

# 20Product - Jean-Michel Lemieux

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Atlassian will ship on speed.

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time horizon friction is caused by, a lot of process. And that process is you have a lot of people who want to. Put plans in place and they feel comfort. most companies Overplan a hundred x.

**Scarlett 2i2 USB-3:** This is 20 product with me, Harry Stebbings now 20 product is the monthly show where we sit down with the best product and engineering leaders in the world to reveal that tips, time, take some stress sheets to scaling the best product teams. Now stay. We have one of the OGs joining us. He's built engineering teams at two of the world leaders.

This is the CTO at Shopify and the VP of engineering at Alaskan.

There is little, this guest today has not seen in product and engineering. And I'm so thrilled to welcome Joe Michelle. Amir to the hot seat today.

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**Scarlett 2i2 USB-1:** Um, speaking of amazing products like air table there.

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What is Pendo? The only all in one product experience platform for any type of application. What are the features that make Pendo so awesome? Pendo's differentiation is in its platform. Every capability from analytics to in app guidance, to session replay, mobile feedback management and road mapping, are all purpose built to work together.

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You have now arrived at your destination.

**Harry Stebbings:** Jean-Michel, I've heard so many good things from Scott, from Harley. I mean, just brilliant references. What more could you want? thank you so much for joining me today.

**Jean Michel:** It's my pleasure to be here finally.

**Harry Stebbings:** I wanna start with a little bit of context. So I always find like finding one's love in life is actually quite rare. Many people don't actually find their love. And so I wanted to start on yours. When did you first fall in love with product and tech? And can you take me to that moment?

**Jean Michel:** I think love's a good word. we, we use that word kind of, we [00:04:00] throw it around, but I, I think love is a good word of describing where I'm at and I'll, I'll tell you why. So I got into computery things through, uh, fine arts in high school. So we're going back to 1988. I'm in high school and I, there's too many things I like doing, so I picked.

I'm gonna do fine arts and music and math. And I ignored everything in between. I've never taken any biology class, I've never taken any history. I just literally did fine arts, music and math. So my days were, drawing and painting, music band class. And then I did, I did math. And then at one year, I told the band leader, I said, Hey, my parents got me a computer.

And it turns out that there's this protocol called Meaty. And I can, I have a keyboard and I know we're doing a Phantom of the opera miserable mix. What if I did all the music for it, like myself? You don't need the band. And she was like, that's crazy. And I was like, I was like, I think I could pull it off.

So I basically fired the high school band and I didn't have to do anything for the whole musical that year. And I pulled off, a Les Miss fan of the Opera Medley, with my computer and my keyboard.

And I, I [00:05:00] recorded a, you know, I recorded a bunch of tracks. I did, you know, some stuff. And then I did one, I played one live. I was in grade 11 or something. I'm in grade 13, and I'm like, what am I gonna do with my life? And my guidance counselor was like, I think you should go into this computer thing.

I'm like, ah. But my parents like, I don't know, no one who does this for a career. Like I'm, I was just doing this for fun and, she was right. I went into

computer science and never looked back. So I think I, I stumbled into it kind of young, but I, I have, I've always seen computers as a tool, you know, for me it was like, Hey, it's really cool that I could do this thing, like computers, like a, a companion, a copilot for creativity, you know?

I was not like a programmer. I was like a computer's, like a tool that can. Make really cool shit happen. Right. And so that's how I, I fell in love with it.

**Harry Stebbings:** A weird one, but one I've been oscillating on a lot recently is I think, you know, the safe path is never as safe as you think, and the risky path is never as risky as you think. And I, I say that to a lot of people considering entering the workforce today. when you think back about your entry, your love of product there, what do you advise graduates, people entering workforces, listening to you now?

**Jean Michel:** people always say, do something you love. And I'm like, do [00:06:00] something you're good at, you know, in some ways my guidance counselor was like, Hey, it looks like you're good at it.

there's kind of no wrong path if you keep doing something you're good at. And it turned out I was,

**Harry Stebbings:** you were very good at it, and it led to like key, key leadership roles at Shopify. At Atlassian, which is obviously how you're so close to Harley. And Scott, I wanna ask, they're very seismic organizations and they have big impacts on people's minds. if you had two, one takeaway from each on, how it impacted your mindset, Shopify and Atlassian, what would it be?

**Jean Michel:** Yeah, that's a good question. So from band class to, leading and growing kind of the engineering orgs at these two companies that at the time had no idea where they're, they're gonna be so massive. and seeing both from the inside, I'd say Shopify, Atlassian are really interesting. If you drew a Venn diagram of both companies, there's an overlap and there's a non overlap of both.

So the overlap is, founders playing a long game and good at marketing. And that might be a bit weird coming from an engineering dude, but like. Founders playing a long game. So making these decisions that, you know, I guess staying alive long enough that you just, you'll be around longer.

and they're both brilliant at [00:07:00] marketing, right? Harley, Mike and Scott, like they, they knew the value of of getting eyeballs. And as an engineer

building things, I, I was at the time when I, when I met all these folks, was heads down just trying to make things work, loving building companies, building teams together.

But I think the value of investing in getting eyeballs was, um, something I learned from both.

**Harry Stebbings:** what are, I'm just too interested. What are an example from each on how they played the long game strategically.

**Jean Michel:** Well, strategically both invested in a, in building communities around their company, right? Like, you don't, you don't build a product, you build a movement. Atlassian built a movement around open source 20 years ago, around, easy software and getting people really excited about it, right?

They did things like, cash for clunkers. They were going after Joel Polsky at the time. It just built a movement around like how people work, right? their vision was, you know, empower, you know, everyone working on teams, right? They built a movement around that. Shopify, same thing. What did Shopify do?

They, I think at the time Harley and Toby got in touch with, Tim Ferriss like, Hey, you wrote a book at the four hour work week. That's, there's a movement around being an entrepreneur. Shopify wasn't about the product. It was about a movement [00:08:00] of like, let's build this thing around entrepreneurship.

And it's not like that was. You know, accidental. We had meetings about, you know, we have to create a, a movement around entrepreneurship and it turns out we have one product for that. Now, we might have multiple in the future, but that's what we wanna do. And both those companies did that really, really well.

I learned so much because as an engineer, again, as a product person, the most important thing to do is, get a group of people together that care about what you care about as much. And I think both companies have done that amazingly.

**Harry Stebbings:** God, you are good at soundbites. I don't look for companies, I look for movements. That is just like the most Twitter worthy quote. I love that. I, where do they not overlap then? If they overlap there in terms of long game and movements and communities? Where are they distinctly different?

**Jean Michel:** I'm curious, what do you think, what do you, you, you, you know, both, you've interviewed both, let, let's compare notes. Where do you, where do you think they don't overlap?

I allowed to do that? Can I ask you questions?

**Harry Stebbings:** You can, but I'm just gonna lose friends. I mean, listen, I think Harley is creatively astonishing. brilliant communicator externally and is a [00:09:00] fantastic face of a company pushing a message, driving a community. And I think Scott, on the flip side is internally one of the most assured, controlled strategic thinkers, resource allocators and leaders, very much focused on internal operations and optimization.

So different mindsets completely

**Jean Michel:** Yeah, and I think, I think one, one thing you're not seeing is, is there's pairs of people, right? There's Harley and Toby, and then there's Scott and Mike,

right? So all these companies have, a bunch of really good people who are, who are making decisions. And I think the non-overlapping I saw the most from, from the inside was, Shopify will ship on quality.

Atlassian will ship on speed.

and I think that's culturally, like Atlassian does a lot of stuff. You go to their webpage and there's a lot of products. They've a lot of m and a. there's a lot right there. There's a lot. And I think that was driven culturally. I think the founders are very, they're good at acquiring, turning that into monetization and using their, you know, using their pool of customers really well.

Both turned into really great companies at Shopify. We spend a lot [00:10:00] more time on doing less things and then from the outside you might say, well, we did a lot, but less things. And we would, and especially Toby would, would, stop things based on quality, which why I would not see as much at Atlassian.

Now both companies, you know, obviously evolved since then have done a lot of things. But you can still see that in, I think Atlassian was a crazy good business in terms of like, as you said, Scott's really good at, at, at numbers. I remember seeing spreadsheets of spreadsheets of here's what, you know, Atlassian's gonna look like in 2020 and 2010, really good mechanics of how, how to, create great businesses, right?

and, and Shopify, I think great business. I think the product is really, really good. I think that we didn't extract as much business right from it. Like, like

Shopify could be 10 x the revenue, right? If you look at how much value is being provided. So very different companies now, both are really successful.

And you could go in the past and go, actually, if you did that thing that would like, there's some magic sauce that made Shopify what it is today, that if you would've done some more pricing optimization, maybe it wouldn't have turned into it. And the same thing for Atlassian, right? But that's where the Venn diagrams don't [00:11:00] overlap as much.

**Harry Stebbings:** Why did I bother writing a schedule? Why? Why didn't you tell me? You were just inherently interesting from the start. This is great. So I'm too interested. You said there about like Shopify could be 10 x bigger How so? yeah. How could it be 10 x bigger? I.

**Jean Michel:** let's just get into the comparison to, like Atlassian to Shopify. I think Atlassian was a lot better extracting value like revenue from, that value that you're giving.

Like that's what a company does. It's like, I'm gonna give you some value and I'm gonna over time extract some revenue so I can keep giving you value over time. Right? you have to create a feedback loop there. And, Atlassian did a better job, I think, monetizing some of the products.

Shopify's starting to do it right. Raised prices for plus recently, and I think it's something we talked about internally. And, and the other thing, when you're building a company, here's the other thing to realize.

When you build a company, you have one thing to do is like build a product that people can use and they love it and they tell their friends about it, If you do that for 10 years and you figure out how to monetize it over time, like that's an okay position to be in, right?

monetize enough to keep going, but you have some flexibility in how you're gonna do those levers, which means that if you spend too much time looking at the spreadsheets, you're gonna forget, [00:12:00] you're gonna forget about your priority number one, which is you have to get people to love your product and tell their friends about it, and then actually like yell to their friends about it.

Which I think both companies have done, have done really well. And then the way you monetize that, if it's a long game, maybe the first 10 years you break even, you're making some profit and you, you've got some levers to play, right? And I think both, companies. Use those levers differently. both have been



extremely successful, but it's really interesting to see kind of two different playbooks

**Harry Stebbings:** You said, they're like, make your customers love it. I literally just tweeted this afternoon, if you want your customers to love you more, narrow the scope of your ICP, they will love you more because your products will fit them more tightly. The features will be more aligned and they will tell their friends more because it is more aligned to them and their friends will be more than you think.

Do you agree? If you want more customers, narrow the scope of your ICP and make fewer people love it more.

**Jean Michel:** I think in your, in your first couple of years. Absolutely. companies are gonna die, from indigestion before they die of starvation. which means that we all have way too many ideas in our brain, and our instinct is to give everyone [00:13:00] everything.

And it's really hard to say no. So, you're absolutely true, right? give people a couple of things that are really, really good and then buy you time to figure out what the next things are.

**Harry Stebbings:** if we think about the two kind of different worlds that you mentioned, which was speed versus kind of quality for founders, again, that listen, that are in their first three years, say we have, you know, 700,000 that listen. how should they think is speed of execution everything? Or is build slow, but build right the right way at that stage?

**Jean Michel:** Do both. like, I'm in the middle of the building, so I, I did the shop fight lasting thing, hyperscale, and I've, I've, I. Done the one to end a lot, after you have product market fit, everything breaks, and how do you put the pieces back together and, build a company and an organization to get to, you know, a hundred x that?

I haven't done the zero to one in a while, one of the things I've been doing for the last years is zero to one again, and just prove I can go back to band class and, and play my instruments. And, I'm living this viscerally right now, which is, that debate of like speed versus quality.

The good decision is every month pick, half the things that have to be polished. like the best things on the [00:14:00] planet and half of them don't have to be, and that's where you actually get long-term momentum, which is polish the



things that you want, you know, your customers are gonna go, holy shit, I just use this app, blah, blah, and it's does X, y, z, like amazingly.

And then the other stuff. Like, you know, they're not probably gonna talk to friends a bit, right. So for me, that's the thing of just like every month there's like half I'm doing, I'm gonna rush it, and then half I'm not. the question to you and these founders then is like, what's in each bucket? Not pick one bucket, like, that'd be stupid, but what's in each bucket?

how do you know that every month and how do you readjust that every month?

**Harry Stebbings:** Are there things that should be always in one bucket versus another? So like, should security always be in the, like, spend time on it, bucket should, whatever that may be, payments, but whatever the, are there certain elements where you're like, you can't shortcut it?

**Jean Michel:** Yes, absolutely. So I'd say, like for me in my, in my current startup, I was like, I'd love to build a multimillion dollar business with the least amount of people possible. So I was like, how do I do that?

there's obviously some technical foundations we have to put in place so that. You know, I'm not woken up at night or I, I don't have to [00:15:00] hire a bunch of people. Like, so we, I did spend a bit of time getting some of that in place, obviously. and then I'd say the designers we work with, like I've got this designer was really good.

And I think that honestly it's a weekly debate on what we do now.

but I think one of the ways you get speed and quality is by time capping things and then deciding as a team again, what has to be polished, what doesn't have to be. And I think it, it's thrown my team for a loop a bit, which is I just don't want to talk about that much.

That doesn't matter. And no one does that, everyone, everyone's way too polite. Everyone's wants to talk about stuff that's gonna happen in the future. I'm like, either it's shipping this week. Or we're gonna discuss a direction of something that we, you know, we have to exchange some ideas.

But it's time kept, and I think that's given us a huge amount of speed, but it's been very culturally jarring for people.

**Harry Stebbings:** How do you measure progress, and how do you approach goal setting to assure input aligns to output achieved?

**Jean Michel:** I just look at code too. how much do we ship? code talks and bullshit walks, which is I see where we're shipping, Is it good? you see we shipped this stuff this week. and it's not, are we doing more than last week? Is this, we have a consistent hum of we ship [00:16:00] this kind of stuff, right? Every week and it ebbs and flows, but over time I'm like, if we can keep that cadence up, I'm, I'm kind of happy, right? And I literally just look at the PRS and the code that we ship and how much time we spend on that.

that's literally all the progress. And I, that's the exact same measure I had at Shopify, by the way. it's not different, there's no magic thing. I'm like, I was like, what are we shipping? and, and then you have to look at, there's, there's things that you ship that are different, right?

There's some things that are one line of code. There's, there could be some magic in one line of code. So it's not necessarily like number of lines of code, but it's just, you see this velocity happening in, things shipping. And you just, you, you get, there's this like humming in a company of shipping.

when you see that happening, and it's not a hum of meetings, it's not a hum of, we're talking about stuff, but it's like after all that filtering, if you discuss, you've aligned is like, can you keep shipping stuff for me is like the ultimate measure.

**Harry Stebbings:** It's a very direct approach with no fluff, and it makes me think to one of your tweets, which I loved. You said, I've retired from software process, no, scrum, dds, TDD, standups a load of other things. Instead, we just build and run software together. [00:17:00] Software teams are built on process, as you know. Why is that wrong?

Why are you issuing that? Can you just talk to me about why you don't need it now?

**Jean Michel:** Yeah. And as, as you can tell as we're talking, I'm, I'm probably overly maniacal about, Waste, maybe put it that way. and I've been pulled into the whole, there's a process that's gonna make me better, there's a way I should be working that's gonna be better, that's gonna bring something outta me.

And a lot of this came out of like some of the last years at Shopify, you know, as I was, programming the organization and trying to get the most out of people

is, we put process in play. Like you put process in place 'cause you got people and some of it's there.

But what I realized is, is at the end of the day, which just really mattered, was. Like a couple of people making some really good decisions and, and us writing code and, and, and getting it's almost like your architecture is your strategy. So I was like, why don't we spend more time talking about that versus who's doing what and are we have, do we have story points?

And one really, really good example is I, I believe that one of the things that slows teams down the most is what I call time horizon friction, so if you think about [00:18:00] slowing down it's physics, right? Like there's some friction in place that's gonna slow you down. So I call it time horizon friction.

time horizon friction is caused by, a lot of process. And that process is you have a lot of people who want to. Put plans in place and, and, and they feel comfort. You, you talked about how do you get comfort in progress is some people get comfort in planning progress. They go, man, we're freaking nailing it.

Like, we've got plans for these 10 things and we've got, I've got a good roadmap you know, I've got people that are really excited about, we're building next. I, I was realizing, like, I was like, Shopify's slowing down in these places. And then you, I do an audit of like, of things and we're like, we've got, you know, we have planning process, we have, we have to write briefs, we've gotta get roadmaps aligned.

And I was like, holy shit. and you know, what happens then is you end up having more meetings about work that you're not doing yet than you are doing the actual work. So, so I call it time horizon friction because you're planning the future and you're not building the present. And think about an organization and, and I'm sure people listening, you've all lived this is, you have a lot of people who [00:19:00] can't write code in a company.

But they're gonna see progress as having plans. So they're gonna have plans, but the only way to have plans is you have to talk to people writing code. ' cause you're gonna put a plan together and you go, can we do this? How long is it gonna take? So you end up having meetings with people doing the planning to help you do the planning with the people who are doing the building.

You see that? so you end up having this bottleneck of, way too much planning happening for the actual output of building. And you can't plan without the builders. So at some point I was like, what if we just cut out this planning

process has to be completely thrown out. And I bet most companies completely like Overplan a hundred x.

I'm not saying you don't plan, I'm saying you should just plan enough I'm swinging the pendulum personally now because I believe there's, a model Of progress and shipping things that you can take a lot of cruft out. And I'm in this experiment now of taking as much cruft as I can out and building and time capping.

And I am absolutely loving it. I've never felt as productive. I feel like we're getting so much shit done. And um, and that's why I tweeted

**Harry Stebbings:** what does yours look like today? Then just build [00:20:00] in silence on your own and ship.

**Jean Michel:** No, no. It's, it's super easy. It's like we just said, where do we wanna be in three years? you need to chat about that. Like, like what are we about? Okay. What are we, what are we about? What are we not about? Cool. we realign it every quarter, whatever, like, cool. And we're like, what are we doing next in the next month?

Cool. So I literally, I go into linear. I, we write, we have a meeting, we write, what are we doing next, next month. Cool. And we have one, a one hour meeting a week on. Who stuck. That's it. That's literally all we do. And we ship and, and you write code, like you just, you write your product, we ship it, we run, builds like all the other shit.

Like but you'd be surprised at the, like, it makes everyone on my team very uncomfortable we've all been, think, indoctrinated into planning reduces risk, and I think shipping reduces risk. So as a company, your job is to reduce the most risk possible and I just really believe shipping does that

**Harry Stebbings:**

Is there a scale of company size where this process or lack of process no longer is possible?

**Jean Michel:** I believe Toby at Shopify is implementing this exact same thing. I think we're doing it in parallel universes, and we will have beer every summer and compare notes. But I, I, I strongly believe that [00:21:00] some of the shift that Toby and and Harley have been making it at Shopify to get towards this.

Now, I'm not saying a align, alignment's not important. you have to be aligned like a, a 1% difference in trajectory between the earth and the sun. 1% puts you 1.2 million miles away from the sun. So, people can drift and teams can drift, so the question is how do you align?

there's a million ways of doing that, that are very ineffective in some ways, that are way more effective at aligning.

**Harry Stebbings:** Is there anything you think that Toby has to do differently in the way that he's creating this structure compared to how you do it in the way that you are creating your structure?

**Jean Michel:** I think it's based on, similar principles,

What's really interesting is I think, I think Toby and I both understand that there's some sociologic things not in the way, but that we're conditioned to, right?

So just think about what it was like in school for you, You go, you're given an assignment, you take the assignment and your job's to go away and get an a plus on the assignment, And not only that, you're not even allowed to talk to, you can't even talk to people. You can't even like get help on that assignment.

Like, it's crazy. So you've, we've got like 21 years [00:22:00] indoctrinated and getting a homework assignment going away and coming back, and then we're like, we throw you into the workforce. And we're like, by the way, now your job is to cheat as much as you can. I'm gonna give you assignment and you could cheat.

You better cheat, right? You better be looking at shortcuts, trying to find other ways of doing it and, and, and cheating, right? And, I think as we're building companies, it's getting people in the mode of like. these aren't homework assignments where you, you get it perfect and you go, wait, you've gotta cheat, right?

You've gotta build prototypes, you've gotta look at other people. You gotta get feedback. You've gotta put it in the wild and see if it doesn't break right away. There's, there's like so many things that we've gotta do when we actually build things in the real world and real companies we've gotta unprogrammed from all these people who are in school doing homework assignments and trying to get an a plus and not cheating.

So, you know, that's something that we've gotta really, almost beat out of people in our education system to get people to actually build things. And especially like, you know, technically and engineering and product of, just like, that, that rhythm of building things I, I think is, is different.

And that's why I'm, I think swinging the pendulum here is, is really interesting. And just, get kids to like, let's write the code, let's build it. How do you know it's gonna work? And, and, and I think we're gonna get [00:23:00] velocity out of doing that versus just talking about things,

**Harry Stebbings:** with less process people, monitoring becomes difficult. You hire someone and you don't know, first three months you are getting to know each other. But with less process, is it not harder to understand new team member quality than before?

**Jean Michel:** I think it's easier you know,

the only thing we should judge ourselves by is, is that output that people are gonna see, right? Like, our customers never see the sausage factory of how many meetings we have and what process we use. They're only gonna see the output. So let's evaluate ourself on, how good we see the output.

And when I do performance review for, for executives and managers that work for me, like the first question I ask is, cool, what did your team ship? can you just rank for me, what was good versus what was great? I want their opinion. that's a really good way.

Like, I need everyone in the company to like understand what we're shipping, how do you, how do we build some, shared understanding of what great is and what good is. I wanna see an organization where we have the most amount of people possible asking themselves that question. you need everyone in the company who has that internal barometer of like, [00:24:00] looking at things that we're shipping and going, like, how would I know if that was great? Like, how would I know if that email I sent to the customer was great? like you should know that, right?

You should. So when you're writing it then, and you should be building it and getting better all the time. And I think if you build an organ organization where you don't reward yourself by what process you use, but you reward yourself by a shared understanding of what great looks like and, and building towards that.

I think that's, I think that's how you get better.

**Harry Stebbings:** I'm thinking to something that you've actually said before, though, when it comes to people and talent management, which is the worst advice, is hire great people and get out of the way. I've always believed that, and so can you help me understand why is that such bad advice?

**Jean Michel:** the context here is, everyone's heard of that phrase, it must be written in like a bazillion Harvard management books, right? Like, hire great people and get outta their way. you know, like, and I believed it. I was like, holy shit. Like that makes so much sense, right?

Because everyone's love loves autonomy, just give people autonomy. And what I realized building companies is. If you're trying to get a bunch of people together and have a shared understanding of what great looks like, it's messy. Like there's no way you do that by [00:25:00] letting people go in their own direction, right?

Like the Steve Jobs analogy, there's a rock Tumblr that you're gonna be in together to figure out how you're gonna polish things, how you get a shared alignment. So, so for me, you know, hiring great people in get other way is like, assuming that everyone is magically gonna have the same understanding of the world, is magically gonna have the same quality bar, is magically gonna be aligned on how they do things, like, is impossible to happen, right?

So, it's not only do I think it's a bad, I've seen the biggest train wrecks in companies happen because bosses do that, or VPs or CEOs. They hire people and they let them run. And, and my thesis here is why it's, it's, it's absolutely it. Terrible is. And, and why I'm very strongly saying that is because I think people believe it's really good.

And the second thing is the only way you get, you get that level of autonomy is when you actually, align on a lot of things together. So I'll give you a really concrete example. when I would onboard new VPs that would work for me, I would very clearly say, and this is I'm not smart, I just, I learned this over many, many years, is I would go, listen, we're gonna spend a lot of time together.

We're gonna spend time together. [00:26:00] Like we were pair programming like we used to do when we were, programming all day. We're gonna pair program on leadership. And the reason we're gonna peer program is it is as complex as programming. Like there's typos, there's bugs. It's, it's hard. And the only way we can get to know each other is we're gonna have to peer program on leadership.



And the way we do that is, there's a couple of things that I've, I've noticed in the org that I really want you to ship. there's three things in the next six months that, listen, I'm gonna make it easy. There's, you don't have to find these, there's three things we have to ship that I'd like you to, to lead.

And I'd like you during that time, I'd like you to find three other things that we should do that are really important. and then what's really cool is we're like, I'm not going, here's exactly all the things you're gonna do for the next year. I'm just, I'm, I'm helping the, the kind of, the onboarding.

I'm like, let's get, let's get aligned on, on how you ship things. So I'd go, for example, like, really great guy, his name's Farhan. I think he runs engineering at Shopify now. I hired Farhan. he's almost too smart. He knows, he's looking at everything and I'm like, I'm like, dude, Farhan, I know you have all these ideas.

Here's three things we're gonna do. We have to become, we want to become. the best company for React native on the [00:27:00] planet. We're making a bet on React Native. And I need you to publish a blog post and do some research on what we're doing internally in React Native. I'd love you to lead the mobile team to get us reoriented around, react native and come up with, We're redoing POS, blah blah blah. Cool. Those three things. and then cool. I'm like, can I review your blog post? And then we probably went back and forth on it five, six times together and I was like, cool. I was like, Hey, I'd say that differently. Why? Oh, that's super interesting. We got to know each other in this super fun way, just shipping stuff together.

Right. And instead of talking about it, I was like, can you write that thing? Let's, let's. Oh, I, I, I hadn't thought about doing it. That, that's really smart. That's cool. I learned something from Farhan and then the flip side, he is like, oh, Jean Micha, I didn't see things that way. Right? So we got into this, like pairing mode of really getting to know each other.

And then by year two and three, I'm like, Farhan, what do you wanna work out? Like, we kind of know each other at that point. Right? But that's very different onboarding and very different philosophy than I think a lot of companies they feel that any, any premise of command and control is like, is is like, a, a religious full pa now, right?

Like if you, if you don't like, pray to the autonomy, [00:28:00] pulpit and church, you're almost burnt at the stake these days, right? Like, what do you mean autonomy? Everyone wants autonomy. I, I swing the pendulum. I think that, You've gotta have a lot of high alignment. And I don't, you don't do

alignment by meetings necessarily, like alignment's, not this, we have to talk all the time.

Alignment is like sending your boss a slack message every day going, Hey, here's two decisions that I saw. I did A, B, C. What do you think? Bam. Okay, cool. That's cool. Let's, let's align on decisions. Let's align on, what did you see? And what do I think like, like that you can do these micro alignments all the time that are, that are really amazing.

You know, to the point where we would hire new executives at Shopify. At Atlassian, and one of the questions I'd ask after, you know, this new CFO or the C new CMO had been onboarded for three months, I'd go, Hey, how often do you talk to our CEO? And they'd go, well, well, we have our one-on-ones every week. I'm like, oh, wow, that's not a lot. And they'd be like, what do you mean it's not a lot? I was like, well, I, I, I do at least one slack a day. And they're like, what do you mean? Like, I don't want to bother them. What do you mean? You mean bother the CEO e Like, I was like, let me tell you something.

The, the only thing on the CEO's mind [00:29:00] right now is everyone running off in different directions and not being able to kind of understand what kind of decisions we're making. So I'm like, I share a decision every day with the CEO E by Slack or by email, like depending, and like I'll, and I'm like, they don't have to respond to me.

I'm just doing these micro alignments of like, Hey, I saw this thing, what do you think? Or, Hey, do you see this demo that's cool. Or I was like, Hey, I need a hand hand with this. So I'm like, I'm such a fan of like these micro alignments that you've gotta build into your habits. And I feel that if you,

um,

**Harry Stebbings:** Sean, Michelle, I, you know, I manage now lots of people across media companies, across funds. I don't want that. I, I honestly, if I have no, I respectfully, I trust you. That's why I have you as a team member who I respect immensely. I'm full trust battery. I think Toby says the trust battery.

**Jean Michel:** I'm up here. I hired you. I pay you really well. Do not send me a message saying you made that decision. Just make the decision and move on. It, it's interesting. I think that the world is so complex why would I build a company where I can't use everyone's brain is always the thing I'm thinking about. Right? So, so it's like, [00:30:00] for me, I'm like, I have to tap into my

boss's brain in the, the most effective way possible, because that'd be stupid to not tap into everyone's brain.

So for me, I see it less as bothering, right. And more as as I need to tap someone's brain.

**Harry Stebbings:** so we have so many operators that listen What can they do to action that very specifically? Do they sit down with their team and say, Hey, I would like a slack every morning with a decision, a update. How can they action this and make that tangible?

**Jean Michel:** it has to be a bit more natural than that. And I think there's a book by Susan Scott where she introduces the decision tree. And the decision tree is basically how you talk to your team about this and you go, Hey, listen, there's roughly three types of decisions that we're all gonna make, right?

There's root decisions, there's trunk decisions, and there's leaf decisions. Root decisions are kind of really important. They're, they might be one way doors, they're hard to undo, right? Trunk decisions are. medium size, and then leafs are, they don't matter, right? So like, let's talk about the roots together don't surprise me, right?

Make [00:31:00] sure that the trunks if you wanna brainstorm, I'm always available for that. Like, I always wanna learn something from you, and maybe I can bring some input and leafs, as you said, don't bug me about that, right? So I think your approach of like, I hired you, big bucks go away, I think, I think is a bit naive in a sense.

And maybe naive is not the, but it's, it's simplistic, right? Where I think building, you know, companies where there's a lot going on, there's a lot of micro decisions to be made that make a difference. like sometimes like we're gonna put the code there versus there sounds like I just trust you versus that's a root decision because that's gonna lead onto a lot of other things.

there's no bad reason in getting a couple of, uh, points of feedback. So that's Susan Scott book and that framework I think is a great way to sit down with your team going, Hey, there's three types of decision we're gonna be making. these ones I care a lot about these ones. I don't, versus I don't care about them all, which is, I think is gonna be a train wreck.

**Harry Stebbings:** Sean Michelle, I like you. You turn questions back on me and then call me naive.

**Jean Michel:** Sorry. I was like, I'm just gonna blame my, uh, English isn't my first language, so can I.

**Harry Stebbings:** No, I think it's fantastic. I love a discussion. God, it's so [00:32:00] boring when everyone says, I agree. Fuck. That's terrible. So, no, wonderful. My question to you is then if we think about, you know, these brilliantly talented people who we want to give us these updates, you gotta get 'em in the door first. You've hired unbelievable teams.

You know, Harley and Scott told me about your hiring abilities and scaling teams. How do you structure the hiring process and what are the stages for you? Because it's really hard to know and do.

**Jean Michel:** Man, hiring's really hard. Three things I think are important. The first thing is, I call it the snowboard test, which is, premise around the snowboard test is I can't get another human to do something they don't really naturally want to do.

Right. So I'm like, just generally, like with my kids and my dog and cat, like, if they don't wanna do something, like it's not gonna happen. So the snowboard test is, it's the way that you find out if someone is a left is goofy or not goofy on a snowboard, right? So goofy, depending on what foot you put forward.

So the snowboard test that you push someone from behind without them noticing, and you look at what foot they put forward, that's their natural instinct, right? So I'm always thinking about in an interview process, I'm like, how do I give you [00:33:00] a, a snowboard test where it's completely unbiased, but I learn the most about what drives you?

so one question for that would be, I was like, listen, I'm, I'm interviewing, you know, some exec role or something, or someone senior, and I'm like, listen, you know, their question would be, tell me about the job. I'm like, listen, let, let's not get into that right away. I'm like, you kind of know what, what we do as a company.

I, I assume you've done a bit of research. I've got so many jobs, jobs open. You could do anything here. What's your dream job at Atlassian, at Shopify? What is it? talk to me about why that is for 10 minutes? Right. So, so that question for me is like the ultimate snowboard test.

I want to know what people care about the most, like viscerally care about, because that's when you're not talking together. When you're not with them,

that's exactly what they're gonna do. that's step one. And you get to know, and often I'm hiring for X and I'm like, oh shit, their instincts are always on y And then you have a decision, you're like, well, can they do X? And you need Y or just, like, you'll see that and, and you know, typically, for example, I'll see instincts on like I really care about the culture and like, cool, I really care about the process. I really care about the people. I really care about the tech.

I really, I really wanna do this. And, and so that, [00:34:00] that, first alignment that you have with whoever you're interviewing, for me, that snowboard test is, is great. It's super over open-ended like, but it, it works really well. Like you get to know kind of viscerally what people wanna work on. So that's step one.

**Harry Stebbings:** I'm gonna, I'm gonna pep you with questions afterwards. I'm gonna let you go through these steps 'cause this is too good. Step two.

**Jean Michel:** Okay, so step one is, is you kind of know what their, instincts are, what they really like to do. step two is, I wanna know How are you gonna do X? So then I'm, and like, show me how you've done X in the past.

So there, I'm basically, I want them to go into teacher mode to me, which is cool. You wanna do X? can you entertain me and teach me something about X for the next? Hour, you know, so I'll, I'll, I'll just geek out for an hour, like, talk about X.

Like, oh, I'd love to, you know, build a system that could do this and that. I'm like, cool, like how would you start, and how would have you done this before? What do you do? Like, then I'm trying to figure out layers, Because I think, I think great skills for any human is a, a deep appreciation of all the layers that come into problem solving, right?

So like. Someone wants to be a great, like I'd love to build a team. And I'm like, cool. Like, do you know psychology? Have you read any books on human [00:35:00] motivation? Like how do you do that? Like, I want to understand someone's playbook in terms of what, what depth they have in that area. I gave 'em the snowboard test.

They told me they like it. Cool. Like, how much do you really like that? And I went, I want to know someone's depth. And again, there's no right or wrong answer here. It's just, discovering like what someone like, do you even like the conversation? Is it fun? Do you, like, I hope after talking to someone about the thing that they really love, that you come away with that come away outta that chat, super energize and maybe learn one or two things.

Like, that's great. I wanna work with people like that. Right. So that's step two for me is, is that kind of deep dive understanding depth,

**Harry Stebbings:** Go step three. Sorry, I'm writing down so I don't forget. This is how you do it when you're a true projo, Michelle. I'm like,

**Jean Michel:** what you've got writing on your hand.

**Harry Stebbings:** Yeah. Yeah. Because I don't wanna forget my points, but I want you to finish the three step process first. So, uh, please step three and then we'll go in.

**Jean Michel:** Yeah. So, you know, step three then is, is gonna be obviously like talking about, okay, well here's kind of what the job is. I'd like to understand how they, how they, they'd approach that, what they've done in the past. And I, I love this one question, which is, what's the hardest thing you've built [00:36:00] before?

**Harry Stebbings:** Why do you love that question so much? And what do the best answers elicit or show?

' cause I wanna know if someone's got a, like an internal quality bar, again, I wanna know what, like what they would put on their life's trophy of what they're proud of, you know? And it both gives me an idea of like, their level of, difficulty, you know, because you've got this job and you're like, I think it's a difficulty 9.5.

**Jean Michel:** And then they give you, oh, the hardest thing I did was X. I'm like, Ooh, that's a 7.2. I was like, okay, well I think they can stretch, right? Like, are they gonna be able to stretch that? That's, that's cool. But, and then, and then, and then that leads you down a lot of things of going, well, why do you think it was hard?

Have you seen other people who are doing this? What do you, what do you like? It just, I just want to get to know someone about what they built. Like, there's so many twists and turns around just asking someone what they've built and, and, how proud they're about it.

So that's, kind of the three questions. And then I, I, for someone senior, I'll, I'll have 'em have lunch with other folks. I think it's important that, like, can they get. Other people to,

**Harry Stebbings:** do you care if they've had experience in the industry? Oh, well, you know, you've, you've got experience building developer tools before, [00:37:00] ah, you've got experience in, you know, e-commerce and fulfillment or whatever may be the kinda chosen field. Do you care about experience or do you go No, it doesn't matter.

**Jean Michel:** I'd say generally not. I think the, those three step process for questioning is really about getting to know that human you're putting humans on like a, a growth trajectory of things and matching that with what your company is.

Now there are some, you know, you're building a logistics company, like it'd be good to someone who's been in a warehouse before. Like there is some advantage of doing that. But I'd say there's, There's a lot of people you can just throw into the deep end, into, into anything, and they're gonna learn it.

Right. I, I, I want people who can grow quickly and people who can, understand that problems are multilayered and see that and fix it. I think that's more important. I,

**Harry Stebbings:** What do you think are the biggest mistakes that founders make when you review those three steps? And then you look at how founders hire for product and engineering today?

**Jean Michel:** like they're in that order. The top one is a snowboard desk. Like, I don't know how many times I've done it. Like, you know, I'm on the interview panel, I'm like. My feedback is, I don't think they want to do this job. they maybe want the money or the prestige, but I [00:38:00] don't think like deep down they're gonna do what we think we, you want 'em to do.

Like, what do you mean? And it happens a lot, right? So I think the, like, the alignment on what people want in their life is a big one. Because I think if you, and if you fake one, it, like, it's, you get like a 70% real person, but not like, full on. And I think the second one is, I think someone who doesn't have the depth, because again, like, we're building multi-billion dollar companies where everything's hard and it's like eating glass.

Like it's, it's hard, right? That it need someone who, has like the, the ability to like see and address things at every layer of your company, right? From, from the code to the emotions and seeing that like you're basically hiring people who are, full stacked debuggers of, of things.



And I think, people don't interview. Like, they're like, they're really, really good at like these two layers or they're really, really good. And, and it, it's not that you have to be good at all of them and there's no perfect people, but actually out of the interview process, knowing that going, I actually think they're really good here versus there.

Like, versus people just getting so in love with, like, we spent three hours talking about this one layer of, of things, right? I'm like, yeah, [00:39:00] but when you throw 'em in this thing, there's other, other things you're gonna have to see at least know that before you, you say yes to the hiring process. So for me that those are kind of the two, um, two biggest mistakes I've seen,

**Harry Stebbings:** What's been your biggest hiring mistakes personally, where you're like, oh, I can't believe I did that and you would've done something different? In

**Jean Michel:** dude, I've done it so often. Like for me it's always when I'm rushed, it's always when I'm rushed. I tell you what, you're rushed a lot when companies are going gang gangbusters, right? Or you have, you've got pain. So I've. So one of the things I've tried to do to remove the rush

**Harry Stebbings:** before we go into that, why does it happen when you are rushed? 'cause you skip parts of the process because

**Jean Michel:** I, I skip, I, I don't, I don't do my three steps properly all the time. I get rushed. Right. And, and for me, like to get to know someone, like it takes a while, when I talk about the snowboard test, like it's not one chat, it's a couple. And then I, like, I, I do really want to dig that. It's, it's, I, I'll, I'll skip it and I'll like, ah, shit, I saw that.

So what I do to not rush hiring now is, when someone leaves, I try to take the monkey off my back and I, I always felt a huge amount of responsibility that when someone left on my team, especially a [00:40:00] manager that I was like, I told their team, I've got it. Don't worry, I'll hire someone new. You know, they were always like, there's always a bit of unknowns and people don't like that.

And at some point, either it's 'cause I got older, I didn't give a shit, or I just was in so much pain that I, I remember sitting a team in a room once and their, their manager had left their vp, whatever, and I was like, you guys are all adults. you all are doing great work. Keep it up. What can I do to help?

I have no idea if it's gonna take me one week or six months to hire a replacement, but what are we shipping in the next six months that I can help with? like everyone got super pumped about it. I just brought it back to like, what are we, what are we here for again? Right?

you guys are all adults, right? You can drink, you can vote, you have kids, all that shit. Like what, what are we shipping together? And I always bring it back to customers, like, what do our customers need from us right now? It did not change, Yesterday, that person was there.

Now they're not there. Nothing. Nothing's changed, but what we have to ship, how can I help do that? Right? And they go, oh, well maybe we should do this and that. I was like, cool. Yes, no, that, let's do some stuff. Sounds good. And then I would also, I'd go, listen, let's get ready that we might have not have someone in here for six months.

So I took that stress off me. I [00:41:00] was like, I wanna take some of my time a bit. The second thing that happened is Everyone just steps up. they, they get jazzed about what we're doing, right? They're here like, they're still getting jazzed about doing this. And they get, they get jazzed about, just I see their face light up when we start talking about what we're, what they're shipping and what they're working on.

And, um, I think that connects me with them, gives me a bit of time. And then I think I make higher better, at least personally, I make better hiring decisions when I get a bit of time to, to get to know people better.

**Harry Stebbings:** Founders always say, I get it. I get it, but I need to hire now. I've, I've got X, I've got YI need to hire now. What do you say to them and to people who say, Hey, a good hire today is better than a perfect one in six months time?

**Jean Michel:** the right answer is Buy yourself some time. one of the favorite books that I've, I've read about leadership is, um, I think it's called How to Negotiate Like Your Life Depends On It. in the first chapter?

I tell my kids about this 'cause it, it, it taught me so much of just, you know, someone, someone, has your kid as a hostage, they want a million bucks and you're on the phone with them and the first thing you do is you've got a monkey on your back.

'cause the hostage negotiator says, I need a million bucks tomorrow. And you're like, you have all these things you can [00:42:00] say, and they're like, the, the, the thing you should do is just buy yourself some time. So you throw the question back and you go, how do I get a million bucks in a day? Like, that's a lot.

And then the hostage negotiator has to think about that. Like, oh yeah, that's a lot. Okay, I give you a week. Right? So that's, I just remember that's the first example, which is buy yourself some time all the time. Right? So, so how do you buy yourself some time in a company as a, as a manager, as an exec, I'm like, take some monkeys off your back and get some people involved.

Like, you know, like for me, getting people in the room and going, Hey, that VP's not here anymore. Cool. But we still have customers. Let's keep going, is buying some time and get people, let's get refocus on, on what we're here to do. That's buying time's important. Now, this flip side of, Hey, we've got all these companies, and I'm sure as VCs and investors we're like, you have to hire great talent.

Absolutely. So the other thing that I thought was really important was like, if I did not talk to a candidate every week, and I don't even call 'em candidate if I did not talk to someone that I'd love to work with every week. As part of like my ongoing networking, I was not doing my job, right?

So I, I had this buzz flow of like, let's just talk to interesting people all the time. Like I'd [00:43:00] ping, you know, c like CTO of Microsoft. Like, Hey, Kevin Scott. Like, I'd love to talk to you about some things that I'm, you know, like, cool, let's have a chat. Or I'd or I'd talk to some, I'd see some really good blog posts.

I'd talk to people, right? So I think as a, as a leader, the, like, there's no hiring process where you just started and stop it. It's always, always going. So I think a lot of the, the CEOs that I work with in some of the smaller companies, I'm just always asking 'em like, have you talked to one person a week that at some point you want to, you want to work with?

And then what happens if you do that one year, two years, three years, four years? You'll realize that when it's time you're just gonna know so many people that you wanna work with, that one is like, it's gonna be super amazing. And then you can start to figure out when you have time, you can look at your Rolodex and you go, cool, let me go back to talk to those three people and figure out where they're at.

And so you end up basically having an ongoing. Continuous networking of cool people that you wanna learn from, that you can hire from. And then you buy yourself some time internally by just realizing, let's just not negotiate against myself and not be rushed. And for me, those, those two things have been, have been magical.

**Harry Stebbings:** It is interesting that we're talking about this adding to the [00:44:00] team because the thing that is so core to you is doing so much with, with little, and actually the benefits of smaller teams, and we see everywhere, all over social. AI will create the rise of, billion dollar companies with one person, whatever we want to call as that, you know, headline, grabber. I know it's a really shitty question, so forgive me for it, but how do you think about the future of code and the future of product when so much can be done with such little teams?

**Jean Michel:** I absolutely love where we're at with, AI and coding because it brings me back to 1988 when I, I told our band leader that we didn't need the band to do a musical, so. I've seen this playbook happen. 30 some years ago where I fired the band to do some music? I've seen the power of like the computer's, your, your, it's your copilot for doing things right.

And I, right now, I, I literally feel giddy and excited about programming ' cause I've got a copilot in my IDE and, and I think it'd be crazy not to use those tools, right? Like there's no musician now to not have a computer in the music studio, I think we're just catching up [00:45:00] now with a bunch of other trades where it's gonna help us.

And, and the way it helps me personally is, you know, it writes 80% of my code. It doesn't write my architecture, but it it, the programming AI tools. Now let me work on the hard stuff, which is phenomenal and that's gonna keep going. And you know what's gonna happen is we have a lot more software to write.

And that's what people don't realize. Like, is there jobs and software development? Holy shit, like healthcare, agriculture. et cetera, like educate, like all these places that need technology have been completely underinvested. We've gotta distributor programmers more than we have before and I think AI's gonna make that completely more possible.

And I've never been as excited about, being a programmer and a developer.

**Harry Stebbings:** What's been the single biggest game changer in the last two years? For you writing code

**Jean Michel:** I think having the AI copilot that I talk to nonstop, it's blown my mind.

**Harry Stebbings:** does 80% of what you do, how far does it go up? Is there a point when it just becomes 99%?

**Jean Michel:** That's a good que I'm not sure. It's kinda like music, right? In the music studio. It would, gimme my tempo. I can do a lot of tweaking with sounds. I can invent [00:46:00] new sounds, but. I've got to tune in my head, that's kind of where we're, we're gonna be at with, with computers.

**Harry Stebbings:** do you think teams get incredibly smaller? Do they just ship more, ship faster? How does that

**Jean Michel:** I think teams are gonna get, I honestly, I love it. I, I think companies are gonna un bloat and we're gonna distribute programmers, we've got a global, you know, lack of procreation happening. We're gonna have less and less people who can, who can build technology where we need it. Like we need more efficiencies in agriculture and healthcare, in education, in renewable energy.

Like, I think we're gonna distribute these programmers that we're making tweets boost on Twitter and Facebook, and we're gonna distribute to more. 'cause we're, we are gonna need less. But I tell you, I think the pie is gonna grow in terms of the kinds of problems we can throw technologists to. And I think that's, that's kind of what's gonna happen.

**Harry Stebbings:** I'm just freewheeling here, but I'm enjoying this too much. I look forward and I, for the first time, I'm like uncertain of where to place bats because the size, speed, and cash flow capabilities of incumbents is so strong. That I don't think we've ever seen an incumbent set so [00:47:00] strong and move so fast before.

They've always been laggards. They haven't had advantages. They're fucking brilliant. Now, Adobe, Microsoft, Nvidia moving faster than ever. How do you think about this and am I right to be worried as an investor looking to invest in innovation?

**Jean Michel:** I mean is if you go back in the past, is there a time where there hasn't been the five incumbents that scare the crap out of you?

**Harry Stebbings:** Uh, no. You are always scared by the incumbents, by nature, but they don't have the inherent capabilities and speed that they do today. They don't have the data advantages which ties their products together so strongly. They don't have the cash flow capabilities of Microsoft doing \$350 million a day in free cash flow, and they don't move as fast as they do today with people like Scott Belsky dominating at the helm of Adobe.

They scare me more than NAIA did in 2007. Yeah.

**Jean Michel:** Yeah, maybe I'm, uh, and this is where I think, you and I spend time in different places.

so I'm more, I look at things more as opportunities to build new things and I've never seen as many. Right. And I, I always get frustrated. I go to every government's website, like, actually, you know what the [00:48:00] coolest thing to build right now?

And this is where maybe from a vc, we might be at a point where we're actually building human infrastructure a lot more now. Right? Which maybe the VC model might be busted. But you know, what I need is a comp. I need a country operating system. I bet you like if someone could come up with a country operating system is probably the next biggest mul planet.

Well be the richest company on the planet is a company operating system, which is how do you run a country right now? Like how do you run a country like website taxes, bot, like all that stuff. Like we are being It's crazy how much crap software and technology we have out there. So, so for me, that's opportunity.

You're seeing, how do we make money out of it? I kind of don't care. I just think I want to make, you know, everything we touch, better, right? Better customer experience, better product experience. So if I look at an opportunity, I'd love a company to build a country operating system,

**Harry Stebbings:** Request for startups. My other big question is, you

**Jean Michel:** but it's not, it's, it's like, but, but how, how do you think about that? Right? Like, we might be at a point where we need more infrastructure than ever. Like we build, we've been building startups and things here and there, but how do we, like, how do we do the rest, right? Like, how do I electrify our [00:49:00] roads? How do we do, better intake system in hospitals, data sharing.

I, I see a lot of opportunity there.

**Harry Stebbings:** I think that's what you're seeing with the shift to hard tech investing, which, is I think probably an embodiment of that in funding

**Jean Michel:** So, is that a word? Do you guys use that? Hard tech.

**Harry Stebbings:** Hard tech. It is

exactly as you said, like electric, electrification of transport, roads, improvements in hospital facilities and everything. I, hard physical infrastructure in many ways within countries.

but honestly, I, I fear that this is a different ball game. having software investors invest in hard tech is a very different game.

It is.

like you wouldn't have your sales team write code it's the same thing. It's a very different mindset. So I think a lot of people will get burnt there. But I agree with you in terms of the excitement around it.

One thing that I'm always just really troubled by honesty is I've missed investing in a lot of the foundational model companies, always believing that there would be just a layer of commoditization there. Do you agree that the foundational model there will be commoditized? Or do you think, how do you see that playing out?

**Jean Michel:** I think they are like, obviously it's harder to build a, [00:50:00] like almost a platform company. I. you're building a foundational layer of the thing, right? The internet, hospitals, et cetera, it's actually a lot harder. and you've got two exits, right? Someone's gonna buy you because you're gonna build the layer and they someone else wants it.

or it's gonna take you 20 years before you, you scale. But for me, I see it de-risk. 'cause I, I do s I've been on the buying side of being in a bigger company, going, that small company really, they push that platform in a cool little direction. Let's, let's acquire them.

So I, I see some, there's always two exits for platform companies that I think is, is useful to think about right as you start looking at, at, at, at risks. And, it's



harder, but I think, don't we, that's hard tech. We have to get better at doing harder things, so.

**Harry Stebbings:** Final question before you do a quickfire, but I'm really interested by this one. Sorry, I'm going back to it. We were talking about scaling teams earlier and you talked about trajectory and growth. What are the reasons that great product teams and engineering teams go average? Why does that happen and how do you think about that?

**Jean Michel:** Wow, that is such an interesting question. How do you, how does every, every team get pulled down and, and not do to the best of their [00:51:00] ability? I think the, one of the hard things about teams in building companies is it's really hard to pace yourself. You know, it's kinda like you're running a marathon, you know, like, I dunno if you've done any half marathons, like there's always a Pace Bunny,

**Harry Stebbings:** I run a marathon a weekend and have done for two, a year and a half.

**Jean Michel:** Well, there you go. Okay. So, you know all about the Pace Bunny. There's, it's really hard to have a Pace Bunny for a company in the team, right.

I'm a big fan of Pace Bun myself. I'm like, as a leader of a company, you should always be looking for your Pace Bunny. So looking at what other people are shipping, looking at velocity of other teams. And, a lot of the people that I talk to where I'm like, I'm building my hiring pipeline or I'm learning something, I'm always going outside to like, you know, CTO at Spotify.

I'm like, Hey, can you talk about how you do info doing this? And did you talk about your last couple of incidents? What were they, you know, like always trying to like pace myself. I'm like, and often, you know, I'd be really hard on myself. I'd go, oh, actually we're all doing this shitty thing. And then sometimes I'd be embarrassed going, oh my God, we can be so much better.

So I think, uh, a really good tool for, for I think leaders is build a pace bunny process of some [00:52:00] sort where you can talk to enough people where you, build kind of an internal model of, of what great looks like, and then you bring that to your team and then you can, obviously, making sure you're surrounded by people who care about that.

But

**Harry Stebbings:** What's been the hardest thing about zero to one with the new company? You know, I think it's, so maybe you'll tell me I'm wrong, but I think it's so different, you know, moving from the you know, scale that you were at with Atlassian and Shopify to zero to one, it's a completely different game. What was the hardest or most surprising element about that transition?

**Jean Michel:** I think that a lot of it's the same. I think the hardest part was it is a bit more lonely

there's two of us and we're grinding and grinding and, there's a lot of friends at Shopify and people I could shoot the shit with and people who were in the same bucket.

And I felt it was a bit lonely and, and it was a, a year grind that if you see some of my tweets I had, I had some pretty, pretty low lows and pretty high highs and I'd forgot, huge respect for, you know, that first year or so when you're just, you're trying to pull the pieces together. You're trying to figure out what to build, what not to build.

And,

**Harry Stebbings:** How did you get through those hard times? Like, I've had low lows and high highs, it's part of life, but what's the internal voice that gets you through [00:53:00] them?

**Jean Michel:** my wife just pulls, like she's my counselor and my cheerleader, honestly, like, yeah, she, you know, some people don't bring their work to their, their spouses, but, um, I do a lot and she's my life partner. And, uh, honestly, she's my biggest cheerleader.

**Harry Stebbings:** the fun part about building zero to one two is it did, let me try out a lot of cool companies, new products now that, you know, like you, you read about them on Twitter and you see, but now I'm like actually like, Hey, let me use, you think that your new thing is really cool, let me use it.

**Jean Michel:** So I've met a lot of really good people by just, I'm gonna use your product and I'm gonna give you some feedback. And it's been, it's been fun. Like, I'll give you one example. One of the products that I'm really pumped about now is called equals.com. So get equals.com. they're doing something that's super subtle.

But actually the more you use it, the more you see the value in it. It's kind of like, I'd never invest in this if I didn't. Use it day in, day out and, because I think there's some innovation that comes out that's not deep tech, but that's changing how you use something completely. So, get equals is basically taking the [00:54:00] SQLs and the X sellers.

And giving them a shared data warehouse where they work together.

Zero investment. I'm not getting paid for this. I'm just, I just love using new things. We're like, holy shit, this changes how I work.

**Harry Stebbings:** I do know them. I, I think I saw that first round, but it was some egregious price. 'cause they're out of intercom and I, I mean, they're obviously very talented people, but it was like a 30 or a 35 million start tough price to digest at that stage.

**Jean Michel:** but they're building a hard product. And this is, you know, um, I think to your question, Harry, right about, you know, there's some startups who are solving some really hard problems where it might take 50 million bucks to get a one oh out. Right? And how do we build a VC culture where that's

**Harry Stebbings:** Well, I, actually think that, I think that I, I think there are harder problems, product marketing, as you said there, it kind of takes a couple of unraveling to see the beauty in the product. A lot of people don't have the patience to see it. A lot of people don't have the willingness to spend the time to see it.

and then it's also in a very messy market where a lot of people say, Hey, we'll turn you into a data wizard. Hey, we give you data skills that no one else does. It's a [00:55:00] messy product marketing challenge.

**Jean Michel:** and that's why you're a much better investor than I am. I'm a happy customer and I see how it changed my life, but I have no idea if this is a business or

not.

**Harry Stebbings:** I listen, it is why actually, you know, be an interesting partnership as an investing partnership. 'cause you, you learn from each other. And the question then is like, well, is there viral spread within the loving customers? And what's the net new from each existing? So yes, maybe I should ping Bobby.

**Jean Michel:** Yeah.

And you're right, like customer acquisition is, is hard. I think that's something I learned from Shopify and Atlassian is it's hard. So my, my zero to one, the first thing I did is you know, my co-founders are YouTube celebrities, so I'm like, okay, I've got that, I've got that part nailed so I can go to market quickly.

So

**Harry Stebbings:** what's the price point as well? cause the a CV is important.

**Jean Michel:** yeah, I think they're, they're marketing it as a business tool. So, uh, pricing's kind of, you know, it's not a 4 99 pricing. It's a, it's, it's gonna be the data data layer for your company. And if you're not willing to pay four, nine bucks a month to like, see everything that's happening in your company, like, you're probably not the right tool.

So they're, I think they're positioning themselves as a pro tool. Right?

[00:56:00] Again, is there a ProTool market? I think there's some really good pro tools. You talk about Adobe, right? Some pro tools that have been, uh, been successful, but.

**Harry Stebbings:** I wanna do a quick fire round with you, Jean-Michel. So if we start with,

**Jean Michel:** What's the biggest problem you see CEOs make and what's the fix?

I think CEOs, underestimate go to market a lot. I think you talked about that, like how are they gonna acquire customers and are they gonna be able to create a movement around what they're building? And I see CEOs, think they can do it, but don't realize the grind it's gonna take over year over year.

And I think they see the outcome of companies like Atlassian and Shopify who've been doing it for 15 to 20 years and assume it just happens. But it's, it's daily, daily grind to get people to care about what you care about. That's, there's a saying which I said, no one cares about what you're building.

Like literally no one gives a shit about it as much as you do. And how do you get people to give a shit about it?

**Harry Stebbings:** and it's not something you layer on. I see so many people like, yeah, Harry, I know your, your content or your community or all that. We'll do it after the a. it's not how, it's not like build it, build it when you want to. It's like, no, no, no. This will get you to the [00:57:00] A. tell me what's the biggest mistake founders make when hiring products and engineering teams?

**Jean Michel:** they, they hire too quickly as a result, they don't know what the capacity of their team actually is on paper. So I always wait till things break a couple of times before I add people

**Harry Stebbings:** if you, if you go back to the night before, you know, your first day at Shopify or Atlassian, what do you wish you could call yourself up and tell yourself?

**Jean Michel:** I started on the support team at Shopify. And that was the best thing that I've ever done. And it's the only time I did it. I spent one month and I said, if I can't take customer phone calls for the product that I'm leading and I'm building, I should be fired. So, um, I thought that was one of the best things I've ever did.

I learned so much about the product, I learned about the team, I learned about customers, I turned out to be an expert user of Shopify and I would recommend that everyone starting a new jobs would literally start on the phones.

**Harry Stebbings:** What function has the most tension with engineering.

**Jean Michel:** I think the function has the most tension is the design product and engineering like that triad, right? That tension there,

**Harry Stebbings:** Not [00:58:00] sales. 'cause sales is often the one that's said to, they demand things, they want customer changes, they want blah, blah, blah. That's

**Jean Michel:** okay. That's true. So, so you've got two companies. I think there's some companies that are very sales driven where. Absolutely there's some tension around sales. I think there's a whole hour podcast. We can talk about engineering leaders and how to, how to manage that. it's not remove the tension, but how do you use attention for good and not for bad, right?

Because that's useful. And, you can talk to Harley about this, but one of the things he did well, he, he encouraged is I took over sales at Shopify for a year to remove. So I had 800 people, uh, at Shopify that were in sales, and they

reported the CTO for one year because we had a lot of tension and we had to realign.

we had to decide on, you know, what customers are saying yes to, and no, based on not just what we want money wise, but what we want product market fit wise. And it got me really involved in, in, in helping with that tension, actually accelerating it. Right? One of the things I did is like, I love sales, which is.

Which is like, bring us the right customers at the right [00:59:00] time. And I think one of the biggest problems with misalignment of sales is sales, bringing you the wrong customers at the wrong time. So if you can realign that and then you're like, well, what are the right customers at the right time? Cool, let's talk about that.

And I think that's, that's one of the things that I did for the one year when I was running sales. Um, and Harley was nice enough to hand me the keys for a year and then take them back, but was really realigning on that. And, and you know, for us was deciding, Shopify is gonna be the biggest hype platform on the planet.

We wanna land all the celebrities, we wanna land the biggest, uh, retailers that are having pain points. And we, we kind of listed, you know, and then, you know, we went ahead and, and built for that and we said, we don't wanna land these kind of customers. And we went through and kind of redesigned, you know, who we wanna land focused the roadmaps on, on delighting the ones we wanna land this year.

And,

**Harry Stebbings:** is it a bit of being everything to everyone landing the biggest brands in the world, landing Kim Kardashian Landing X and Y, but then also wanting mom and pop shop who's got a bakery,

**Jean Michel:** absolutely. okay, let's peek into Shopify's product strategy was exactly that, right? So if you [01:00:00] take all the retailers on the planet, right, you organize them maybe as a, a bit more like a triangle, right?

So there's complexity, and there's volume. Okay? Actually, if you, if you draw a line and you don't, you just look at complexity and volume, right? What you realize is that high volume and low volume merchant are often low complexity, oh, holy shit. They've got something in common.

They're low complexity. What does low complexity for retail look like? It's low skew count. Their catalog's not a million things. They've got one, one website, like, so a mom and pop shop and Kardashian have a lot in common.

So what are the differences? Holy shit. Kardashians gonna do 70, 70,000 checkouts a minute. Okay, let's, let's solve that. So that was our sales strategy was like, we found some commonalities in the platform regarding these small merchants and large merchants have an 80% overlap. Let's fix the gap so that the, the, the super, super large ones, don't crash.

We've got highest volume. Go a let's go after Supreme, like supreme again, like a fairly simple business, high volume. Let's solve that. And I'm like, I was like, Hey, I think we have [01:01:00] five years of revenue in this bucket where we've got really good product alignment. Why are you trying to go close like FTD flowers that got the most complicated business on the planet that I'd love to get them, but if I can buy you some time by just getting the right customers at the right time.

We have time to evolve the platform, we have time to do that. So I think that was, for me, was the biggest way of, it wasn't even removing tension, it was just put at the right place. And that once we had that, I was like, why aren't you bringing us more customers? You know? Then I can, I can put the gas on the sales team and, and, and get up their rear end and go, I told you what our product market fit.

I want them all on the planet yesterday. And then they get busy.

**Harry Stebbings:** Sean Michelle. I've loved doing this. This has gone in so many different twists and turns, which is always a sign of a great discussion. I always hate it when you stick to schedule. It's a sign of a crap show. This has been fantastic. Thank you so much for joining me and I've loved doing this.

**Jean Michel:** It was a pleasure. We waited too long and, again, sorry for the 20 million directions, but I, I hope it comes out good. So, thanks Harry.

**Scarlett 2i2 USB-4:** That was such a fantastic discussion. Michelle, Michelle, if you want to see more, you can check it out on YouTube by searching for [01:02:00] VC that's two zero VC to see the full interview in video that, but before we leave each day,



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**Scarlett 2i2 USB-1:** Um, speaking of amazing products like air table there.

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**Scarlett 2i2 USB-5:** As always, I cannot thank you enough for tuning in and check out our show. This coming Friday with the man who's mastered longevity, the one and only Brian Johnson coming on Friday.