HOW I GOT
PRODUCT MANAGER JOB

TYLER HOGG
Product Manager at Wealthfront

In June it will be 2 years since my wife and I moved to Silicon Valley with our 2 kids. We absolutely love it here. She loves the weather, the diversity, and the beaches, and I love the ambitious, brilliant people I get to work with and the fact that I can work for a few dream companies.

For a while I've been meaning to share what led us here and what I think makes SV unique.

A LinkedIn Message

In 2014 I was sitting in my living room in Boise reading Ben Horowitz' book "The Hard Thing About Hard Things" when I came across the story of how Ben hired his VP of Sales at Opsware:

"After interviewing about two dozen candidates—none of whom had the strengths I sought—I interviewed Mark Cranney. He wasn't what I expected; he didn't fit the stereotype of a hard-charging sales executive. For starters, Mark was average height, whereas most sales executives tend to be rather tall. Next, he was a square guy—that is, he was as wide as he was tall. Not fat, just square. His square body seemed to fit rather uncomfortably into what must have been a custom-tailored suit—there is no way an off-the-rack business suit would fit a square guy like Mark.

And then I looked at his résumé. The first thing I noticed was that he went to a school that I'd never heard of, Southern Utah University. I asked him what kind of school it was. He replied, "It was the MIT of southern Utah." That was the last joke he told. Mark's seriousness was so intense that it seemed to make him uncomfortable in his own skin. He made me uncomfortable, too."

I put down the book and started to laugh. My wife asked me what was funny, and I told her that the book I was reading just talked about a guy from Southern Utah University (where we both went to school) and how interesting he sounded.

Then I kept reading:

"When I asked Mark for his references, he surprised me again. He gave me a list of seventy-five references. He said he had more if I needed them. I called every reference on the list, and every one called me back within one hour. Mark ran a tight network. Maybe these references were the sales FBI. Then, just as I was getting ready to make the hire, another executive on my team called to say that a friend of hers knew Mark Cranney and wanted to give a negative reference.
I called the friend—I'll call him Joe—and proceeded to have the most unusual reference call of my career:

Ben: "Thanks very much for reaching out."
Joe: "My pleasure."
Ben: "How do you know Mark Cranney?"
Joe: "Mark was an area vice president when I taught sales training at my previous employer. I want to tell you that under no circumstances should you hire Mark Cranney."
Ben: "Wow, that's a strong statement. Is he a criminal?"
Joe: "No, I've never known Mark to do anything unethical."
Ben: "Is he bad at hiring?"
Joe: "No, he brought some of the best salespeople into the company."
"Ben: "Can he do big deals?"
Joe: "Yes, definitely. Mark did some of the largest deals we had."
Ben: "Is he a bad manager?"
Joe: "No, he was very effective at running his team."
Ben: "Well, then why shouldn't I hire him?"

Joe: "He'll be a terrible cultural fit."
Ben: "Please explain."
Joe: "Well, when I was teaching new-hire sales training at Parametric Technology Corporation, I brought in Mark as a guest speaker to fire up the troops. We had fifty new hires and I had them all excited about selling and enthusiastic about working for the company. Mark Cranney walks up to the podium, looks at the crowd of fresh new recruits, and says, 'I don't give a fuck how well trained you are. If you don't bring me five hundred thousand dollars a quarter, I'm putting a bullet in your head.'"
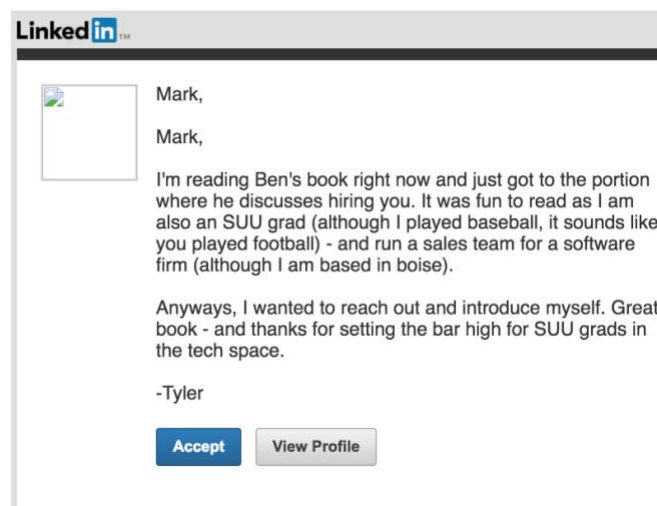*Ben: "Thank you very much."*

Now I was laughing hard.

And I had already concluded I had to meet Mark Cranney, this mythological sales leader who played football at the same school I played baseball.

So, I did what I always do, and I cold-emailed him.

Except this time I used LinkedIn invite (not something I typically do)

LinkedIn

Mark,

Mark,

I'm reading Ben's book right now and just got to the portion where he discusses hiring you. It was fun to read as I am also an SUU grad (although I played baseball, it sounds like you played football) - and run a sales team for a software firm (although I am based in boise).

Anyways, I wanted to reach out and introduce myself. Great book - and thanks for setting the bar high for SUU grads in the tech space.

-Tyler

Accept   View Profile

Not my best effort…..but ok.

And in an hour or two, he replied:

Re: Mark, please add me to your LinkedIn network

Mark Cranney <mcranney@a16z.com>
to me

Go t-birds

Sent from my iPhone

Go t-birds. Awesome.

I still remember reading that reply.

Over the next few days I decided two things: 1) I wanted to work for Mark Cranney at Andreessen Horowitz, and 2) I was going to run a sales process to convince him to hire me.

The only issue: I was just getting ready to start business school in 3 months, and there wasn't a natural way to continue our conversation. Fortunately I had one last business trip in SF before starting school, and I emailed Mark again to see if he'd let me come by Sand Hill Road to meet him in person for 15 minutes.

This is where I told him I was going to business school, but that I wanted to keep in touch.

Mark: "Why the f*** would you go get an MBA? Those idiots don't know anything. They all think they are above being in sales. And they're all wrong. You can pay me $200 grand and I'll give you a network 10x better than any dumbass MBA program"

I laughed. Hard.

Yes, I had to work for Mark Cranney at a16z.

Over the next semester I kept in touch, and finally decided to go for the kill. I put together a packet of all the companies I believed I could introduce to a16z to help their market development efforts and I sent it to Mark. The day the package was delivered, I called Mark and asked if he'd seen what I sent.

Then I asked if I could intern there the following summer.

Fortunately he gave me a chance at an interview that went well, and I spent the summer of 2015 on Mark's team.

For a 27-year old obsessed with startups, venture capital, and sales, it was a dream come true.

An email

During my time at Andreessen Horowitz I also tried to meet as many interesting people as possible. One of the people I admired most was Jason Lemkin, mainly because of his success building EchoSign and the straightforward advice he'd give on Twitter and Quora. So I emailed him.

It turns out most people are within a few miles on Sand Hill Road, so the cold email I sent had a pretty good subject line (and the whole email was much better than the Cranney's):

: Can I walk across the street?

He replied. And after I followed up 4x, we finally met for 30 minutes one day while I was in SF.

First thing he says in our meeting: "Well, you're persistent."

OK!

I told Jason I wanted to work for him during my second year of business school on any projects he needed, and I floated the idea of me helping review potential investments (pitch deck review, competitor analysis, customer interviews, etc) and fortunately he gave me a shot. I dug in. And then I got a few more projects.

As a result, the second year of business school was a blast: I was able to help Jason review several deals and plan the VC portion of the SaaStr Annual in SF, instead of going to class.

2 year later and I'm still helping Jason with several projects as he grows SaaStr into a global $10 million+ business.

All thanks to a lucky cold email. And some follow up. And a crisp 10-minute pitch.

A Tweet

The final experience is a little bit of a rewind. During my first semester of business school I became enamored with this startup named Wealthfront. I had been a client for a while, loved the product, and was already somewhat of a finance nerd. I had just completed the CFA exams and had a long-held belief that some startup was going to be able to automate most of financial planning, and Wealthfront seemed like the leading contender.

I wanted to better test my hypothesis, so I often debated with smart people on twitter about Wealthfront's potential. Most of the arguments I found against Wealthfront were pretty weak or ill informed. I eventually decided Wealthfront was a company worth making a bet on, and I already knew that I preferred joining a startup over trying to get into VC. Perhaps it was the a16z kool-aid, but I became convinced I needed to be an operator if I wanted to have a standout career.

One day, while sitting on Cornell's campus during a break, I sent a tweet to Andy Rachleff and Adam Nash asking if I could talk to them (at this point I hadn't yet received an offer from Cranney to go to a16z):

Tyler Hogge. 🎯
@thogge

@arachleff @adamnash Andy & Adam - I'm a CFA charterhldr & SaaS customer success & sales mgr interested in wealthfront.Who runs the cs team?

3:17 PM - 24 Sep 2014

♡ 1

Two minutes later, Andy replied:

Andy Rachleff ✔
@arachleff

Following

Replying to @thogge

@thogge @adamnash pls email me at andy at wealthfront.com

3:19 PM - 24 Sep 2014

I couldn't believe it.

So I emailed him that night. Always the professor, Andy put me through his first test:

Andy Rachleff <andy@wealthfront.com>   9/26/14
to me

Thank you very much for the interest. As you know Wealthfront does not and hopefully never will have a sales team. therefore our only relevant position is in client service, but is that really what you want to do after having earned your MBA? If yes I would be delighted to talk to you

best

When I read this, I knew immediately how I'd reply.

How?

Not long before, I read Andy's "Career Guide to Silicon Valley" — the very best content ever written for people who want to have a successful tech career — and one of the principles states:

All our advice on Silicon Valley careers is based on a simple idea: that your choice of company trumps everything else. It's more important than your job title, your pay or your responsibilities

So I replied:

Tyler Hogge <tylerhogge@gmail.com>   9/26/14
to Andy

Thanks, and yes - I would absolutely be very interested discussing further. a few thoughts:

-I care much less about the position or title than I do about the company, its growth prospects, its product, and its leadership. Wealthfront has a unique opportunity in front of it and I believe I could really help.

Passed the test. Best email I ever sent. And now I'm a Product Manager at Wealthfront.

So here we are. Two years in, with hopefully many more years to come.

What are my key learnings?

- Cold emails work really, really well *if you do them right.*

- Almost no one does them right.

- The nuanced lesson here is how you can get someone who receives endless email to reply to yours. With a high degree of confidence. 3–4 essential things are required for a stellar cold email, but that's a separate post.

- Identify 2–3 companies, not 10–15. Be targeted.

- Stalk those companies. I later learned Andy already knew who I was because I had tweeted positively about Wealthfront many times (and battled the trolls). So I won the deal before the reach out even happened.

- "Warm up" your emails by doing lots and lots of research.

- Know your value prop. Sales isn't enough — must have a great product :)

- Add value in every interaction. No pointless "just following up to check in…" emails. Again: every interaction has to add value.

- Silicon Valley is a special place.

I'm extremely grateful for the type of culture of giving and mentorship that exists here. Because almost no one is "native" Silicon Valley, you're surrounded by people who at one point also wanted to break into the community, who received help, and who now pay it forward. It's really a special place.

KYLE SANDBURG
Vice President, Strategy @ Porch

How was your University time?

I like to divide my time at university into a few phases

1) First 1 ½ years: This first period of time was full of the excitement of college, but faced more downs than ups. I went to a small university focused on engineering and science. I had not thought through the implications that having a school with a higher than average ratio of introverts would have. At the end of this phase I had applied to a few schools to transfer for my Junior year.

2) The Turnaround: The next phase was sparked by studying abroad. During my sophomore year I studied at the University of Leeds. This change of pace was amazing, despite a minor medical setback. I had a chance to visit 20+ countries and meet amazing people. Through this experience I realized my disappointments were largely in my control. This change the trajectory of my experience at Colorado School of Mines.

3) The finish: My last two years were awesome. I built great relationships with friends, including many international students. Where there were voids I filled them. This led me to a second study abroad at the Technical University of Munich. Through this phase it harnessed by curiosity and desire to learn. Downside was that I hadn't spent as much time thinking about my career – partly because I thought it would take 5 years to graduate, but was able to get done in 4 years.

Why did you Seek out a career in this field?

My first job after college was working as mechanical engineer intern for Precise Flight, a small aircraft parts company. My role was essentially a product manager. In my role I was able to design new products using 3D modeling, run calculations to determine the best design, and test existing products to pass FAA qualification. This job was a great taste of engineering.

At the end of the first summer I heard back on a job I had applied for as I was graduating college with Accenture. I didn't know everything that Accenture did, but I knew it would challenge me and give me a lot of new experiences, plus the job was in Seattle. This meant I'd be closer to home and get the chance to live in a new city. I was fired up to be in a job that was all about problem solving.

What was your first job or nuggets from jobs you had that helped you to get to where you are today?

My first job was at 14 as a housekeeper. I worked alongside some people much older than me. It was a minimum wage job. It taught me work ethic and to have a positive attitude. The job sucked, but the people I worked with were great. This lady Flo was amazing. She was in her 70s and her stories were hilarious. To this day it has taught me to respect others, work hard, and appreciate the luck I have had.

How did you prepare for an interview?

When I interview well I am clear on my stories to the most common questions. I know my fit for the role. I understand the company's / organization's goals and needs. I understand the market in which they operate. I am confident in what I have done.

I bridge the answer to a few of the key points about me and why I'm great for the role. Similar to entering a new market or product category you assess the market and define a plan. There is one interview to this day that haunts me because I didn't follow the above and did not get accepted into that school.

Books that helped you.?

So many great books for different points in my career. Here is a short list:

- 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
- The Alchemist
- Innovator's Dilemma
- Freakonomics
- What Customers Want
- High Output Management
- The Score Takes Care of Itself

Things are changing very fast in the industry, how do you keep yourself updated. Please list techniques or newsletter, podcasts, events etc

I use a myriad of sources. I'll attempt to distill my madness into a few sentences. My main sources for staying up to date are the following:

Podcasts: I love the Overcast app and the ability to set variable playback rates. Here is a short list of the podcasts I listen to regularly: Marketplace, Rocketship.fm, Intercom, A16Z, Masters of Scale, YC, HBR

Newsletters: Here are three that I get the most out of: L2 Inc, Benedict Evans, and Andrew Chen

HBR is the only magazine that I subscribe to as it gives me lots of great stories and frameworks

What is one thing you thought you knew but later found out you were wrong?

Early in my career I thought there was no way I wanted to touch sales. This was because my only experience with what I classified as sales was the traditional salesman. As my career has progressed I have a great appreciation for sales and how it is really about relationship building. This shift in mindset has allowed me to be much more successful in my job. I treat every interaction as a relationship building exercise to understand their needs and how to fulfill their needs.

What can you recommend on CV?

Your CV is a story of you. What matters most to you, to the role you are applying? Your CV should be crafted to each individual job you are applying. This should be small tweaks if you know what you want in your next job.

Advice for someone looking for job?

Network. Find a way to get to meet people at the company. This will ensure that you come across proactively, but also increases your chances of being seen in the candidate pool.

Know yourself. If you know your strengths, your desires, your story, you will come across well and be judged on your qualifications.
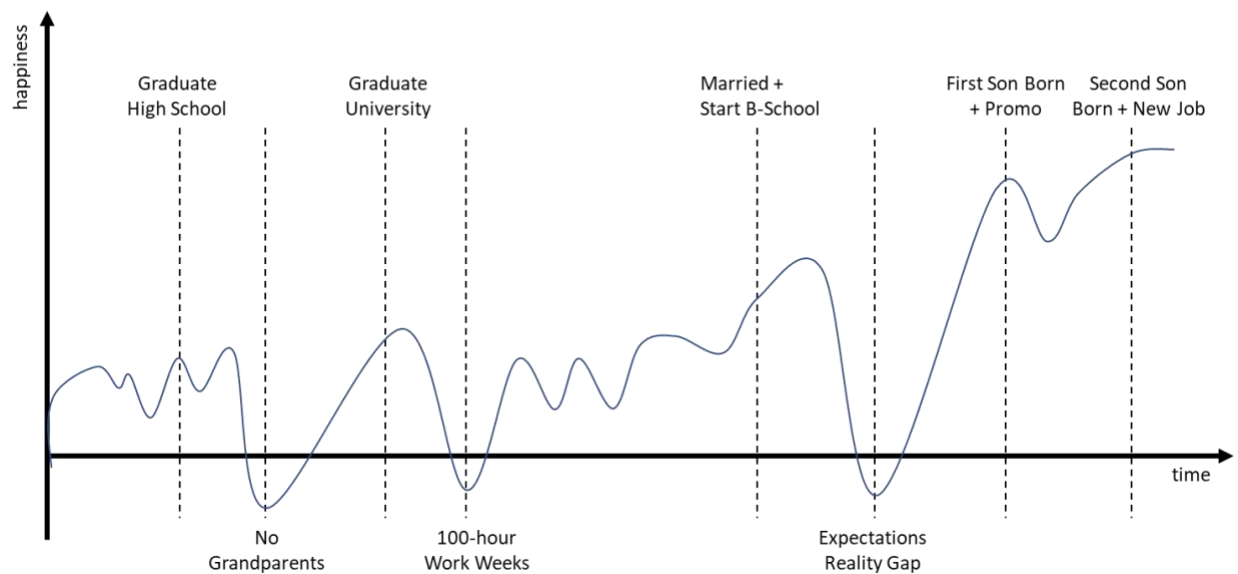
Lessons from jobs that you couldn't get.

At the time it was disappointing, but in retrospect they helped me to figure out what matters most to me. I feel that job interview processes, especially in tech, do a good job finding the best candidates for the role.

My Life Journey

MY PERSONAL JOURNEY MAP

High Points:

Graduate High School. High school was great. Lots of amazing friends. There were ups and downs, but mostly ups.

Graduate University. I finished college on an up note and despite a poor economy after the dot-com bust I was able to do some interesting work.

Get Married + Start B School. I married my amazing wife and then we drove down to Berkeley to start business school, which was amazing.

First Son + Promo to Senior Manager. Having a kid is amazing. On the day of my first son being born I found out I was also promoted to Senior Manager. It was a momentous day that I'll never forget.

Second Son + New Job. I changed jobs before my second son was born to be closer to home and try the startup world. It was a refreshing change and my second son has been such a great addition to the family.

Low Points:

End of Freshman Year of College and Losing my grandparents within 1 year. I was also feeling depressed at school. Things weren't how I wanted them to be. I studied abroad the next year and that changed my whole perspective.

100-hour work weeks as an analyst. It wasn't even the amount of time, it was the effectiveness of the time. It was mostly manual testing and often we couldn't test until was code was deployed late in the day.

Expectations – Reality Gap. After finishing b-school on a high I was charged up to take on the world. Within a few months I was as far from my career goals as I had been in years. I was regretting my decision. I networked with many people and within 6 months was on an upward trajectory

SEAN ROSE
Product Manager at Slack

During College

I grew up in NJ and had no idea what the tech industry was until about halfway through college at Stanford. At that point, I knew I wanted to be part of making things in the tech industry. At that (very late) point, I switched my major to Symbolic Systems.Symbolic Systems is computer science + philosophy + linguistics + psychology and has a legacy of PM-esque alums (Marissa Mayer, Reid Hoffman, etc). But, I took the minimum required programming classes and opted for CS classes that were really just design classes. In earnest, I had no idea how to write code.

Job Search

So, when it came to looking for jobs, engineering was out. I didn't even know what a portfolio was, so design was out too. Product management was what was left.When I applied for every entry-level PM position I could find (dozens), I was rejected by every single one, mostly due to lack of job/CS experience. (I can still

name every one of those companies   )I completely failed at getting a job the traditional route. I was also graduating heavily in debt (loans, medical bills) and definitely had to work at

graduation.

Meanwhile, I "wasted" an inordinate amount of time answering questions on Quora, trying to learn about the tech industry through other means.

Unexpectedly, because of my Quora answers, someone from a startup called box.net cold messaged me about a new team they were starting. Coincidentally, Aaron, box.net CEO (who was 3 years older than me!) spoke at one of my classes. He was... kinda weird but overwhelmingly charismatic and smart.That convinced me to meet the random message-er. Their new team was focused on "building a platform" (I had no idea what that meant); the role was for sort-of-PM work (the top line was the actual title initially :lol:)

Platform Something

There is another role that is completely undefined as of yet that will be more of a Go-to-market PM. It would be on the team I joined, the Platform team, and would focus on formalizing a process around Enterprise clients' custom integrations. This would include being a technical resource for the sales team, productizing the common customer-centric and vertical-centric needs and pushing them to market (i.e. creating a market for them), sourcing new vertical-centric partners to seed the innovation around the Platform, etc.

In the Role

But, I barely had any idea how to do anything: product management, platforms, developer products, enterprise software... How was I going to make myself useful? I started by reading everything Aaron read — Grove, Christensen. Moore, Benioff, etc — dude was only 3 years older than me! If he could do it, so could I (I thought).And I kept voraciously reading as much as I could — it seemed like the only way to compensate for (a lack of) years of experience. I taught myself half a dozen programming languages, started building web apps...

And the job itself was so many things: designing/building web pages, building APIs, writing documentation, doing developer support, business development, customer meetings, speaking at/running events, and so much more...In my first year at Box, I

probably learned more than in all four years at Stanford combined.

Eventually the company grew, the org changed, and my title shifted from "Platform Something" to "Product Manager" along with it.

I eventually got tapped to lead product for an acquisition (@**crocodoc**) that we ran as a standalone product/business within Box. My learning curve got even steeper; it was amazing.But, that curve plateaued at some point. I was spoiled by my first three years. I tried to find something else to do internally to no avail.

Slack Journey

I saw @**pmarca** tweet about Slack in early 2014, tried it, and instantly fell in love. The product wasn't perfect at the time, but you could feel how much they cared about it by how it evolved.Slack also seemed on the forefront of how everything in enterprise software was changing, as @**stevesi** presciently wrote just before it launched.I clearly believed in Slack as both a significant company and significant product. This was the place I should go, I thought! I spent weeks agonizing over whether to even apply for a job at Slack (I'd had one job at one company for 3+ years — leaving felt like leaving home at that point).I had no contacts at Slack and simply applied through their jobs site.

And was almost instantly rejected. "No need for more PMs at this time." There went that hope.

Meanwhile, I was fairly active on Twitter at this time, often trolling @**mikeisaac** among other things. One day I caught him in conversation and injected an ill-advised "stroke of brilliance" into the conversation. And that, for reasons I'll never truly understand, tipped Stewart's opinion and led to the Slack recruiter following up with me again offering an interview.

Stewart Butterfield wants to take a 3 month break from interviewing Product people. He needs time to evaluate the new hires. However, he does not want to miss out on an exceptional product hire.

After that, I spent several weeks meeting the Slack team, interviewed, and got hired!It honestly took me some time to get adjusted to Slack. But, 3+ years since then, I've PM-ed several of our most important things ever. Knowing how this all started for me, It still feels unreal.

Advice for someone looking for job

So! To everyone who asks, if you want to get where I am, just do all of that.

KUNAL GUPTA

Product Owner, Payments & Statements at IG

This is my life as a Product Manager:

- All Developers shudder at the thought of taking up my role.

- All QA's want to take up my role.

- Business considers me as a member of the tech team.

- Tech team considers me as a member of the business.

- And I want to become a designer - seeing opportunities where others see problems!

After graduating as a software engineer in 2008 I had a job offer from IBM GBS and a startup. This was a time when startups were not a craze, neither they used to pay as much. However, I was offered the same salary at the startup as my offer from IBM. So, nothing to lose I joined the startup.

My experience in the startup felt like an extension of my student life, just with more responsibilities! I worked on so many different projects and technologies which still awes me. I felt I was just about average as a software engineer, i liked product development but not coding, i wanted to be involved in defining the product without actually implementing it, but it didn't make sense why anybody would involve me in such a role. Recently I read Ken Norton's blog and could relate so well to him! So, soon something else drew my interest - Business development! We were developing a product in-house for asset tracking using GPS, RFID, GPRS, SMS and client-side website to track assets and a server side to manage all the data. It started frustrating me to the core

when we just kept on developing the product for over a year and didn't have a single customer and neither were we even talking about getting any clients. I dropped contributing as a software developer and started hunting on the field to get clients, door to door, *the old-fashioned way*.

Thus started my journey *away* from software development.

Then I went and got an MBA in sales and marketing. Being a married man pre-MBA I had done a calculation that I needed at least INR 10 lacs per annum (A million Rupees) package for a decent independent life with my partner. With this scare, and having experienced a complete confidence shattering experience during summer placements in MBA, I didn't take any chances and applied in all tech companies from day one. During summer placements I had applied in 30+ companies, had my resume shortlisted in 5 companies, rejected in all 5 companies in interview or GDPI round, then selected in one company on the insistence of my placement cell.

I joined a pre-sales team in an IT services company. It felt like a decent job in Bangalore, at least my salary expectation was met. But my job satisfaction was at an all-time low and my confidence of moving out of this role was diminishing by the month. I knew my salary was average among my peers, however, I still felt that the work that I am doing doesn't justify this salary. **I felt I am being paid *more* than the value I am adding!** Does anybody feel that, especially after doing an MBA? However, I have a rule in life to give my best in any job. I hate when people stop being productive saying why should they do more if they are not getting anything from the company in return. Well, you are getting something in return, the company is giving you a salary, so either do your best in 8 hours as per your ability, or leave the job. I spent 2.5 years trying to learn as much about how big corporation works, made the best use of my time there and became an expert in

working with cross-functional teams. Then, while working on an application development outsourcing deal I found my spark. I learned about agile development, project planning, estimations, and microservice based architecture. I loved all of this and decided to move out of presales and closer to engineering again. I wanted to get closer to the value adding chain

There was an opening for a product manager within my company for a DevOps platform being developed in-house. I was sceptical about this role, as anybody aware of IT services company would be on the idea of:

"product development in a Services company"

However, I interviewed for the role and was lapped up by the managers on that team. Apparently, they were struggling to find anybody for the role (probably everybody within the company was sceptical of the role and didn't want to take chance with their career). Well, whatever was the case, after asking a series of questions to the hiring manager and the head of Business Unit I decided to take up that role. And it was a turning point in my career...

Luck as well favoured me. IT services as an industry was seeing headwinds due to automation, higher expectations from the clients for better productivity, and Infrastructure was moving to cloud which don't need as many people for maintenance. And on the other hand, employees were expecting higher salaries, startups were abundant and luring away all good staff, the traditional skillset which was the bread and butter of IT companies was losing sheen. Thus my company as well others in the industry were starting to focus on product development, so as to attract and retain its clients and try to develop non-linear revenue sources. CEO's had started committing to the market that the revenue will

be doubled in 5 years with same employee strength, this couldn't be achieved by doing more of what they were already doing.

The product team I joined (Agilebase) got the benefit and support of entire organisation because of this movement, and I got high visibility and opportunity to work on an actual product development in an agile fashion. I started working with the tech team in 3 week's sprints, launched the product on the Microsoft Azure cloud as a service, worked with marketing to launch a media campaign about this launch. Parallelly I was working with the legal department on trademark filing and EULA finalisation, with finance on pricing and with the companies portfolio team on defining a longer-term roadmap as well as devising plans of integrating Agilebase with other key platforms in the company.

Within a short period of time, I was talking to clients, giving them demos, taking their feedback, as well as working with sales teams to pitch this to existing and new clients.

In 5 months I felt that the amount of learning I got was more than what I had got in previous 3 years. Also for the first time in my career, I got a feeling that I am not being paid enough! And it was a happy feeling, I felt worthy.

6 months in as a product manager for Agilebase I put my resume online and started receiving calls on a regular basis. Apparently, the market was in need of good experienced product managers, and there was a dearth of them. So this is how I landed my current job. In all my interviews i was speaking passionately about my product and everything relating to product development, launch, cross-functional teams, influencing business, prioritizing roadmap etc, all from my previous 6 months experience. Not one interviewer spoke or asked about my previous 6 years experience!

I chose my current company over a couple of other offers for the following reasons:

- it is a product company

- Is in Financial domain, which has a high appetite to adopt latest in technology.

- Has high revenue per employee - I had realised that the treatment that an employee gets has a high correlation to how much revenue the company makes PER EMPLOYEE.

- This is a UK based company having operations globally. Which means I can continue to be relevant in a global market and also get opportunities for business travels outside India.

- The treatment I had got during the entire interview process was exceptional, nothing I had experienced before nor imagined. I was feeling like I was being hired for a very senior role (which isn't really the case, product manager, though important, is no more important than engineers or other key roles in a tech organisation).

- The company offers free fruits, daily. Delivered on the desk! :)

Well, now I am a much more confident and self-aware product manager; having worked in a startup; in a global services enterprise in various roles; and in a mid-sized multinational product company. However, I still am grateful for all the experiences I got along the way - Software developement, Sales, Business Development, Demand generation, Presales, Product Management, Product Ownership! And after all, my zig-zag path

through my career all fit together nicely like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle.

I may not be a star who outdid the whole world and achieved something pathbreaking, neither have I worked on a next billion users product (yet!). However, my story is a story of masses. Not everybody has to work on such products, and nor will everybody get a chance to work on such products. If one gets to work on one billion user product in their lifetime, it's an achievement, if you work on two, you can become a motivational speaker or career guru. However, for once I feel belonged in my professional life, so I would like to share with others who are in their early career, to keep searching, keep exploring and keep experimenting. Keep trying to find your fit and enjoy the journey. *Don't keep your best for when you get the thing you like the most, give your best to everything you do on your journey, it will make you stronger when you reach the goal.*

Career is still too long to become complacent or contended. So I am ready to see what lies ahead for me... 1 step at a time.

How did you prepare for an interview?

One of my colleagues once said that there are 2 kinds of people-

1. Those that are good at working, and

2. Those that are good in interviews!

Actually, for some both are tough. And if you have to put an effort to be good in one of those then I would recommend to improve oneself in being a good in your work. No surprises there, right?

Interviewers these days are moving away from puzzles, guesstimates and analytical problems, to more of behavioural interviewing. For PM interviews, focusing on each area of your experience is a good way to start. I try to identify each area of my strength that I would like to highlight, and then identify times in my past experience where I exhibited that strength. A repository of such past experiences, prepared in the form of stories, makes me prepared for the interview to use them appropriately. I also read a lot on my area of work, now more than ever as I am on the other side of the table, interviewing PM candidates.

I always try to anticipate all possible questions which can be asked in the interview and prepare their model answers. And I am pretty good at organising my stuff, I have all my notes prepared since my engineering. Many of those answers now appear childish, but it motivates me seeing that I am maturing. It helps me gain confidence in myself that continuous learning shows the result. I am a big proponent of the power of growth mindset.

For my last successful interview, focus in all rounds was on my last role as a Product Manager for one product I was managing. So it was exciting and a relatively easy sail for me, as it was my area of strength. Additionally, I had read "Cracking the PM interview" which also helped.

Books that helped you.?

- Cracking the PM Interview: How to Land a Product Manager Job in Technology

- The Lean Startup

- INSPIRED: How to Create Tech Products Customers Love

- Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking

- The Phoenix Project

- Ken Norton's blogs are one of the best resources to understand Product Management and take the best practices from his experience https://www.kennorton.com

What can you recommend on a CV?

Be true about everything on your CV. That doesn't mean that you cannot tweak to highlight some areas more than others. Identify your target role and try to highlight areas of experience that showcase your strengths and knowledge relevant to that role.

Advice for someone looking for a job?

To people, early on in their careers I strongly recommend to put an effort to understand a wide array of roles, some by doing it hands-on, and others by talking and taking an interest in other peoples roles. Don't take your first role as your retirement role. Try to identify where you are stronger and where you find the work also interesting. Some roles look jazzy from outside like Data science, Architect, Product management. However, if your aptitude is more attuned to something else then even if you get in any of these roles you might start losing interest in them pretty soon. But no harm trying out a number of things, till you identify your retirement role.

Things are changing very fast in every field, how do you keep yourself updated. Please list blogs, podcasts, or any techniques that you follow etc

I read extensively as that interests me and gives me so much learning. I am a firm believer in self-help books. I moved into PM area by reading a book, I quit smoking by reading a book, I constantly apply models used by industry leaders in my day to day work after reading things suggested by them. Some blogs and podcasts I love:

- https://www.kennorton.com

- http://www.sachinrekhi.com

- https://markmanson.net

- https://waitbutwhy.com

- Podcast: This is product managememt: https://pca.st/jCSe

- Podcast: Yours productly: https://pca.st/6XEw

- Podcast: TED radio hour: https://pca.st/nprted

Other than these things, keep talking to people in the area, attend meetups, spend time with UX designers, discuss product's aspects. Keep yourself motivated. Set annual improvement goals and stick it up in front of your desk or somewhere you will see it time to time.

Hope all this helps someone else as well, as much as these things helped me.

ELLEN CHISA
 CEO and Co-founder of Dark

How Was Your University Time?

When I was in University, I was in a new, experimental engineering school, Franklin W. Olin College of Engineering. I studied Electrical & Computer Engineering. I new I didn't want to design circuit boards for a living, and I also knew I didn't want to be in a cubicle working alone.

Olin focused on project based learning, and most of the projects were interdisciplinary. Projects tended to have a strong design component, and a sometimes a substantial humanities component. The school required at least one entrepreneurship class, and I did an entrepreneurship capstone too (including auditing Founder's Journey at MIT). I did a lot of projects on my own too. I'll never forget my first Git + Ruby + Rails + Heroku experience (we made a virtual gum ball machine).

In University I spent a lot of time leading teams and coordinating projects. That led me first into a career as a Product Manager before branching out on my own as a CEO/Cofounder.

Product Manager Turned Entrepreneur

I originally wanted to be an engineer because I was curious about the mindset. I think there's something interesting about breaking a problem into pieces and figuring out how to solve it.

While I was doing that, I learned that I love to be a generalist and see the problem holistically. I'm curious and I like to talk to other people about their work. Being a CEO/Founder is one of the most general jobs you can have – you get to work with everyone on the

team. I might be hiring and talking to recruiters, I might be talking about engineering challenges, and and I might be thinking about partnerships.

I also like to work autonomously. Being a founder gives you a lot of latitude to solve problems in the way you think will be most effective.

How I Became A Product Manager

I doubt I'd be a PM now if I hadn't gone to engineering school. (This is a reflection on myself: not on you. You can still be a PM even if you didn't go to engineering school. My younger brother actually went to business school, did a summer program in graphic design, did a Product Management internship at a Startup, and then ended up a PM at Microsoft.)I didn't really want to go to engineering school, but my dad said "well, I think you should go to engineering school. It's harder to get into engineering school later, so you might as well just go and if you hate it you can always transfer out." So I did.

Most people at Engineering school actually want to be engineers. I went in saying I wanted to "think like an engineer, but not be one." When I got to Olin, I wanted to try everything. I couldn't make a decision about a major, or what I was going to do after Olin (no joke: MD-PhD-MBA was on my list of options). Being at engineering school, but not wanting to "be an engineer" meant I was constantly searching for new, interesting things to do. I'm not exaggerating: I joined 11 committees.

There is one major downside to having lots of cool opportunities. I did many things badly instead of one thing well. As a result, I'm not a particularly good "Electrical and Computer Engineer" the way many of my classmates are. I often wish I had a technical

specialization. But, trying many different activities and not spending as much time on the technical side of the degree allowed me to develop a few important PM skills early on:

- **Prioritization**—I did too many things. One should not join 11 committees. I never had enough time to do everything. But there was an upside to that: I got really great at picking between multiple things and prioritizing what's most important. I always knew what could be a bit late, and what would below over if it never got done.This was my personal version of what happens in Software Engineering: companies have a lot more work than they can ever do. The PM helps pick the most important things to get done. The PM decides what can wait a little while, and what needs to get fixed right away.

- **Synthesis**—All of this work also helped me to build my synthesis skills. Many of the committees I was on were things like "Curriculum Advisory Student Team (CAST)." We had to go through all of the student course feedback and figure out ways to aggregate and make improvements to the process.This sort of work is also similar to being a PM: having a problem area that already has tools, doing research on what exists, and what works and doesn't, and proposing a new directional strategy.

- **Driving to Consensus**—All of the committees and projects I did were with other people. Lots of people had ideas on "what we should do"—but that didn't always mean they were right, or that other team members would be on board. Even after I'd prioritized or synthesized, I never had any official authority. I'd have to come up with good reasons it would appeal to that team of people. You know, just like being a PM.

Picking up these skills from committees and projects during my first semester built on itself. Since I already had some of the skills, I kept playing a specific role during other team projects in my first two years.

My main role was always helping make sure we knew everything we had to get done, who was doing it, and that no one was blocked. I helped define what was "important" to the project, and what we should present. Playing that role in teams helped me get better at these skills, which led to more projects in which I used them. I can think of over a dozen team projects that reinforced my skills, but it all goes back to my early start as a generalist and trying lots of different things.

After two years of developing skills through classroom projects, I had three experiences that made my skills much more valuable in the "work" world.

- **Alight Learning**—After attending Olin for two years, five of my friends and I decided to take a year off and have a startup. We weren't really sure what we wanted to do, but we all agreed that we'd quit school and go live in a house in Waltham together to work on it.Alight Learning was the first time I actually used my skills in a "Product" context. We did user interviews, market analysis, and business analysis of what we were building. We prioritized feature lists, and made hard design decisions about what to make and what to cut.There's a big difference between doing a project for a few weeks in class, and actually trying to get a business off the ground. Alight was the time where in addition to using Product skills, I worked on a real Product.Because of Alight, when I interviewed for Product roles, I had much more substantial "real world" examples and experiences than I would have otherwise.

- **Microsoft PowerPoint Internship** — This is a pretty obvious one. My last summer before graduating, I ended up at Microsoft for a PM internship.The reason I bothered to list it is to call out that I doubt I would have taken the internship if it hadn't been for PowerPoint. Alight Learning was focused on education, and PowerPoints are a big (problematic) part of education.Even in the Summer of 2009, I wasn't convinced I wanted to be a PM. I'd developed lots of skills, and I liked doing the work at my startup. I didn't necessarily believe there was a "canon" of being a PM. I thought of it more as a skill set I'd use to do my own things.The PM internship at Microsoft taught me there was a lot I didn't know about it. How do you convince people you work for instead of your peers? How do you deal with internationalization? Localization? Accessibility? How do you deal with non-web products when you can't fix things all the time? On top of giving me more real world Product experience, my internship at Microsoft intrigued me: What really was the "full time job" version of being a PM?

- **SCOPE PM** — After I concluded my internship, I returned to Olin. Olin has a Senior Capstone program in which a company sponsors a team of 5–7 students to work on a non-trivial project one day per week.I was chosen by our team to be the Project Manager, meaning I was on the line for organizing the team. I took the role very seriously: it was the first priority out of all of my classes. Two other students were also interested in the role, and we planned to rotate midway through the year.When it came time to rotate, the team decided to let me keep the role. Their confidence in me was

what gave me confidence that being a PM was something I could do well, and that wanted to continue doing.

So, throughout my college experiences, I spent most of my time developing the skills necessary to be a Product Manager. In my later years of college, I specifically spent time doing "Product / PM roles." My diploma says "Electrical & Computer Engineering" — but it should probably just say "PM!"

When people say "Wow! It must have been really challenging to get a PM job right away!" they aren't entirely correct. "Getting a job" as a PM was challenging for me, but the same way all job interviews are.

What was genuinely hard was becoming a Product Manager. It required developing a specific skill set, and working on it for a period of years.

Books That Helped You?

I used books more at the beginning of my career. A lot of the books I read about being a PM are listed here: https://www.goodreads.com/review/list/1952043?shelf=pm but in particular I enjoyed Making Things Happen by Scott Berkun, and Just Enough Research by Erika Hall. As an entrepreneur I still try to read as much as possible. Right now I'm reading Camille Fournier's book "The Manager's Path" on engineering management.

NITIN JULKA
Group Product Manager At LinkedIN

Context

After six years of running an Ohio-based IT business, I was ready for a change. I wanted to work in Product Management at a rapidly growing, venture-backed startup in Silicon Valley. I had loved software technology my entire life, majored in Computer Science and Psychology as an undergrad, had an MBA, and 7 years of professional experience as a consultant, co-founder, and executive of a mid-sized business.

Over the course of the next 2 months, I called every friend, acquaintance, or friend of a friend possible to learn more about working in Product Management in the Valley. Some people told me I didn't have a chance because I was attempting to change industries, roles, and geographies simultaneously.

Nonetheless, with the encouragement and support of my wife and daughter, I began a 5-week mission to find a job in the Valley. I crashed at friends' apartments, bummed a spare desk at a former classmate's office, and lived off cheap pizza and Mission burritos.

By the end of the 5 weeks, I had multiple job offers, including the one I accepted – as a Product Manager at a rapidly growing venture-backed startup in the Valley. Here are my key insights from this experience.

Company Target List Creation

To ensure the highest likelihood of success, I decided to cast a really, really wide net. My initial target list was ~60 companies. My process for the target list creation was to select ~20 VCs, and

2-5 companies per VC that looked interesting to me. Given that VCs fund a ton of companies, I probably read over 200 Crunchbase summaries and visited over 100 websites. For what it's worth, here was what my company target list spreadsheet looked like:

Firm	Website	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Compan
Big Firms					
Greylock	http://www.greylock				
Trinity Ventures	http://www.trinityven				
Accel	http://www.accel.co				
Meritech	http://www.meritech				
Founder's Fund	http://www.founders				
Charles River Ventures	http://www.crv.com/				
Redpoint Ventures	http://www.redpoint				

Ineffective approach – over investing time in select companies

I probably invested 60-80 hours per company for the first 2-3 companies that I targeted. I read 10-Ks, 10-Qs, blog post, and about pages, and did product reviews while forming an opinion about the company's strategies. I soon realized that I was over-investing time into the companies that I thought I was most excited by.

Connecting with Target Companies

My daily metric during my search was to get meetings, and not interviews. Once I arrived in San Francisco, my goal was to set up 3-5 meetings per day.

Using personal connections and 2nd degree LinkedIn connections, I started to set up as many meetings as I could. I also tried experimenting with LinkedIn ads.

The best sources of introductions were my graduate school network, friends from high school, friends from college, and friends from older jobs.

I spent a limited amount of time reaching out to a few recruiters and got traction with 1 company through that process.

Requesting Introductions

If I was asking someone for an introduction, I tried to be as respectful to the introducer as possible. I even drafted ghost-written e-mails for the introducer to send to my target, requesting the target's permission, and another draft e-mail of the actual introduction. See samples below:

[1] ASK FOR INTRO

Hi <NAME>,

Hope all is well. No pressure at all, but one of my friends is staying in SF and applying for Product Management opportunities in the Bay Area.

He is running an IT services company based in Cleveland and is exploring moving his family to the West Coast. His background is MBA/CS prior to running the business. (His LinkedIn profile FYI - http://www.linkedin.com/in/nitinjulka).

I understand if you do not think it makes sense, but would you be OK with me sending an introduction between you two?

Thanks either way.

[2] MAKE INTRO between <NAME> and Nitin

Nitin

Meet <NAME> He is a great Product guy and someone you can likely learn a lot from.

In hindsight, it would have been better for me to directly send an e-mail to the introducer with why my target would be interested in me. As an example:

Meetings Structure

Once I got a meeting, my agenda was as follows:

- What do you do?

- How'd you get into (role) (with specific thoughtful questions/comments demonstrating I have done in depth research about them and the company)

- My story/background

- My goals

- Any advice?

- Do you know anyone at x companies?

- Anyone else I should talk to who is looking for Product Managers?

I always brought the list of companies that I was targeting to the meetings and asked for suggested companies to add to my list. I also took detailed hand-written notes.

Immediately after the meeting, I sent a follow up e-mail recapping the conversation and next steps. I also kept the introducer updated on my conversations.

Tracking Meetings

I had a spreadsheet to keep track of who I was meeting and who introduced me to who. An example of this spreadsheet is below.

Interview Preparation

Practice Interview and Case Preparation

I tried asking as many Product Manager friends or Consultant friends as possible to practice interview with me. They were probably sick of me asking them for help by the end of it.

For case interview preparation, I watched 6 hours of [Victor Cheng's Consulting Interview Preparation](#) videos and read his website. I also attended workshops at General Assembly.

Interview Packet

In parallel, I created a 48-page set of personal interview notes. I did not use the notes during my interviews, but I believe the process of creating the notes helped crystallize several concepts in my head. An excerpt from P. 1 of my notes is below

Nitin's Story
- From Ohio
- Lifelong – technology geek ; 1st and 2nd grade – spending all my time a
- 1994 – Presented to the school on the importance of the Internet. "co finding new and innovative ways to utilize the internet".
- 1995 – 1999 – IRC ; AOL ; Programming in Visual Basic
- 1999 – Created a social network in PHP, Yourworks.com. Store works
- 2000 – Started blogging (diablo-2.com)
- 2002 – Started using Blogger
- 2003 –Trusted tester for Google ; used to read usability sciences journ
- 2004 – Started social networking – Facebook ; became passionate abo
- 2004 – Worked in the consulting firm, CRA International
- 2005 – MBA ; wanted to leverage SSI as platform to improve educatio

Technical Preparation

Even though I hadn't coded in 8 years except for writing a few javascript scripts in Adwords, I wanted to get up to speed on as much technology as I could – NoSQL, Distributed Systems, Networking, etc. Therefore, I solicited the help of my friend, a former Google programmer, to give me a couple hour introductory

tutorial on these topics. An excerpt of my notes is below

Technical Review

- Networking
  - o Physical;data link;network;transport (TCP);session ; presentati
  - o IP (Internet Protocol)
  - o DNS (name server – convert names to IPs ; on WAN)
  - o ROUTERS using BGP (route packets with tables of IPs)
  - o TCP (handshake)
  - o SSL or TLS (after handshake, encrypt traffic)
  - o HTTP uses a GET
  - o WEB SERVER delivers HTTP response – HTML, CSS, JAVASCRIPT
- Database Design
  - o Ask overall purpose
  - o Ask fields required and relationships between fields (one to m
  - o Assign types to each field
  - o Ask NoSQL (denormalized) vs. Relational (normalized)
  - o **Locking** – ATM is perfect example : read-modify-write : **mutex**

```
Coding Examples
Bubble Sort
function main() {
  test=[3,1,3,4,5];
  Logger.log(test);
  var thv;
  var i;
  var new;
  for(i=0;i<=test.length;i++){
    j=i+1;
    new;
    while(j<=test.length) {
      if(test[new]>test[i]) {
        thv=test[i];
        test[i]=test[new];
        test[new]=thv;
      }
      i++;
      new++;
    }
  }
  Logger.log(test);
}
```

```
/* Insertion sort */
function main () {
  sortme =[4,3,5,2,6,7,8,1];
  Logger.log(sortme);
  var curi;
  var th;
  var newip;
  for(i=1;i<=sortme.length;i+
    newip=i;
    for(j=i-1;j>=0;j--){
      if(sortme[i]>sortme[new
        th=sortme[i];
        sortme[i]=sortme[newip
        sortme[newip]=th;
      }
      newip=j;
    }
  }
  Logger.log(sortme);
}

SQL
```

I also read that interviewers will sometimes throw in technical programming questions. Therefore, I used Google Adwords Scripts as an IDE to re-teach myself some old sorting algorithms. This is P. 4 of my interview prep. I should probably be embarrassed of this code.

UI/UX Preparation

In terms of UX/UI, I tried googling free videos on design. I did not have any friends who were UI/UX designers, so I put a lot of this page together on my own.

UI / UX

- Favorite product: Timex Digital Watch || Captio || Jean Georges prix [
- How to measure quality? Ease of learning | Efficiency of use | user satis
- Design Approach? Keep it simple ; **Prototypes, personas** and **Use C**
- HTML UI Elements: Check Box (0 or more) ; Radio (0 or 1) ; Text ; Select
  - DIV: Generic HTML Element ; always rectangles; can do style ele
  - CSS: <style> bgb (border:1px solid black; background-color:red; position:absolute; left
- *Document Object Model (DOM)* – Represent HTML in way that can be i
  - Response time: represents worse user satisfaction and inefficie
  - Errors: how many errors do users make?
- Javascript Frameworks (jQuery ; Closure): Hover, Auto-complete, Bubbl Datepicker, Progressbar, Tree .... "more" click,
- Ideas: Think about the OS/Interface and varying for interface (Win7 vs. '
- Mobile vs. Desktop: Screen RealEstate ; TouchScreen(swipes& < precisic
- Concepts: Chunking (Similar elements together) ; Vertical vs. Horizontal

Interview Question and Answer Preparation

The rest of the document consisted of me anticipating as many questions as I could and writing out my response to those questions. As some example questions:

- What are your favorite technologies?

- What are some products that you love?

- What are your top product ideas?

- What are your values?

- What are your career goals over 3-5 years?

- What is your product management experience?

- What metrics would you use to evaluate a product's success?

- How would you promote a new product?

- What is your experience managing engineers?

- What are the biggest mistakes of your career?

- What are the biggest successes of your career?

- When did you face a conflict?

- What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Interview Day Preparation

If I had the time before an interview, I would try to do as much of the following as possible:

- Review Company Website

- Online Research including Glassdoor

- Practice Interview

- Product Reviews

- Find Websites on what it is like to apply there

- Anticipate Questions

- Find Current or former Employees to ask what it is like to interview there

- Read 10K / 10Q or Shareholder Letters

Minimally, even if I only had 10 minutes to prepare for an interview, I would come in with these notes handwritten on my notebook:

- 3 points about myself to emphasize

- 3 reason this company should hire me

- Specific questions that the interviewer can uniquely answer

- Day in the life of (job)

- Perception of work culture/ environment

- Thoughtful questions demonstrating you did your homework

What exactly is Product Management?

During my search, I was repeatedly told, "Product Management is different at different companies." The breakdown someone shared with me that made the most sense is as follows:

The Technical Product Manager is deeply involved in the backend infrastructure. This person knows how to code and create specs for highly technical back-end systems. Google PMs tend to be Technical Product Managers.

The Analytics Product Manager is highly data-driven. This person is a KissMetrics, Flurry, and Google Analytics maestro, and optimizes conversions, funnels, and virality in their sleep. The Analytics Product Manager is typically used on existing products to optimize key metrics.

The New Product Product-Manager has a deep, intuitive understanding of the customer needs. This individual will design something that has never existed before. The New Product Product-Manager will work with designers to ensure that every pixel is perfect, and launch the prototype of MVP to test assumptions prior to building the full version.

Conclusion

I am now a Product Manager at an awesome startup (that recently got acquired by LinkedIn). It is one of the best jobs I could imagine. I am involved in strategy, product road maps, scoping requirements, interacting with UI/UX and developers, QA, testing, support, maintenance, and commercialization. The best description I heard is that as Product Manager, you are both the CEO and the janitor of the products that you are involved with. It's awesome and I love it!