

Harry Stebbings: [00:00:00] David, I am so excited for this. So I spoke to Ali years ago and I've heard many great things. So thank you so much for joining me today. I'm

David Meyer: really excited to be here. Well, I

Harry Stebbings: want to start, how did you make your way into the world of product? It's an interesting world. What was your entry point?

David Meyer: So, you know, I'm a civil engineer by training, environmental civil, and then I became a nuclear engineer.

but I ended up at the startup Plumtree Software and first running QA, then running engineering. And this guy that ran product Phil Soffer. And every day I told him how he was doing his job wrong. I was the receiving end, building stuff.

Right? So I just told him this every day. And then one day he decided to move on, to leave Plumtree. And he told the CEO. I had to run product to like, get back at me, right? I didn't want to do it. I was like, my job's too important doing engineering. I can't give that up. But once I got into it, it was incredible.

Harry Stebbings: I've got too many things to ask you. First, on the helpful feedback to your boss, How did you do that in a

David Meyer: productive way? I was pretty young, I wasn't that productive. Like, [00:01:00] the thing is... You need to build things that matter, right? The way I got into engineering is I was in QA, and there was this engineer and his stuff had so many bugs.

So I went into the source control system and I started to figure out the bugs, right? And he locked me out of the source control system. So I went to the CEO and I'm like, I don't know what to do here. I want this code to work. So he fired the guy and he told me to write it.

He was a very like big hearted guy, but he just didn't want that kind of attitude in the

Harry Stebbings: company. So why did you not want to take up that product role? You felt that your job in engineering was too important. Anything

David Meyer: else? I got into this world through like weird ways.

So I didn't understand. I felt that the engineering part was more important, but I couldn't work on things that didn't have clear customer value, weren't thought through. And the, and like, Phil was amazing, amazing product manager, but it's easy to critique what you've never done. Sure. Right. So everything coming over the wall, I was like, These things don't make sense.

And I was like, you [00:02:00] have to define these things upstream, or else we're gonna go down dead ends.

Harry Stebbings: It's so interesting, you said about critiquing things you've never done. I'm constantly oscillating on the question of is naivety good or bad.

David Meyer: I think it's a superpower.

I'm not a CS guy, but I ended up being, like, an architect at Plumtree Software. And, like, running engineering at a bunch of places. And it's because I don't know what I don't know. Code is not complicated. I can't write it well, but I can understand it. You can look at it. It's just a logical system. I'm a systems engineer, initially, so it's not a hubris.

It's just curiosity. What do you think you

Harry Stebbings: didn't know that you did or didn't do that was of real benefit?

David Meyer: You figure out a way to solve a problem, And everybody thinks you're crazy. But then you just don't really have time to absorb that. There's a saying, if something's impossible, don't stop the people doing it.

It was said much better than that though.

Harry Stebbings: Oh, I'm sure it was said with a wonderful quote image on Instagram. I totally get you. You said there about kind of people thinking you're crazy when you solve a problem. [00:03:00] Often customers don't love new products because it's a change from what they're used to, what they're expecting. How do you deal with that as a product? Yeah, so How does one do that? Is it walking them down your vision?

Is it taking them? I think

David Meyer: it's, it's, it's walking yourself down their vision and then Vectoring their vision into your vision, right? So people come in with a point of view about your product or their business. I use the same methodology for like

everything I do and it's just go in And then interrogate the person until you feel like you could do their job, And so, you really understand, like, they say I did this, this, and this. But you can't figure out how they got from here to here. Keep asking questions until you figure it out. and then you get a picture of what they're trying to achieve But then you're like the why behind it. They don't want to do all these steps.

They just want to accomplish a job Sure, and then you say okay Well, they articulated a lot of pain in these steps and you have a point of view that Totally different from what they [00:04:00] said and then you kind of like try to tease the best imaginable out of them So they say what you want them to say.

Harry Stebbings: That's really interesting. So they say what you want them to say. How do you actually do customer questioning well? I find a lot of people lead the witness. I mean,

David Meyer: I'm a human, so I'm terrible at customer questioning. it's impossible not to lead the witness. It's really, really hard. You know, I've been doing this for a long time.

I like to have other people that I know on calls. And then I ask them for like notes of when did they see me? One of all these cultural values, but I've kind of internalized it truth seeking. You want to get at the truth. There's all the biases, confirmation bias, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

So the open ended questions, but the problem is open ended questions oftentimes you can't get to where you want to go, right? So then it's just like open ish questions. how would it feel if it happened this way instead? Rather than like, let me talk at you and show you a demo, When do you

Harry Stebbings: listen to customers versus when do you [00:05:00] stick to product plan, product roadmap, and actually the idea and the vision that

David Meyer: you had? So, people like to talk about being customer obsessed. Yeah. But I think of there's the... And then there's the collective customer. So you have to be collective customer obsessed.

you never want to over fit to a customer because then it'll be a tiny TAM, right? customers, well, I never listened to them in terms of how the feature should work. But what they need to accomplish, suss out if that's a common need from your collective customer. Because if you're serving one customer, if you're

obsessing about one customer, but it's overfitting, you're screwing over the collective

Harry Stebbings: customer.

There's a lot of feedback that one gets from customers when you map it out. It makes for an impossible job. How do you prioritize customer feedback and ideas either that come from customer or come from team? How do you think about what to do next?

David Meyer: There are a lot of conflicting inputs.

It's funny because a lot of people come to you wanting to go into product. You know, we'll get into that. Yeah. And as you know, I tried to dissuade them. But basically, if you're rocking it [00:06:00] as a product manager, Everybody thinks you suck think about it. Okay. Your stakeholders are there's customers, this field, there's engineering, there's business finance, right?

If sales loves you, engineering hates you because you're chasing deals. And you're not thinking about the longterm future. If engineering loves you, sales hates you. Because you're just doing long term stuff and you're never helping them close the deal. like me, when I was talking to Phil Sofer, everybody thinks they can do your job better than you.

people come to me and they're like, I could do your job better than you, from all functions. Because they're so frustrated with the path you have to take in order to juggle all the different constraints. Why should people

Harry Stebbings: not go into product and product management?

David Meyer: it might sound goofy, but have you ever read Letters to a Young Poet by Rilke?

I haven't. Okay. The argument is don't write unless you have to. Because it's miserable, people often think... I want to be a product manager. I'm the CEO of the product. I'm the GM. I call the shots. I can tell people what to do. I can create something. I can be, [00:07:00] you know, Johnny Ive.

I can create this beautiful thing, and everybody will build it, and customers will love it. But that's not what the job is. Right? It's finding these impossible compromises. What do you say

Harry Stebbings: the job of a product manager is then? For people listening going, No, I do want to be a PM, actually. I do want to. What is the real job of a PM?

Because I hear it's the CEO of the product, which sounds sexy. Bullshit. Yeah, sexy though, isn't it? Like, okay, cool.

David Meyer: It's finding a way to make baby steps towards the vision. while staying alive,

Harry Stebbings: basically. So the biggest misconception is actually the glorification of being the CEO.

David Meyer: Yeah. And the fact that you have unadulterated agency.

If I'm talking to someone that wants to move from another function into product, the main thing I try to figure out is, are they doing product now? if you're an engineer and you're not involved in the PRDs and let's say you're in the field, right? You're a sales engineer. You're harping on engineering and product all the time to fix the shit your customers need until you see it working the way you want and then you're doing product management, But if you can live as a sales engineer[00:08:00] or an engineer without doing that, if you can take the spec and build it without fighting, you can never be a pro... So, if you cannot not product manage... Then, you should be a

Harry Stebbings: product manager. So, you like people who aren't product managers already.

Because I, you know, I speak to, and I sit on many boards, and everyone's like, oh, we want someone who's been a PM for three to four years, they've probably worked at Google or Facebook or whatever. And that is their spec. So you like people who are fresh to

David Meyer: product management. No, I think that, again, they might not have had the title, but have they done it?

How do you

Harry Stebbings: tease that out

David Meyer: in an interview? you ask them where their biggest impact was. And if it has nothing to do with product, if it's like calming down an angry

customer, but it has nothing to do with the value the company, you know, so you just tease it out and then interrogate from there.

Harry Stebbings: With interrogation you get data, sometimes helpful, sometimes less helpful. You said before about being a data driven product manager. Yeah. Before we dive into kind of whether it's good or bad, what does that actually mean being a data driven product manager? When I saw this I was like, huh, [00:09:00] is that?

David Meyer: So, It's a complicated topic, right? Databricks used to have this value called data driven, where we wanted everybody to be data driven. But it has a dark side, because you can weaponize data. Right. You can argue any point of view with any set of data if you're clever enough with numbers, right? So we we modified that to be truth seeking because the point of being data driven was be truth seeking but truth seeking defangs The dark side of data driven.

So when let's say you're gonna build a product you want to like ship early ship often But how can you figure out the early signal? If it's not revenue based because maybe you're not charging it of whether or not it's working, right? And you come up with a KPI and you can set goals and stuff like that and you track that and we could talk about That for days input metrics versus output metrics and things like that But the key is as soon as you start like reporting on it, it becomes the goal So the data in your progress serves one purpose one purpose only which is to figure out your blind spots and where to ask questions.

The goal is not hitting your target. The goal is [00:10:00] seeing where you're varying, or going way above your target, why. And then you can dig in and figure out if you need to course correct or not. A lot of times, the right thing to do is change the target. The target was wrong. Like, you came up with a target when you had a point of view and hypotheses before you shipped.

And then you disprove those and adjust the target. How often

Harry Stebbings: should you adjust the target?

David Meyer: Well, I mean, that's another funny thing. Like, isn't it a

Harry Stebbings: daily reveal of like, is this even the right metric here, or

David Meyer: Okay, so, if you're a startup of one, then continuously. You're continuously doing the loop of hypothesis validation.

No, I'm wrong. I'm an idiot. Got to change. When you're a company of 6,000 people, you got to be very careful, there's a lot of grumpiness to do it more frequently than annually, just because a lot of people have built up flywheels that are organizationally complex to hit the goal. But then again, if it's existential, like, why would you wait?

Why would you do something stupid for six months? Because you have annual goals.

Harry Stebbings: Is speed everything? Everyone's like, the only thing that matters is speed and velocity. You illustrated two very [00:11:00] different types of movement there. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Is speed everything, or actually do people overemphasize the importance of speed?

David Meyer: I mean, speed of what? Like, speed of learning is everything. But that doesn't mean shipping. People talk about one way doors, two way doors, type one, type two decisions, and all this stuff. Like, the key is maximizing your learning curve. And there's so many clever ways to do that.

And a lot of it feels slow. You want to know... Why you are doing the next step, you know, before you do it. But then sometimes, you can't figure it out that way, and you just need to try. And that's when, you know, ship things that you might throw away, and do it, you know, don't scale prematurely, don't over architect it, get the learning in.

Harry Stebbings: why is most data driven product management done badly? Because

David Meyer: they get the, they let the data be the thing.

Harry Stebbings: Do you not think that they use data as a crutch to kind of lean on because they don't actually know? I

David Meyer: think that's it. Because here's the thing. I'm just as bad at this as everyone else. Like, I have these dashboards.

I build a lot of dashboards. And if there's something I don't understand, I like to do data [00:12:00] science until I figure it out. And then I look at these all the time. This morning I got up, I looked at some dashboards. Am I going to do anything with that? No, it's a fucking waste of time.

It's like infinite scroll. I want to see if the next bar is green or not. I have like this dashboard where if it's a record day it's green. And I call it record book for all these different parts of our product.

I look at every day, I get, it's green! It's green! We're rocking it! But like, I'm not going to do anything with that. So it's a waste of time. think about the time people spend. A lot of times you don't have a good telemetry in place. You don't have good BI systems. So there's humans spending time counting shit to put the number in to send out the email with all the numbers so people see it.

And is that adding value? That's the problem. The human energy waste that goes in. to data driven product management when it's not becoming actionable.

Harry Stebbings: And so that's the difference. The difference between useful metric observation and unhelpful metric observation is actionable

David Meyer: takeaways. And making sure the thing you're [00:13:00] measuring...

is not gameable and aligned to your...

Harry Stebbings: what would be your example, because I really struggle with this, you know, if you think about, say me as an investor, you know, with our team, we can say, hey, number of companies met, it's about meeting as many companies as possible. You could game that and just make 40

David Meyer: shit companies.

Exactly. That's like top of funnel metrics. Yeah, everything... I can make the top of funnel as big as you want.

Harry Stebbings: But everything's gameable, like, can you give me an example of something that I couldn't

David Meyer: game? No, I can't. But, but things like active users, Time is so precious. If people are spending time in your product, there's value there. Now, it might be never, uh, credible to revenue value, right? That's a business model question. But you're building something that has value to someone if someone's using it. So those things are hard to get.

Harry Stebbings: What do you think of the state of product management today? As he said, it's become the hot job for everyone. How do you think about it? I'm just gonna be blunt. I think they're worse than ever.

Wait,

David Meyer: product managers are worse than ever?

Harry Stebbings: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. They're like business school grads who are like, doing it because it's cool.

David Meyer: You know, it's funny. [00:14:00] I have a kid, freshman in college now. And I just pay attention more to what's going on in college. And like, people hire consultancies because it's a top school of people in college to advise their companies.

It's like a racket. a name which then employs a bunch of college kids to do the consulting, but

there's the mechanics of product management. most people don't have like the hunger and the curiosity to keep going.

And because it's a, it's a thankless job in a lot of ways. You think you're going to be the rock star, you're the roadie. you need, uh, like stick to itiveness, whatever that weird word is, to be in product. But the people that have shown demonstrated impact, you know then that if it was them, and that's a lot of the interrogation when you're, you know, hiring people, then they, they understand the mechanics of the job, If you were at Google during the aughts you think it was because of you. So how they accomplish extraordinary things at companies that aren't ramping. That's what I find

Harry Stebbings: that's unbelievable, which is how many people are at great companies with insane product market fit.

But actually, they're really not very good. And it's just like, well, you know, search at Google is [00:15:00] kind of... Because

David Meyer: it's confirmation biased. Like, you think, you're like, you ship a feature and it grows. Well, because the button's on the page and everybody's there, you know? But

Harry Stebbings: do you think product managers today are worse than they were years

David Meyer: ago?

I think that on average, yes, because there's so many of them. And when companies scale super fast, they have to build big teams fast. And it's just hard to sustain that, you

Harry Stebbings: know? Do you worry about that? You mentioned the 6, 000 people, amazing people within Databricks, but do you worry that with the 6, 000, you just can't move as fast and we have this incumbency challenge?

David Meyer: Absolutely. I mean, I think it's just a different challenge at every stage. And, you've talked to Ali a bunch. That's what keeps him awake at night, is the innovation factor. Now, Objectively, we seem to be accelerating, which is a little crazy to think about. Like, I use the product constantly. That's the only way I can understand it, you know?

But I can't keep up with everything now. But again, we're, you know, a thousand engineers and, more than a hundred people in products. But I think it's a different game at every stage of company.

Harry Stebbings: I think one thing that was really interesting when I spoke to so many of your friends and [00:16:00] colleagues was the optimism that you bring to every product and product release.

How do you think about that balance between optimism and also hesitant cautiousness with new products? Some said it was a weakness, some said it was a strength. Yeah, yeah,

David Meyer: yeah. So you know, venture, you know, startups, product. Why do something? Why do anything?

the founder. Why are they doing it? They're doing it probably because they're the kind of person that has a problem with authority and can't have a boss, So, great products bend reality. And so you realize something could be made a ton easier, right? you're starting a company, you need to enroll someone in that vision. And you need to bring them along, Because you want a co founder. You want to hire the first engineer or something like that. you need to get them to believe. Or else they're not going to go through the shit show to try to get there.

I think you will things into existence. I think we do impossible things all the time. Because we just don't think they're impossible.

But I think human ingenuity can like create impossible things. [00:17:00]
Because you just really, really want it to exist, and you find a way.

Harry Stebbings: I totally agree with you, and I think it goes back to the naivety element, which is you also don't know that they're impossible. Yeah, yeah. When you embark on them, where you don't know it will take that long.

David Meyer: Yeah, and whether you're talking to engineers, engineers have to believe, Otherwise, they're just not going to have the same velocity. Do engineers

Harry Stebbings: believe? Because often engineers are held as like the cynical ones. Like, oh, they always say no to everything. Oh,

David Meyer: cynical. Yeah, but again, I call it brain massaging.

It's really manipulation. So you arrived... At the conclusion, you have to do this through logic, right? Through a set of assumptions and stuff. And it's because you've basically taken the other possibilities and you've disproved them. And so you take the engineer through the same thing. The engineer wants to do this thing and you're like, okay, it's great that you want to write your own API instead of using a standard.

That's awesome. it would be like super efficient, It'll be great. So how are we going to get, 000 developers to understand that? How are we going to get the whole ecosystem to adopt it all the things that you'd have to do if you don't You know if you invent some new proprietary shit, [00:18:00] and then they're like, oh that would suck And then they realize they don't want to do all the work You'd ask them to do to build this whole community and they're like we should use a standard We should use a standard because then we don't have to do all that work and I can work on fun stuff but you need to take them down your mental travel Because you're not, well you might be stupid, but you probably have a point of view of why this is the right thing.

need them to discover that in their own framework.

Harry Stebbings: When you change your destination, or you realize that actually what you thought it would be, it's no longer, how do you communicate

that effectively without being like a flimsy leader? Do you know what I mean? It's like, hey, I know I said that we were doing this, but like, I was

David Meyer: wrong.

I mean, sunk cost fallacy is like...

Harry Stebbings: That's why most British marriages are still intact.

David Meyer: It's so ingrained in being a human, and it ties to the thing about, like, willing something into existence. I think, and this will sound completely bananas to you, I think, like, things you build, things you create that you love and are passionate [00:19:00] about, There's a bit of you in it.

there's a bit of your soul in the thing. And then someone's telling you to toss it out the window. You gotta be kidding me. And so, I think that when you're gonna change Target, and people have been working their ass off to build something meaningful to the old Target, you just have to give it the morning cycle, You have to be empathetic and human. you need them to come along with you on the ride.

Harry Stebbings: So what does that mean? It means that, David, I understand the time and work you've put into this, but because of X and Y, I've decided that actually we need to change our goal in this way. Yeah,

David Meyer: because of this world we're in...

And these things we need to achieve. This creature you've created has an illness. And we have to have a funeral for this thing. But you mourn in a funeral. you give it the space to say, yeah, this really sucks. If you don't put words to that, if you think they'll figure that out for themselves, you're lost.

And then you have a churn like later on because they're like, Management's bananas, you know? And should they care

Harry Stebbings: as much? And what I mean by that is, like, I've had people on the show before say, like, Actually, the [00:20:00] unemotional product manager or the unemotional engineer is the best. Because actually, they just think rationally.

It's like, Well, that didn't work. Okay.

David Meyer: Bin. Yeah, I mean, that's great if you're doing something incremental. If you're like, Let's grow revenue 10 percent on a product that has product market fit. You can have no emotion then. a lot of the job is not about spec'ing the product and building the product.

A lot of the job is about enrolling customers you talk to into what's possible. How can you do that without emotion?

Harry Stebbings: Do you have to do what you love? Oh, that's funny.

David Meyer: No, but you have to love what you do. So, I went to university... What's the difference? Well, I went to the University of Pennsylvania.

Because they told me, when I was applying, that I could get a dual degree in fine art and engineering. And then I got there and they're like, who told you that? So I call up my dad, I'm like, dad, I have this deep decision to make. Do I go into fine art or engineering? He's like, it's not a decision. You go into engineering.

So there's a lot of things I put on pause that I love. but there's beauty in solving problems for humans.[00:21:00] And if you're not inspired by what's possible in what you're doing, then you should take a hike.

Harry Stebbings: You mentioned that fine art and engineering, a wonderful balance between art and science, I'm always conflicted on how much product is art or science.

I've had Gustav at Spotify say on the show, pfft, 99 percent science. Most people just like tentatively go 50 50, which

David Meyer: always pisses me off. Okay, so like it gets back to this data driven thing, like I've known a lot of product managers that ship a product and don't observe how it's behaving in the wild through data.

I think they're fucking insane. you spent all this energy and willpower creating this thing, and you're not obsessively watching exactly how it... Interact with the world. That's crazy, It's a

Harry Stebbings: little bit like content, which is the biggest problem with content is people spend hours and hours and hours Especially at large companies creating and making everything that beautiful Distribution just press publish.

Yeah

David Meyer: Okay Like Putting something on your website is not marketing. You've got to get in the mind chair of the [00:22:00] person whose problem you're solving. They're never going to look at your website. Yeah. It's crazy.

I've never run marketing.

So, I'm always telling them how they should do their job better. It's the same thing as the flip as before. Do you worry they don't

Harry Stebbings: like you? Not in a bad way, but like

David Meyer: here's the thing like and this is the core of being a humanist having empathy I think everybody's a genius Maybe not at their job, but it's something, and they're trying to do the best they can.

So if you lead with that kind of empathy and understanding and try to enroll them in why it should be different.

Harry Stebbings: do you think they are they're doing the best they can? I don't know. I work my fucking ass

David Meyer: off. Hold on. So it's a good point. There's a difference between hustle, doing the best you can.

Like, okay, I'm having, you know, relationship stress. I didn't sleep well. I have a migraine. I just want to get through the day. That might be the best you can. You might be dialing it in at work because of some other meta. people don't want to suck, but everybody's world is infinite. So, with that mindset, if you're talking to someone in marketing or [00:23:00] sales or something, you want to see different behavior.

It's the same as talking to an engineer. You need to enroll them in why you, the missing opportunity. And just understand, be inquisitive and be open as to why don't we attack it this way? Wouldn't this be opening up a whole new thing? And when I do that, I learn a lot. And a lot of times it's like resource constraints and CEO needs this, all these things, sales, So, it's just like me, people thinking product manager is a god role when it's a...

Harry Stebbings: So if you were to put a number on a product being art or science, what would it be? This is, this

David Meyer: is where it's unfair because I presume that the only way to interact with the world is to fully understand the functioning system you're in and then have intellectual rigor and observation of data behind it.

So I just assume that that's how brains work, but not everybody's brain works that way. So if you assume that that's just free, then it's 90 percent art. But if that's not a natural inclination of people, then it's probably a lot more of [00:24:00] that being done purposefully. Have you

Harry Stebbings: always felt like that? Often what I see with product leaders is they tend to find that science leads the way in their early product

David Meyer: leadership.

I was, I was just gonna go there. Like, I have created so many detailed frameworks, And it's basically like I have mathematical proof that this is what we should do, but it's so fallible. there's something like the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. It's an economic theory. And the gist of it is the more detail you see, the more correct you think something is. you can have this incredible financial model. Like, you know, people do financial models in spreadsheets all the time.

You can have, like, a very simple model. Or you can have one, billions of pages. And you're like, they put so much work into that. They're really good. But it's bullshit. So, the key is, using your collective experience, and there's a lot of science and math in that, to find holes in the strategy.

Because humans are not mathematically definable. And products are for humans. So, over rigor is just waste [00:25:00] in the system,

Harry Stebbings: I think. How do you then imbue that in the team? How do you ensure that they don't put together, a 50

David Meyer: sheet Anybody listening to this, that's worked for me, thinks I'm totally full of shit now.

I ask, we ask people to do all, tons of shit, and they're like, this is meaningless.

Harry Stebbings: Do you justify them? Do you say, well, no, it is actually valuable, and it's valuable for these three reasons? Or do you say, listen,

David Meyer: No, I, I always want to get to the why. Like, let's talk about people on your team, or people, you know, in a close adjacent team.

Your team

Harry Stebbings: love you, despite what you just said. Well, I think that's

David Meyer: because of the human connection. I am maddening to work for. I'm maddening because, like I said, I need to understand the system. if there's something that's done that I don't understand, I'm picking it apart and asking a million questions because until I get the system, I might give wrong advice, But that seems like and oftentimes is a little micromanaging. I'm maddening, I think I connect with people on a human level so they respect the intent of my maddening ness. When you say

Harry Stebbings: let's talk about the team, what have been your biggest lessons in terms of what it takes to [00:26:00] build fucking amazing product teams?

It's

David Meyer: hard.

Harry Stebbings: One of my biggest lessons on like leadership and management is actually it's my job to know what I'm doing. How each person internalizes feedback and actually I was always like truth seeking. Well, I'm gonna be direct Yeah, there's some people actually need a little bit more hand holding a little bit more love and nurturing Yeah, and actually you have to tailor the leader that you are to the employees that you have totally

David Meyer: every one on one I have is fundamentally different.

Yeah,

Harry Stebbings: but that's because people like choose your style and you

David Meyer: stick yeah, but that gets to I mean you have Empathy, EQ, and human understanding to enable you to do that. And that's really key in a leader. I think a lot of leaders are formulaic. And I think people follow people that see them. When I'm in a room, and I'm frustrated, if I feel like I'm not kind of in the core of the conversation, but I have a point of view that I think they need to hear, I just want to feel seen.

if I'm not seen, I feel ignored, And I think when you give people feedback, you need to get their [00:27:00] feedback on your feedback. you might not give them any space to talk about the why or, you know, what they're going through. That doesn't mean not to be resolute on the feedback.

Like, I need you to do this. And if they, you know, if they look ashen and they, you know, they're like stressed out, figure out why. It's your job to figure out why. Because... Otherwise, you've lost

Harry Stebbings: them. Do you know when you've lost them? I'm

David Meyer: overly confident in this topic. So, sometimes you do. Sometimes it's clear, right?

But I generally have this unspoken or sometimes spoken contract with people that work for me. If you're going to leave the company, I'm going to help you find the best job imaginable. But first, I'm going to figure out if you're running away or running towards. Like, if you're running away from the company because something's broken, I want to fix it.

If you're running towards an unimaginable opportunity, I'm going to guarantee you get it, if I can, But then some people don't trust me. A lot of people tell me six months, nine months before they're going to leave. And I helped them get a kick ass job. But some people don't trust me tell me, Oh, I've already accepted this offer from blah, blah, [00:28:00] blah.

I'm like, what did I do wrong?

Harry Stebbings: Did you make that offer clear enough? Do you say to everyone, listen, if there is ever a time when you are tempted to leave, just let me know. We can talk about it. I

David Meyer: won't dissuade you. So I do that with my immediate staff, but often, you know, oftentimes there's layers in an organization and you know, not everybody knows you that well.

Yeah, but I feel, because I feel strong connections with people, I feel that they should know me that well. Don't you know me? Don't you get that? That I wouldn't, like, walk you out of the building in, anger.

Harry Stebbings: No, because most people actually are different to how they present. Yeah. Which is one thing.

And then it's not what you say, it's not what you do, it's how you make people feel. No, exactly, exactly. And the challenge is, if they're a manager removed from you, they may not be made to feel the way that you would want them

David Meyer: to. No, exactly. And when I come into meetings, in my maddening way, there's like, you know, the term, like, seagull management.

Like you swoop in and shit over everything then

Harry Stebbings: fly away. Oh, I haven't heard of that, have I? I just heard of like the bird's eye overview that you just like [00:29:00] peer down. Oh, no, no, no. Are you sweeping?

David Meyer: Shit. Someone like categorizes a bunch of animals and like... So, I ask people that know me, like, was I too seagull in that meeting?

And sometimes, to my directs it's fine. But then a new product manager that doesn't know me is like, why is this... SVP giving me shit about all this stuff. Do you worry that

Harry Stebbings: you become a cynic over time? I worry about this because I'm a little bit of a seagull. I have to be on top of like everything. But I do.

Come down. It's the fifth day of time I've seen kind of a BI tool for SMBs. Piece of shit. Next. you can't lose the optimism in venture. And you can't lose the optimism in product. Yeah. Do you worry about becoming cynical with time? I

David Meyer: kind of embrace becoming cynical with time. Because, I mean, we talked about one of my weaknesses is I'm too optimistic, I think that's unlocked incredible things in my life, incredible things.

But it gets back to if you haven't enrolled people in the vision, oftentimes you can't achieve the vision. And then it falls apart and they're like, why were you such an idiot for being so optimistic? I'm like, well, if you [00:30:00] believed we would have gotten there, it's your fault. You know, don't say that. Being more selective about the things you care about.

I would imagine investing in a company, you need to care a little bit. And so not caring about another BI tool is a blessing. there's so much optionality in the world that when you reduce dimensions. You get more powerful because you can focus, have more domain context, more point of view, and probably more impact.

Well, that

Harry Stebbings: was what I was going to say, which is you said before, narrowing the scope is a gift. How do you think about that applied to product?

David Meyer: there's so many dimensions of it, but one of the classic failure modes of a startup is they get like early signal of product market fit, and then they start talking to customers and customers.

big deal. I'll, you know, roll this out to all these users if you just do this. But it's not coherent with like the, the focus, you know. Suddenly you're going large enterprise and SMB. Suddenly you're going after the practitioner and the business person. And then you try to be all things to all people it's just way, way, [00:31:00] way premature.

And then you're nothing to anyone, Now you can choose the wrong narrow focus. And implode. that's

Harry Stebbings: the balance. I think the one thing that I also see is like, slowly they open up the aperture of the available customer. Yeah. And so it used to be like, SMBs. And then it's like, ah, BI analysts. And then it's like, just analysts.

And then suddenly like, a freemium tool for everyone.

David Meyer: Then it's a prosumer.

Harry Stebbings: Yeah, because they get nervous as time goes on, that traction won't happen. But you loosen your product marketing tightness. Yeah, yeah. With every expansion.

David Meyer: this is a funny, what's that new, like, the diabetes drug that everybody's losing weight on?

Oh, Ozempic. Yeah, so I read this article, and, someone was concerned that it'll be the collapse of society. these drugs, not only, that's quite a jump, curb appetite, they curb other addictive things. They're good for people that have a gambling problem, But then someone looked at the data and there's power users are the, the thing that makes the revenue for all companies, basically. Like [00:32:00] there's people that, I don't know if you have Chipotle here, but say a fast food that eat it every meal, I go once a year. The company makes a lot more revenue from these people. And if you take away the addictive tendencies of the

super users, no one will make profits in any sector of any business anymore because the 80 20 rule means you're going to lose 80%. Obviously, that's crazy, but it gets to the...

Same in gaming,

Harry Stebbings: obviously. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

David Meyer: Yeah, so the whole world's going to collapse. But you need your fanatic users. If your product becomes everything to everyone, you lose the fanatics. But your fanatics are the ones... They talk about it in bars, bring their friends in, have the viral coefficients and stuff, but they're also the ones that push you to do unimaginable things, to really break through.

Barriers

Harry Stebbings: I had Scott, uh, the founder of Atlassian on the show. Yeah, I watched it, I watched it. Yeah, and we talked about Jira and like, you know, bluntly, it can be quite hard for people to drop into. And my question to you is like, how do you build for fanatics to retain them?

To inspire their love even further, but also not make it holy shit [00:33:00] for someone to drop in on day one?

David Meyer: It's hard, like, you need to use your product every day. And you're not going to always be the persona it's for, but you need to at least have an appreciation for what that persona goes through. Products become complicated over time. You add a feature for one person, it might be another click for another person. But I think that's where the art is.

it gets down to the human connection.

Harry Stebbings: Is simple always better?

David Meyer: Simple is like the dumbest word. You know, it's like...

Harry Stebbings: Yeah, what a shit question,

David Meyer: hang on. What a shit test. what the hell does it mean?

Harry Stebbings: Well, I mean, fewer. So, fewer options, fewer, fewer buttons, fewer color schemes. as small a option base as possible.

David Meyer: clearly, is it always better? No. If it's possible to still... Give the superpowers to the person you're giving superpowers, but you can't dilute their superpowers, right? So when I came into Databricks, I started using the product and I was like, good lord, you know, I'm not, I'm not a developer.

I mean, I've done it. I'm not good at it. Good [00:34:00] lord. And I, uh, there were all these things that I saw as, you know, broken edges to the product. And I thought it was really important that we fix them. But most of the things I wanted to focus on didn't matter at all. Didn't matter at all. It's like the speed of execution mattered.

Auto completing in code mattered. Consistent gutter width on the UI, nobody gave a shit. But it hurt my eyes to see it. because different things matter to the developer, wanting to be in the flow of their work. than the goofy product manager that joins a company that's like, Uh, the UI is not pretty. So, It's not clear what simple means. Simple doesn't mean, removing optionality. Unless it does. And that's where it gets complicated. Like, you don't want to give people five ways to do things.

If you can give people one way to do things, that's great. If they can still do the thing. That they need to do that. They're using the product for which oftentimes You know, like I remember, so I've been using Atlassian stuff for a while. In fact, we, we, we talked to them. I was at this company, Plumtree, Jay Simons.

I don't know if you've [00:35:00] talked to him. Yeah, of course.

Harry Stebbings: I was meshing him last night actually about the show. Oh, yeah. Yeah.

David Meyer: Yeah. He's, he's, he's an old friend. I should have sent you his name, but he has plenty of stories. we tried to acquire Atlassian back in like 98 or something.

We thought we should get them cheap. They're a little dinky company, but they had a plan, you know? And they're like, pound sand, there's no way. But we're like, it's just a JIRA! Then there's like this wiki confluence thing, you know? But then in that product, early on, you could do a lot with, like, markdown and stuff like that, But they moved a lot of those things to a, like, clickable text

editor. And, like, I was furious. I was like, these people are jokers. Because, like, I want to do all these things. Now all these things, there's no button for it.

And it's a lot harder. Now, that was the right choice. it radically opened up the TAM, right? There are a lot less people like me. You know, you need to go into that acknowledging that you're gonna get rid of some people. Are those people you're getting rid of key to your vision? Developers have to love us.

Because they're going to be the ones influencing the decision that the CFO makes.

Harry Stebbings: I'm fascinated. You said there about kind of [00:36:00] different types of feedback that different segments of customers will give you. Product reviews They're kind of hailed as this kind of black box.

How often do you do product reviews? Who's invited? Who sets the agenda? Can you just walk me

David Meyer: through it? Well, okay. So in short, it's like fractal. I use a product all the time. I'm reviewing the product when I'm using it like continuously.

And so getting into like the preview, we have this dog food system and stuff like that. That's kind of like asynchronous product review. But then, you know, in the classic scrum sprint methodology, you demo every Friday. You want the core group to be seeing things as it's being built because you can't waste time If it's going the wrong direction, you need to know soon you should have like continuous product reviews for the core team and then monthly or quarterly for management, but the danger the danger is like the seagull management like How do you bring them along

Harry Stebbings: enough in the vision, in real time?

David Meyer: Yeah, so like, let's take Databricks. When I got there, a lot of founders, they're all ridiculously smart. They're all operating in the company. [00:37:00] And you want to include them in your early thinking. Because they have so much context, But then there's also the danger, you know, if you have a handful of founders, they might not all have the same opinion.

about the button placement, you know, and so that can be very wasteful to like do cycles on exactly how something should look with a lot of people. But the intent and the context they bring to it is super critical. So, the danger is, the

more people in the room, the worse it is. In a bigger company, people in the management chain all feel like they need to be in the room and there might be multiple levels there. And then it's just a ceremony. Like, more than six people?

If you're going to try to make a decision, how many people do you have in the room? It's got to be less than ten, probably more than four.

Harry Stebbings: I say four to six, it's like venture partnerships. Yeah, yeah. But four to six is really where you get the ultimate decision making, I think. But then

David Meyer: if you have twenty people, it's a ceremony.

I

Harry Stebbings: totally agree. Does remote or work from home change that in some way? Where people can be on mute, people can listen in, you don't feel their presence. Does that open up [00:38:00] the aperture or change anything?

David Meyer: Yeah. Because you dilute the clarity and the intensity of what you say the more people are in the room, even simple as like being glib using curse words and things like that you feel uncomfortable because

Harry Stebbings: like you actually can be quite important it can emphasize pain it can yeah you know if i say actually it's frustrating versus it's a fucking nightmare yeah it's a big

David Meyer: difference because that that takes maybe four seconds
Transcribed To say it politely takes 10 seconds.

And so you want conversations to be as high bandwidth as possible. Like if we work together a lot, we have the same lexicon, right? We can be efficient, high bandwidth. If you get 10 people in the room, though, oftentimes it'll be like damaging. We'll understand each other. They'll interpret it differently.

And they'll report the news to other people that's wrong.

Harry Stebbings: How do you deal with that in terms of documentation of decisions made, action items, to ensure that that communication downstream is

David Meyer: efficient? It's so important, and everybody's terrible, [00:39:00] I'm terrible at it.

I like to be partnered with a program management type person, because I'm not fastidious. I want notes to be sent out. And oftentimes I'll just, like, if I join a meeting and there's no document link to take notes for the meeting, I go apoplectic. And then I'll create one and I'll write really bad notes and then I'll forget to send them out.

But I'll invite other people to and then they'll send them out. So, like, I really believe in the importance of that. I'm kind of shit at it personally. But it's so important because, at any company of any size, any venture of any size, people do to...

They're doing the best they can. So why would they do stupid shit? Well, if someone does stupid shit on my team, I didn't give them the context. Because they're smart people. So if they're doing something dumbass, It's because I failed to give them the context and the framework to understand why it's dumbass.

Harry Stebbings: When you review that, why have you in the past failed to give them the context? You're too busy, you haven't done

David Meyer: it effectively. Well, the other thing is like, I need to understand the system of something before I give advice on it, [00:40:00] so I like, dig in hard. I assume everybody's brain works like mine.

But I have a, a foible of thinking people think like me. I assume the things that I find self evident, you find self evident, because it's self evident. But that's the luxury of me being in a bunch of meetings you're not in. it's not clear to me. What is in someone else's brain, and I misread that a

Harry Stebbings: lot. You mentioned that you hire, obviously, very smart people. I think the hiring process is a very challenging one. Yeah. How do you structure the hiring process for new additions to your product teams?

In terms of the structure. The first

David Meyer: conversation I have with someone, it's the same as a customer interview, Or talking to someone in another function to move into product. So, I want to understand impact you've had. And then you'll say something, and until I think I could do it, I keep asking questions.

But you do that until you find someone's floor. I have an engineering background, or at least a civil engineering background. And I can decompose systems, you know? And a lot of product managers don't know how their shit works. In some consumer companies that might be okay, but in [00:41:00] enterprise software you got to know how this shit works because otherwise you'll make bad decisions because you won't understand the dependencies, right?

So we talked about how, you know, someone that was at Google during the aughts. Whatever they did the numbers went out, but was it causal is the question so trying to understand how they dealt with a difficult situation and then is it other people's fault? Do they take responsibility?

How did they get out of it? Were other people damaged in the way they got

Harry Stebbings: out of it? Is that in the first conversation? Is that in the first meeting? Yeah,

David Meyer: I like, I, I try to connect as a human in the first meeting, because first of all, what's my main goal in the first meeting? I want a fast, you know, fast fail, if they wouldn't be a fit.

And I want them to want to talk to us again. Oftentimes it's easy to forget the second part. But like, being deeply, deeply curious about what someone's done, they feel seen. And if you feel seen, you feel a connection, and you'll want to talk again. That's my hypothesis, or at least people for whom that doesn't work, I just lose in the process.

Harry Stebbings: Okay, so we find actually that there's someone really interesting and we want to do a second meeting or a third meeting. How do [00:42:00] we dig deeper on their technical skills? Is there case studies? Is there, how do we understand ability grade?

David Meyer: So I think that it's great to find a low stakes way to do work together.

the best way to figure out if someone's good to work with is to work with them. Yeah. But then if you say... Give me advice on my product. That's a big lift for them. And also they

Harry Stebbings: don't have the context. If I just dropped in your products, you'd present. And they can

David Meyer: say something stupid and I haven't given them the context and I judge them for that.

So if we take a problem from their domain, change part of the context, change a constraint and see how they deal with it and talk through it. You're working with them. Well,

Harry Stebbings: the thing I find hard there though is that you then don't have the context, and they've been working on it for three years. And so whatever they say, you'll be like, wow, that's smart.

And it's like, well, no, you just know nothing. And they've been working on it for three years.

David Meyer: That's true. but it's powerful to know nothing because you ask questions that seem dumb, but it can kind of throw people off because they're not the questions they're expecting and you see the internal consistency of what they're talking about.

And again. how they're talking about it. If they're just taking [00:43:00] credit for shit without the how, it's really the meta. It could be anything. It could be talking about how civilizations on Mars operate. They don't exist. But it's like a great world building fiction book feels real. But It's all made up, but there's a lot of intellectual, you know, coherence in what they're talking about.

So I think you can, you can smell bullshit pretty easily, even in a domain you've never seen before. If you're just intellectually curious and you keep digging until

Harry Stebbings: you understand it. It's like to where it is five whys. Yeah, exactly, exactly.

David Meyer: It's a five whys process, but deal with humans. What's the biggest

Harry Stebbings: mistake you've made in hiring processes?

David Meyer: So... People can be incredible in one company and a total failure in another company. I've worked with people who were brilliant game changers. Often times they didn't show up first that that was obvious, but then they like accomplished amazing things. And then I brought them to interview at another company, convinced they'd be a game changer at the other company.

And then [00:44:00] the panel was like, this person isn't a fit at all. they give me, you know, a bunch of reasons that are true. And it's just because different companies have different cultures and different needs. And like, let's say, you know, someone would be great. You know, they would, but there's people that doubt in the process.

If someone comes in and there's non believers, confirmation bias is very real. So if you can't enroll the hiring committee, To believe that this person is great, they're going to fail.

Harry Stebbings: How do you start your hiring committee?

David Meyer: Not too big. You have to have people whose job it is to prove that the person is about to hire.

If I have people that work for me, As the only people on the hiring committee, and they know I really like a person, it'll color their view. So you have to have antagonists in the system. A small number, it should be cross functional. You need to have someone technical. Well, in enterprise software, you need to have someone product.

Someone technical and some naysayer as like the core three and all three of them have to be deeply, deeply respected in the org. And that's the hard [00:45:00] part. You need their signal to matter.

Harry Stebbings: What are the first things to break down in scaling product orgs? We have these hiring processes, we hire many people.

You've been in very fast scaling product orgs before. What are the first things to break?

David Meyer: Losing touch with the day to day of the individual contributor. I don't know. what people spend their time on intrinsically. There's things I assume I ask for something to be done by everybody in the org. And in my mind, it's just a tiny, tiny extra effort every week.

But these things can pile up and be meaningless to the point where they're just running the machine and they're not doing the art.

Harry Stebbings: They're doing the work, not the art. Yeah.

David Meyer: they're not deeply truth seeking what really matters for the customer. They're filling out. How

Harry Stebbings: do you attain that at scale?

Integrate them into customer support once a month?

David Meyer: I mean, you know, measure. I hate to measure what people do, but make sure they're talking to customers all the time. A third of their time should be talking to customers. A third of their time should be using the product and working with engineering. And a third of their time should be thinking properly, But, it never works out that way, because [00:46:00] usually, 60 percent of their time is filling up bullshit. What

Harry Stebbings: is the most frictitious functions? I know that's a weird question, but like, is it engineering and sales? Where sales sell ahead of time, and then say to engineering, I need this feature! Is it between products and engineering?

Is it between products and sales? It's engineering and sales. Engineering and sales? Yeah.

David Meyer: Why? Because they're an opposite. So like, when I came into Databricks, it was bimodal, Engineers thought sales ran the company, and we're destroying it. And sales thought engineering ran the company, and we're destroying it.

there was no real product muscle. Ollie ran product, but then he became CEO, and there was a gap, right? engineers and sales have, opposite is a good word, motivations. Short term, long term. they're always going to think the company would be better.

If the other had less influence. A salesperson, like, there's a customer that wants to give me five million dollars. Are you on crack? why aren't we building this feature to get the five million dollars? Engineers, like, it would destroy the company because nobody else wants what that company, you know, it's

Harry Stebbings: the You want to work on this security thing over this new product that's going to get us guaranteed revenue.

Do you mediate that [00:47:00] then

David Meyer: as a product? I'm like the I'm like the fixer or the mediator for a lot of these things. So, like, I always try to find a third way. People always present options that are myopic, you know? we don't do this and we lose the revenue. Or, we do it and it delays our strategy.

I'm like, no, I don't like either of those options. So you talk to the customer and you find out they don't even need the feature. It happens all the time. You're like. We could do this for you, we could do this for you, but wouldn't it be better if we did this for you? And no, no, I really need this. But then you just tease it out and I'm like, but if we did this, this whole scope of work you have to do first half of next year would disappear.

so again, you talk to the customer, you diffuse the situation, you enroll them into what you really want to do, and then you make the salesperson realize you never needed the feature. Now you don't, it doesn't always happen. And because I'm too optimistic, sometimes I like come up with a crazy third way.

it's possible if everybody was inside my brain, but then coordinating all the pieces to do [00:48:00] weird shit sometimes doesn't scale either. Possible

Harry Stebbings: if everyone was inside my brain, it's like reality distortion fields. What's the difference between good reality distortion and bad

David Meyer: reality distortion?

So I think that every great leader in startups, you're, you're bending reality. You're creating things that seem... impossible. you have to enroll people in that. And once they're enrolled, if you think something's impossible, but you convince three friends, then the four of you think something's impossible, but the world reality thinks it's impossible.

That's reality distortion, but you enroll people in it so they can hunker down and prove everybody wrong and accomplish it. as organizations grow and, leaders have ego. You can believe yourself and not be truth seeking. And then you can do your company a lot of damage and you can do people a lot of damage.

Think about how many people that have been traumatized by startups. It was kind of like, we want to accomplish this by any means necessary because it's the right thing to do. And you start to see less and less what you're compromising to do [00:49:00] that. if you get caught up in your own reality distortion field, it might be impossible.

So you've convinced all these people that something impossible is possible and they're going to waste a lot of, their career chasing you on it because you're so convincing. That's when it gets a dark side. What's

Harry Stebbings: the best relationship between a head of product or a CPO and a CEO?

David Meyer: This is funny.

Like after every product role I do, when I'm seeking my next role, I want it to be anything but product.

you meet someone like, you know, Ali, pulls back this curtain and you're like, holy shit, I want to be part of this. Let me do some product stuff. But the CEO is the CPO, So it gets back to, are you a rock star or are you a roadie?

You're a roadie. It gets complicated because you want to exercise your craft and do something that you know is the right thing to do. The CEO is driving the vision of the company and knows the right thing to do. And you can't be in their brain and they can't be in your brain. And you're both working really hard and really busy and probably don't talk that much.

So there's always this conflict [00:50:00] between you're hearing that we need to do things that you don't understand the full context of, and it's frictive with what you know you need to do, but you don't have the bandwidth or the time to articulate. What's in your brain to the CEO? How do you have great

Harry Stebbings: communication then?

David Meyer: again, it gets back to hiring, but high bandwidth and truth seeking taking ego out of it. I've had a lot of difficult bosses. How often do you speak to Ali? Very seldom. But it's generally, messaging and calls late at night, Because the key is to be simpatico enough. Like for example, for the second half of the year, I listed all the main objectives I had and the tide of the vision and what outcomes they drive. I get his buy in on that and I just relentlessly, go after those. I oftentimes, I send a lot to him that I don't necessarily get.

responses on unless he disagrees. there's a lot of delicate shit that goes on. I send to him probably, you know, a couple other leaders, founders, Adam or whoever. And then if I hear nothing, I just execute like mad. [00:51:00] Final one

Harry Stebbings: before we do a quick fire. When you like review yourself as a product leader, what would you say you most need to improve on?

David Meyer: Because I formed this human connection with people. I underestimate the negative impact my words can have.

Harry Stebbings: What does that mean in reality, that you hurt people more than you think?

David Meyer: I might be despondent about something unrelated to the topic at hand, my body language conveys that, and that's interpreted as disappointment in the topic at hand.

How would you change that? Move on. cognizant of it. It minimizes it and takes the edge off it, but it's just, you know, moving fast.

Harry Stebbings: Or is it communicating to them that actually this is just how I am and don't be disheartened or alarmed if X or Y happens? Yeah, I think

David Meyer: that gets to like, you talked about how everyone I want is different, right?

just be direct and honest. Be vulnerable and share, what's going on. And then they'll assume best intent with how you communicate. Do you think

Harry Stebbings: leaders are vulnerable today?

David Meyer: all the great ones are.

Harry Stebbings: And then you get to [00:52:00] a level where you're a politician. where you get to name names at certain heights, and you suddenly then have to embrace being a politician.

It's so funny.

David Meyer: We both know Jay Simons well, right? Yeah. And he just talked about, like, there's this stage you get when an elevator ride is like, Heightened and consequential for how you interact with everybody in the elevator because of your role and people want things from you People want to feel seen by you it gets crazy The way sometimes yeah, yeah, and you can have a very brief interaction.

That's very asymmetric And how much it meant.

Harry Stebbings: if you're a Scottish, Alaskan, or you're a market sales force, that's the highlight of someone's date meeting you, if you're in tech, like, for sure, you're one of their heroes, I'm sure.

If you're a bit tired, haven't had your coffee in the morning, your wife's just had a go at you, your husband's had a go at you, you're not like, oh, hi, David, hi, it can actually not be the best ever experience. Yeah,

David Meyer: no, and that's, that's hard. That's really fucking hard. And that's why sometimes it's like, so we're doing this conference, you know, so I gave a couple keynotes yesterday, customer meetings for five [00:53:00] hours, and then I go to dinner with like 50 customers.

Are you kidding me? it's so loud, you can't hear people. Bizarre accents you have to really focus you're just done you just need quiet

Harry Stebbings: time. Okay, we're gonna do a quick fire All right. So what should you focus on if you want to get promoted as a PM?

David Meyer: really no The customer and really, really know the product. Know exactly how the product works and know exactly what the customers need in aggregate.

Harry Stebbings: what would you say is the biggest mistake founders make when hiring product teams?

David Meyer: Not being clear about the level of agency they'll have. a founder CEO is gonna be in the details of all the shit and that's good. And some people expect complete agency, calling the shots as a product leader, and they will fail. I think

Harry Stebbings: you've only worked with good founders.

What I mean by that is, quite often what I hear is like, Oh my god, I mean that's so far removed, they just kind of left me to all of my own abilities. Okay, okay, okay, so

David Meyer: the, I was talking about good founders, yeah. I've worked with a lot of people that were basically like, the right [00:54:00] thing for me to say was, I've got it.

And I tried that for the first six months of Databricks. And that's not what Ali wanted to hear. he didn't want me to go off and do something and then show him how awesome it was. You know, he wanted to be deeply involved and have the founders deeply involved in the sausage making because. They had so much more context and I wouldn't go through, you know, wasted time that way.

Harry Stebbings: What one piece of advice would you give to someone starting a new role as a CPO or product leader?

David Meyer: There's a failure mode where you feel like you have to put together comprehensive frameworks that sales is, you know, given confidence by and just give yourself time. Do as little changing the world of how the company works as possible in the first 90 days.

Should you look for early

Harry Stebbings: easy wins?

David Meyer: Yeah, but they shouldn't be vanity wins, you know? if the early wins are human, more than technical, you'll, uh, build the followership you need.

Harry Stebbings: what are some most important skills to build early, early in your career and product?

David Meyer: So when I was at Plumtree, and... Phil Sofer left and told John [00:55:00] Kuntz to make me run product. I met with John Kuntz and he, he was at Adobe in the great days, you know, And I was like, John, I'll do this. I'll do this if you want me to do this, but I need you to be my mentor I need you to teach me how to do products. I I don't know what to do and he's like you can't teach it That's all he said.

Harry Stebbings: Thanks John. That's super helpful, isn't it? But I throw me in a deep end cheers brother.

Yeah, you should do it and I can't teach it Okay, you see I think it's very difficult to teach parenting. Yeah If you could cool yourself up the night before you had your first child, what would you say to yourself? Wow.

David Meyer: Just, like, hold on to the wonder.

What does that mean? the first kid we had, it's like, urgency for them to, like, roll over. They're going to walk. When are they going to walk? When are they going to walk? Like second kid, you want to delay walking as much as possible because then you have to chase them, you know, just watching them.

You watch videos of them as babies now and you're just like, it's just amazing. Every little thing they do is amazing. stop trying to shape them. Just Get a front row seat.

Harry Stebbings: Does [00:56:00] it get easier?

David Meyer: My wife says bigger kids, bigger problems, you know? So it gets different. it's interesting. It ties into career, right? Because these things are balanced. I used to think when I left work, I was being selfish.

Until I had kids. And then I thought, When I stay at work and don't go home, I'm being selfish. I think the clarity is easiest when they're young. Because spending time is good and, and what to do. How to navigate as they get older. How much do you try to, try to direct shape? I'm bad. I'm a bad disciplinarian, you know? in sales and engineering, I try to find the third way. the kid is obstinate you know, the rules are this. I try to find a compromise. Compromise isn't always good for kids. You know, you need to set boundaries. I don't know. Isn't

Harry Stebbings: that why you have a partner?

It's

David Meyer: very important. Go there. You got a balance. Yeah.

Harry Stebbings: What recent company, final one, what recent company product strategy are you most impressed by? So I'd say like two for me, which is like Notion and Canva.

When you look at what they've done in terms of opening up the aperture of [00:57:00] templates and

David Meyer: how Why didn't that happen 20 years earlier though? That's what I can't figure out. It seems so Self evident, when you ask the question, I was thinking more about business model, because I think that's where Disintermediating things and there's a there's a business model innovation is by true.

That's where I get most Not on the craft of the product I really respect the craft of the product the companies that I find most intriguing are ones that Have a very unusual insight into business model like the early days of a company like Oh power, They were using data to drive efficiency at power plants in the US because the power plants got paid by the government for reducing the demand of the energy.

You know, so it's like multiple way. It is very complicated to pull things off like that, like figuring out to, to the big problems of environmental transformation. energy efficiency, social and economic equity. you have to come up with really creative business models to, tackle those things.

And I think those, those are the fun ones to think

Harry Stebbings: about. David, [00:58:00] listen, I've loved doing this. I'm so glad that you didn't really read the schedule, spend much time on it because we didn't really stick to it at all, but this has been such a joy. It was really fun. Yeah, man. Thank you so much for that.