

Product

Innovation  
Educators



# Four Essential Skills Product Leaders Have

# The Everyday Craziiness of Product Management

There is little doubt that the role of Product Manager requires a diverse skill set.

Some days you feel like the captain of the ship pointing the way into uncharted territory: you're making decisions that will determine the lifecycle of a product and the feature set that will be included in each stage of life.

Some days you feel like you need to roll up your sleeves and man the oars: you find yourself coding, or project managing, rewriting someone else's spec because it is just faster that way and you want to ensure quality.

Still other days you feel like you're the crew member in the red shirt on the away team: you know where you're headed even if you're not sure what you'll find there but in any case you're fully aware that the target has been painted on YOUR chest if things start to go awry.

*How do you know which skills  
to build to move  
**FORWARD** and **UPWARD**  
in your career?*

With so many different hats to wear and roles to play how do you know which skills to build to move forward and upward in your career? How do you identify which skill set will open the door to greater influence? Where do you put your focus when it comes to developing your corporate voice?

# The Move from Manager to Leader

Making the move from product management to product leadership can sometimes be only a subtle shift organizationally but in terms of influence and relational capital it can be a tectonic shift. Time and time again research shows that, while there are still a wide variety of skills required to be a successful product manager, there are four essential communication skills that distinguish product leaders from the rest of the pack. These skills take on the identities of the (1) Pitch Artist, (2) Exec Debater, (3) Inspirer, and (4) Truth Teller.



## The Pitch Artist

The skilled pitch artist can present ideas and conclusions in a manner that convinces people, reduces emotional churn, and helps speed time to market. Too often this is seen by folks in product management as spin, or salesmanship and the name does imply a certain ability to sell. But this skill is not focused on flash; rather it is the crafted expertise that lays at the core of building influence. Part storyteller and part wise-sage, the Pitch Artist takes a wide swath of product data, market data, and sales data and combines it into a simple yet powerful message that is easily consumed by varied audiences from engineers to executives.



## The Exec Debater

Even the most skilled pitch artist will sometimes find themselves at odds with executive leadership, anything from the sales VP who makes promises that aren't aligned with the product direction to the "flavor of the day" CEO who gets energized by something he heard on a TV commercial and wants to change course suddenly.

The skill of the Exec Debater lays in their ability to stand up for what is needed and challenge executive teams when reality requires bold moves. This follow on skill to the Pitch Artist not only combines well-crafted arguments and conclusions but it also brings to bear conviction and ownership.

The Exec Debater is ready and willing to stand up for what they believe is right, can present their case compellingly, and brings the evidence that supports their convictions. And even if the Exec Debater can't gain the CEO's support after presenting a compelling argument, the CEO and other executives will respect the attempt.



## The Inspirer

Great products are built by great teams but these aren't necessarily teams that product managers personally manage. Instead, product managers need to inspire others and share the vision of the product. Where the Pitch Artist can sell vision – the pitch, and the Exec Debater is able to create executive re-alignment – the proof, the Inspirer is the product evangelist that gets the buzz going across the organization – the passion.

Successful Inspirers know how to bring diverse team members into alignment to deliver product success. They know how to walk the halls and present the same picture they developed as the Pitch Artist but now make it specifically applicable to an audience in a conference room or a person in a cubical, wherever they are at the moment.

Where the first two skills are foundational in terms of driving products forward, this third skill is foundational in developing organization-wide influence.



## The Truth Teller

The Truth Teller is the opposite of the spin doctor. You know the spin doctor. This is the person always trying to present inconvenient truth in the most positive light. “Yes, we ARE late to market as a result of internal delays but this means we won’t be bleeding edge.” Spin doctor.

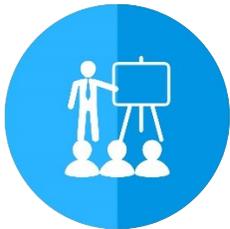
Conversely, Truth Tellers wield power in bringing unpopular messages when needed by learning how to bring a combination of truth and solution.

Truth Tellers are not going to shy away from saying what needs to be said, but they avoid casting blame and instead look to make the best of the situation. Rather than cowering in the corner hoping they won’t have to deliver bad news, Truth Tellers seek out solutions and are proactive in pointing out potential problems to leadership. This approach builds credibility, trust, and influence.

# Gain Strengths in Each of the Four Identities

I will be adding specific training for improving your strengths in each identity as part of making the move from product manager to Product Master. Until then, numerous Everyday Innovator interviews have revealed insights you can apply now. These are organized as level 3 of the Product Mastery Roadmap called ***Apply Deep Dives***. Find all the interviews here.

I suggest you start with the episodes listed below to focus your skills.



## The Pitch Artist

[TEI 097: How product managers pitch and sell ideas to managers – with Chris Westfall](#)

[TEI 076: Effectively pitching your ideas and influencing others – with Nancy Duarte](#)



## The Exec Debater

[TEI 137: How product managers look & sound like leaders – with Tom Henschel](#)

[TEI 099: Speaking with confidence and gravitas – with Caroline Goyder](#)



## The Inspirer

[TEI 046: Building a Global Innovation Capability at a Large Enterprise – with Caterpillar Director of Innovation Ken Gray](#)

[TEI 098: When product managers' good ideas are not enough – with Samuel Bacharach](#)



## The Truth Teller

[TEI 052: The Simple Approach for all Product Managers and Innovators to be Effective Communicators – with Curtis Fletcher](#)

[TEI 096: Conjoint analysis for product managers – with Brian Ottum, PhD](#)

To learn more ways to increase your influence and grow into leadership, visit [TheEverydayInnovator.com](http://TheEverydayInnovator.com) and explore the Apply Deep Dives topics.