The characteristics of successful product leaders

Based on a Q&A with Carlos González de Villaumbrosia, founder and CEO of Product School

Carlos González de Villaumbrosia founded Product School to train product managers (PMs) and bridge the gap between business and engineering. Prior to running Product School, Carlos worked in software engineering and studied business at Berkeley.

Product management fragments as companies grow

Carlos defines product management as *"the intersection between three big groups: business, engineering, and design."*

As your company grows, these groups also grow, which makes the lines of communication more complex and fragments the product manager role. At smaller companies, PMs have to deal with every aspect of product, including development, design, marketing, and operations. Everything from managing team sprints to communicating with the larger organization about what's happening falls under their purview. As a company gets larger, the product manager role splinters into several more specific roles such as product operations and product marketing. These roles help manage the connections that PMs must have with the rest of the organization so that the PM can focus on the bigger picture of product ideation and development.

Three best practices for product managers

Changes in the focus of product management mean changes in best practices for product managers. Here are some best practices from Carlos González de Villaumbrosia.

1. UNDERSTAND HOW YOUR TEAM THINKS

Your previous experience will inform how you approach the product manager role. Carlos sees two types of people coming to Product School for PM training: people with an engineering background, and those with a business background.

If you come at the PM role from an engineering background, you may need to focus more on learning to facilitate growth at the company level. You already understand the technical aspects of the product, but you also need to understand the mechanics of how the business runs and how to identify the levers for growth. Conversely, if you come at the role from a business background, you may need to focus more on the technical details of how the product works and what that means for future development.

Either way, product managers need to be able to communicate with their entire product team, which means being familiar with the business, design, and engineering aspects of the company. Even though you won't be directly involved with every step of the creation process, you need to be hands-on with each department and understand all the different elements of product in order to be effective as a product manager.

> " **Product is the intersection between business, engineering, and design.** "
>
> –Carlos González de Villaumbrosia

2. DEFINE GROWTH WITH SPECIFIC METRICS

The focus of product management is increasingly on company growth, and growth is more than just acquiring new users for your product. You may get 200 new users a week, but that doesn't mean anything if they immediately stop using your product after the free trial is over.

To accurately measure growth, you have to define what growth means for your company by using specific metrics. Your metrics might correspond to retention rates, new revenue, recurring revenue, or a combination. For example, you could set a goal of going from 200 to 300 new users per week, while maintaining a retention rate of at least 30%. These metrics are specific and measurable, so you can easily see if you're meeting your growth goals.

Keep in mind that growth metrics don't exist in a vacuum. If one of your metrics is increasing sign ups, for example, a quick way to achieve that would be to allow signup for a free trial without putting in a credit card. However, while this would grow surely grow signs ups, it would likely result in a higher churn rate and not much revenue growth.

3. USE A MIX OF BIG-PICTURE AND DETAIL-ORIENTED EXPERIMENTATION

Once you define your metrics, you can't simply hand them to your growth team and tell them to make it happen. Tests and experiments run by the growth team will often involve the product manager. That means you have to keep lines of communication constantly open, so you are aware of and have input on how your growth metrics are achieved.

Part of this communication is making sure your team does a mixture of optimization experiments and big-picture experiments. You need to know details, like whether customers prefer specific color schemes. At the same time, you should be testing your product with different demographics to look at broader market appeal. If you focus all your energy on small details, you can lose perspective and miss out on big wins that could result in dramatic growth for the company.

How Segment can help

As a product manager you have a lot to deal with as you balance the business, engineering, and design sectors of your company. Check out our recipes catalog for tools to help with growth measurement and optimization, including:

- A/B testing

- Retargeting potential customers

- Increasing trial conversions

- Measuring impact on revenue growth

For analytics and data warehousing tools, head over to our integrations catalog.

Keep reading to learn more

- The future of product management report from Product School

- Growth strategies that work

- The tools of today aren't the tools of tomorrow