

**Chad:** [00:00:20] Hi this is Chad, your host and this is where you make your move from product manager to product master. Each week you get valuable training through this podcast--concepts that grow careers. I also provide training through my web site that helps you not only grow your career but accelerate it. You'll find out more about that at the same place where the show notes for this episode are. And that's [www.theeverydayinnovator.com/132](http://www.theeverydayinnovator.com/132). Now several listeners have asked about Lean Startup and product management and how the two fit the other. Many organizations are incorporating Lean Startup practices and these are organizations that already have a stage gate process in place typically. The challenge is how do you get both to play nice with each other and gain the benefits of each without losing something in the process and hopefully without frustrating people in the process. To discuss this topic I turned to a well experienced product manager and innovator, who mentors young entrepreneurs as well as large companies, showing them how to put lean into practice and align that with other methodologies including stage gate. My guest is Mark Adkins, president of Smart Hammer Innovation, a management consulting business that helps companies apply best practices to innovation management. He's also a part time professor at the University of Pittsburgh Center for Medical Innovation and Mark shows how lean startup works best in the front end of stage gate, enhancing an organization's product process overall. I hope you enjoyed the interview.

**Chad:** [00:01:50] Hi Mark, welcome to the Everyday Innovator podcast.

**Mark:** [00:01:54] Hi Chad, it's a pleasure to be here with you today.

**Chad:** [00:01:55] I appreciate you taking time for this. So we know each other from PDMA circles, Product Development Management Association, and both have volunteered time over the years with them and you have a good deal of background as a product manager and bringing products to life and that's where I wanted to start. Share a little bit of your background, how you got started in product management.

**Mark:** [00:02:17] Sure be glad to Chad. It goes back to the very late 80s early 90s the first product I ever launched that I was kind of the team lead on was in 1990 and it was quite nerve wracking, I really was tapped on the shoulder and just said hey Adkins, we need a new product. You look like someone we can rope in to do this. And so a team of us worked for almost two years and then launched it at a large trade show. And very fortunate that it went on to be quite successful on the market. It certainly helped my career advance at a company called Cincinnati Millicron. This was a form of factory automation. But one of the things that I reflect upon and will I'm sure we'll get into it more about later phases of my career is that I really wasn't very well trained. I felt very fortunate that we had some good people. But when I look back on what I knew twenty eight years ago and what I know today, and what I'm able to teach and mentor, I think the people coming up in in our community today, the product development management community, have a wonderful opportunity to learn a lot and get better than the previous generation.

**Chad:** [00:03:38] And you are involved a lot in mentoring both through teaching I know that you do and then informally through the kind of community of practice through PDMA and other groups of product managers, but I'm curious when you got tapped on the shoulder these twenty-eight years ago and said hey hey Mark come do this for us. Where was your mind at in terms of I don't know what kind of experience you had even knowing anything about products and product development.

**Mark:** [00:04:05] Well I had some electrical engineering background but I was also doing work. By that time I was in the marketing department. But what we called a proposal engineering so it was a foot in the world of the technology and a foot in the commercial world. So I think that was one thing that helped me that I was looking at both sides of that. And I think they frankly they

wanted people with a passion, with ambition, with the ability to rally a team. When I look back in those days we'll talk later in the talk about stage gate and process. This company had no process I mean they just would say we need a new product. And there was no gate meetings or gate reviews or deliverables. There was no playbook for me. So I built the playbook while developing the product, then later I was promoted eventually and ran product development for that company and then by that time I'm learning more about stage gate and then we did deploy stage at Millicron in the mid 90s and that was one of my accomplishments while there.

**Chad:** [00:05:12] And if you're the person that develops the playbook then people are using it, that makes sense that you would be promoted to be leading product effort.

**Mark:** [00:05:21] And that segued into my meeting PDMA because in 1998 PDMA, we were nominated by people who knew us. And in 98 we won the outstanding corporate innovator award for the whole world.

**Chad:** [00:05:36] And what was the organization?

**Mark:** [00:05:38] Cincinnati Millicron was the name. It's changed now. But we made factory automation equipment and CNC machine tools. But the two things I'd mentioned we had an outstanding statistic in terms of new product as a percent of sales. We were overhauling all our major product lines so we went from somewhere in the low 20s to hitting 50 percent of sales were coming from product launched in the last three years. So I'm very proud of that. The PDMA came in and saw that and because they wanted real numbers this wasn't just you know talk the talk. You had to walk the talk. So the fact that we were launching and selling products and driving our new products as a percent of total sales so high that caught it. And then I got to quickly mention the other part of it was the cultural element where people who were project team leaders, we were called killers because the president of the company had a motto. He was an ex-military guy and his motto was kill or be killed. So when you were given a project, literally we were known as killers and I never forget when the PDMA people came in and we were introducing and I'd say well this is Jim Harden and he's one of our killers. This is Cabot Devon. He's another one of our project killers.

**Chad:** [00:07:03] Out of context, they're not sure what's going on there.

**Mark:** [00:07:07] Yes. And then we had to explain that hey we are in an ultra-competitive environment and we have to beat the competition. There's no other way. We either win or die. And so I thought those are a couple of interesting elements of the days at Millicron on winning the OCI award and putting stage gate in. Putting our version, our flavor, of stage gate into the company.

**Chad:** [00:07:33] What a wonderful experience as an early product manager and getting thrown into this role, figuring out what the processes are, bringing those processes to the organization and being part of winning outside corporate innovation award. That really was a big boost I would think to what has become a great career path for you.

**Mark:** [00:07:50] Yeah it was and enabled me when I left Millicron in 2000 I was able to help start the Cincinnati chapter of the PDMA. So I wanted to give back in that way. And then I ended up moving into the consulting role and it's been wonderful to have, if you take a 30-year career, it's about 50-50. Fifteen years in corporate life, 15 years consulting and consulting certainly has given me the opportunity to look deep into other companies, see much more than I would have if I'd only stayed in one company for example. So it was a really great jump off to have all those years at Millicron but then start my own company and start working with companies in other industries like medical devices or the steel industry and so on.

**Chad:** [00:08:45] And those processes that you learned early on you have refined and helped other companies with, and the topic of our discussion is really focusing on looking at lean practices and lean startup practices as well stage gate. I was talking to the US manager of Stagegate International. And this was a couple years ago. At that time 80 percent of the Fortune 1000 used some kind of stage gate process to organize work. We've see Lean Startup practices certainly get adopted more frequently in the last few years by organizations also. And it's not always the case that one replaces the other and it's sometimes hard to get these things to fit together. So wanted to dive into that some with you and your experience. Let's start on the lean startup practices side. I'm curious what kind of things were going on as you were working with companies that got you involved in investigating lean startup.

**Mark:** [00:09:40] I had left consulting and a client of mine, company called Kenna Metal here headquartered in the Pittsburgh area. They hired me to come in to run product development and marketing for their company. And one of the things Kennametal was facing was they're a mature company, they weren't getting great market share growth and they looked at their portfolio of what they were offering and said we're just not getting enough breakthrough, big homerun type ideas. And to the leadership's credit and a very, very strong stage great organization, so as opposed to Millicron where when I started was kind of wild west, Kennametal was definitely a very rock solid stage gate organization. But they then said we have to try something new. So this was even a bit before Eric Reis and the Lean Startup book. They formed a group called Innovation Ventures group. I got to work with one of their founders, a fellow named George Colston. So I got exposure to this idea that we have to have something outside of stage gate if we're looking for bigger breakthrough ideas. Then the next step in the evolution for me was the mentoring programs here at the University of Pittsburgh in Pittsburgh. So they both have a program called blast furnace and a program first gear. Both go right off of Eric Reis and Alex Osterwalder's material to teach and use lean startup with very early, very immature ideas that have a high degree of uncertainty and a high degree of risk.

**Mark:** [00:11:25] And so I've spent the last four years almost continually working with one cohort or the other as a business mentor and it's been a wonderful opportunity to take literally dozens and dozens of primarily healthcare related ideas and try to apply the techniques of lean startup: build, measure, learn, business model canvas, design of experiments, learning bands and so on. So just to close on the lean startup side I have a client currently again with a very solid stable stage gate process. But again lack of breakthrough, hard to get home runs, hard to take market share, hard to enter new markets. So I've spent the last year and a half putting in a lean startup methodology for them and I tend to position it as pre-stage gate. So there's an overlap there if we have time or how much detail you want to get into, but in this one instance we're definitely deploying a lean start up mentality prior to the traditional stage gate process.

**Chad:** [00:12:36] Okay, I want to take a quick side trip with you and go back to blast furnace and first gear. Those are programs with who?

**Mark:** [00:12:45] The University of Pittsburgh.

**Chad:** [00:12:46] And these are entrepreneurial programs with the intention of helping students experience what it's like to get an idea created and take it somewhere?

**Mark:** [00:12:54] And start a company. Their metric they get measured on is how many new companies did we create this year. So it's I think in the one program we're up to 28 companies that have been formed coming out of blast furnace.

**Chad:** [00:13:14] That's excellent. I love hearing about these programs. There's more and more

popping up and I like bringing them to the Everyday Innovators listening too, in case anyone's thinking about whether they're interested themselves or they have a child interested about these programs. There is one at my local college University of Colorado at Colorado Springs that brings together engineering and innovation disciplines to try to get people to actually create something new and create companies or help companies. I was visiting First Build about three, four weeks ago, which is the General Electric Appliance innovation incubator and they're on the campus at the University of Louisville in Kentucky. And they are on the campus for the same reason, to have students involved with developing new, for them, new appliance technology. So, interesting programs. I'm glad to see more and more of them popping up. A lot more co-creation going on, and opportunities I wish I would have had as a student at the time.

**Mark:** [00:14:12] So I'd like to add one quick thing that some people don't appreciate but all of these students that are in it, like the last cohort we just hit 24 teams come through Blast Furnace. This isn't for credit. There's no school credit. They're still carrying a full load. This is done in their spare time because they want to start companies, they want to create new businesses.

**Chad:** [00:14:36] It's a real experience. Yeah there's a young man at the local coffee shops I frequent. I tend to spend too much time working out of coffee shops. It's just my M.O. He was talking one day about business ideas he was interested in creating and he's at the point where he's thinking about do I go down the path of going to business college or do I just try to be an entrepreneur, and I give him some resources and we chat from time to time. But I'm delighted to find out about programs like this because there are good options for business school to get this experience along the way too.

**Chad:** [00:15:12] OK. So thanks for the tangent for me. Let's just set the stage a little bit because we talk about lean startup practices and not everyone knows what those are and how we think about them. So can you just kind of frame that about what you mean by Lean Startup and how that applies to the work that you're doing.

**Mark:** [00:15:31] Sure. So I think the first thing I would say, I would give credit to the book Lean Startup by Eric Ries. And there was the two books by Alex Osterwalder Business Model Canvas and then later Value Proposition Creation. So those are kind of the fundamentals, there's been now a number of other spinoff books and so on. But the hallmark of their principles, the core, and it's a quote from Eric Ries, different quote than the one we talked about earlier, but you have to be in learning mode. So when you're doing your early customer investigation, when you're thinking of value propositions, when you're thinking of product concepts, when you're in these early stages, your sole metric is what am I learning. And if you're not learning, everything else is waste. And for companies that have a very execution-oriented mentality where you've been running stage gate for 20 years and it's all about milestones and deliverables and budgets and execution, to stop and say we don't know what we don't know yet. Another quote cliché, we want to fail fast. Big companies really struggle with that. Once an idea gets into their pipeline there's a cultural element that if you fail, if it's not a commercial success, not only did the project fail but you were a failure as well. And again I don't know if I need to go through this with the Silicon Valley entrepreneurial world where you're celebrated for your failures, you're admired because the only way you have failed is because you took some big risks and you failed. And that makes you smarter and stronger.

**Chad:** [00:17:33] Exactly. You learned a lot in the process.

**Mark:** [00:17:35] You learned a lot. So it's a really interesting dynamic to set up these project reviews now, where the leaderships of these companies are all about budget and milestones and deliverables. And I've had to just say this till I'm like a broken record. What did you learn. That's all I want to hear today. Tell me what you learned and tell me based on what you learned, should we

still be doing this project. And that's such a different atmosphere than what you have in traditional gate review meetings, so that's maybe a little still at the cultural level atmosphere as opposed to lean startup means, building out your business model canvas, looking at it, understanding what the killer assumptions are behind your business model canvas and then designing experiments that attack those assumptions that you believe will kill your project. That's the mechanics of it. People get that pretty quickly. But I still find months later they still forget that we're doing this to learn. We're not doing this to execute.

**Chad:** [00:18:47] Which is a big contrast. And so when we look at the stage gate process in what you just described for Lean Startup practices, very much the learning mindset. We're doing experiments. We're seeing what works, we're testing our assumptions, we're learning from that. When I work with companies and help get their product managers really become more capable as a group, there's almost always something that looks like a stage gate process in place because we do this to reduce risk in organizations. So for stages, organizations will vary but there's typically some kind of idea generation or scoping stage and then we go through a decision gate and then there's a business case development and then we move into actual product development. Then we do some kind of testing validation and then we launch it. More times than not, and I'm curious what you've seen, that first stage whether they call it stage 0 or something where you get the idea and you flush out the idea, it's really hard to get anything out of that stage. But the things that do never get killed. And so once they're out of that they might go through, depending on the organization, another four, five, thirteen stages but they almost never get killed past that point.

**Mark:** [00:19:57] You know what that means, right? It means they have a tunnel, not a funnel. Your pipeline is supposed to be a funnel, funneling down. Most companies have just a tunnel, 10 ideas come in and 10 ideas come out the other end as opposed to let's have 100 ideas coming in and let the seven best come out of the other end. The other term I use is zombie projects. You can't kill them. They're just walking dead. They're just, well, we've put too much money into them. Oh no you know that's Jim's pet project. You wouldn't think of killing that, we can we can fix it. So those are all the excuses as opposed to having this fail fast idea that says you know this thing's really weak. Let's just dump it and get on to the next good idea that we've got in the pipeline.

**Chad:** [00:20:51] And you gave some good reasons why that happens. The pet projects or the CEO wants this or I think another one is the sunk cost fear that we've already spent so much money on this, how can we kill it now. But why would you want to bring a product to market that you know is either going to harm your reputation, not going to provide value, that's going to fail once it's in the marketplace. Take the earlier and kill it. I was curious when you were first introducing the notion of killers in that early organization you worked with. In what context that was and you said it was we need to dominate the competition. We want to win this battle and kill the competition. But often product managers also they're thought of in terms of the ones that hopefully are killing off the bad ideas and really highlighting and amplifying the good ideas. And you don't know that right away. You have to do the experiments and the learning.

**Mark:** [00:21:46] Yeah. And that's why the first stages one and two are in traditional more mature organizations. And I think there is a place if you are simply upgrading a mature product line, I could make the case you don't need all of the the early ideation, if you will, and all of that testing. But unfortunately they do tend to just short shrift stages one and two and then you do find yourself sitting there in development ready to drop lots of money and God help you, I hope you've done your due diligence. There's other old saying right? Measure twice to cut once. In my workshops I would always challenge companies if this is a five gate model and it's a million dollar project, what percent do you spend in stages 1 and 2? How much of your dollars?

**Chad:** [00:22:40] And tell us again what you would do in stages 1 and 2.

**Mark:** [00:22:46] Stage 1 and 2 is scoping and then business case. Done very quickly, done with very little money, and now you're into development and now you've got 20 engineers designing, writing code, and now all these other dynamics. You know gosh we've got so much money and then invest it. Oh we've already promised a launch date. It's in the financial plan. We can't stop this project. We've got 10 million in 2019 for this. All of those dynamics begin. That's why you end up with the zombie projects because there's no one willing to kill them. But it goes back to did I do my due diligence in stages 1 and 2 or even stage zero which is what the work I'm doing is. The projects I'm working directly with are not even in stage gate yet. They're pre-stage gate.

**Chad:** [00:23:45] OK. So tell us more about that, about how you fit together lean startup practices and stage gate. What are you doing in that? I assume that's what you're trying to solve in stage zero.

**Mark:** [00:23:57] And so what we're doing is you go all the way back to idea generation. There's many many methodologies for generating great ideas. There's brainstorming but there's a dozen books out there on brainstorming, connecting the dots, co-creation, so you need a spark. You generate the idea, then you want to quickly do some customer discovery, customer exploration. So we have a saying again, get out of the building. And I think that's an Eric Ries or Osterwalder tagline.

**Chad:** [00:24:46] Steve Blank is who Eric was inspired by.

**Mark:** [00:24:46] So you get out of the building, you go test. Does anybody care. And then from that early work you can pretty quickly build your business model canvas. And then behind that canvas is a set of assumptions and then what you're required to do as a team is look at those assumptions and say, and I like to use an old failure mode and effect analysis technique. What's the probability that I'm going to be wrong and if I am wrong, how big is the impact. And if I have a high number there, that's the assumption I want to go tackle. How do I tackle it? I start designing an experiment or two to test that assumption and the collection of those experiments are what's called a learning plan. So you end up with, the way we run it, one company, you come to management, this is the learning plan I want to do. I need so many dollars and so many people and so much time. These are the four experiments I want to conduct. And we use another term we call turn the crank. So it's turning the crank through four to five quadrants. Some people might call them lenses, so technical, clinical, organizational, financial. These aren't just research projects. You're coming at it from all five elements because you want to know do I have an oh crap somewhere in this idea, something, it could be technically smooth as could be, but if nobody wants it or cares about it why invent it? And so on. So that's a little bit more into the detail. This is again all prior to putting this project into a stage gate process.

**Chad:** [00:26:38] And let me summarize. I want to run through and make sure I got the steps right. So in your stage zero, we start with the ideation. Somewhere there's the spark for the idea. And quickly do customer discovery, get out of our cubes, get out with real people. Since I spend so much time in coffee shops, ask people in coffee shops about the idea, what the problem is. You said build a quick business model canvas. This is that Alex Osterwalder tool. I interviewed him just a few weeks ago too, he's on the podcast. So that one page business plan to examine who are your customers, what's the real problem you're solving for them, how are you solving, what's your value proposition. What can be your real revenue streams. And then you did the probability impact work to say okay, which assumptions should we better make sure we test because if we're wrong it's going to be a big deal.

**Mark:** [00:27:30] Yeah.

**Chad:** [00:27:30] And you create a learning plan to actually test those assumptions. And in your learning plan now, are you making specific questions to go back out and interact with customers?

**Mark:** [00:27:40] So the learning plan could be any one of those four to five quadrants, because again the key notion is iteration. That's where that turn the crank metaphor comes from. So you take a turn of the crank, you conduct the four experiments, you come back. You honestly look at the data. What did we learn. Uh oh, one of our major assumptions, we had it wrong. What do we do? Do we kill the project or do we pivot? From that, let's say in this case we're not going to kill the project. But we have a completely different target audience. We discovered instead of adults we're going to go after teenagers as an example. Again, we iterate, we look at everything from a clinical, from a technical, from a commercial, from a market standpoint, put another learning plan together and turn the crank again. And basically there's no hard and fast rule of how many turns of the crank you do until you get to where you and your management team say I think we're confident enough. I think we've de-risked this enough. I think we've got a deep enough learning. Now I'm ready to go into stage gate. I'm ready to execute. I've had six months, 12 months, 18 months of learning to really honestly learn about this market, about my value prop, about my clinical efficacy, whatever those challenges are. I am now ready for stage gate. Drop me in and let's go. Now I do want to launch, I do want to get market.

**Chad:** [00:29:26] Excellent. I know when I first came across the lean startup ideas they just resonated so much with me in terms of we spend too much time developing products no one actually wants. Often, we're in the middle of that and we kind of have a feeling that might be happening and we're stuck. And then Lean startup practices really got formulated well, building on Steve Blank's work by Eric Ries and it was like candy in the sense I just couldn't get enough of it. Now we have some good tools and a lot of us in product management, we had been doing something like that but now they kind of got codified for us. This notion of let's actually figure out what the customer wants, what the real problem is, how can we create value for them, before we start encountering the more expensive development activity so we know we're developing the right thing. Very good. I appreciate you laying out your stage zero work. There's another resource I'm going to share with listeners and I'll put it in the show notes. So Eric Ries wrote the first book in the Lean series. The second one is Ash Maurya's Running Lean. And he was back on episode 10 so he was one of my early interviews and in that interview he does a nice job of talking through how do you run experiments.

**Mark:** [00:30:42] Yeah I've got it. I like his work as well.

**Chad:** [00:30:46] Yeah I find I like the action-oriented perspective. He puts things into practice and tests them and see what works.

**Mark:** [00:30:55] Can I then I'd like to just mention one more small note on lean start up and fitting it into stage gate. And it's the word that comes to mind is velocity, the ability to run many, many ideas and do fast fail because I think that's another big, if you will, failure mode that the larger companies have that they can learn from this entrepreneurial environment. I'll work with these teams and again over four years, dozens of teams now, and I've watched us take a very, very immature idea, and in eight weeks the amount of work we can do to test and retest and then say is this thing even worth a damn or not. It is amazing. And then I go into the corporate environment and they can't even touch that kind of velocity. So I am working on a program with a client in a university. We have it in writing. We haven't executed it but we do have the contract where I'm trying to bring these graduate students that I teach which I did mention, you mentioned I teach at the University of Pittsburgh. I teach in their school of bioengineering and I teach a course on innovation management. So I get great exposure to some really, really smart young people. And so what I'm trying to put in place is the ability to use these students who have done one of these blast

furnace eight week programs. So they kind of know the lean startup playbook right now. And now I want to bring them in and provide them as a resource to a client, the corporate client, says hey here's a smart young person who could take an idea with me working with them and your scientists or your researcher and let's get to an answer in eight weeks. Let's not wait two years to find out if this thing is worth it or not. So I'm kind of on that kick right now about it's not only good in terms of doing the proper due diligence and customer discovery but if you don't do it right there is a velocity that can happen that's only going to help the company.

**Chad:** [00:33:15] A lot of large organizations that are either told or they think themselves that they need to act more like a startup. I just struggle with that phrase because large organizations can't act like a startup, that's not in their DNA. It's not possible. But there are activities that they can bring in like this. So for anyone in a startup listening they might say you know eight weeks to test out an idea? You've got to be kidding. I do it in 24 hours. But for established organizations that's new and improved velocity for them. It's a big difference, a big deal. So thanks for sharing that. One question I suspect some listeners might be thinking of is why not just do lean entirely? Why is there still a stage gate thing in the picture? What do you think about that?

**Mark:** [00:34:00] I think it stays in the picture because, again, this will be a mid to large enterprise viewpoint. To do a global launch and to do scale, there's hundreds of people that eventually have to be brought in to that effort when you're coming out with a new product. In those later stages, when you're completing development and you're bringing manufacturing in both for quality reasons and scalability reasons and cost objective reasons, stage gate is good for that. And then when you're ready to take it to the market and you've got to put marketing programs together and materials and you've got to educate sales people or distributors around what this new product is and what the value prop is and what the differentiators are. That's a lot of work and it's not like you stop learning, you never stop learning or finding problems and resolving them. But stage gate does a very powerful job of getting that whole orchestra playing together, which is needed when you're going to do a big launch. So I think that and then there is the classic risk management of signing the checks as you go. Again, I worry that some of these projects never do get killed. But I would not want to be ready to do a global launch and go, gosh let's take a look at our killer assumptions and go and go do a little you know a little test or something when I've got four million dollars invested in trade shows and sales training. You know what I mean. At some point we got to lock it down and we got to ship it. So I think stage gate is good for that.

**Chad:** [00:36:05] And I've seen certainly in medium large businesses it's something like a stage gate process, doing work in these in these phases and then having the review meetings to make sure, did we do what we needed to do. Are we ready for the next place we need to go, the next stage of work? Even in startups with two years of experience that are 30 to 100 people, they might be doing development in a lean fashion but they're managing actual product development through something that resembles a stage gate and that's because they're managing the risk and do we have everything accounted for that we need to have accounted for. Are we really prepared at each stage to move on and we spend more money every time we go further in the process as we're getting closer to launch. So it's a way of helping to add visibility to that money that is being spent and manage it wisely. So, good. So, this is great. So thanks for bringing some perspective on fitting together lean startup and stage gate and really getting that done in a stage zero process, as you shared. And I'm also delighted to hear about activities at Blast Furnace and First Gear and things I want to look more into. Love those ideas of programs that schools are doing and incubation labs to make these practices more accessible to people. I'm curious. You've been in project management so long and such good experience. What wisdom would you impart to a younger product manager? If you look back when you were yanked out of engineering and they said hey Adkins come help us with this, what's something that you wish you would have known starting out that you did not know?



**Mark:** [00:37:41] I think it kind of goes a little bit back to this quote that we that we were talking about earlier that I'll mention is that I think today there are so much more tools in educational ability or capabilities out there so that you don't have to be thrown into the fire or thrown into the water training. So for me, it's wonderful to be teaching product development at a university, to be mentoring entrepreneurial programs at a university. We haven't talked a lot about PDMA but the types of programs that we do here in Pittsburgh, what we call our innovation forums and the ability for young product managers to come meet people who are in the space who do the profession every day, so those networking opportunities are there. t all comes together in this notion of community so I think the other thing, having two sons that are product managers, I don't know if I mentioned it or not, but my older son is a product manager at Google here in Pittsburgh, and my younger son is a product manager for a company called Riot Games. It makes a large online game, League of Legends, which is well known in his group. So the difference is, trying to give advice to the young product manager, is that there is a community. There is a network of knowledge, of people, of experiences that are out there. So don't ever feel alone. Even if you get thrown into the water into the deep end. There are people, there are books, there are podcasts, there's so much out there now that you really ought to take advantage of. So I guess as I said earlier we've had some really wonderful things happen recently through our PDMA and through my mentoring and we too often chalk it up to luck and say Well that was lucky. So-and-so met so-and-so or so-and-so got a job at such and such place and then there's this Thomas Jefferson quote, right? "The harder I work the luckier I get." And I think that's what I'm trying to do. I think that's what we're trying to do through PDMA and through the Pittsburgh community. We're working hard to build a community so people can learn and be better at their job and be better for their employer and kind of live a really, it's a really, really fulfilling life as you know. I mean there's, other than kids, I don't know if there's anything greater than to bring in the life than when you bring a new product to life, to the market. There's nothing cooler. So it's a pretty cool career to have.

**Chad:** [00:40:43] It is. Thanks for sharing that. There are so many new options available for being part of what I would call a community of practice. The other product managers at different stages in their career and they go to meetup.com, go to pdma.org, find these groups near you, join one that's online. There's people that are glad, like you, you have mentored so many other younger product managers and people interested in project management. There's people who are glad to be mentors and just someone to bounce ideas off of and say what would you do in this situation? And thanks for sharing the quote, too. You know that hard work pays off that prepares opportunities. So Mark, how can people find out about the work that you are doing? You've been helping companies for several years now with these sort of ideas.

**Mark:** [00:41:27] They can find me on LinkedIn. Mark W.Adkins. I know I come up on LinkedIn. I have a Website. [www.smarthammer.com](http://www.smarthammer.com). I don't know if we mentioned my company name but my company name is Smart Hamer Innovation. So you can find it through SmartHammerin.com and then locally I'm still active with PDMA. If you just go to [www.pdma.org](http://www.pdma.org), I'm the volunteer executive director of the Pittsburgh chapter. And then you can also find me at the University of Pittsburgh as an adjunct professor. So those are ways to contact me. I would encourage anybody if you have further questions, I really appreciate Chad you've given me the time to share some of my thoughts and experiences and if anybody would like any follow up dialogue please call or email me. It is a community practice that we need to build.

**Chad:** [00:42:29] Excellent. I'll put those links in there too. And Mark, I really do appreciate your time. I'm always glad to have experienced project managers on that can talk about what it's like in the trenches and actually getting this work done as a project manager. So thank you very much.

**Mark:** [00:42:42] Thank you Chad.

**Chad:** [00:42:43] Thanks for listening. If we're not already connected on LinkedIn, please send me a connection request. Just search for Chad McAllister Ph.D. and you'll find my profile. For a summary of the discussion with Mark, just go to the [www.theeverydayinnovator.com/132](http://www.theeverydayinnovator.com/132) and from that page you'll also be able to download the product mastery roadmap, which shows you how to go from product manager to product master. All that and more is at [www.theeverydayinnovator.com/132](http://www.theeverydayinnovator.com/132). Keep innovating.