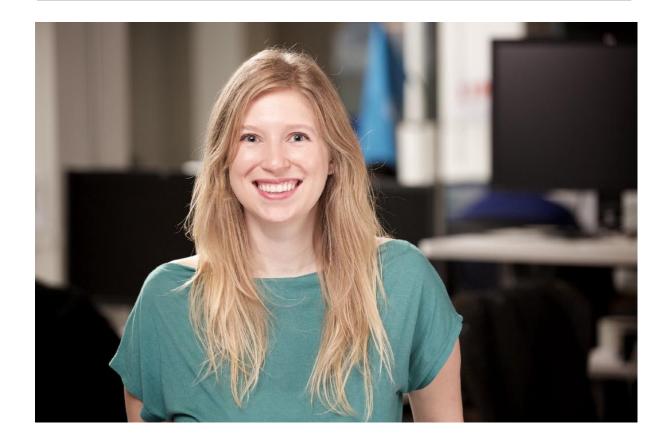# CREATORS OF PRODUCTS

# Ask Me Anything #4

# Jackie Bavaro

**25th June 2021**

Jackie Bavaro is the author of bestseller book 'Cracking the PM Interview' - a holy grail for PMs across the globe. She's now launched her latest book - Cracking the PM Career!  Jackie is the Head of Product Management at Asana, & has held senior product roles at Microsoft & Google.

**Creators Of Products: In smaller orgs and startups, where do we draw the line between management and technical roles of D&D?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** Great question! At a small company I'd meet with each of my coworkers and ask them 1) what they're hoping to get from a PM 2) do they have any concerns about working with a PM or things they don't want to give up? PMs at startups need to "fill in the whitespace". That said, generally the PM needs to be responsible for defining the problem and what success looks like -- what problem should we be trying to solve?

**Creators Of Products: What skill can I hone in a non product job so as to compete for and get a product job, both internal job posting and external?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** The best experience is to work closely with product teams. See if you can read their documents, join their meetings such as product review, and offer to help PMs out with their work.

You might even be able to turn that experience into an internal job transfer!

**Creators Of Products: If there was a checklist for establishing a PMF, what would it be? Both in the B2B and B2C domain?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** I've used the question "How disappointed would you be if you couldn't use this product anymore"
https://buffer.com/resources/measure-productmarket-fit-product-feature/

**Creators Of Products:  I am building products in a company which has traditionally been a service company. My question is how does one negotiate the transition from a service company to a product company?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** Great question! I don't have specific experience with this, but a general technique that I've seen work for shifting companies is to gather a list of examples of "difficult decisions' '. Then, with your coworkers and leadership, you can come up with a set of strategic principles that would make those decisions easier.

For example, you might come up with a principal that says "We will only build one-off features for customers if they bring in more than X amount of revenue"

**Creators Of Products: When managing stakeholders in a short duration release cycle, how do we convince business about potential risks when an estimated timeline isn't met. I've always had to overestimate and keep internal buffer as a PM, my developers don't like it**

**Jackie Bavaro:** A few ideas

1) Share a range from best case to worst case of the timeline, aka "2-12 weeks, depending on how much infrastructure we can reuse and the first A/B test being positive"

2) Discuss with your developers what they'd like to do about the buffer. There are many different kinds of buffer, eg. X2 for ideal dev days to actual dev days, vacation/sick time buffer, push schedule buffer, iteration buffer. The developers might be happier with clearer explanations of that the buffer is

**Creators Of Products: What will be your advice for an APM? What advice would you give to someone who is building a social platform like Twitter?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** That's broad, but I'd think very carefully about what your distribution advantage is — how will you attract people away from other platforms

**Creators Of Products: I'm in an MBA college preparing for PM interviews. Can you please let me know what else beside product design questions I should focus on? I'm from a non-coding background.**

**Jackie Bavaro:** Cracking the PM Interview covers this a lot!  I also have some new sections in Cracking the PM Career.  Beyond that, google the company you're applying to and see if there's information online about what they ask in interviews, and if possible, talk to people from the company

**Creators Of Products: Can you share a few pointers to keep in mind while transitioning from APM/PM (mid career) PM to senior PM (leadership) roles?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** Great Q! Lots of stuff I wrote here: https://www.lennysnewsletter.com/p/senior-product-manager

**Creators Of Products: How does a mid level PM with experience in B2B switch to B2C or vice versa? Today interviewers seek almost exclusively experienced PMs only in their domain. Diverse experience seems to be less valued.**

**Jackie Bavaro:** If you're having trouble making the move, the best approach is to use your network, especially someone who's worked with you before and thinks you're great. If you're getting the interviews, then the feedback "we need people with B2C experience" is just an excuse which actually means "your performance on the interview didn't demonstrate the skills we're looking for"

**Creators Of Products: What are the factors to consider in deciding when to kill a product/feature? As PMs, we are supposed to be the voice of reason but sometimes the dev and other teams feel otherwise and it seems that the best way to come out of a pit is to keep digging**

**Jackie Bavaro:**  It is SO hard to know whether to keep iterating or give up! The main factor I'd consider is whether you have a strong belief in the feature and if you are learning something from each iteration.

**Creators Of Products: What is your opinion on the burst of audio based products? Is a market consolidation expected or will they coexist as a new form of social media (Facebook Twitter Reddit Snapchat Pinterest coexist)**

**Jackie Bavaro:**  I'm not sure! Audio products don't work well for me because I get distracted and can't rewind

**Creators Of Products: It takes a long time in B2B to accept that a product is failing. There are so many stakeholders involved.  A lot of times your user and customers are different. How does one fail faster and identify when to stop , what products are not working?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** This is hard! The approach that works best for me is to set up the goals and the decision tree about whether we'll launch/iterate/stop BEFORE we see the results.  It's much easier to draw a line in the sand and drive alignment around that line before you know how it did.

**Creators Of Products: What are some absolutely essential skills for a student to learn to become an APM/PM, or maybe even grab an internship?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** Product Mindset:
https://jackiebo.medium.com/how-to-hire-great-product-managers-part-2-product-mindset-ff495d4f420b

**Creators Of Products: What are some books you'd recommend one should read to get into the groove of product management? (Other than Cracking the PM interview of course)**

**Jackie Bavaro:**
https://sfpl.bibliocommons.com/list/share/1596498678/1596523539

**Creators Of Products: For B2B products , a lot of times building features that competitors already have is tablestakes/non negotiable as per sales teams. As a product team, is this the right approach to blindly go ahead and build? How can we overcome this bias?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** Great question - this is where marketing really shines: What is the market you're trying to win? What drives purchase decisions in those people? It helps to slice up the market into narrow targets to see what it takes to win each group - for example it's often easier to win over people who do not use a competitor product yet, rather than convince people to switch.

**Creators Of Products: What advice would you give to someone who is transitioning into a PM role after 15+ years and non tech background?**

**Jackie Bavaro:**  Don't be afraid of your non-tech background! Ask lots of questions to understand the user-facing impact of tech choices — you don't need a tech background to learn this!

**Creators Of Products: What is your favourite product, as a PM?**

**Jackie Bavaro:**  Sorry, I don't answer this question b/c I don't want to influence people's interview answers

**Creators Of Products: This is a non PM related question. Congratulations on the new book! What all should we expect from the book & how different was your experience writing it?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** Thanks! This book is quite different — it's about 80% pm skills (the kind of things I mentor people on all the time) and 20% career ladder (what is a senior pm?!?)

**Creators Of Products: Could you please suggest any framework or material which helps in defining metrics and analytics for a new e-commerce website?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** I think the best approach here would be to network with more experienced e-commerce PMs and learn directly from them.

**Creators Of Products: In the context of a B2B product, during the initial stages of when the product is being built, are there any frameworks or best practices that you've come across that helps product teams prioritise the right set of capabilities to be built into the product that not only attracts large sized enterprises but also smaller enterprises ?**

**How can one also make sure that a specific enterprise (usually the ones that account for a significant chunk in your revenue) does not have too much influence over the roadmap of your product in the initial stages of the product?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** At Asana we were lucky that we had a principle to never build something we didn't want to build for just one customer. We could move things up in the prioritization for a single customer, but not make the product worse to help one customer. Eventually we had a small

committee that triaged requests from our largest enterprise customers - CEO, head of sales, head of product.

**Creators Of Products: Your advice / guidance on the top 3 things to consider when building API products and PaaS products pls. Thanks.**

**Jackie Bavaro:** My rule of thumb is to have 3 diverse end-user use cases in mind for any platform product — this ensures that the platform is actually useful and also flexible enough

**Creators Of Products: Please suggest how to get started on pursuing APM related independent projects to showcase on CV.**

**Jackie Bavaro:** From what I've seen, independent projects aren't a major factor in APM hiring - they can help a bit, but I'd focus more on real company experience

**Creators Of Products: Can you elaborate more as to how one transitions from being business analyst/project owner to product management? How do I analyze that a company's mindset is product based and not project based(service based) without knowing anyone from the company?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** When you speak to a manager or PM at the company (for an interview or informational chat), you can ask them to tell you about some of the last things the company built, where the idea came from, and what role the PMs played

**Creators Of Products: There are so many frameworks available on each stage of product building. To use them effectively, one has to remember the frameworks, their pros and cons, and the situations where they work (or don't work).Is there "one framework to derive them all"? Is there a way to make your own framework that fits your product (for example,  using first principles) ?**

**Jackie Bavaro:**  Yes! "What are our goals? What are several possible approaches to achieve those goals? What are the key trade offs that differentiate those approaches?"

**Creators Of Products: How does a PM get better at giving Design feedback? Any resources you can suggest?**

**Jackie Bavaro:**  Love this question!  My rule of thumb is to always give feedback in terms of a principal or goal.  I let my designers know this, and if I have feedback that I can't match to a principle or goal, I might ask for their help in how to reframe it.

So never "make the line spacing larger", instead "Our goal is for this to feel calm, and I'm not sure this part of the UI is meeting that goal"

**Creators Of Products: For a non technical person starting off as a PM and executing product delivery, is API understanding a priority to learn? Technical team can handhold for most API integrations and hence my question.**

**Jackie Bavaro:**  I wouldn't get scared by the word "API". The important thing is to learn what capabilities are already available / easy, and what capabilities are not provided, and hence much harder or impossible.

**Creators Of Products: Code vs low code vs no code, how do we decide which one to choose while starting up our own venture. Also, can we really scale no code /low code? Does the quick results early on lead to tech debt when we want to scale up? Please suggest any guidelines we can keep in mind for it.**

**Jackie Bavaro:**  I'm not sure, I'd ask my technical counterpart.  I'm guessing the key factors to consider are 1) have you validated your MVP? 2) What are your scalability needs?

**Creators Of Products: Just wanted to know if you have a mentor? If yes, then how do you go about finding one?**

**Jackie Bavaro:**  I don't have an official "mentor" , but I have learned so much from other people in my career. The main people I've learned from, in order are: 1) My managers 2) Other PMs on my team 3) Other PMs at a similar level to me from other companies or teams.

To find mentors, I start with my question/challenge, and then think about who the best person to learn from is. I love this article: https://medium.com/@julesdwalt/networking-for-introverts-3544f4287fc1

**Creators Of Products: In a No code powered product/company, how to ensure that a Product Manager carves out a significant scope that doesn't step over the shoes of say, a CEO or the other Cofounders and avoid being redundant?**

**Jackie Bavaro:**  I don't have specific experience with no-code companies, but in general I'd meet with the cofounders and ask them about what they're hoping I bring to the company and what success for my role looks like to them.

**Creators Of Products: What should the first 30 days look like for a PM when they join a new org? What should they focus on?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** Ooh, I've got a chapter on this in the new book! High level - align on shared expectations with your manager and coworkers, ask lots of questions, do at least 1 thing to tangibly help your team, even if it's not your main job.

https://www.amazon.in/Cracking-Career-Frameworks-Practices-Interview -ebook/dp/B08TQ89LKB

**Creators Of Products: Where and what should be PMs goal and plan to focus on during their initial stint (30/60/90 days) after joining any organisation?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** Usually I have the first 30 days as shadowing, then next 30 days as "reverse shadowing", where I lead the team, but the previous leader watches and gives feedback

**Creators Of Products: In your view what is the most overrated aspect and most underrated aspect of product management?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** Overrated is "public speaking skills" - I think that most people who want to improve public speaking should instead focus on really understanding what their audience cares about.

Underrated is "do whatever it takes to make the product & company successful" - many people's best opportunities come from things outside of their typical PM scope.

**Creators Of Products: What are some of the best practices followed by orgs to make them awesome Product companies to work at?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** Companies that are self-reflective around their culture and strategic principles tend to be great for product people.

**Creators Of Products: How does a PM hold the other team accountable even while not directly being their manager?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** I love to have teams where the Tech Lead runs sprint retrospectives — the team holds themselves accountable!

**Creators Of Products: What are some of the key skills freshers should acquire to step into Product Management without an existing tech bg? Do you recommend any online courses for the same or self/peer-learning and learning while working are more efficient for a rookie?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** I think exposure to product teams is still the best experience - anything where you can see how product people make decisions and what work they do

**Creators Of Products: How to correctly assess oneself as a PM? Am I good/bad, where do I lack, what are my strong points, what skill is okay to not have or be great at? How to become one's own cheerleader because PM is a lonely job that makes you doubt yourself a lot at times.**

**Jackie Bavaro:** Great question! There's no single answer, since the skills you need will vary based on the team you join. To assess yourself relative to your current team and your goals, you can ask your manager (and maybe even your coworkers) "I'd love to eventually become a [senior pm], what do you suggest I focus on now so that I'll be ready when the opportunity comes up?" And you can substitute [senior pm] for whatever your goal is.

And I totally agree that being a PM is a lonely and thankless job. The more senior you get, the less positive feedback you get — you'll be making more and more decisions where there's no "right answer".  What can work here is a mindset shift, to see that the ambiguity is a positive sign that you ARE getting more senior.

**Creators Of Products: What is your opinion on doing certifications such as CSM or CSPO for a person who wants to pursue their career in Product roles? Does it help in getting the right kind of roles in the industry?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** I do not think they help much, but I'm more familiar with the US market so I'm not totally sure for the Indian market

**Creators Of Products: In the start up and product management world, everyone on Social Media be it LinkedIn, Twitter, Clubhouse is blogging, sharing/imparting wisdom on Product Management. Is that self branding as a PM? How necessary is it to do so for networking/creating a profile?**

**Jackie Bavaro:** Social media is not important, but networking is! Some of the best networking is with your current and former co-workers — they'll eventually switch jobs and then they can refer you. You can also ask them if they know anyone who could refer you (second degree connections)

**Creators Of Products: What should be the criteria for the build vs buy decision for product managers? I usually look at the following parameters: Speed, Effort, Is it our core capability? Will this be a user facing feature? Can you highlight any frameworks for this assessment?**

**Jackie Bavaro:**  I don't have a full framework in mind, but I'd also consider the stability of the company you're buying from and the future flexibility you'll need.