

TEI 001: Weekly Discussions for Product Managers, Developers, and Innovators  
Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Hi. I'm Chad McAllister. Welcome to the first episode of the new podcast I'm creating for product managers, developers and innovators. If you are new to one of these roles, you know product management, development or innovation or are someone with more experience looking to refine and deepen your skills as an innovator. My hope and expectation is that you'll find the podcast episodes helpful. Each week I'll be discussing relevant topics related to innovation with people in an interview format and help you be more successful and also able to improve your career.

I'm going to talk about five parts through this first podcast to give you an idea of what to expect. So first, how I became fascinated with product management and why I teach those topics now. Second, why the interview format, which goes back to an RV trip I took for a year.. Third, highlights of some of the lessons from past interviews I did during that RV trip. Fourth, what to expect from coming episodes, and finally, a free gift for you for listening to this.

So let's start with how I became fascinated with product management, development and innovation. This is a challenging role. What is it that project managers do? Fundamentally, we are doing something new, right? We are creating something that didn't exist before. I think of innovation in the sense that it's "in a new way". It is something new, something that hasn't been done. This is really challenging for organizations because we tend to do those things that are successful, how the organization started. We continue doing what made them successful in the past. We want to do more of it in the future. Innovation is doing something new and it's hard for organizations to often turn breaks.

As product managers, product developers, you're going to be very cross-functional having to work across sales, marketing, production, manufacturing, research and development, procurement. You know if there is a function in the organization, likely the product manager is having to interact with them, at least on some projects.

Along with all these responsibilities of creating a new product, which can include adding on to an existing product and making an incremental improvement, but creating this new product is a lot of responsibility, little actual control so at times it can be a frustrating role because of that. It means the product manager has to have the ability to influence. Also, this capability is switched between the tactical and strategic activities, while walking this tight rope of taking actions that are in line with the organization's strategy and at the same time doing something new.

We also need to be customer-focused, able to listen to customers, observe them, ask questions and identify problems that need a solution and then how we can provide a solution that really creates value for them. You know value in the form of this new product.

Trends are important to us too, watching what's going on in the marketplace, in the business environment and also at the same time keeping track of the competitor's action, what they are doing and what they might be doing in the future.

The way that I got fascinated about this world of product management and product development, I started out as an electrical engineering student and out of college, you know we basically get trained to

## TEI 001: Weekly Discussions for Product Managers, Developers, and Innovators

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

solve problems and create new things. And I really enjoyed doing that. I started with a company that shortly after I joined them turned into a software company and I went along for the ride. I was working with good people. This was a small environment. I was employee number four in the office and in that sort of environment; you wear lots of different hats and I loved it. I spent eleven years of my career there and just loved that environment where you got to do everything that can be done inside of the company. But over time I evolved into the person who was really good at talking with customers and understanding what their problems were, analyzing what they really needed and the software development team would create those products.

Along the way, we recognized that we needed to do a better job of actually managing projects and that led to me to learning more about product management. I came across a professional organization, Project Management Institute, and learned the sort of things that we needed to do to manage the lifecycle of a software development project.

As time went by I recognized we were really not just doing projects, we were developing products for customers and there were more things we needed to figure out. And I started looking for product development, product management sort of knowledge that led me to another professional group, the Product Development Management Association (PDMA) and that was really useful. And they had this thing called the New Product Development Professional certification (NPDP) and a few of us got together at the same time. Basically we were all trying to get our hands around, "Well what does PDMA mean by product development and management?" We thought a good way to figure this out would be to actually study for the certification and earn that certification. So we did that and we created a study group program to help others do the same thing. And in the process I became their VP for Education for the Rocky Mountain chapter out of Denver, Colorado. It had a really successful study program for preparing for the certification. It was a credible foundation of knowledge for product developers and managers.

Couple years go by and another professional organization got introduced to me. That was the Association of International Product Marketers and Managers (AIPMM) and I helped lead an effort for them to develop a certification focused on innovation and new product development and they called that the Certified Innovation Leader. I found these professional organizations really helpful for me and others in getting that foundation of concepts for what is it a product developer, manager and someone involved in innovation really needs to be doing to be successful.

Over time, I trained more and more people in the concepts and was getting really good feedback from participants about how important these concepts were. That they were providing a foundation for them, that it was viable to the work they were doing, especially people that were new to these roles, new to product management, product development, as a team member or even leading the team. Again this foundation under the belt was really critical to helping them feel comfortable in that role and being more successful. And more seasoned professionals that had been doing the work already often were lacking some depth in specific areas and were finding that through the training some really good applications that they could bring back to the work that they were doing.

TEI 001: Weekly Discussions for Product Managers, Developers, and Innovators  
Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

I now have more than 20 years of experience with product management, development and innovation. Have worked in small and large global organizations along with four startups, two technology companies, one startup was a media company and then my own training company. An interesting thing happened along the way. That was that I decided to go back to school, something I never thought I would do, to earn a PhD. And the reason for that was I was becoming fascinated with a problem I was seeing on some of our projects developing products and that was, a lot of the times we developed products that really did hit it out of the park. We were hitting the needs of the customers and exceeding their expectations. But there are other times I just got it wrong, right? I led the team, we developed a product and it did not provide the value the customer was looking for or expecting. It really failed to meet their expectations and I got fascinated with why this was the case. What was going on in those cases where we were doing a great job being successful? And you know there's probably a lot more to learn about the cases where we were actually failing to meet those expectations. So I started to study that myself. A few things came together at the same time. I was working with a startup CEO from the Silicon Valley area and she was going back to school to earn her PhD and that got me thinking about this more. Well I'm already really interested in these topics?. Why not?

So I dove back into school and that was a really rewarding journey. And it led to some things I never expected. One is I spend most of my time today teaching others about product development, product management and innovation. I do that formally through some university courses that I have the pleasure of teaching, master level and PhD level courses for universities as well as the online training I do and in-person workshops. I'm also the author of a book "Turning Ideas into Market Winning Products".

Let's talk about the format of this podcast which is going to be interviews. So why interviews? I need to back up. I spent a year, actually fifty-four weeks, on this epic road trip with my family. We were traveling in a motorhome across the United States. About twenty-five states we've covered, around forty national parks and a little over than twenty-two thousand miles driven between the motorhome and the car that we also took. Wonderful experience. Did that primarily to just have time with my kids, who are now nine and twelve, to build experiences with them. And I had a great time. Along the way, I took this opportunity to meet people that were involved in product development, management, and innovation, you know, what I love. So I spent a lot of time talking with business owners and entrepreneurs, learning from their failures and their successes. And I had a great time talking with these people, people that were entrepreneurs, small business owners, as well as product professionals in large companies, and learned so much from those conversations, and frankly, really enjoyed it. That was the key reason for wanting to do this. I just enjoyed the experience and I learned so much from these interviews.

The idea at the time was to write up these interviews in kind of a case study format and post them up on my blog. I did a few of those and I quickly realized that this was taking a lot more time than I really could be spending while I was on the RV trip. I wrote up several of them and enjoyed so many more interviews I still need to work with. And as of now, I've come back from the RV trip, and I miss that interaction of

TEI 001: Weekly Discussions for Product Managers, Developers, and Innovators  
Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

talking with other product professionals about their past experiences and what they've learned and how we can help apply that to even more people. So I decided to do that in an audio interview format.

Each week I'll be interviewing someone who can help product developers, managers and innovators really improve their success and improve their career too and I'll be posting that up as an audio interview. It also helps me practice what I preach. Since I train people that are new to these roles in product management, development, and innovation, as well as those refining their skills, I'm talking to my audience, right? The people that I'm talking to, that are helping those professionals are also the ones that have been through the heartaches and the failures that helped them learn what they needed to do. So it's really a way for me to get some customer research done, hearing about those problems that they've encountered as well as their success stories. And again I just really enjoyed doing it.

I also want to share some highlights from the RV trip that I took and the interviews I did then. So some of these are written up on my blog at [www.TheEverydayInnovator.com](http://www.TheEverydayInnovator.com) but there were some great lessons learned and I'll just take some time in this episode to share those. And then on the next episode, you'll hear a live interview that I recorded ( live or recorded) and get to hear first-hand from a product professional.

So, not too surprising, and I thought this was quite fitting, the first interview I did was with the founder of a motorhome company, Bob Tiffin, who founded Tiffin Motor Homes. Bob told me about the importance of trends and it was something I heard in many of the interviews I did after that. The business professionals I've met shared how trends impacted their success or created some headaches for them. Seeing a trend beginning to take place and acting on it before others was really critical to their success. Some, early recognizing that a trend is changing and avoiding mistakes like in having too much inventory on hand and getting rid of that before the trend really took place was important. In Bob's case he attributed his ability to spot trends such? As maybe adding a new feature or benefit that the customer will really value to his deep industry experience and a constant customer contact. I want to say constant?, I spent a little over an hour with Bob in his office and during that time his phone was ringing all the time and it was customers calling him because he has a very open policy. If you have an issue with your motorhome, you call Bob and Bob will take care of it. He is always talking with customers. His recommendations for refining your trend-spotting powers? He said, "Watch your customers, participate in industry events and mostly talk with customers daily" which he clearly does.

Another interview that I immensely enjoyed was with Dan Rattigan. He's the founder of the French Broad Chocolate Factory in Asheville, North Carolina. He has a chocolate lounge that sells chocolate and chocolate desserts and other food and a chocolate factory where the chocolate is handmade. After talking with him about his story and why he loves chocolate, I he? started characterizing culture in terms of the 3 Ps. I'll tell you what those are. But you know talking with him, culture is supremely important when there are few other factors to create differentiation among your competitors. Culture stands out. It drives success. And the 3 Ps are personal, powerful, and persuasive.

## TEI 001: Weekly Discussions for Product Managers, Developers, and Innovators

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

So what's the personal aspect? When you truly love what you do, the work becomes personal to you, right? It becomes a part of the product that customers value. The second P is Powerful. Many businesses, including Dan's, incorporate some social change aspect, something that's really deep in their DNA and meaningful to most of the company and it becomes a part of the driving force in the success, and also creates a competitive differentiation. For the Chocolate Factory, this was making an economic difference in the communities where they source the cacao beans. And the third P: persuasive. ?Businesses just like brands they've a story? and telling a compelling story persuades the customers to become raving fans, really elevating the success of the business far beyond the others. I found as I was talking with Dan and hearing the story on how important culture was and his 3 Ps of , personal, powerful and persuasive, I just fell in love with the mission and the vision that they have. And frankly at this point I love the story so much on how he was helping these communities where the cacao beans were growing and having an impact locally there in Asheville, North Carolina that I didn't really care anymore what he was selling. I was sold on the story. He could be selling anything-- I'd just want to buy something that supported him and the mission that he was on.

Another business owner I ran into was Mike Yontz. He's the owner and operator of a McDonald's in Oro Valley near Tucson, Arizona. Now I'll tell you I never expected to find any sort of innovation stories out of McDonald's. I had spent at this point in the RV tour, several months in and out of Starbucks and McDonald's because they're reliable places to find WiFi and sometimes a power outlet. You know, power outlets are getting harder to find but I could get WiFi for sure, so they were go-to destinations for me on the trip to do work that I was doing.

So, at this McDonald's, I noticed something very different. When people came into the store they were being greeted by first name. And when they weren't being greeted by first name, they were greeted in a very jovial, warm manner. This was such a unique experience from other visits I'd been to at McDonald's, so I had to find out more. I asked to sit down with Mike, the owner/operator. ?And you have to think about at McDonalds you know as franchised owners?, they had to comply with the processes, structure and pricing set by the corporate office. A lot of businesses have the same issue and this leaves little room for real innovation. But even in such a controlled environment, there are opportunities that exist and Mike truly found those opportunities, especially around customer experience. What Mike was able to create was more of a coffeeshoptype experience instead of what frankly I'd seen as pretty unfriendly experiences at a lot of McDonald's on the trip.

So how did he come about that? He was really big on pushing the greeting. Odd sentence: What I had witnessed so many times with that initial experience you have at the counter, the feeling that you're welcome in a very friendly manner and repeat customers they quickly learn their names. It was much more like a coffee shop experience than a McDonald's. Also odd sentence: Mike truly considers the work he's doing as a privilege, that few people have the opportunity to join the McDonald's owners' program and have their own store and his passion about creating a place that customers like to visit and employees can develop skills.

## TEI 001: Weekly Discussions for Product Managers, Developers, and Innovators

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Continuing the emphasis on the customer experience, Mike strives to hire people that are really focused on helping the customer. Those innovators are looking for ways that we can make a difference and add more value to the customer. And again when? we have few options like when you're controlled as in a McDonald's franchise, hiring the people that are really customer focused can tip things in your favor to create a better experience obviously for the customer. And Mike is the model for that. He sets the tone for how the other employees should also be responding to customers. He's very enthusiastic. He's warm. He's personable. So, meeting Mike and visiting that McDonald's was truly a breath of fresh air.

Frankly, previous to this experience, I had been starting to formulate a blog post that would be entitled something like "The Coming Demise of McDonald's" because my experience up to that point was at best neutral and often negative. You know--customer service that was generally unfriendly, stores that were not particularly unique, maybe even not particularly clean and just not a real pleasant experience, right? Even for what I might expect for a fast food convenience experience at McDonald's, not up to what they should have been. And Mike's store was so completely different--really like coffee shop experience that I've come to know, that I enjoy from places like Starbucks and other coffee shops. So that was a great pleasure.

There were many other people I met along the way that were business owners and product professionals, people were leading the charge for innovation in their organization, but let's get to the future episodes. Each week I'm going to have discussions with someone who's going to be able to provide insights both from lessons they've learned, along with their failures and also practices they've put into place that led to their successes. So you'll be learning from people's failure and successes and also hearing from professionals that research this area and can really help product developers, product managers, and innovators improve what they're doing, improve their success, and improve their careers. It will be in interview format so you won't have to be listening to me. You'll be listening to the guest most of the time. I'm really excited to be talking with these people. It's going to help me learn more too and it's a great blessing to be able to turn that around and help teach others what we need to know to stand out and be a successful product professional.

The free gift I mentioned before, that book I told you about. I'm the author of "Turning Ideas into Market Winning Products". As I record this it is a brand new year and I'm anxious to start the year with this new podcast. If you're listening to this anytime in 2015, email me and I will give you the eBook for free. I'll send you the eBook via email--my email address is [chad@theeverydayinnovator.com](mailto:chad@theeverydayinnovator.com). The Everyday Innovator is also the blog site where these podcast air [www.TheEverydayInnovator.com](http://www.TheEverydayInnovator.com). So just send an email to [chad@theeverydayinnovator.com](mailto:chad@theeverydayinnovator.com) asking for the free book and I will send that back to you.

I want to thank you very much for listening to this, ask that you check back each week so you can benefit from these discussions with product professionals, innovation managers and people who have insights to help all of us in this product innovation space do a better job and really grow our careers and stand out. In addition to this podcast I do provide weekly resources at [www.TheEverydayInnovator.com](http://www.TheEverydayInnovator.com). The weekly resources include a brief summary of tips and practices found around the web that week from

TEI 001: Weekly Discussions for Product Managers, Developers, and Innovators  
Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

innovation writers at Forbes, Wired, Fast Company, Harvard Business Review and many other resources. So if you're looking for a quick, short, easy to read summary of the information really related to best practices or lessons from failures and you want to benefit from that, just go to the blog [www.TheEverydayInnovator.com](http://www.TheEverydayInnovator.com) and sign up with your email address and you'll get that sent to you Friday afternoons with that summary.

Again thank you so much for listening. If you have colleagues that are also involved in product management, development, and innovation please let them know about this podcast and the resources at the [www.TheEverydayInnovator.com](http://www.TheEverydayInnovator.com). If you have any questions that I can address personally, please again contact me at [chad@theeverydayinnovator.com](mailto:chad@theeverydayinnovator.com). Come back next week and listen to an interview with an industrial designer and how innovation has taken place in his work, building physical products for customers. Have a great week!

Thank you for listening to product innovation training your customers will love you for. To learn more please check out the blog at [www.TheEverydayInnovator.com](http://www.TheEverydayInnovator.com). Keep innovating!