn some of these skill sets as long as well as with storytelling and being impactful.

Speaker 1 ([34:13](#)):

I love that. I love the title because listening is so important and so unappreciated sometimes. Oftentimes it's the person in the room who's quiet and listening who then has the one little nugget that, yeah. Evelyn, you were going to say something.

Speaker 3 ([34:34](#)):

I was just going to jump onto that. I saw that in my session too. And I love that because there's a book, every Product manager where business people would read called Never Split the Difference by Chris Vos. So that topic is the opposite version,



but a female version. So why do superheroes all have to be, man, it could also be human. So when I saw that topic, I was like, yes,

Speaker 1 ([35:02](#)):

There you go. I love that. So just to kind of wrap things up, I think it would be great to hear from you guys about why should women attend the conference. You guys have really been critical in putting together the content for this conference. And so why should people come and attend and why should their companies pay for them to attend? And Monte, I am going to start with you.

Speaker 2 ([35:29](#)):

So I think women should attend the conference because it offers invaluable opportunities for only professional growth, but networking empowerment, the conference provides access to industry leading speakers, workshops and discussions that are tailored specifically to women in product roles. And obviously everything that we've said this entire episode, but last, I believe your company should pay for you to attend the conference because it really demonstrates their commitment to fostering diversity, inclusion, professional development within their organization. And I think that when you invest in employees attendance, it not only enhances their individual skills and knowledge, but it benefits the company as a whole by promoting more diverse and innovative workplace culture.

Speaker 1 ([36:27](#)):

Anybody else want to jump in and say anything here?

Speaker 4 ([36:32](#)):

Sure. Every time I've attended a Women in Product conference, which is most of them, I've come back and it's hard day to day to keep up that excitement and energy level doing the same job over and over, even if you have a fantastic job, I have a fantastic job, but coming out of the Women in Product Conference, I always feel more engaged. I've always met some new women. Last year, a bunch of women from FanDuel attended with me, and it was a great connecting point for us. We had a little happy hour in our office afterwards just to connect and discuss our favorite parts of the conference. So definitely highly recommend for employers to pay for it. And if there's multiple women in your conference, it's a great networking event for them, even if they're not physically going to the conference, just listening to it and then regrouping together. It's a great way to kind of network with other women in your company, reenergize them, et cetera.

Speaker 1 ([37:29](#)):

I mean, that is something that, I've talked to a lot of companies in the lead up to the conference here, and one of the things that I always say to them is try and set it up so that people can meet before they go to the conference and talk about what they



might do, go see and kind of divide and conquer. But then when they come back, get everybody together and talk about what they learned, what stood out to them, what was important, what they're going to do, what they're going to go and implement against that. Because it really kind of cements the learning, but it also spreads the learning, if you will, which is incredibly valuable. I think companies benefit hugely from that. Yeah. So anybody else? Any last words here? No. Well, I just have to say it's been great talking to all of you. First and foremost, thank you for your effort on behalf of the community and the organization. We super, super appreciate your time and your energy on it. And I hope all of you have a great time at the conference and I hope everybody listening joins us and has a great time there too. So thank you.