



# **Getting Onto and Moving Up the Product Management Career Ladder**

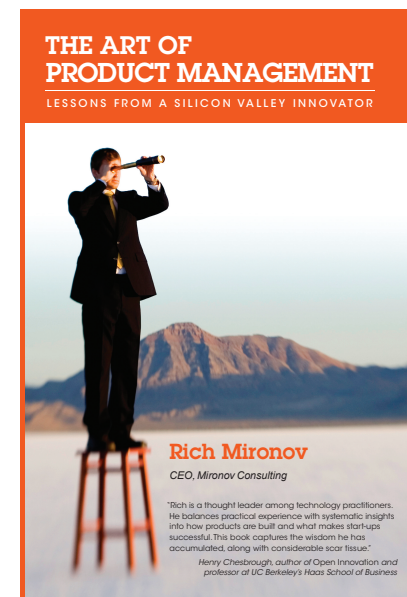
**Rich Mironov**  
**SVPMA**  
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# About Rich

- Software product management since 1988
  - VP Product, CEO, 6 startups
  - 13 interim (“smokejumper”) CPO roles
  - Now coaching CPOs/VPs
- Writer, mentor, founded Product Camp

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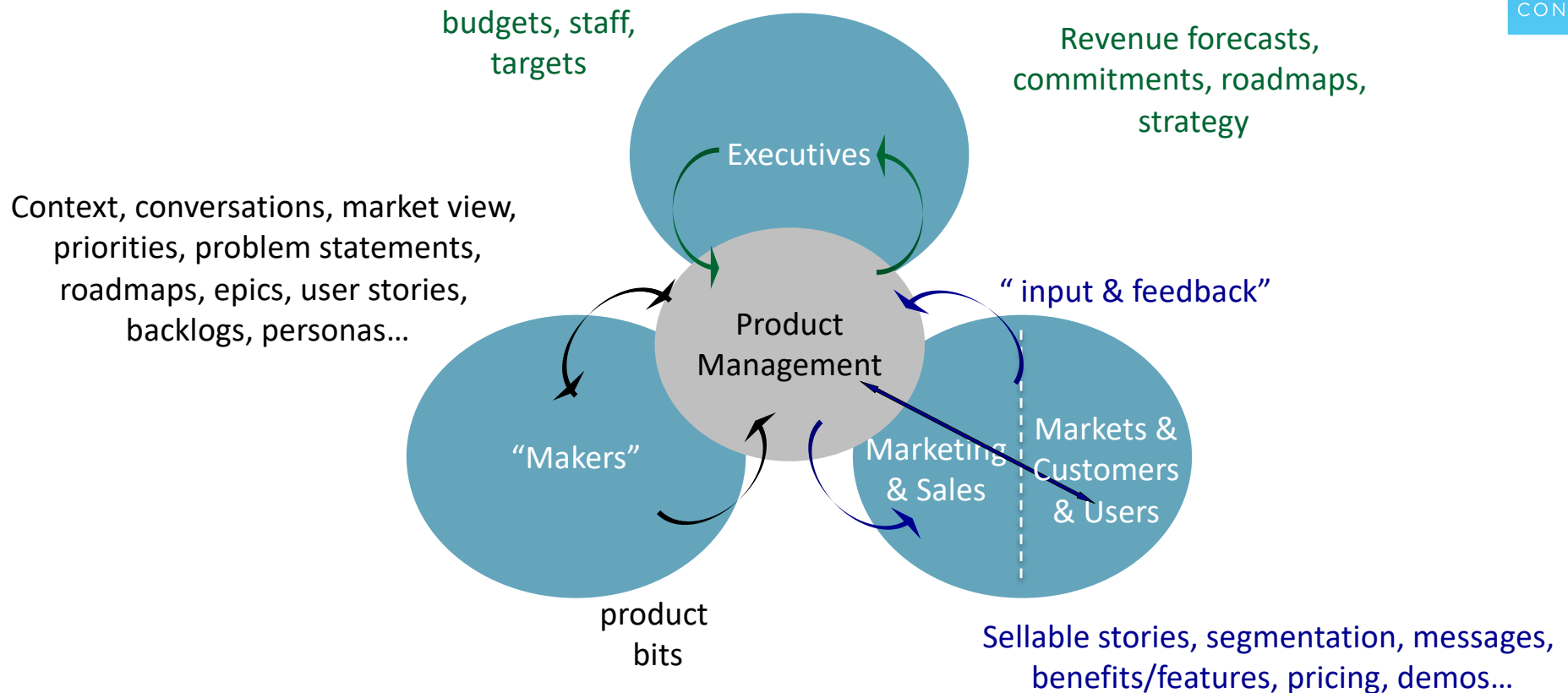


# Agenda

- What do product managers do?
- Rich's hiring-side biases
- Getting your first product job
- Product Directors
- Q&A



# What Does a Product Manager Do?



# Product Managers

- Champions for our products
  - Know more about product, market, roadmap, competition, use cases, trade-offs than **anyone else**
  - Talk **benefits** with customers, talk **tech** and **benefits** with eng/design, talk **strategy** and **revenue** with execs
  - Relentless communicators of the truth
- Humble: continuously validating markets and assumptions via real user interviews

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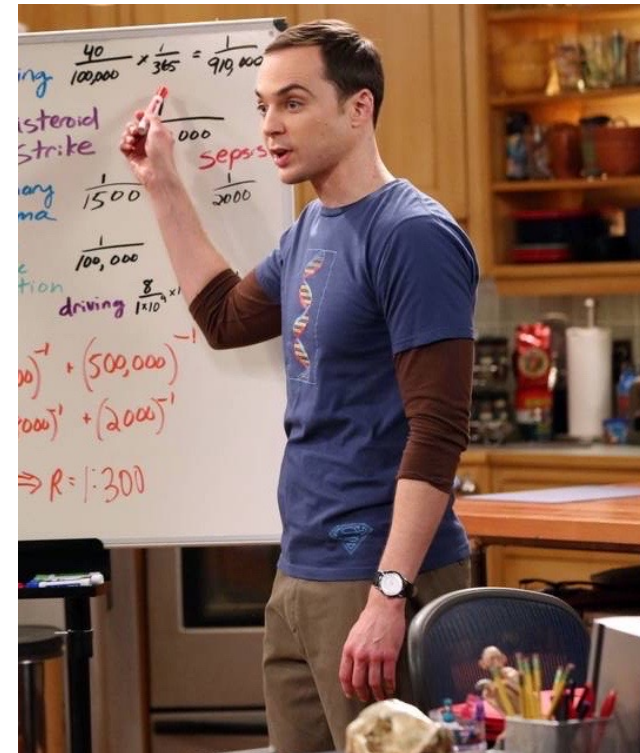


# Product Is a Craft, Not Just a Process



- Much more than algorithms or templates
- “Soft skills” as important as “hard skills”
  - Leading without authority, negotiating, understanding executives, motivating teams, organizational thinking, “merchandizing”
  - Tell product story differently by audience
  - Long-term thinking informs short-term choices
- Students of human behavior & corp culture

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***“A weekend at the  
Dude Ranch doesn’t  
make you a cowboy”***

— Scott Sehlhorst



# Rich's Hiring-Side Biases

- Previous product management experience is #1 requirement
  - Far ahead of subject expertise, current user, “similar” roles, MBA, certificates
  - “Product owner” is ambiguous: most internal IT POs aren’t product managers
- Seasoned PM can learn new market or tech in 1-3 months
  - But 1-3 years to learn product craft
  - Mentoring 1-2 hours/week for a year
- Rich’s advice to CPOs: hire veterans first, novices later

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# Getting Through the Door

If you're not already a product manager (with that title)...

1. Opportunity in your current company
2. Soft connections and mentors
3. Subject expert in your space
4. Huge companies with APM track
5. Cold start via online job postings

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# Raising Your Hand Internally

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- Meet current product team
- Clearly express interest (*including with your current manager*)
- Small assignments, analysis, stray tasks, shadowing... help while showing smarts
- Ask about/watch for entry-level openings

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# Director/Group Product Manager



- Focus on processes, resources, teams
  - Cross-functional cooperation and priorities
  - Role/tools standardization and simplification
  - Portfolio-level trends and market input
  - Mentor your PMs and your replacement
- Keep the trains running
- Aggressively delegate product work

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# Signaling Interest Internally



- Non-threatening talk with your current Director
  - *“I’m interested in what you do. I might want a position like yours someday. Feedback for me on skills, opportunities, challenges? Advice?”*
- Demonstrate product **leader** skills
  - Volunteer for cross-functional task force
  - Mentor junior folks
  - Lobby for someone else’s product
  - Speak at user conferences

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# Takeaways



- Product management is complex, strategic, cross-functional, **experience-based**
  - Odd, misunderstood, not a fit for everyone
  - But world's hottest job for next 5 seconds
- Hard to get that first opportunity
- Show your skills (internal), network aggressively (external)



# Q&A





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