Chad: Hi, this is Chad. So glad you're listening again and learning more about product development and management. I'm super excited to be talking with Paul Freed. He knows an awful lot about what companies are looking for when they hire people for product management. He's been a recruiter now for 20 years, helping companies from startups to global organizations hire product managers and developers as well as other professionals. He is the managing partner for Herd Freed Hartx, the leading executive search firm in the Pacific Northwest and the Seattle, Washington area. He also recently created the Job Search Roadmap website that is full of advice and insider tips for creating a career strategy.

Paul, I'm really eager to have you share your knowledge and help product managers and developers find a great job or move to a better job. But first let's get into your background a bit. Sound okay?

Paul: Sounds great, Chad. Thanks for the invite. I'm looking forward to chatting.

Chad: Thanks for your time. I know your tips are going to be very valuable. So, first start off letting us know what led you into helping people with job placement.

Paul: Sure. I've been an executive recruiter the last twenty years. I get an unusual front row seat to see what works. I see the company side when I hear employers talk about what they want. I hear the interviewer feedback about what worked and what didn't. I also see the candidate side of how they present themselves to me as an Executive Recruiter, from the resume to the call to the interview—I see what works and what doesn't. Because of that, I'm the guy my friends always buy a coffee or beer for when they're going through a job change or they're stuck in their career. Over the years, I found that I kept seeing similar feedback as far

as the strategy and the game plan that worked and it really was effective for them. The thought it was very unique and they encouraged me to write this stuff down and help out others. That is where the Job Search Roadmap website and resources came from.

Chad: Very good. You sound like just the right person we need to be talking to because you shared that you have a 360 degree view of the situation and not just the company's perspective but helping individuals find a better job or find work.

Paul: That's right. As a little background too, I've been doing erecruiting for 20 years. What that means is companies pay me as a headhunter to go out and find talent on their behalf. Like you mentioned, we worked with venture-backed startups where they're getting funding and they need to go find people to build new products and launch new ideas to mid-cap companies and ??[inaudible] [00:02:40] that have been around for a while to large public companies that need to do nationwide searches. I find as a consistent thread across industries, we do work in technology and manufacturing and consumer, healthcare, and nonprofit, and all those people have various product managers and product engineering talent in them. There's a common thread I found that we can talk more about later about what works and what's happening out there. That's the 'how I got into recruiting' history. I have had my own search firm the last 14 years. In 2001, we founded that. We've had a chance to have a team and work with a mix of folks as well. So that's a little bit on the recruiting side. It's a fun industry. You get a chance to meet a lot of interesting people and build companies that affect a lot of folks.

Chad: And in an exciting area to do it in. You've worked across a number of industries. Being up there in Seattle, you've certainly seen huge growth in the last couple of decades—everyone, it seems, if they're not moving to California, they're wanting to move to Seattle.

Paul: I think it's the fastest growing large metro area in the United States. From the product development side, it's just red hot—I think second only to the Bay area. Every week, there's a new company opening a development office or product management office in Seattle. I think there were four announced last week. As far as new company headquarters opening up in Seattle or secondary offices, just to tap into the great talent here. So it's a fun time to be a recruiter, Chad.

Chad: Very good. For those of us who are Product Managers and Developers, it's a good time to be looking for work. So, tell us about the company perspective. What do you see in terms of companies hiring Product Managers and Developers? What sort of things are they looking for and have you seen any changes in the trends going on?

Paul: Great question, Chad. It's red hot, first of all. So, if you're in Product Engineering, Product Management, congrats, you've got job security. It's a real hot industry and a great time to be in that space. The emphasis, I would say, for the technology and the innovation—I think Apple has had a very positive ripple effect on a lot of companies where they have said that we need to make sure we are being creative. We need to be sure we're being innovative. It's raised the bar for what consumers are expecting from our products, from the user experience to the innovation. I think it has raised the game on the product look and feel. Technology is moving so fast that almost every client cannot get enough product engineers and developers. They're so behind. So the war for talent is on. It's fun to see the playbook of the dot com era being pulled back out again on how to get great people. So the demand is high.

I think you're also seeing a real professionalization of the industry as far as just finding more certifications, best practice methodologies. Everything from the Agile methodology to pragmatic framework for marketing and product management. You see more rigor as a profession that is being put into it that I think really helps to elevate the whole craft and really view themselves as the craftsmanship of the role—in raising the bar on Agile methodology or Lean methodology that flow throughout

the whole organization and speak in the same language. That's one of the interesting trends that I see that it starts out with Lean methodology, first in manufacturing, then it moves into product development. We see that. We see that also marketing now talks about it and all that Agile methodology that engineering uses, they want that also in the program management. They want that in product management. They want that in other departments. So it's interesting how that concept has expanded across organizations.

So you're seeing terms that used to only be used in development are now being used in other groups. That's an interesting side note. Also, on the product management side, I'm seeing really good product managers get the voice of the customer. I guess that's a question I might get asked later but it's, what separates the good from the great product manager. The company is telling me what they're looking for and they really want someone who gets the voice of the customer. They're an advocate for the customer. Whatever that customer segment is that they're going after. The one base error found in engineering is you get a bunch of smart people building stuff but you have to make sure people care about it and really want it. ??I think the product managers are the ones who create the voice of the market??. Are we building something anyone cares about? Will they pay for it? Is it competitive? Is it the right thing to build first or second? Really thinking through the whole product road map. I'm seeing more and more companies hiring that function earlier on in the startup cycle and elevating that role to much more of an executive level role. I think before, it was buried deeper.

Chad: And that's the product management role you're seeing hired?

Paul: Right.

Chad: Very good. Yeah a voice of customers is a huge aspect. I'm very excited to hear this is "red hot" and a growing area where people are in demand. When you talked about engineers and that companies are really

struggling to find enough engineers, product developers, and this context, what do you see in terms of a ratio? Do you have an insight on that? How many engineers does a company have when they say they need a product developer over this group or that sort of thing?

Paul:

I haven't seen the ratio between product managers and engineering as much as—I'll see more program manager ratios where there's typically a program manager overseeing certain projects and certain groups of engineers as far as integration between engineering and product management. But the product managers, I find, are more around the different products they go after. Because they may have this one main product and need one good product manager or it could be fifteen products or segments and they need a manager for each. It varies so much as I'm thinking about all my clients. No ratio comes to mind that I've seen but typically I would say somewhere between 10 to 20 engineers per product manager. This is just looking at the orgs I've created for, that's about the ratio I've seen.

Chad:

Yeah, very good. I came across some information that Google, now or at one time, was at one to seven. I don't know if they're still—if that was valid information or not but I thought it was an interesting ratio. The professionalism of the industry—product management still tends to be this squishy thing that most people are not really sure what product managers do. But I've really seen that change in the last few years too. You've mentioned places where you can get a good grounding and certifications in the field of product management. I've been involved in the last few years with two professional associations providing training for them to get certified as product managers and I've seen that sped up too. Interesting that you're seeing the same thing.

So let's talk now on the person looking for work side. We got the company perspective there. I was a product manager and I'm not satisfied with the work I'm doing right now with the company I'm with. Maybe I don't like the culture or things I'm seeing. How do I know it's

time to start looking versus waiting it out and see if things will change? And what are the steps I might take there?

Paul: Great question. I encourage people to think through a three-step process. The first step is fix your attitude. I say that first because sometimes the challenges of a job are not the employer or the job. It may just be how you're viewing it. It may be that you're not approaching it with a heart of humility or respect. Maybe you're not giving them their full due. ??Maybe there's stuff that personally applies to the job??. I'm a big fan of first checking your heart and asking, do you have the right heart when you think about work, the opportunity the work has, and your team? Is there anything you've done that may have contributed to that, that maybe you need to own and can work on? Because regardless of whether you decide to make a change or not, those are things that you should have self-awareness on and work on. I've seen situations where people say, "You know what? You're right. I changed my heart and attitude around my job and I realized it wasn't the job, it was me." Not to be too introspective, but I actually found that to be the case initially. But regardless, it's a good setup for a change if you decide later anyway.

The second step is fix the role. Sometimes it's not that you need to make a change in a company but instead it may just be the role is not playing to your strengths or maybe the blend of responsibilities isn't quite right. So I encourage people to get a little piece of paper out and write a plus and a minus on each side of the column. Just write things you enjoy about the job, things you don't. From problems you're facing to functions and you're probably going to realize there's half the job you like and half of the job you don't like. Let's just say that. So a way to fix the role would be to look if there is any way to outsource the pieces that you're not really good at and that are not in your genius zone. Things that you can let go of. Because when you're doing things you're not good at and you don't enjoy, that sucks your energy and it sucks your life. When you're doing things you are really good at and that are in your genius zone, it's really life-giving. So how can you shift the role to play more to your strengths? If you're a team leader, you may have a chance to swap out team or structure by talking to your boss and having a heart to heart to

see if there is some way to change that. I've seen that be a great change, where people realize that their job is different and they focus on this aspect and now they're loving it.

Chad: I would think managers would be glad if someone would come to them and say, "Here are my strengths. Here are the things I really want to excel in and help the organization with. How can I do more of that?"

Paul: Exactly.

Chad: I love that phrase. The genius zone. Stay in the zone.

Paul: The genius zone is where you have great skills, energy, and passion and the things that give you energy and life.

The last piece, if you've gone through that process, is time to fix the logo. I call it 'fix the logo on your card'. It's probably the same functional job but you need to switch the logo. That's the time when it's probably worth looking at your options and seeing what's out there. I find that people sometimes go too quick to that phase and start looking online or interviewing but they haven't really thought about why they're making a change and what is not working where they're at.

Chad: Thank you so much for sharing that framework. I like those three "F"s there. Fix the attitude, fix the role, and fix the logo. And with fixing the attitude, that might be a hard pill to swallow at first but I've had friends that completely skip over that. They say, "I'm just tired of this place. It's time to move on." Where a little bit of introspection would have served them well.

Paul: Yup. I totally agree. [Crosstalk]

I can speak for myself on that too. I'm someone who went through that. I've seen it both ways.

Chad: Yup. And the grass is always greener on the other side, right?

Paul: Oh yeah! I'm a special snowflake and flower and you don't understand me. That's a perspective we sometimes bring to our job. We need to think less of ourselves.

Chad: Yup. And play to our strengths. A book I found a lot of value in and others have too, I believe it was called *The Strength Finder*?

Paul: Yes.

Chad: ??Alpton? This kind of gave us permission to say, "I really should be focusing on my strengths as opposed to…" You know those annual performance reviews that so many organizations do? Early in my career as I was going through those, I always felt like, "Okay. So how do I improve my weaknesses? What are the steps I'm going to take to make my weaknesses not weaknesses?" That seemed to be the focus as opposed to, "How can I really leverage my strengths?"

Paul: I'm a big fan, Chad, of that. You should be doubling down on your strengths. You should have awareness and mitigate your blind spots. Where you really make the breakout and the linchpin in your organization is when you play to your strengths. Not when you become average.

Chad: Yeah, I absolutely agree. There's always people around us that their strengths are things we are not good at.

Paul: So pointing back to the engineering and product management world, and reflecting on the role, that's maybe a way to unpack the pieces where you realize there are certain aspects of that job or things you've done on project that you really stood out from your peers and were really excellent at. But you got sucked into other things you're not. Finding a way where you can play more to those strengths and be more of a specialist in some things can actually help accelerate your career. I think a lot of the perception is that you need to be good at everything at the job and maybe you're just not.

Chad: Good. When it comes to fixing the logo, let's dive deeper into that a bit more. So if you're at that place where you say, "I've tried to adjust the role and play to my strengths. I've done everything I can in this organization. We're just not a good fit." What are the right steps to start taking then?

Paul: Great question. The biggest challenge I find in going through a job search. The advice is the same whether you're at a job and you're just in a funk and you're not sure what to do next or you just lost your job and you are looking. I think it's the same problem where most people spend more time planning a barbeque party than they do their career. So what that looks like is that most people don't know where they are and where they want to go in their career. That's the fundamental problem. It's not the market. It's not your resume. It's not the job boards. It's the fact that you don't really know where you are and where you're going. And you're hoping that some company will give you a vision for your life. So I think that is the fundamental starting point where I encourage people to slow down and stop looking at their resume and step back and see where your starting point is at. I can walk through those stages if you'd like but that's the general framework of what I do. It's just like on a GPS map— once you know where you are and where you want to go, it's not that hard to map it or to route it. In a similar way, it's a much more effective resume and interview when you can answer those questions. But when

you don't have answers to those points, that's why your resume and interviews kind of suck.

Chad: Yeah. We have a few minutes; if you could walk through those steps, that would be very helpful.

Paul: Well first is the starting point of where you are now and there's a process where you unpack your career. This is really doing the plus and minus because not all jobs are all good or all bad. So I like to think about the aspects you enjoy and so think about what was good and how you can create more of those in the next role. Knowing yourself—I'm a big fan of the ??disk test—and knowing how you're wired uniquely, your personality profile, and your motivators. Talking to family and friends to get some honest feedback and wisdom helps you get this criteria of 'Here is where I'm at now in my life. This is what I'm good at, what I'm not good at. What gives me energy', and certain aspects of what you need either money wise or commute wise. It's basically just things you can create on where you are now in your life.

Then it's the question of where you want to go next. I find that there's three steps in that have been really helpful. First is to broaden your perspective. In Seattle, I get people who say, "Oh yeah, I'm looking for a job. I've already applied to Amazon, T-Mobile, REI, Expedia, Microsoft, Starbucks, Nordstrom, all the usual players. And then they don't know where to go next. Part of broadening your perspective is to look at the hundreds and thousands of companies in your industry and in your area that could be interesting to you. It's a process I kind of walk people through to broaden their perspective.

Then there is a process of narrowing that focus to get that target list for the right reasons and really visualizing what that might look like and get you excited. You get this visual of 'I can visualize doing this type of job at that company. That really drives me."

Then, you're actually ready—third step in the process—to really tell your story in a compelling way. To stand out from the pack. And from that,

that's when you update your resume to reflect those things. How you prep the interview to tell your story in a compelling way. And research the companies to get going. I think—just one quick anecdote on the interview—people shouldn't waste too much time preparing for interviews. It really comes down to two fundamental questions. If you nail these two questions, as a recruiter, I'm going to tell you that 80 percent of the interview is done. The rest is just supporting material.

The first question you'll always get asked is, 'What are you looking for?" People don't take advantage of that question. I coach people to say, "I'm looking for five things." Just saying that alone, you've already stood out from the pack because you know what you're talking about and I get a pen and I'm now at number one. I'm waiting to hear what number one is. So you walk through very tangible and measurable things that you've created because you've done this process of you know who you are and where you're going. And you tell them what you're looking for.

The second question you will get asked is, "Why are you interested in us." That's where doing your research and making a link with the past in where you want to go and why this is a good fit. If you've nailed those two questions, which typically are the first five or ten minutes, someone is going to already have a bias to want to hire you or at least to put you on the short list. There is an art to the recruiting process that I think you can use and that I help coach people on.

The last part is to get rolling. There's ways to email your resume properly. There are ways to ask for help from friends. Most of us do a really poor job of asking our friends to help us, through the contacts and connections. There are also ways to track weekly progress of things you're in control of. You're not in control if someone interviews you or gives you an offer but you are in control of daily or weekly activities that will lead you to success. So I'm a big fan of measuring things that you have control over, which gives you a bit of sanity but also gives you a bit of daily, weekly progress.

Chad: Wow. Okay. So everyone listening? I thought that was incredibly, tremendously valuable. So I'll run through it real quick. Let me know if I miss anything here, Paul.

First, it's unpacking your career and getting to know yourself. Maybe using some assessments like the ??disk?? to help you with knowing yourself. In my case, I mentioned that book already, ??*The Strengths Finder??*, I found really good value in that. And another resource—I wonder if you've come across this one—is Max Lucado. He's a prolific author and a pastor of a church in San Antonio. He wrote this book a few years ago called, *The Cure for the Common Life*. With his process, he was a Pastor getting involved in all these other things like the building committee and the parking lot committee, all these different things. But his strength is teaching. *The Cure for the Common Life* talks about this process called the sweet spot and trying to find out—sweet is an acronym, I don't know what it stands for. Figuring out where your sweet spot in life is, and looking back on even what you really enjoyed doing as a kid. Just working through some steps to really unpack yourself and getting to know yourself well.

Paul: That's a great point.   It reminds me of Michael Hyatt-- he gave a good diagram too in those three circles that intersect and that's where you ask, "What are you really good at?" What will people pay you for? What makes you stand out from your peers? What is a functional skill and experience you have?

The other circle is the part you're really passionate about. What gets you excited and you enjoy.

And then there's….I thought there was a third circle. Basically the point was—

Chad: And you want to be able to get paid. I think the third circle [crosstalk].

Paul: Yeah, you get paid. You're good at it and yet you need to get paid. Will the market actually validate that.

??oops messed up formatting…this is all Paul…??Right. I think that sometimes the mistake you get a quote on a lot is "Follow your passions." There's even an Oprah quote on a Starbucks mug I read that says, "Follow your passions. It'll help you in your career and life." That's actually really horrible advice, which may sound funny. Because I feel really passionate about videogames or backpacking but it doesn't mean I should necessarily go work at a backpack company. You can have a hobby. You can have a hobby outside of work and have some volunteer stuff outside of work. But it doesn't necessarily mean you should do that for a living to feed your family and maximize your career. There's a confusion a little bit that you need to always be super passionate about everything or if you are passionate about it, that's what you do for a living. It's a clue. It could overlap but it doesn't always have to be that link. I know it might sound like a controversial statement but I just wanted to throw it out there.

Chad: Yeah, and back to that three circle model, 've also heard that described by Jim Collins, the business author of *Good to Great* and other things. The passion is part of it but those other two elements are really important too. Your strengths as well as what people are going to pay you for.

So we got that knowing about yourself and then thinking about broadening your perspective about what your possibilities are and places you might really enjoy working , and then building that target list to go after. And then telling your story. Everywhere I look, it seems that everyone is talking in terms of story. I personally relate to that context of, "What is your background and how do all these pieces fit together?" But you used it in getting ready for the interview and those two questions. So everyone listening, catch this. This is great.

What are you looking for? Great response: "I'm looking for five things." You've already unpacked yourself and you're familiar with your own story. You know what those five things are.

And then when you're asked, "Why are you interested in us?" You've built your target list, you've already done your research. You already

know that company, why you're there, and why it's a good fit for you. And then get rolling.

Really good steps. I want to step out of this context just for a second because I suspect you have some of this information as resources available someplace. Is that true?

Paul: I'm glad you asked, Chad! Yes. Don't worry about trying to take notes on what I said on those areas because I created a job search checklist for you. That you can—it's a free resource that has all that I talked about but in detail. It unpacks everything in this process. And it gives you a roadmap for that. You can find this on my website, jobsearchroadmap.com. On the top right you can just download the checklist and from that you'll be directed to about 18 blogs that are related to each of those topics. So you can get a high-level overview or you can drill as deep as you want. It should be a good resource for you that has helped many other people.

Chad: Excellent. Good because I was feeling the same way. This is a lot to keep track of right now. In the show notes of this episode, I'll put a link to that website and a little summary of this too.

Okay, we got a little information on the company's perspective, the product manager or developer that might be looking for a change in the work they're doing to another company, perhaps. Does this change any for the person that is currently unemployed and the steps that they would take?

Paul: Honestly, these steps are the same for anyone. I think it's more just the urgency you might feel if you're unemployed versus at a company. It might take more time to do this process. I think when you're at a company, you need to be a little more discreet in how much you're away from the office. Part of this is important when you have clarity on what you want, you can be sure that you only take interviews for stuff that you

know could be a fit. I think a mistake I see people do is they will just post their resume and anyone who calls them, they'll go out and do interviews. But the hard part is you start to have fifteen interviews, you start to look like you're not at your job very often. "Where's Bob?" I think you want to be smart on how you approach this while you're currently at a place. But also I find that people at a job will get a phone call from a buddy or run across something and it's the only thing they've looked at. It's the only thing they've seen. And they make a decision linearly, "Oh should I make a job change for this or not?" It could be a dream job where you just found it or they found you and congrats. But I do find people who just take something because it ran across in front of them and they gave them an offer without really going through this process to figure out where they are, where they want to go, and does it fit into their framework.

I encourage people to be going through this regardless of where you are—even if you're happy at your job and not looking. It's good to go through this because then you're ready when opportunity does call, to know if it fits into the framework of where you are and where you want to go in life.

Chad: I think that's an excellent point—one I hadn't pondered until you said that. I would expect there are benefits in just going through this process and doing a better job to get to know yourself and what is a really good fit for you. That would even apply if that opportunity did come but it would probably make you a better employee for where you are right now.

Excellent. I love motivational quotes. I often ask my guests to share an innovation or a success quote and why you chose that one. What do you have for us, Paul?

Paul: I was thinking about your audience—people in the product?? engineering industry. My favorite quote was from Steve Jobs that, "Real artists ship." Because real artists need to ship something in order to be a good artist.

In the end, engineers and product managers are artists. You're creating something of value, that is new, that makes an impact. But there is something about needing to get it out the door and how the market responds to it. I think that is something I have seen where you can get caught in feature creep and lose sight of the fact that it has to ship. Anyway, I do find that what separates the good from the great leaders ??in the state?? is they understand the concept and live it well on our teams.

Chad: Very good. You've got to get that product out and then start getting that experience from the market and customers telling you how to make it better.

Paul: You don't want your customers to be beta testers but you do want to at least…you gotta get it out there.

Chad: There's another perspective which is—and I forget who to attribute this to, I'm drawing a blank right now—but if you don't hate your first product, you waited too long to ship it.

Paul: Yes.

Chad: You gotta get it out and get that feedback.

Paul: Perfectionism, which is very common in engineers and why they're such great engineers, can also hurt the timeline.

Chad: Exactly. That's why I have in my title, "Recovering Engineer". You give me a problem, I see a solution and I will go drive down that solution path and not necessarily take into account what the customer really needs and

how soon they really need it. So very good. Thanks for sharing that quote.

To wrap up, how has this interview been beneficial to you? What do you want to leave our listeners with and how would we find out more about your resources?

Paul: Thanks for doing this interview. It's really great you're providing these resources. It's really valuable information for people in this space making products.

Chad: Thank you.

Paul: ??It's fun to [inaudible] [00:28:39] of that?? and it's fun to pay it forward so congrats on what you're doing. The main thing is I really want it to be a blessing for people who are feeling stuck in their career or maybe going through a job change which on average most Americans go through a job change every three to four years so it happens to all of us. But this is just to be a resource and help people out. Just go on the website to check it out. If it helps, great. If you have a friend or co-worker going through that, it's a resource to think of that and it's free. Happy to be available to be a resource for folks. That's the big win. Just go to "JobSearchRoadmap" to check it out.

Chad: Again, that's jobsearchroadmap.com?

Paul: Yes.

Chad: Very good. I really appreciate your time, Paul. Thanks for talking about your experience and for helping the product managers and developers listening. We all need to deal with this issue of finding new work at times

and I think we're better prepared now from your tips. Looking forward to checking out your resources on your website. Thank you.

Paul: Thank you, Chad, for inviting me. Have a great day.