

## TEI 055: Solving Challenges Organizations Create with Product Management and Innovation

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Rich Mironov

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Chad: Hi, this is Chad, your host and founder of Product Innovation Educators where I help turn product managers into product masters. I have something really special for product managers. It is the product mastery roadmap that guides product managers to become product masters. It shows the path to doubling and more your product success rate and creating products customers want and love without feeling overwhelmed as a product manager. Go to [theeverydayinnovator.com](http://theeverydayinnovator.com) to download your free product mastery roadmap.

My guest today is Rich Mironov. He's a legend in the world of product management. He is the founder of Product Camp, a collaborative conference for product managers and marketers that are spread across the world. He also authored the Art of Product Management: Lessons from a Silicon Valley Innovator. Today, he provides full-time and short-term product management direction to technology companies. While our discussion is in the context of software product management, much of the insights apply to product managers across industries. To get the notes of the discussion, go to [theeverydayinnovator.com/055](http://theeverydayinnovator.com/055).

Rich, thanks for being on the show today and talking innovation with us.

Rich: Oh, I'm thrilled. Thank you so much, Chad.

Chad: You have deep experience in the world of product management. One of the things you're involved in is coaching people who are new to product management, and you probably hear a lot about why they're getting into that field, right? So let's start there. What are the reasons that you hear for people wanting to become product managers?

Rich: I think I hear a couple or three different clusters of reasons or explanations. One that I'm really excited when I hear about is that particularly folks coming from the development side of the world are looking to get into less structured, more interesting problems and engaging more with customers, figuring out what the world wants. Often that's people who have been frustrated by getting a lot of very detailed specs or requirements that don't seem to go anywhere, and they want to push out and back into the world. And those are generally the folks who I'm really encouraging and thrilled to hear about.

The next group of people, again from the development side, that I'm a little less excited about are the ones who are thinking about being in charge or being in control or somehow in the power seat. So there's a fair number of people who have this I think incorrect perception that product managers are in charge and make things happen on their own and get to be the boss who really want to be the boss. Often I'm trying as many different ways as I can to wave them off because that's just not my experience with the job.

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And then there's one last group which tends to be coming not from the engineering and development side but from the marketing or sales or sports side. And usually, that's about wanting to get more involved in the earlier stages of building the right product. So good stuff.

Chad: Do you see that related to the first one, with those people that want to make a difference and actually get the product moving through the system, or are they wanting to build a product people actually buy and appreciate?

Rich: I think from the development side, that's a clear motivator. I think there's nothing more frustrating than building a product or a module or a thing and not having anybody using it. I think from the marketing and support side, it's a frustration with having products arriving that you're incomplete or hard to support or don't meet the need much, and so that's folks who are trying to move back upstream and help have the right thing done. So kind of the same motivations but from opposite ends.

Chad: It's interesting; I ask this question of a group recently too. The one that just wasn't part of my past experience was the influence and power dimension, right? Because I would think of that in terms of I want to have influence over creating the products that people actually want, but I detected the same thing that you said earlier which was there's also this dimension of I want to have more power in the organization.

Rich: Right. I'm always a little trepidatious about folks who want to be in charge of other people. They want to be the boss. They want to run the process; that it's about personal position or personal grandeur because my experience in product management is there's a whole lot less of that than anybody expects or even wants.

Chad: So even those of us that have gotten into product management, we typically find out that that's a lot of responsibility and very little authority, right?

Rich: Right.

Chad: And that doesn't mean that is not a path to executive roles. A lot of people end up from a product management background -- maybe Steve Jobs is probably the most famous one -- into executive roles or the C-suite of companies.

Rich: And I think that's for a good reason because again we may think of the folks who are at the executive level running our companies as being in charge and telling us what to do, but I think the reality is really not that. If you're a good, strong CEO or a CXO, it's a lot more of rallying the good ideas from wherever they come from and shaping them and getting people on board. A tremendous amount of what executives do are communicating the goals, communicating the metrics, communicating the customer joy so that the smart people further down the chain can actually get real work done and figure out what to do on their own.

Chad: Absolutely.

Rich: The sort of Soviet style command and control. In the business school days, we called that Theory X.

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"I'm your boss. I'm smarter than you. I've done your job before. Do what I say" I think is a uniquely bad model for building technology. So if you come at this with the "I want to be the boss of you" point of view, you're not setting yourself up either to be a great product manager or to move up to be a great executive because great executives are people who motivate and lead and help shape vision in other people's heads and then set them free to do real work.

Chad: Right. It's a great point. You'll like this story. It's a past episode, I think Episode 46 that I interviewed the global director of innovation at Caterpillar. So 110,000-person company, right? And this is a new group since June this year. They have 200 people in the analytics and innovation division. He draws the organizational charge upside down, so with him at the very bottom supporting everyone else's job and his job is to make everyone else successful.

Rich: Right. I think my first job out of school way back before electricity was discovered was that Hewlett Packard in the early '80s and a lot of what we have forgotten and rediscovered about management HP knew about in the '30s, '40s, '50s and '60s. We always talked about great managers are the ones whose people got worked on and were happy and fulfilled and successful, and a lot of that was removing obstacles from the people who work for you, right? Hire smart folks. Get problems out of their way. Let them succeed and what the Agile folks sometimes call servant leaders.

Chad: Exactly.

Rich: To the extent that we remember that product managers don't deliver anything that's an end deliverable to any customer. We're just helping things along so that they're coherent and well considered. But developers write code and document folks write docs and UX people figure out workflows and salespeople take money from customers, we don't do any of those things. We aren't allowed to think of ourselves as that much more important than anyone else.

Chad: And oddly enough, we get involved in all those things but more as a facilitator and just helping out as necessary.

Rich: That's right. If there's not clear direction, if there's not clear vision, if we don't have our customers firmly in mind, we do the wrong stuff and our efforts wasted. But again back to the original point, if this is about having a big head and being in charge, not so good.

Chad: Not the right fit.

Rich: Right.

Chad: So let's talk about some of those frustrations. So people get into this because they really want to influence product, because they want to work with cross-functional teams and hopefully build the right products, right? But it also has these challenges. You've run on this first person and what do you hear with the groups that you helped? What are the big frustrations people encounter in product management?

[09:06]

Rich: Yeah, a really good question. I think a lot of this is outside the scope of an individual product manager to hold back. So what are the five or six really toughest things that happen? One is the sales teams that are given free rein to close deals with special features in them, that don't currently live in the product. After the fact the sales team comes back and says, "By the way, we got a \$2 million deal with customer x and it requires that we had teleportation by next Friday."

Whenever we're doing that, we know that we're in trouble as product managers. Usually, that's along the road to moving from being a volume software vendor to being a custom software shop because as soon as each customer gets to define their own specs, you now have one version of the product for every customer. All the economics of the business go to hell in a hand basket because you have to actually now charge for the time that your developers spend instead of amortizing that over thousands of customers.

Sales teams getting the right to put in features, the second version of that is the sales teams who have really good fast escalations to the CEO who comes over and says, there's always some phrase that includes "How hard can it be?"

Chad: I've heard that too many times. If we're talking software that gets used way too many times and people listening are in all kinds of industries but it still fits. We have the same problems.

Rich: And it's usually followed by some phrase like, "I bet it's only ten lines of code." By the way, as a product manager you're 100% welcome to sit whoever says that down in front of the computer and ask them to type those ten lines of code. So those are I think two of the pressures from the sales side. From the engineering side, from the development side, I think sometimes you've got a culture of make it perfect. So we can't ship if there are any bugs and we know that there will always be one more or a deep investment in architecture and I love software architects but sometimes we go overboard and we're building architecture to the exclusion of shippable products. So how do we find a balance there?

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Chad: I think the architecture question is when people get wrapped up way too much because we get down in it to a new product, we get excited about it, and we think, "Okay, this thing is officially going to serve 500,000 people," when we first needed to serve ten.

Rich: Right.

Chad: And I have yet to be on a software project. We're around version 3. We don't completely rearchitect everything no matter what.

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Rich: Indeed. I'm a huge fan most days of the whole Lean UX, Lean startup movement where what we must do is we must get something in the hands of customers even if it's only sketches or partials to find out which half of our design was wrong.

Chad: Exactly. I love how you phrase that. Could you say that again?

Rich: Sure. The faster we can get something in the hands of our customers or our prospects and it might just be a piece of paper or it might be some partial piece of software, we get to find out which half of our assumptions and features are just wrong. Routinely, I'm surprised at how poor my judgment is 30 years into this about what's going to be the most important thing. Even though I've done the work and I've done the research and I've done the interviews, I'm just wrong a lot of the time. A combination of urgency and humility means that you want to get stuff in their hands as soon as possible.

The place I worry though, so I see a lot of folks who forget that the back half of that process is in fact to build a product which is more than minimally viable, but folks talk about the minimum lovable product or the minimum salable product. When you're finally looking to take money out of the hands of customers, it has to be good enough to get them to buy your thing instead of nothing or your thing instead of the competitor. It has to actually be pretty good. I see a lot of teams get confused between the learning cycle -- are we still experimenting, are we still learning -- and the production cycle where we ship or die. If we ship something that's not good, we also die.

In the carefully gender-neutral way of saying it out here, real men and women ship code. They don't talk about it. Real product managers ship products that can be bought and used and add value, not just look good in a pitch or in a mockup. Ultimately, we have to get out of the pure experimental learning phase and into the learn as we go but build real product phase.

Chad: That's an element that requires courage on the part of the product manager because there is that great organizational pressure. The product managers are uniquely in the position to say, "This is not a product our customers are going to value. We need to hold out and make it right."

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Rich: That's right. And it's pressure in both directions because on the one hand, if you have investors, most companies have investors, the only questions the investors want answered are: when are we going to ship? How much are we going to charge for it? And how many millions of people are going to buy it? Earlier is better and it's really hard to push back and say, "The product is not ready yet," especially if it's got a working user interface and the fact that none of the algorithms are implemented in software is less obvious and then I can click through and pretend to sign up.

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On the other hand, the other side of the pressure here is that many development teams and many particularly naïve Agile organizations will tell you that they're never going to be ready. There are always two more features. There are always six more bugs. There's almost some more automated testing to build and some DevOps to put in place. Part of being in the product manager job is the unpopular moment when you have to say, "We're done innovating for now. We have to finish the features that are underway. Damn it!" It's ship or die and we may even have to work some weekends and some nights because the competition is going to ship. They've announced that they're shipping on October 31st. If we're two weeks later than that, we might as well not bother. Or the feature which we believe is so innovative is in jeopardy.

So we're always riding that knife edge of wait as long as possible to ship because we want it best but ship as early as possible because we want to satisfy some subset of customers and get money flowing and find out what the market thinks.

Chad: And that's another one of these frustrations is that tension that always exists.

Rich: Right. I see a lot of junior product folks and especially junior engineering folks who would like me to give them the template that computes that for them to five decimal places so that we can pick the exact moment on a Thursday morning when we're ready to go. I have yet to see any magical computational tool that's way better than the gut feel of folks who have been through it before. We ride uncertainty and we ride our best guess for the future and if we're wrong, we have to be willing to stand up and say, "I was wrong."

Chad: Yep. That's it. There's another frustration I've run into quite often which is some view as the internal and external focus. I talked to a lot of product managers in some organizations even the organizational constraint is we don't want you out with customers. In other cases, it's just "I don't have time because of everything else I'm doing to go talk with customers."

Rich: Yeah, I see that in a lot of places. I especially see that in medium to large companies that have divided the product owner job from the product manager job and then assign the product owners to report up through the development team and the product managers to report up

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through the marketing team. Product manager is on the marketing side. Product owner is on the development side. They don't talk. They don't sit together. They don't communicate well.

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And you've got all kinds of pathologies here. But even in the simpler case where you've got a single product manager on a single small product, I'm always hearing about how they don't have time to talk with customers or they're told not to or the sales team doesn't want them out there making a mess. And it's just wrong. It's just flat out incorrect. It leads you to the wrong place.

I'm usually looking for some 30-60 balance here. If you're not spending 30% of your time with customers, with prospects, with the competitors' products, with your channel partners, then honestly you don't know anything and I think you've lost the right to create epics and user stories or requirements or whatever your container is because if you don't have enough data yourself personally from the people who consume your product, then your guesses aren't much better than anybody else's.

Chad: Right. You're not close to what the problem is anymore and how the customers think about it.

Rich: And often the first come back is, well, I've talked to three or four customers this month. And then we play a little definitional game. I ask them if they can tell me what an outlier is and almost all of them can tell me that an outlier is the one that's not in the middle of the distribution and then we follow up with. So if you've only talked to four customers, how you tell if any of these are outliers? Go back to your statistics. If you don't have  $n=25$ , if you don't have 20 or 30 customers in your recent memory, then you can't tell whether the 26th or the 31st is asking for some crazy thing or you just haven't talked to enough customers. You need that power of conviction to say, "Gosh! That was a great idea. I love that idea. That's a terrific idea. You're so smart and tall and handsome. Let me put that in the backlog where it belongs (at the bottom).

Chad: Yeah. And it takes wisdom and judgment to know if any of those outliers might also be the next big thing.

Rich: That's right. And it's a tremendous amount of judgment because you can't get too far ahead of the market. But one of those outliers in fact is brilliant but the other 92, they're just not and you have to have the strength of conviction to say, "I appreciate your input and I'm glad you're a customer," and in the politest possible way we're not doing that.

Chad: Right. And this goes back to what you're talking about earlier about are we developing a product for individual customers or a segment? We want to identify those outliers that are part

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of a new trend which we go, "Ooh, that's important. And if we follow that, that's going to open things up for us." First is the 92 in your example that really are, okay, those are individual one-offs that we can't provide time to.

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Rich: Or they're asking for things that you know don't matter and everybody knows don't matter. There's some subtlety here though too. So there are companies that are selling into relatively smaller markets. So for instance, if you were doing some kind of software for the major cellular providers in the US, there's only four of them, maybe three and a half, I'm not sure, any day. And it turns out that sort of is a matter of principle. Every one of those four companies insists on a couple of features that whether they need them or not are really just a test of loyalty for their vendors and are not being asked for by the other three customers.

If you're in the market with four customers, you don't have the option to say no and that inevitably leads you to the place where you have four builds of your product and you have to adjust your economics to charge enough money to support four product threads or whatever they are or be brilliant at architecture so those cost you less, and you need to know if you're in that kind of market. But for most of us, the small business market is millions of small businesses and so you better have your pulse of thousands of small businesses because it's not worth bothering otherwise.

Chad: Right. Very good. So we've gone through some reasons why people get into product management, some of the frustrations they find there and some of those frustrations are really organizational challenges. I want to connect the dot back to the beginning which was this issue of influence because I think there's a thread between influence in a positive way which is I want to have influence over making the right products, what the customers really need, and then trying to get that done in the organization. Organizations don't always help us do that. Let's talk about advice that you might give to the product manager in that situation that really wants to have the right kind of influence and how they can get there. How can they basically build products that people want and get their organizations to support them?

Rich: Really good question. I think a lot of folks come at product management thinking it's a purely rational check the box, do the spreadsheet, top-down ROI, we can compute the answer kind of job. There is some of that but if I look at what salespeople are great at, salespeople are great at understanding the psychology of their customers and prospects and figuring out what the process that any one customer is to get things approved and who the champions are and great salespeople are masters at understanding the inner workings of other people.



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I think product managers need a lot of that same skill. Every product manager should go through the Myers-Briggs thing or the GISC process. Everybody should read the old Dale Carnegie book about influencing people.

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A lot of what we have to do is first we have to get the smartest folks around us to help us get to the right answers because it's not important that we create the right answers. It's important that we find the right answers. And then we have to figure out how to sell that up and around through our organizations. So who are the people on the executive team that are classically analytical and fact-driven and maybe those are more the engineering types but maybe not, and who are the ones that really only listen to customer stories and vignettes? So how can we make sure we have three or four instances of specifically named customers, in fact individuals of those customers who have confirmed that we are doing the right thing?

There are other folks who just want to run the spreadsheets and they want to look at the numbers, and that requires us to do some financial engineering to show them it makes sense even if the numbers are to two decimal places and only accurate to one. I think we have to understand that people in organizations are people. Some of them have kids and what to talk about kids and some of them are sports fans and want to talk about sports or travel. Some of them just want to get down to business and you better give them what you need them to do right away because they don't want you to waste your time. The influences about understanding who matters, how decisions get made and then helping steer the right answer to the right conclusion.

Chad: It's being aware of how the organization works, who you need to talk to and how to get help. And I like that you incorporated we do need to know our customers and I just have a one-customer story but have enough to represent what we think is the target market and that we can credibly relay that. I've talked to product managers. I don't know if you've had this experience where they ran into challenges with that or they've come back from a customer event where they're sharing the stories and maybe the teams are "Yeah, yeah, we're down another path." And then they brought video back and they show the video or even better, they keep people from measuring team out to the customer event.

Rich: Right. I think that's great. One other thing that I view is I think a good effect here and it's subtle which is every time I talk to a customer, phone, in person, Skype, whatever it is, obviously I take notes. I try to put those up on the Wiki, wherever it goes, and then I send a one or two-liner out to the engineering team that says, "Talk to customer from Nordstrom." Long form narrative is stored here, the takeaway is they're really excited about feature x and they're not so excited about feature y. If you do that once, it's only once and the team may or may not read the stuff. But if you do that, let's say, twice a week, what happens in the course of a

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quarter is the subliminal drumbeat where the folks on the team say, "Ah, yeah, Rich talked to another customer and Rich talked to another customer and Rich talked to another customer." Some of them will go read the verbatims and find things in there that I missed which is great.

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But everyone will eventually notice that I talk to a lot of customer. That's worth its weight in gold because the next meeting when I say, "A lot of customers had told me x," I have some believability which I didn't have before. Yes, I should include folks in the team every time I can, both because they're smarter and because it's motivating, but I need to establish that I in fact talked to more customers than anyone else so nobody can call me on the "Yeah, but that's an outlier."

Chad: And this is your point, if we're not spending 30% of our time externally, we're not going to have that ability and we lack influence because of that.

Rich: That's right. Again, ask anyone on your development team if they're smarter than you and they will tell you they are. So trying to convince them that you're smarter than them is the wrong answer for technical folks. The only reason we have influence is because we bring better facts and better understanding and better shape of the market to the table. Otherwise, let's not bother.

Chad: So there are other organizational dynamics taking place. We've hit some of these. There are things that have been going on this year in organizations, especially large organizations that I'm not sure -- I know in instances they get a lot of energy going around these new ideas and innovation going on. I'm not sure they translate into real actions. What have you been seeing that organizations are doing to be innovative that's not working? And also let's talk about what is working.

Rich: Good question. Everyone wants to be more innovative and that's defined whoever it needs to be.

Chad: It is the mantra for the year.

Rich: That's right. So I think the number one thing I see that seems like wasted effort is the innovation day. Everybody gets off of their regular thing. They're all excused from their regular jobs. We bring everybody together. We hand out stacks of Post-It notes and everybody writes their 15 favorite innovative ideas on Post-It notes and sticks them on the wall. And then they go back to their jobs. What we've done if that's all we do is we've created a backlog of ten or 100 or 1,000 Post-It notes, each of which -- it's much more like a tweet or a haiku than it is like an idea.

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Somebody wrote, "Get more of our docs online." Okay. Well, maybe. Maybe not. What does it mean? Who is it for? What problem does it solve? Why is it return money or make customers happier? So we have these fragmentary ideas and if that's what we did, it's because we forgot that the world is long on ideas and short on valuable validated ideas that really matter to customers and move the needle.

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That last part actually takes time and energy and focus and smart people who are not doing their regular day jobs 110%. So what's our plan to take those Post-Its off the walls and actually do something with them? It's the first one. The other one that really frustrates me is we need to have some scope or scale for what we're thinking about as different kinds of innovative things. So there are going to be innovations which are internal process integrations. Our travel department could save us money on booking travel if we used different tools. Our HR team could source more resumes if we did x and y.

They're strategic down at the individual contributor level and that's usually who wrote them down. The next up is we've got feature ideas and there are infinite numbers of those. Here are ways we can make our existing products better. One up from that is here's a new product we need that fits into our existing product line. And then here's the entirely new thing which turns out to be a new business unit or a new division and it's going to require us to make major investment and maybe throw some other product line under the bus in order to fund the next hydrogen-powered car.

Chad: And this sounds like a portfolio perspective on innovation energy, right? Where do we spend our energy inside the organization?

Rich: That's right. Exactly right. And it's not that any one of those is, by definition, best but we really want to take the very small tactical operational improvements and hand them to the people who run the departments that those go with because they're the ones who can use them and we want to take the feature level stuff and hand those to the product managers of the products they go with. But the big strategic form of new business unit thing probably goes to the C-level folks and some strategy team and pull in some experts because it needs different kind of handling and may even need the board of directors to approve it.

Chad: Absolutely.

Rich: And so if we haven't planned a sorting mechanism for what to do with those things, then they all just sit on the wall and next quarter we wonder why we're not more innovative.

Chad: Right. Nothing really changes.

Rich: Nothing changes, yes.

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Chad: And when it comes to the innovation day approach that you shared, I think the organizations don't realize where their weaknesses are at times. And when we think about innovation, there is this process -- well, it's not actually a process but I'll say we march across some timeline which is we need to find ideas somehow, sort those ideas, start executing on the good ones, develop it to something real and then get it out to customers. I've worked with too many organizations who say, "You know, our problem is we just don't have enough ideas." When the reality is they put in so many barriers in place in the organization that the problem actually is they have ideas going on. They just can't get them through some process to evaluate them and decide if they should develop them or not.

[33:10]

Rich: Indeed. I did some work with a company that used to have a 15-gate process.

Chad: Only 15?

Rich: Only 15. They had numbers. Everybody just referred to the gates by numbers. It was uniquely designed to prevent innovation.

Chad: Rather risk averse driven it sounds like.

Rich: Yeah. And they were doing it for all the best reasons, just had the wrong result.

Chad: Okay. So those are some of the elements that aren't working inside organizations. Let's focus on what is working and dive into that a little bit more.

Rich: I see some really, really good teams that are putting great innovation processes in place and again thinking a lot about the Lean UX, Lean startups out of the world here. Something I've seen that's really effective is to pull out or create a team, sometimes we call it dual track team or a fully assigned team to work on some innovation stuff, let's say, for a quarter because you're never willing to really spare your best folks that long but you need a really strong product person, a really strong engineering or architecture person and a really strong UX design person as a team.

And rather than handing them one idea and saying, "This is your idea, go run with it," what I see much more effective is to hand them a stack of ideas that are somehow in the same market segment or related and say, take these 12 ideas and as radically as possible, pick one and vet it, decide what's useful, keep it, throw it away, move on to the next, and that your goal at the end of the quarter.

Instead of proving that the one idea which we believe is perfect is perfect, is instead to run one week Lean validation laps around a stack of ideas that are somehow in the same sector. Pick out the good stuff. Throw away the bad stuff, not get emotionally committed to the first one in

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the stack, pair them up, chop them up, and at the end of some finite amount of time and let's call it a quarter just for fun, either they're going to bring forward one or two ideas which are thoughtfully vetted and have some legs to them with some paper sketches from your designer and some rough business model or market size from here and be a product manager and some architectural ideas from your architect, software person.

Or they might come back and say, "We ran through all 13 of these in just five weeks. We got eight weeks left. Let's take the next ones off the stack," that there's no penalty for failing to do that because you want to avoid the emotional commitment that says your job is to prove that my idea is good.

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Chad: Right. And that's a very good caution for product managers to not get attached to the idea of being good.

Rich: We love our ideas. They are ours or at least we adopted them. I think a lot about parenting in this regard which is my kid is more attractive than all the other kids by definition, right? Don't tell me otherwise. And my goal is to have my kid grow up to be a success. The way my daughter gets to Carnegie Hall is I drive her to a lot of music lessons and she practices, practices, practices. But if my job to encourage and to deflect all the naysayers and to put food on the table and have a long-term plan to save for college, it's really hard. Sometimes you find out that your product is just not worthy and we're going to replace it with something else. We get so committed to defending our products against all naysayers, against all commerce, and protecting resources and having a plan for version 11, that it's really hard at version 2 to say, "You know, this isn't as good an idea as we thought it was. We're going to make it a feature of something else or we're going to sun set it."

Chad: And I think this is a badge of honor that product managers need to learn that they need to wear, that there's something honorable and productive for their organization to kill off the ideas that we know aren't going anywhere.

Rich: And even more important than it being a badge of honor for the product manager, it has to be something that the next two levels of management respect because if your boss' boss is appalled at the idea that you might end-of-life a product, then you're never going to do it.

Chad: Right. Yeah, the organizational pressure is too immense. When you were talking about maybe this dual track sort of notion and vetting those ideas, what have you seen people do when they actually are vetting them? Are they applying the Lean techniques of quick experiments, an information for the hypothesis and deciding to continue or not?

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Rich: Many of them are. Actually, there's a lot of good folks, just to call out to Tristan Kromer who does a really good blog here in San Francisco on some of these and Laura Klein and some of the other people that are in the Lean startup movement, Lean UX-focused who have got really good experimental techniques that they like. Teresa Torres who's doing a really good work in the space and some other folks who are really good thinkers about quickly gathering data, quickly gathering particularly on a consumer side, putting up some websites or getting some good online information to quickly move themselves from place to place.

The other thing that I think is really, really important here is to be thinking about goals and high-level metrics. It's tremendously easy to fall into the rabbit hole of getting more people through the signup process more quickly and forgetting that almost all of them don't want your product, won't ever buy it and if they do, won't renew.

[39:05]

So what are the useful kinds of metrics? I was talking to somebody just the other day at an online dating company. They don't seem to be able to measure whether in fact anyone went out on a date after using their app. That would seem to me the number one criterion for why folks should pay you money and why they should come back is because you're advertising that they're going to find dates and they're going to go out on a date. And if you're not measuring that, then everything else seems kind of weak.

Chad: That is the outcome that people are after new better measuring.

Rich: That's right. What's the job that they're hiring us to do?

Chad: Exactly.

Rich: And even if it's hard to measure it, are we measuring the job that they're hiring us to do? Because if we're not, then all the signals we get are silly vanity metrics or something else that we should be very suspicious of.

Chad: We've talked through lots of important information why people get into product management, some of their frustrations, organizational barriers, how to navigate that, what organizations are doing right to really help with innovation. And we could continue this because it's just been a great conversation. But for the sake of our listeners that probably have other things to get on to too, hopefully you're finding value in the everyday innovators. I want to ask Rich for his innovation quote that he brought for us.

Rich: Ah, yes. I've been trotting this out a lot in the last quarter or so, but for me the most wasteful thing we can do on the entire planet is to build a product that's got high quality and it's really easy to use and it's well engineered but nobody wants to buy it or put it to use. There's nothing more wasteful than building the wrong product. And engineering can't

engineer us out of building the wrong product. So we have to step up and be bold and humble at the same time and say this is a product that deserves to be built based on real evidence because I'm going to spend a million or \$3 million worth of engineering on it and no one is going to be happy if we ship it and there's just the silence.

Chad: Right. I hear crickets.

Rich: Crickets, yes.

Chad: And listeners have heard me say many times on this podcast that our problem fundamentally is not in development, is not in engineering; it's knowing what product to build.

Rich: I think that's right. And there are of course lots of problems in engineering and in development. It's their job to fix them and it's our job to be cheerleaders for them for all the tools they might possibly need. I will always be a supporter for anything that's going to make the development team happier, more productive, more effective. But that's not my job. My job is to make sure that the things we're building make sense and that there are customers waiting on the other side.

Chad: Excellent. Really good discussion, Rich. For people that want to learn more about the work that you are doing, how can they best find out about that?

Rich: Pretty easy. So my last name is also my domain name, mironov.com. It's M-I-R-O-N-O-V, hard to spell.

[42:06]

And it's got at this point about 15 years worth of my posts and writing. I started blogging on software product management in 2001 because that's when blogs arrived. And it's a labor of love for me. It's free. Everybody should just help themselves. There's a book out called the Art of Product Management which collects some of those better pieces through 2008. There's another volume that's been 90% done now for about a year that we'll see soon mostly around leadership issues. But in the meantime, everything in that book can be found on the website. So please folks should help themselves. Drop me a note with questions. Drop me a LinkedIn if I can help -- this is all about giving it back and paying it forward.

Chad: Excellent. And I will add that information in the show notes to make it easy for people to get to those resources too. And Product Camp, is there a Product Camp that you're going to soon?

Rich: You know I have a bunch of them on my calendar. There's one coming up in Portland that they're trying to coax me into. The bad news is that I'm pretty busy with a bunch of client work. The good news is I'm pretty busy with a bunch of client work. I try to get to as many Product

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Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Rich Mironov

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Camps as I can again as a labor of love. I think the best thing about Product Camp is that it's been set free. No one owns it. It's not mine. Any group that wants to put a Product Camp together in their local geography should just stand up and do it. I'm there to help if they need some advice. But every one of those is run by the local people who care and want a network and share and pay it forward locally.

Chad: Yeah. It's a great structure that you had put in place, founding Product Camp. I've been to a few and the people that organize them were just fantastic in those great experiences. You started things off well for everyone else to follow there.

Rich: It's my pleasure. Thank you.

Chad: Rich, again, I appreciate your time. Thank you for sharing your experience and insights with us.

Rich: It's a joy.

Chad: Thank you for listening. I hope you find this podcast valuable. If you have topics you want explored, please connect with me on LinkedIn and share the topic. Several listeners already have and I'll work on finding the knowledgeable guest to discuss the topic with. The best gift you can give me is telling other product managers and innovators about this podcast. It always means the world to me when you do. And you'll find all the notes from this discussion with Rich at [theeverydayinnovator.com/055](http://theeverydayinnovator.com/055). Please check it out. Keep innovating.