

Product Management Excellence

John Zettler || Oct 2026



What is Product Management?

The PM is the
CEO of the
product

Take ultimate
accountability
for outcomes

Be the voice of
the customer

Lead by influence
without authority

Set the vision
and roadmap

Quarterback
of the team

Own the “What”
and the “Why”

Work with Eng
and Design

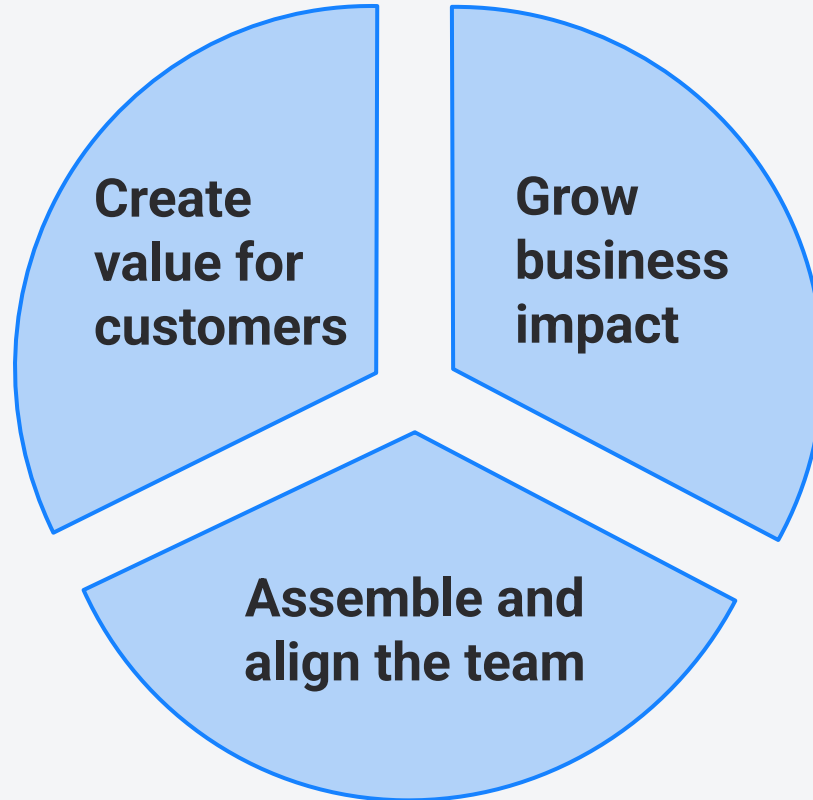
There's truth in all of that!

Sort of...

Agenda

1. What is Product Management?
2. Product Sense
3. Product Execution
4. Product with Super Intelligence
5. Appendices: How to Get Rich & Build Your Career

Your goals as a PM...



Building products is a team sport

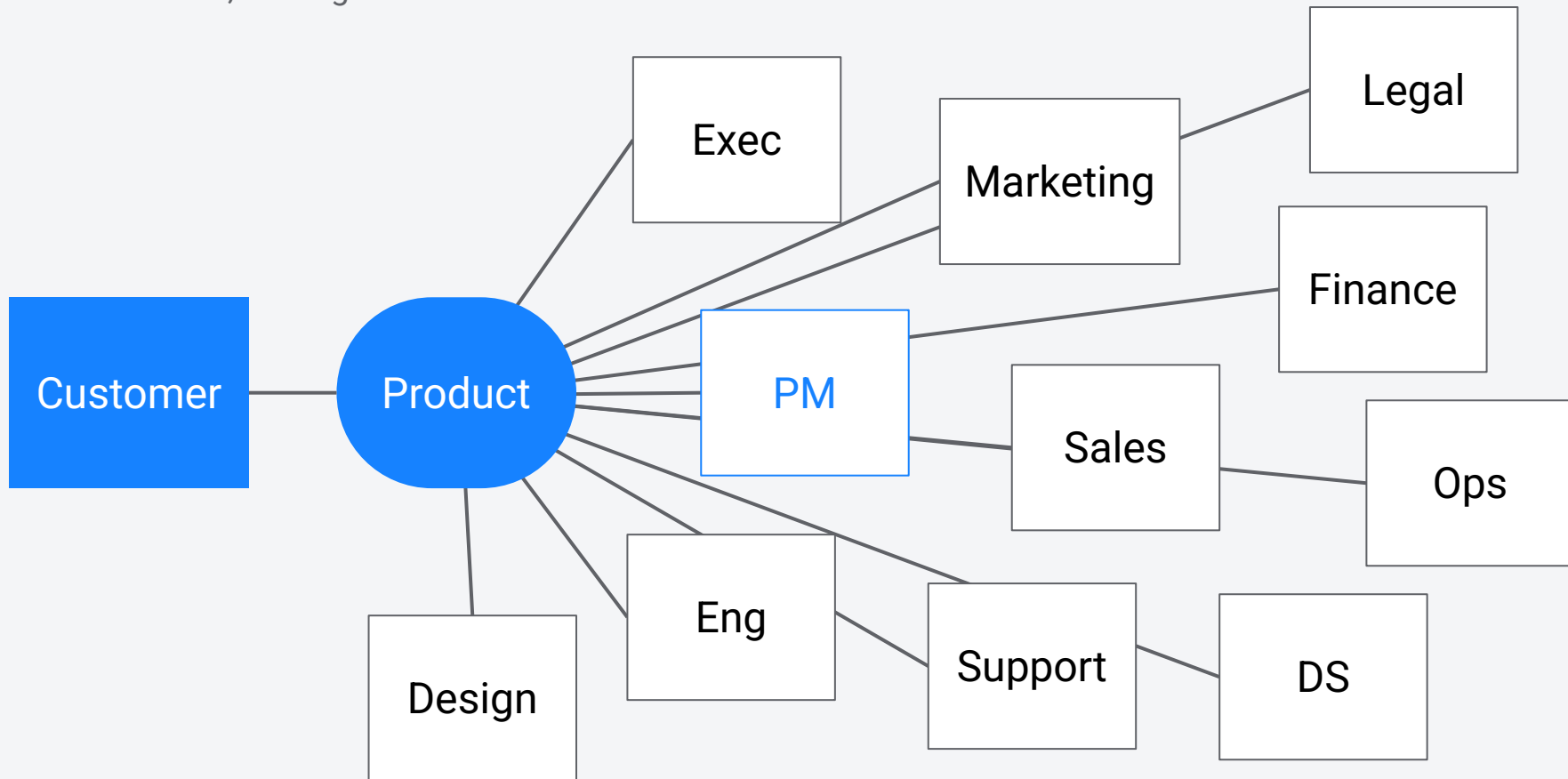
Every function has its specialty

But we're one team. We win together. We lose together.

- Product owns the “What” and “Why”
- Engineering & Design own the “How” and “When”
- Everyone must push each other to make best decisions
- But ultimately the “Decide” should be owned by the specialist

Influence but not control

Trust is earned; never gifted.



First to take accountability.

Last to take credit.

What is product mgmt?

Additional resources.

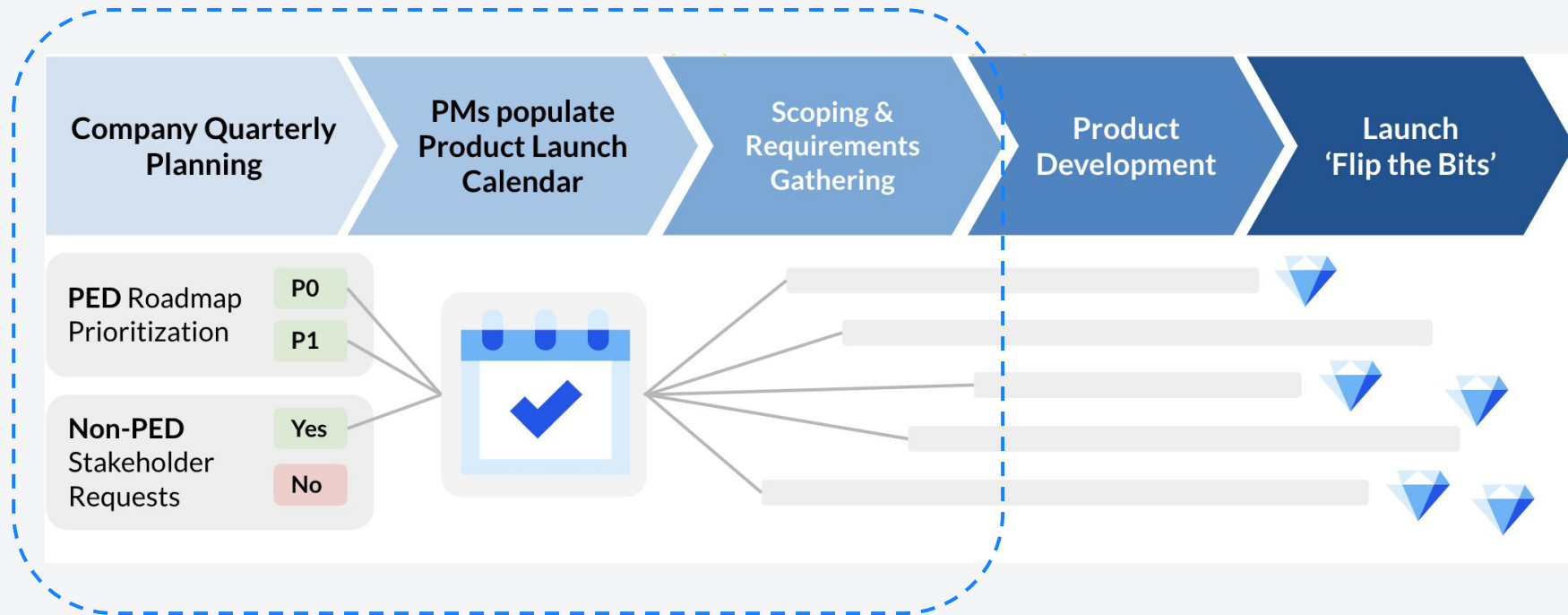
Further reading on the PM career and interview process

- [Cracking the PM Career](#)
- [Lenny's Newsletter](#)
- [Shreyas Doshi](#) ([good pod ep.](#))
- [Marty Cagan](#) on “product teams”
- [Nikita Bier](#)
- Interview Prep:
 - [Decode and Conquer](#)
 - [Cracking the PM Interview](#)

Product Sense

Product development lifecycle: product sense

Product sense involves figuring out the “What” and the “Why” of the build.



How to figure out what to build?

Always comes back to these two things.



**Talking to
Customers**

**Analyzing
Data**

How to talk to customers

The goal is to gather primary data, straight for the horse's mouth.

- Email and ask them
- [User interviews](#) (“customer discovery” interviews)
- User research studies (co-led with UXR function)
- Talking with Sales
- Reports from Customer Support with aggregate findings
- App store reviews
- In-app surveys
- Social media, including direct engagement
- VIP chatrooms / Slack channel / Discord servers
- Et cetera...

How to analyze data

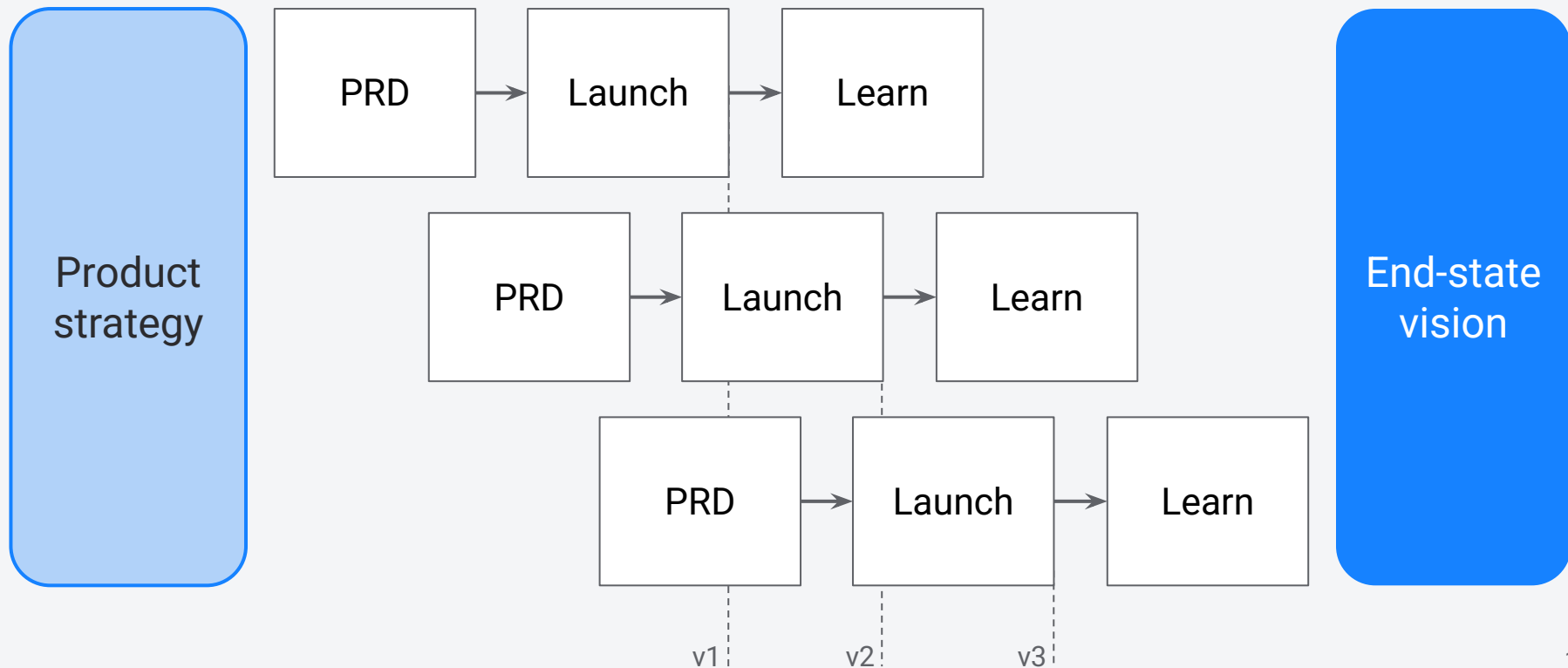
Know your business inside and out. Identify the biggest levers.

- Define your “North Star” metric(s). Every teammate should know it.
 - Revenue (when available) should be included
 - Understand the biggest drivers into each metric
- Build a “HQ” dashboard page. Treat it as a product — the “customer” is Exec.
 - Can a leader with 2 free mins extract the right takeaway?
- Every product launch should have success & guardrail metrics
 - Success metrics show if the product is having the intended effect.
 - Guardrail metrics show if it's having unintended consequences elsewhere.
- Competitor data can also lead to insights
 - Market share and competitive strengths drive product strategy
 - Caution: stay customer-obsessed; never competitor-obsessed

Product strategy precedes PRDs

Product strategy tells the end-state vision

All that you will build, and why it will work. Launches iterate toward the goal.



Build a multi-quarter roadmap

The roadmap is constantly evolving

And your team needs to be bought-in.

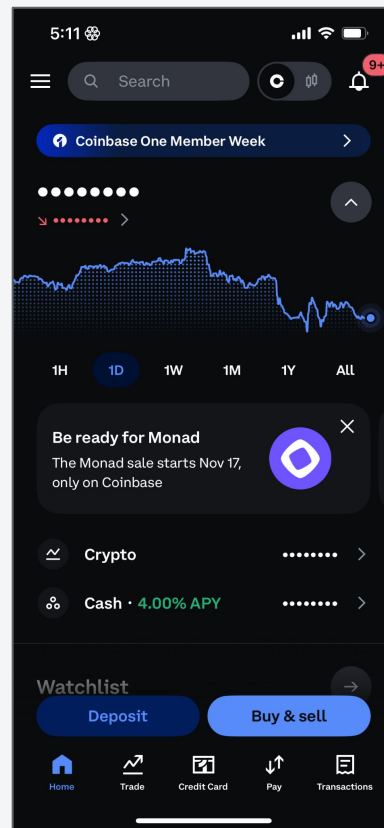
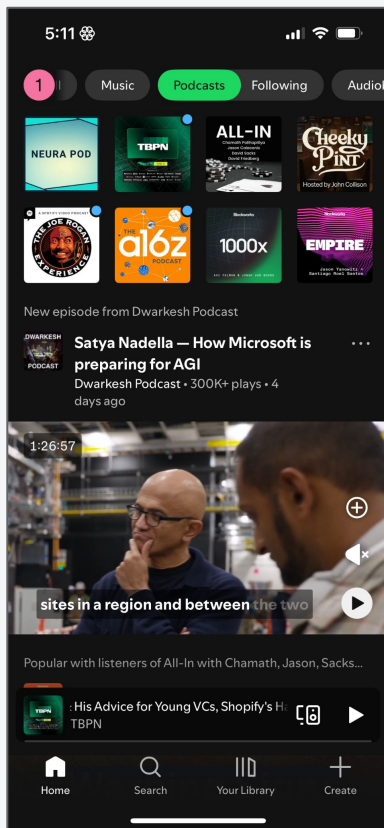
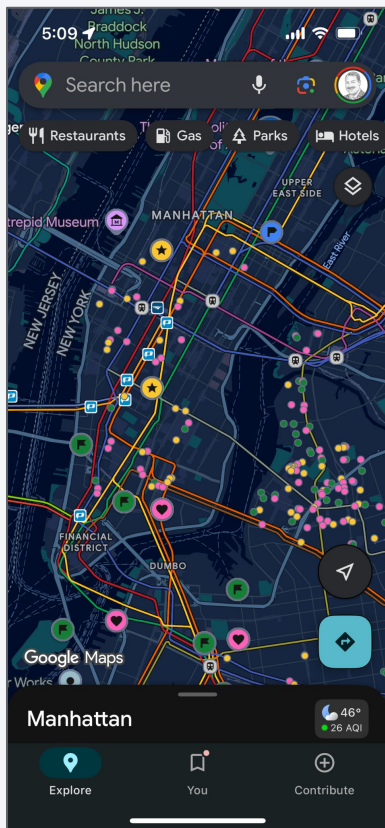
- Google Sheets can be more nimble than Jira
- Keep it in rank-sort order, with P0/P1/P2/P3 priority tags
- Have an impact estimate for each entry
- At quarterly/annual planning, draw a cutline based on current resourcing

Become excellent at saying “no.”

Graciously...

Build design sense by being an observant user

Study the products you love. What makes them incredible?



Product sense

Additional resources.

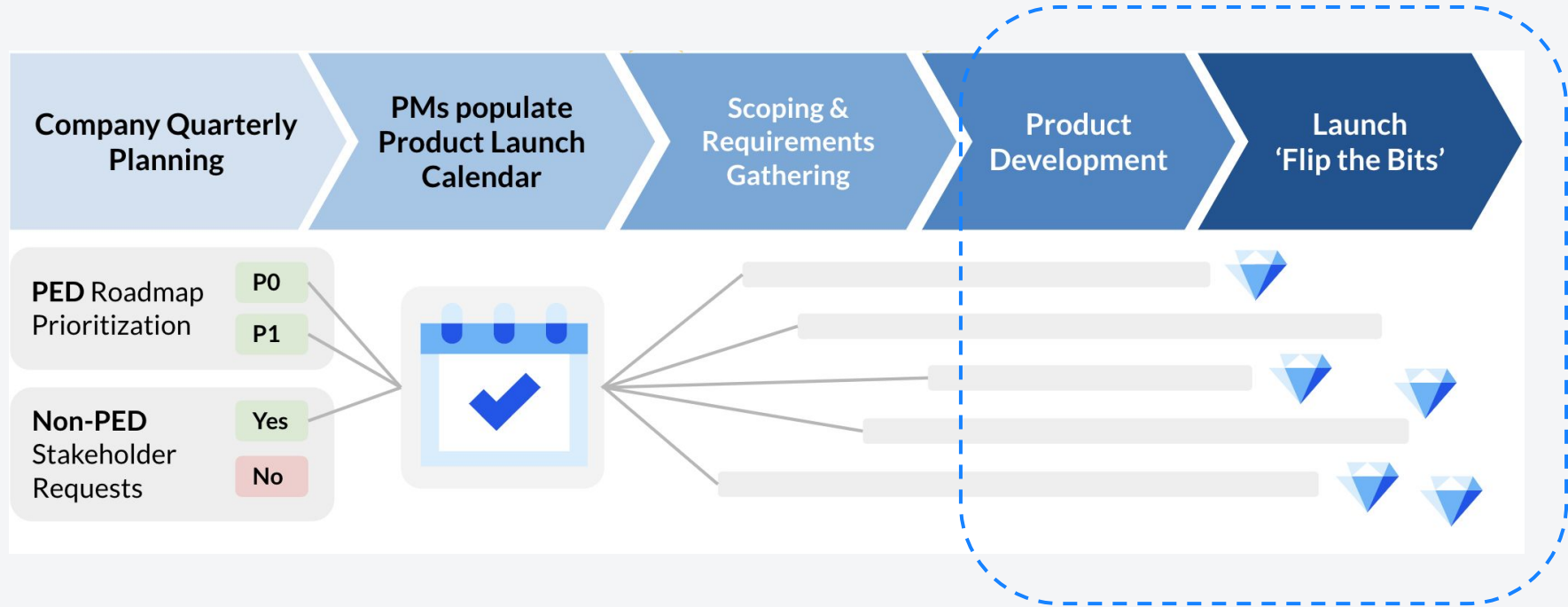
Further reading to develop your product and design sense

- [Zero to One](#)
- [Working backwards](#)
- [The Innovator's Dilemma](#)
- Marc Andreessen's [blog archive](#)
- Paul Graham ("PG") [essays](#)
- Fred Wilson's [MBA Mondays](#) posts
- Chris Dixon's [blog highlights](#)
- Design sense:
 - [Don't Make Me Think](#)
 - [Design of Everyday Things](#)

Product Execution

Product development lifecycle: product execution

Product execution turns vision into shipped product.



Order of operations

There is a repeatable process for executing the product lifecycle.

Research

0. Your strategy informs what to build next

Plan

1. Write a PRD. Host a kick-off call with XFNS

Design

2. Eng drafts a TDD. Design leads mockups. PM iterates and locks the PRD.

Implement

3. Eng begins implementation. PM focus shifts to GTM with PMM & Sales.

Test

4. Dogfooding is the responsibility of every teammate

Release

5. Launch the product. Kick off the marketing campaign.

Measure

6. Measure your metrics. Proactively report-back to Exec & the team.

Principles for working with others

“To go fast, go alone. *To go far, go together.*”

- Colleagues want the same thing, but we have *different lenses* of the world
 - Legal is biased toward protection. Product toward growth. Eng toward hardness.
- When you disagree, the first step is to listen and get curious
 - Distill and recite their point before making yours
- Give positive feedback in public; constructive feedback in private
 - Feedback is a gift. It shows you care about their growth.
- Put decisions and agreements in writing

How to communicate

Communication is the job.

- Concision is key. Write in a brief, structured, and precise way.
- Start with a “TLDR” (“Executive Summary”) for any doc >2 pages
- Communicate the good *and the bad*
- Write down **decisions**, **action items**, and **notes**. You’ll thank yourself later.
- Your documents are your artifacts. They will reflect on you for years later.

How to clean escalate

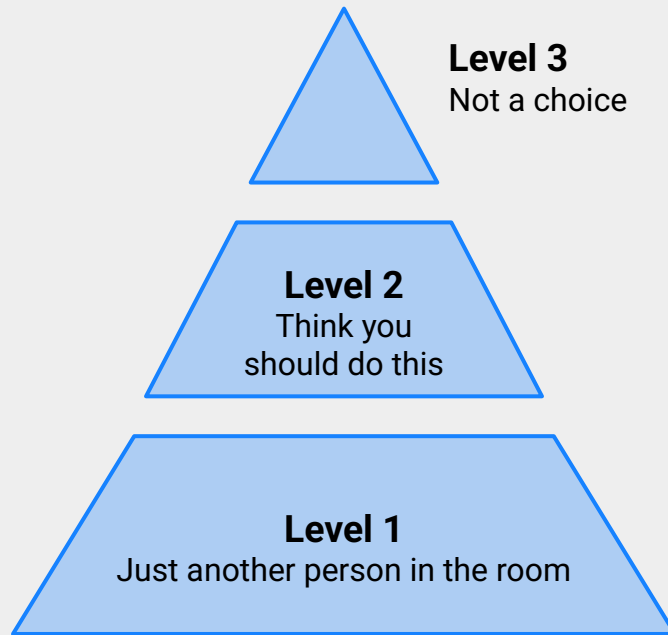
Escalation is a good thing, but not when done dirty.

- It's time to escalate when you and a disagreeing team reach a stalemate.
- Write down the steelman argument for both POVs.
- *Bring in both side's manager* and discuss together, objectively. Get a decision.
- “Disagree and commit”-ing to the final decision is important
- Don't talk negatively about colleagues behind their back.

How to take Exec feedback

Optics and managing upward are important.

- Exec feedback is directional, not literal, unless you're told explicitly
- Take a “yes, and” approach to leaders in meetings. Never a “no.”
- Follow-up privately and directly if you disagree with their POV
- Know the [levels of feedback...](#)



Product execution

Additional resources.

Further reading on execution

- [“Communication is The Job”](#)
- [High Output Management](#)
- [High Growth Handbook](#)

Product with Super Intelligence

Own every word of your output

AI can outsource your thinking; not your understanding

Research. Explore. Challenge. Improve. [Learn](#).

Don't throw
“slop grenades”



Give your agents tools and context

Frontier models and harnesses + your data + verbose prompts = ✨ Magic ✨

Claude + Codex



Claude



Codex

Buy the subscription
and use Code mode

Connect your world



G Drive



Gmail



Calendar



Notion



GitHub



Granola



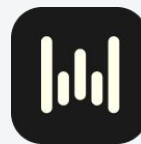
MS Office



Canva

Better context has
a privacy tradeoff

Talk it through



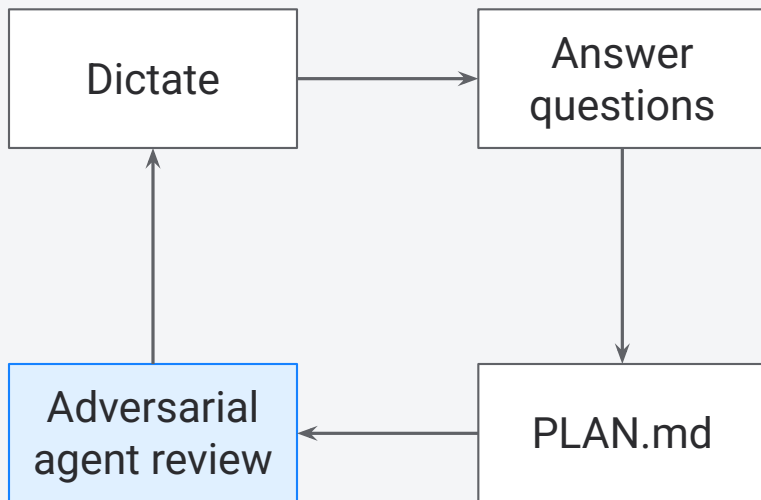
Wispr Flow

3× faster
than typing

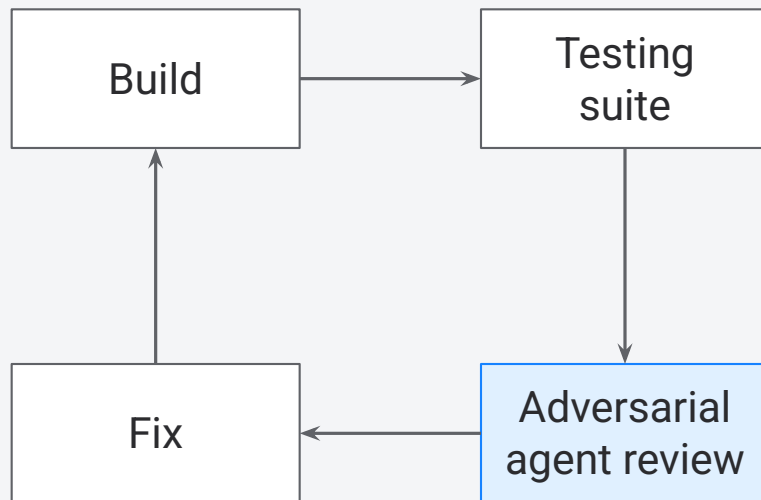
Build with conversations and loops

The more complex the project, the more important loops are.

Planning loop



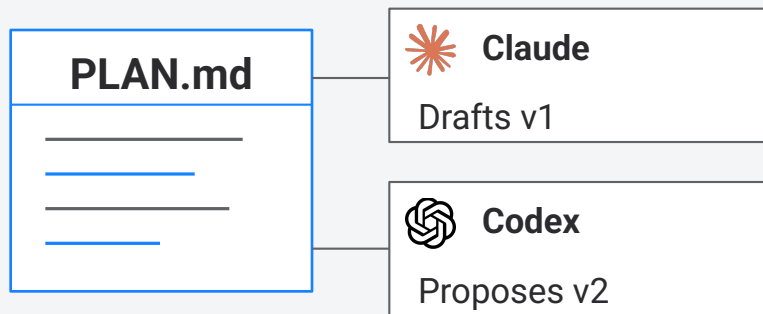
Building loop



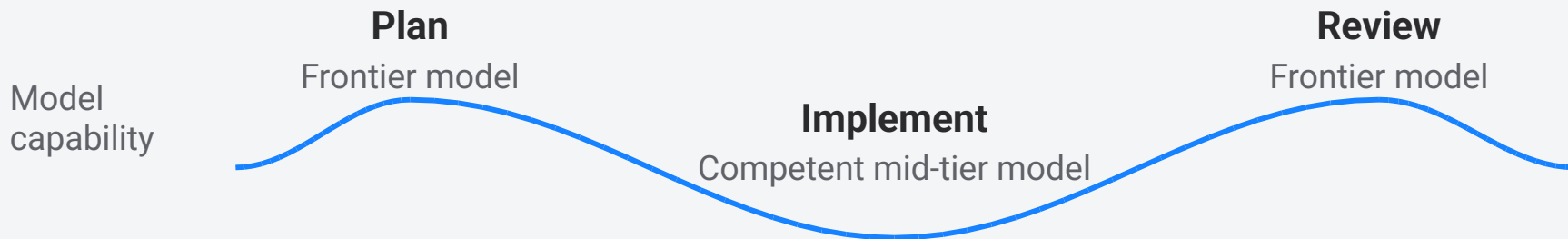
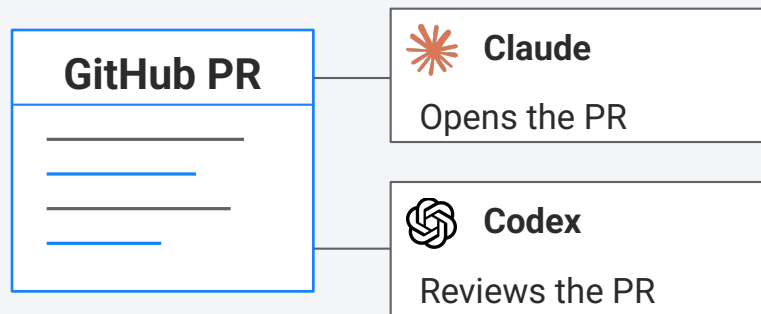
Use agents for adversarial review

Debate the plan. Review the code.

Planning loop



Building loop



Automate what repeats

Skills define the method. Scheduled jobs define when it runs.

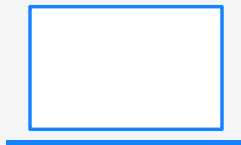
Skills



Markdown instructions

Reusable for repetitive tasks

Scheduled jobs



Local

Computer awake



Cloud

Computer
can be off

Build and share something this week

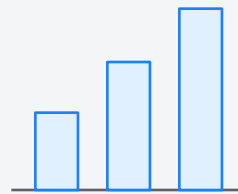
Pick one deliverable and launch it



Small app



Personal website



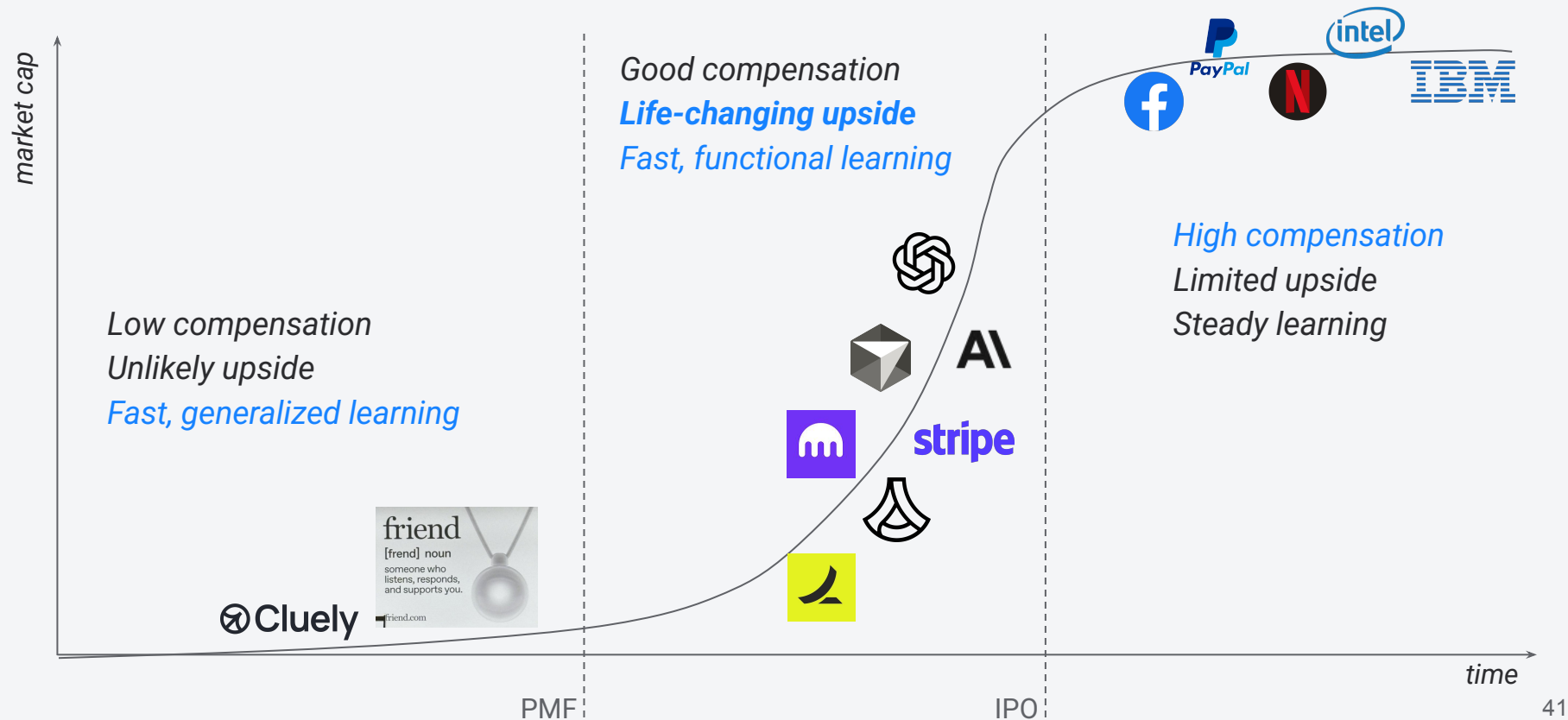
Market analysis

Plan → Build → Ship → Share

Appendix A: How to Get Rich

How to get rich in tech

Think like an investor. Join a pre-IPO company that is scaling rapidly and could be #1 in their market.



Appendix B: Build Your Career

Avoid the elite road to nowhere

Credentials won't lead to satisfaction.

0. Graduate! 🎓
1. Banking / consulting
2. “Private equity”
3. MBA
4. *Now what???*



Choose thoughtfully where to focus

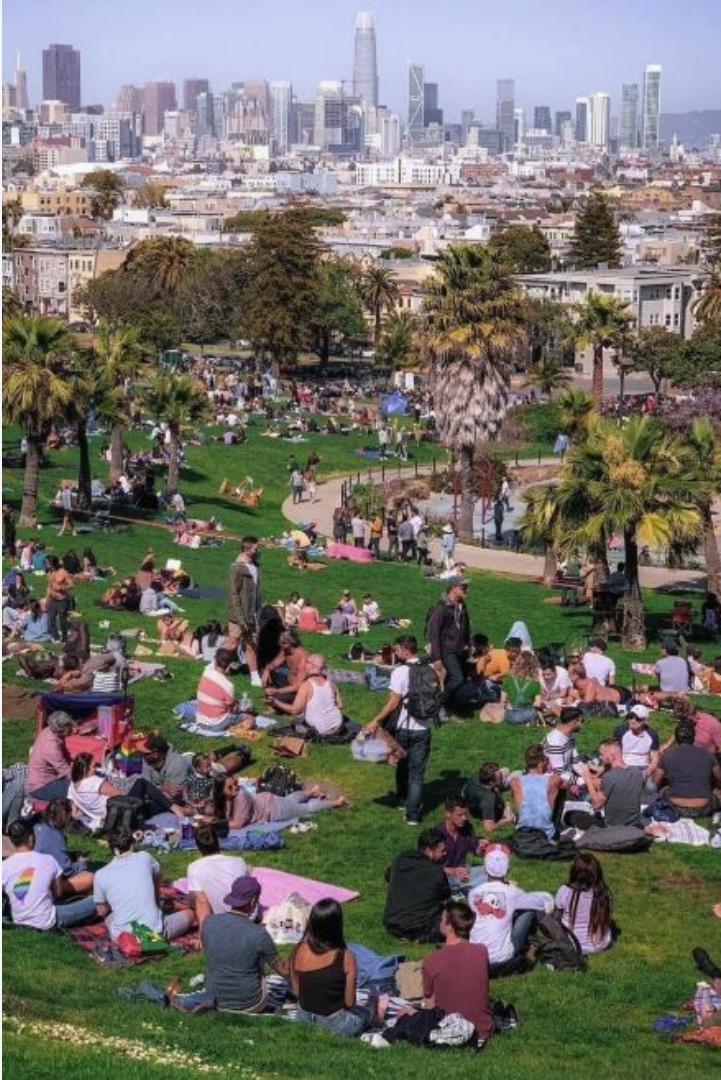
Use the Japanese framework of *Ikigai*.



Where you live matters

Serendipity and talent density will improve your odds of success.

- Seek a high density of smart people who are interested in the same things
- Every city has a culture; don't force a bad fit
- For some industries, only 1 city matters
- For a tech career, generally:
 - Tier 1: San Francisco & NYC
 - Tier 2: Austin, Los Angeles, Seattle
 - Tier 3: Boston, Miami, Denver/Boulder, Atlanta



Manifestation is real

Have a clear vision. Never think small. Work your ass off.

“Work backwards” with your career

Set long-term goals. What must be true in year $(n-1)$?

Optimism is a choice

Optimists tend to be successful and pessimists tend to be right.

Building your career

Additional resources.

Further musings on careers & life

- [Steve Jobs' graduation speech](#)
- [Sheryl Sandberg on rocket ships](#)
- [Naval's insights](#)
- [TBPN daily tech podcast](#)
- [How to Win Friends & Influence People](#)
- [Be Useful](#)
- [Stoicism](#)

Thank you!

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