

TEI 115: 6 areas of expertise effective product managers need

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Steve Johnson

CHAD: Hi, this is Chad. My mission is to inspire and equip product managers to have greater influence in their organizations and over product. I call this helping product managers to become product masters and that is what this podcast is about. You can learn more about that at the same place you get the summary of this episode at <http://TheEverydayInnovator.com/115>.

Product managers and product teams have the challenge of creating market-winning products - those are products that customers love and that create value for customers and the organization. Some product managers are not as effective as they could be, or they have actually become less effective over time. According to my guest, a well-functioning product manager has six types of expertise. We'll explore each in just a minute. This interview also give me the opportunity to interview a legend in product management, and also provide you a glimpse at a side of him you may not know -- as singer and song writer.

He has been working within the high-tech arena since 1979 with experience in technical, sales, and marketing positions at companies specializing in enterprise and desktop hardware and software. His market and technical savvy allowed him to rise through the ranks from Product Manager to Chief Marketing Officer. He has launched dozens of product offerings. Before founding Under10, his product management consulting company, he was a Pragmatic Marketing instructor for over 15 years. His name is Steve Johnson.

In the interview you will learn the six areas of expertise that effective product teams need. That is next.

CHAD: Steve, thank you so much for joining the Everyday Innovators.

STEVE: Thank you. Glad to be here.

CHAD: Listeners probably already know an awful lot about you. You have a great history in the product management space and you have helped literally tens of thousands of people in the product management space. They may not know one dimension of you and I'm just going to introduce this by asking what is the umbrella song about?

STEVE: Well, that's a good question. Let me give you a little background. My son is a professional musician and a few years ago he said, "You know, Mom says you wrote a whole bunch of stuff back in the day. You're old now, so we ought to get that stuff recorded." And so I would sit down and play a sound for him and he would learn it and then I'd leave town and go do a training or a workshop or whatever and when I'd come back, he could lay down all the instruments and then he'd ask me to sing the song and I'd sing it three times and between those three times he'd patch together one good performance and we did 10 songs, I think, together and he put it online on iTunes and it was a wonderful gift for him to give me. It was something I had always wanted. But when we came up with...he said, "You need a band name. It can't be your name. It needs to be something else." So I decided on Not Exactly Steve. Because it's not exactly me. I mean, it's me. I wrote the songs and I sang the songs but he did all the other instruments. One song, called Jimmy, is the only song I was allowed to play an instrument on.

CHAD: That was guitar, wasn't it?

TEI 115: 6 areas of expertise effective product managers need

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Steve Johnson

STEVE: Yeah. My instrument is guitar. So he did all the background vocals and the bass and the strings and the drums and whatever. It was really quite a wonderful gift. As we were going through my music, he was just rejecting songs left and right. He's like, "Oh, no. That one's terrible. We're not doing that one." And then I played him the Umbrella Song and he went, "Oh, this is a gas." He played it for his friends and they all thought it was hysterical. So that's been one of the more popular songs on the album of all things, but I wrote it as kind of an homage to Ringo Starr, thinking that that was the kind of song that the Beatles would give to Ringo. I don't know where I got the umbrella from, but it actually started with a comment my brother-in-law made, which was, everywhere I go I have my computer. He's like, "Do you take your computer everywhere?" I'm like, "Well, yeah, of course I do." And I changed computer to umbrella and that's how the song came to be.

CHAD: For listeners, I'm going to play just a little bit of the Umbrella Song, so you know what we're talking about.

{song plays}

CHAD: Great. So thanks for sharing that story with us. I'm curious. How many guitars do you have?

STEVE: It's unclear. There are probably 20 guitars downstairs. They're becoming less mine as time goes by. He keeps saying this one goes in his corner. So I have actually one guitar right here in my office and I think that's all I have anymore. But I've got a couple of Taylors, a couple of Martins and a couple of Fenders and I have a Fender jazz bass, but I don't get to see them very often anymore. We have a funny case about a decade ago we did our wills, my wife and I did our wills and I said, well, Chip should get all my musical instruments and Krista, my daughter, should get all of her mother's jewelry, so we wrote that into the will. That evening we were talking it over and I mentioned the thing about the jewelry and I mentioned the thing about the guitars, and my daughter said, "But Daddy, I want one." It had never even occurred to me. She's not a guitar player, why would she want a guitar? And then she's like, "Oh, but I love you and there's sentiment and all that stuff." So I said, "Which one do you want?" She picked my best guitar. Chip was like, "No, you can't have that one." So I solved it, I think in a brilliant way. I bought another Martin. So now I have a Martin D35 and a Martin D28. So there's one for each of them. But I get to have them while I'm alive. I thought it was quite brilliant.

CHAD: Also a good excuse to buy another really nice guitar. Well, thanks for sharing some of that story a little bit. Listeners should know, you have a very silky, smooth voice.

STEVE: Thank you.

CHAD: Quite the musician. The topic I want to dive into is really on product teams, but I'm curious about something else before we get there. It's such a great pleasure to get a chance to talk with you and I want to tap into some of this experience. You've trained so many product management teams and you've also trained executive teams and I'm curious. What do product managers want their executive teams to know about product management?

STEVE: That's a good one. What product managers really want to convey to executives is: a sentence from you is months of work for us. I used to work at a company where the CEO said, "Steve, you've got to get us back on track. Our developers are terrible." So I'm in my first week of the job, I go over to see

TEI 115: 6 areas of expertise effective product managers need

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Steve Johnson

my developers and I say, "Hey, Todd, I understand from the president that you're terrible." And he said, "That's one way of going, but we practice a thing we call requirements aging. We don't work on anything for a month, because usually the executive team changes their mind before we even begin." As we're having this conversation, in walks the VP of Development, who says, "Guys, stop what you're doing. I'm getting new requirements." And Todd just goes, "See what I mean?" It was really quite funny. So the following week, that was really my message to the executive team. We can build stuff and we can finish stuff and we can ship stuff, if you guys would just shut up for a week or two. A lot of the techniques that I've used since in my career have been based on that experience, of being able to show the executives here's where we are and I've got your stupid idea on my list, it's not gone but it's not what we're working on right now. But to extend that idea, the opposite thing that's interesting, when I started Under 10 Playbook Consulting five years ago, I contacted a bunch of VPs and CTOs as part of research for my book, and it was really interesting to me how many of them said, "You know, I wish my product managers were more strategic." I fear that agile is part of that. I fear that Silicon Valley or Agile Development has pulled product managers ever more into the support role for development rather than the business role, which is what I think the strategic role of product management is. It's about business.

CHAD: And it's an area where product managers typically complain that they want to spend more time on strategic activities and they don't have that time because they're constantly putting out fires and they're involved in the tactical activities and they don't really have the time with customers to figure out where they're going next and to plan the next steps.

STEVE: Totally. Yeah. As I said in one of my slides in one of my workshops, you really have to choose. Do you want to put out fires or put out products?

CHAD: I love that statement. That might have to become a quote. Okay. Let's talk about product teams. Thanks for sharing a little of that experience with executive teams and product managers. So, product teams come in all kinds of varieties. Probably on scale of being really good to being not so good. You've talked in the past about that there are six roles or areas of expertise needed in product teams for them to really function well, kind of the table stakes for what we need to make a good product team. I want to spend our time talking through those six areas. We won't tell listeners where we're going yet. I know you've talked about these before, but it would be great to get your insights into them. So, let's start with technology. You talk about the technology expertise needed. Tell us more about that.

STEVE: Okay. Well, actually, let me back up just a little bit. When I read job postings, periodically, VPs will say, "Hey Steve, we're thinking about posting for this position. How does this look to you?" I have to laugh at the incredible Superman status that they're looking for. I was talking to a recruiting friend of mine and I was telling her about this and she said, "Oh yeah. We have a word for that. We call those purple squirrels." Purple squirrels are the perfect candidate who can start tomorrow and hit the street running and is willing to work for peanuts. But you look at these job descriptions and they call out all these different kinds of expertise and the one that I see most commonly is a strong preference for technology expertise. I met a VP of product management here in the DC area and she said she requires all of her product managers to have a computer science degree. She said there's no other way for them to get credibility with the developers. I think that in our industry we've skewed a little too heavily towards that. But it's also funny when you think, what do you mean by technical? I asked a product management friend of mine, "Are you technical?" She said, "Well, not really. I can hard code HTML, but I

TEI 115: 6 areas of expertise effective product managers need

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Steve Johnson

can't do PHP or Ruby on Rails. I'm like, the fact that you know those words makes you technical. There seems to be a strong feeling that we need to have a very strong technical understanding or you can't play the game. What I have found is you certainly don't want to even pretend to throw down with development on technical. You need to be technical enough to understand the questions. Hey, Steve, we're going to do it this way or that way. You have to understand those implementations well enough to say, "Okay, this is what we need." But I think that in a lot of cases, a strong technical expertise ends up meaning you basically are part of the development team and not really part of product management.

CHAD: You want some separation there between those. Like you said, the technology expertise needed is more in terms of understanding what they're talking about, enough so you can put some of the pieces together and know what questions to ask.

STEVE: Right. Correct.

CHAD: Good. Where do you want to go next?

STEVE: Well, nearby technology nowadays is operations. I'm working on a piece of software right now to help product managers and I suddenly find myself like never before, getting involved with how much disc space are we going to need to allocate on our hosted solution, for artifacts and attachments, and having an understanding of how SaaS works or having an understanding of how Hosted works, how do you articulate the requirements for storing something in the cloud? It's something I've never really had to do before, because I've always had on-premise solutions. It's like I don't care how much disc space you guys use. It's your disc space, right? But likewise, which technology, it's like if we're doing SaaS solutions or cloud-based solutions, I've got to think about performance requirements and capacity requirements that I haven't really had to think about before.

CHAD: New things just in terms of how the solution is delivered. Is this...from the consumer's perspective I would think of this in terms of the customer experience a little bit. Do you include that in operations or do you put that somewhere else?

STEVE: I was thinking that would be someplace else, like the on-boarding and the user experience is probably crossing all of the different kinds of expertise. When I work with teams I typically, I try to convey that I really want the product manager to be responsible for the problem and for development and design to be responsible for the solution. I think the more technical you are, the more inclined you are to get into the solution space. You find yourself going, okay, here's the feature I want and here's the feature I want and I want it to look like this and I want you to do this sort of a call and I want you to, you know, whatever. You're like, "Dude. If you want to be a developer, go be a developer."

CHAD: Yeah. I think the other danger there, and so I'll speak from the engineer that I am, my engineering background. It's easy to get entwined with the solution in terms of this really creative, interesting, unique thing that I am bringing to life, right? I like the Ash Maurya quote, who wrote Running Lean, that, "Fall in love with the problem, not with the solution." When we're close to the technology, it's easy to fall in love with the solution.

STEVE: It is. You know, I think we all do it. I did it earlier today when talking with my cofounder, Tom. I was like, wouldn't it be neat if we had a...you know, whatever it was, and I found myself going, woah,

TEI 115: 6 areas of expertise effective product managers need

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Steve Johnson

woah, woah, wait. What problem are you trying to solve and do people really have that problem or are you just thinking it would be cool if? Right? So whenever we get into a discussion I find myself saying...he's like, "Should we do it this way or that way?" I always step back and say, "Well, hang on. Let's go through a scenario. Robin, the product manager would do this thing and she would need to communicate that to Jason, the developer, in this way." He goes, "Oh, okay, that totally makes sense." It's been pretty fascinating.

CHAD: A good experience for sure. So we've talked about technology, operations.

STEVE: The next one I had on my list was process. I've encountered that a lot of companies have lots and lots and lots of process around development, but not really very many other places. Maybe they do about support. But I find that really good product managers tend to see things as a process. A really simple example, I took my parents to dinner earlier this week, and I walked up to the salad bar and the plates for the salad bar were on the far left and the big bowl of lettuce was on the far right and all the toppings were in the middle. And I immediately went, the plates are on the wrong side. I wanted to reconfigure the whole salad bar based on process. First you have a foundation or an infrastructure. I find really good product managers tend to see that process stuff.

CHAD: What process is important, then, for product managers? So when you're talking about development, often some kind of stage gate process is in place there. Before we get there, we have the whole, where does the idea come from, what problem are we solving. Is there actual product development, product management processes that you expect product teams to have in place?

STEVE: Well, I expect them to and they rarely do. I read something maybe last year, someone did a survey that said fewer than 50% of companies have a process at all. Which sparks one of my favorite quotes, which is, "Products get released through individual heroics, despite the company's best efforts to prevent it." Right? So that's one of the things I find that I end up doing with teams, is saying, okay, what is your process or what should it be? The joke of my company name is it should be under 10 steps and it should be under 10 artifacts. A number of times I've had the experience where we get into an argument about whether we do or do not need an MRD or a PRD and it's so funny, because I'll say, "What do you put in a MRD?" And this will be in a group, right? And so the first person will say, "Well, the MRD has the following." And they'll start ticking off things. And then somebody else in the room says, "No, no, no. You're talking about the PRD." And then they start arguing about what's in the PRD. Then somebody else says, "No, no, no. That's in the other things." And they've got so many documents with so much repeated information that nobody can keep track of what's supposed to be there. So the agile people came along and said, "This is all nonsense. Let's just use a cocktail napkin." But I think we need more than a cocktail napkin and less than a hundred page MRD.

CHAD: We need requirements some place. Maybe not scattered out.

STEVE: So I've been working with teams to help them define the non-development parts of the process, of how do we take an idea, validate it in the marketplace to see if it's big enough to bother, and if it's not just the president saying God spoke to me in a dream, but it's an actual problem in the market, and then what's the competitive landscape and how are we going to message this and now what are the requirements and so forth. I try to keep it down to a small number of things. My current model has six steps. Underneath all of those steps is continuous learning.

TEI 115: 6 areas of expertise effective product managers need

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Steve Johnson

CHAD: Something we all need more of. Those lessons learned after projects and dealing with them. I got a chuckle out of that quote that you shared about it's the heroes that get anything done in terms of innovation and products, in spite of the organization's best efforts to stop it. There was an organization I was working with recently in helping to assess their innovation processes and just where they are in terms of maturity capability. The examples they had that had been their big innovations for the last year, the things they're proud of, the VPs in charge of those said, "Well, you know, we had to work around our process to make these happen, or they would never have happened."

STEVE: Right. Right.

CHAD: Okay, so the things you're lifting up, that you're proud of, you recognize would not exist if you used your actual process.

STEVE: Absolutely. You know, it's interesting. There's a role in manufacturing called an expeditor. What an expeditor does is occasionally walks an order through the plant, bypassing process as necessary, to hustle something through. Everybody knows that that's a role, but it's an exception. The thing that bothers me is like in the case you gave. When everything doesn't follow the process, then the process isn't helping you. Everything is expedited.

CHAD: We know we have problems. Okay. So we have process, and I expect the next area is domain expertise.

STEVE: I'm a big domain guy. I really like understanding the domain. By that, I mean the area of specialty. I worked with a software company that focused on universities and realized in my conversations with them that my university experience was so out of date that I didn't really understand what they were talking about. I mean, they would say, "Well, you know, the way we apply for things now is through the core thing," I forgot now what that's called. Your kids are too young to know what that is. My kids are too old. But there are things about the domain of education that I'm just not familiar with, so when somebody says we've got to do it this way or we've got to do it that way, I'm like, "I don't know how to judge because I don't know the domain well enough." The converse of that is I see a lot of people come in to, say, software companies who aren't from the world of software and they just don't understand how software is made. I fear that a lot of software companies are having this problem, particularly with sales people. When you don't know how it's made, you don't know how hard it is. It's not just a button. The button is underneath other things. But my daughter has a deep domain expertise in education. Another friend has deep domain expertise in healthcare. I think a lot of, well, I think often we say a good manager can manage anything and that hasn't been my experience. I think everybody in the company needs to have some level of domain expertise. When they don't, like in the case of salespeople, they rely on product management to provide that domain expertise.

CHAD: Yep. Our sales engineers to help them with that.

STEVE: Yes, totally.

CHAD: So I want to look at another side of the coin of this and offer a different perspective and get your take on that. When it comes to taking existing products and making them better for our customer, I think there's really good value in domain experience. There's a time where I think the naïve person, who

TEI 115: 6 areas of expertise effective product managers need

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Steve Johnson

is a good product manager, has good process knowledge down, knows how to interact with customers, might do some really good observation studies, that doesn't have that domain knowledge, they're the ones that can see ways to make value that others have made assumptions about and there seems to be a place for this. I just want to ask you about that.

STEVE: That's a very good point. I don't know if that's product management or if it's design. As you were telling that story, I was reminded of a designer who was looking at shovels. Snow shovels. And realized that snow shovels are not designed correctly. They hurt your back as you try to get under the snow and lift it up and over your shoulder. So the designer who looked at it with fresh eyes said, "No, you don't want to shovel the snow, you want to push it." So they invented the S-curve handle so the shovel part is really low and it's designed to push it off the driveway instead of lifting it. I think you're right. The domain people would say, I mean if you went to a shovel guy and said we're thinking about reinventing the shovel, they'll go, "The shovel's fine. Don't mess with it." I think there is...I would agree with you. There is often a real value in having a new, fresh set of eyes. But it's domain expertise, or subject matter expertise that's another one of those big things in the typical job posting. We're looking for somebody with a computer science degree and 75 years' experience in whatever our domain is. Any of these things can be learned. Spending time with customers and listening to what they say. I think a lot of times, the one that just bothers me a lot is this domain expertise. If you don't have it, you often find yourself saying really nonsensical things.

CHAD: On that topic, it is a bit of advice I give people when they ask if they're doing product management in one industry and they've gotten, for whatever reason, they got tired of it, they want to move on and try something else, how do I break into another industry? This is the angle I tell them to emphasize, which is, you're an expert at the process of product management and developing products, and your lack of domain experience will actually be a benefit, initially, for them, because you're not making the same assumptions everyone else has made.

STEVE: True.

CHAD: Okay, let's move on. So we've got domain expertise under our belt. What's next?

STEVE: Next is market expertise. Actually, domain and market often overlap somewhat. But market expertise is knowledge, well, I'll make it easy. It's a knowledge of a segment. It's either the knowledge of an industry or the knowledge of a geography. So, if we were in education, education would be our domain and North America would be our market. For instance, when I ran Marketing in my last real job, I had an international marketing person who spent a lot of time in sales office around the world, making sure she was really the expert on those markets. It was really funny. My predecessor, this woman came in to my predecessor and said, "We've got to start printing on A4 paper." And the person who was in this job before me said, "Well, I've never heard of that." And it's like the standard around the world except here in America. It looks silly when we bring our 8 1/2 x 11 paper to a European audience, for instance. That's a very simple example of marketing expertise. Knowing how to communicate, well, you know, I had another one. I did a training recently in China and the things that I...I'm sure this is going to come out wrong. The things that I buy quite casually are like my new iPhone. I went out and bought the iPhone and I didn't even really think that much about it. So I was talking to them about doing research for a big purchase so we could do kind of a role play. I was thinking they would say 'house'. Or 'car'. And

TEI 115: 6 areas of expertise effective product managers need

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Steve Johnson

they said, “I spent a lot of time researching the phone I was going to buy or the apartment I was going to rent.” I don’t think you would have that same experience in America that I was having in Beijing. I didn’t have very much knowledge about the Chinese market.

CHAD: Cultural differences make a big difference to our work. Companies get caught off-guard all the time. You can just do a google search on brand fails and it usually has something to do with some cultural misunderstanding where we messed up.

STEVE: It’s also interesting, when you...in kind of the business I’m in and used to be in, I spent all that time at Pragmatic Marketing and now this time at Under Ten, and when you sell a US product in, say, Brazil, the product managers in Brazil make half of what they make here. There’s a pretty logical argument on the part of HR that we should charge half as much for the training, since they’re making half as much of the money. Of course, the problem is my wife spends the money here. I have a friend in Montreal say that they created some software that would allow you to replace such and such a worker, except that when you left North America, that worker was making so little as an income that the software was way too expensive compared to the person it was replacing. So, knowledge of the market, both industry and geography. In fact, a lot of the teams that I work with, I will use the term expert instead of the term manager. Instead of having a product marketing manager or a marketing manager, I like the idea of saying, “Who is the expert on Brazil?” “Who is our expert on England?” “Who is our expert on markets?” as opposed to marketing experts or marketing managers. Of course, the big one, the last one I wanted to talk about was business expertise. Forty-two percent of product managers have an MBA. So they’ve got the business skills. But I’m so frustrated when I don’t see them being used. So the title of my book that I wrote when I started this company is *Look Beyond the Product*, available in print or on Kindle. It really is a plea for us to look beyond the software and just the development bits, which seems to be where product management gets pulled all the time, and look at everything from a business standpoint. All the way from, how do we turn ideas into products and how do we get products through the development process to a launch and how do we enable sales and how do we promote and how do we measure success? Taking the business view beyond just feeding stories to development. I think a team needs all six of these. You’re not probably going to find them all in one person, but if I were managing a team of say, three or four people, I’d want all of my people to have like two of these, or maybe three of these. As part of their grooming I would be wanting to expand on their expertise.

CHAD: Absolutely.

STEVE: The other thing I like about the word expertise is the rest of the company relies on it. Right or wrong. Development doesn’t want your technical expertise.

CHAD: Nor do they need it.

STEVE: Right. Right. So when Scrum came along and they said, “We want a product owner sitting next to us answering our questions” it was not answering questions about technology, it was answering questions about the buyers and the users. Tell me about the market. So developers really value our market expertise. On the other hand, marketing values our product, technical expertise. Our technology expertise. Market communications tends to say, “We need some words and we need some screen shots. We’re marketing. We don’t have to know anything about the product.” Which I’ve never agreed with, but okay. In some cases that’s the case. Then we go look to our sales people and I always thought sales

TEI 115: 6 areas of expertise effective product managers need

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Steve Johnson

people expected the product manager to have technical knowledge, but what I've found they really want is domain knowledge. They come from perhaps not this industry and you come from this industry and you can really talk in detail about the business side of the domain. I have a friend down in North Carolina who was a VP at a bank. Like there's anybody at a bank who's not a VP. The word went out, he came to this company and the word went out that this new product manager had been previously a VP in a bank and his phone just lit up with sales people calling, saying, "Hey, I'm calling on a bank. I need you to come with me to talk bank." Unfortunately, that wasn't he was hired to do, to be the guy who can talk bank. But it was, I think, a really good illustration that sales people rely on product management for domain. My big rant is that executives rely on product management for business. They really...at least when they talk to me, they say, "I really want my product managers to be more business savvy and more strategic." And yet, whenever we talk to them, we're talking about stories or releases or sprints and iterations. We're not talking about return on investment. We're not talking about our metrics. That's certainly how product managers should be growing. More into business people.

CHAD: Absolutely. Becoming more strategic and more value.

STEVE: Indeed.

CHAD: You made the statement about the MBAs—42% of product managers have MBAs and yet don't really bring a strong business perspective at times. There's an intersection of things going on here that...one is the MBA really prepares someone for operations and they're tuned through their education to optimize operations, which is a different thing than developing something new and figuring out what to do with that.

STEVE: That's a very good point.

CHAD: I just see that because I teach university graduate courses, too. The other aspect of that is, as product managers, we have to be really collaborative. We're the ones that work across all the functions and we might recognize that there are the siloes inside the organization but we don't want them to be. We want them to be more interactive and there's that tension that just naturally comes up.

STEVE: True. Very true.

CHAD: Because of that, I think product managers are so ideally suited, though, to have more of a business role, because they have insights that your typical executive doesn't have. They don't see the organization the same way. I think there's good opportunities for growth there. We just have to help them out a little bit. This discussion is one way to help them out a little.

STEVE: There you go.

CHAD: I also love innovation quotes and I asked you to share one with us. You have come up with many that you could share.

STEVE: Yeah, I wrote a few down when you asked me, because I brought, depending on the circumstance, I can fling out a whole bunch of them. But there was one that really struck me in the Innovator's Solution. Clay Christensen said, "The managers in your organization who have most consistently delivered results in the past may be the least skilled at delivering success in new growth

TEI 115: 6 areas of expertise effective product managers need

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Steve Johnson

businesses.” I think that ties totally back to the last thing you were saying, that the MBA school teaches us how to optimize in operations. Optimizing is about horizon 1. Optimizing is about the products we have now. Product management is really about horizon 2. It’s about what we’re building now for delivery soon-ish and that is not optimized for operations or a profit. That’s optimized for growth. An entirely different business mindset. As for innovation, as they call horizon 3, that is optimized for another word I love, that’s optimized for learning. I find it funny when I hear executives say, we’re going to leapfrog the competition. Unless they’re going to buy somebody, they’re not going to be able to leapfrog the competition. They haven’t been learning.

CHAD: They haven’t made that investment yet in horizon 3, in the things that we should be doing to prepare for the 5-10 year range maybe.

STEVE: Correct. I’ve got some others here. I think I already used this one, “My rule of management is nothing seems hard to those who don’t have to do it.” That’s another favorite. I think I had one more. “Executives and sales teams have an amazing talent for amnesia.” That’s from a friend of mine, a consultant down in North Carolina. Here’s my definition of product management: this is quoting Herman Wouk, who wrote those books about World War II, *War and Remembrance*, maybe? *Winds of War*. That’s the one I was thinking of. He said, “When I do my job right, there’s no sign of it. Disasters just fail to occur.” I was reading that book and I went, boom. That’s product management. I worked in a company as a consultant a while back and they had fired all their product managers. Then three months later they went, “Oh wow. Why are all these disasters occurring?”

CHAD: Right.

STEVE: They called me and they said, “What is happening here?” I said, “Well, remember when you fired all your product managers? Those are the ones that prevented the disasters.” And then they had the audacity to go back to the product managers and say would you come back. The answer was no.

CHAD: We made a mistake, we realize it now.

STEVE: Indeed.

CHAD: Thank you for sharing the quotes. That first one really does tie in well, about the horizons and the work we need to be doing to prepare for the future. That last one is a notion on leadership, too, right? If a leader does a good job, once the leader moves on, the people will say, look what we did together. Not realizing there was a leader involved in helping to orchestrate this.

STEVE: Very true. Very true.

CHAD: How can listeners find out more about the work you’re doing? I’m going to make sure there’s links to your book in the show notes, and also to your company resource, but please tell us how they can find out more about the work you’re doing now.

STEVE: Okay. I have a website at www.under10playbook.com and it talks about the workshops that I do and the books that I’ve been reading as well as there’s a page for *Look Beyond the Product*, my book. There’s also what I’ve been spending a lot of time on, as I alluded to earlier, was I’ve been spending an awful lot of time as a...doing software, which has been really a weird, go backwards 20 years and use

TEI 115: 6 areas of expertise effective product managers need

Host: Chad McAllister, PhD

Guest: Steve Johnson

some skills I haven't really used in production in quite a while. It's been a blast. But I sat down with Tom Lueker, my cofounder, when we started this thing, and we were talking about what tools don't yet exist for product managers. They're still using PowerPoint, they're still using Word, they're still using Excel, they're trying to use Jira, which is a wonderful development tool, but not a product management tool. Tom went, "Well, if I was a product manager, I would want the following features." And he just started writing down all these features. I went, "Hang on, Tom. Let's start with the personas and they're problems and let the problems determine the features." He went, "Oh, that's so crazy it just might work." So that's what we've been working on for about a year now, and we're very close to being ready to ship it. As I've gone through, and we've got a beta version online right now. Just go to www.under10playbook.com and there's a signup button and you can participate in the beta if you'd like. As I've been going through this experience of reliving the life of product management, it inspired me to write another book about the mechanics of doing product management with under 10 artifacts.

CHAD: What's the status of that book?

STEVE: Well, one would hope that the book would be finished in time to tie in with the launch of the software, but that's completely contingent upon my ability to overcome writer's block. But I'm very close. I'm hoping to finish it by the end of this month and get it off to my editor soon-ish.

CHAD: Thanks for sharing that with us. I'll have links, again, in the show notes for everyone to get the information on Under10 Playbook and your book and the software that's in beta.

STEVE: And my album on iTunes at Not Exactly Steve.

CHAD: Not Exactly Steve. Check out the music. Absolutely. Maybe we can follow up and do another interview when you get a little experience with the software and you can share it with us.

STEVE: That would be great. I'd love it.

CHAD: I'd love that too. Steve, I appreciate your time today.

STEVE: Alright. I appreciate it. Have a good day.

CHAD: Thank you for listening. Find the summary of the discussion with Steve, along with my Product Mastery Roadmap that shows you how to gain the influence you want as a product manager by going to <http://TheEverydayInnovator.com/115>.

Keep innovating!