

One Knight in Product - E120 - Dan Chapman

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SPEAKERS

Dan Chapman, Jason Knight



Jason Knight 00:00

Hello, and welcome to the show. I'm your host, Jason Knight and on each episode of this podcast, I'll be having inspiring conversations with passionate product people. Now, when it comes to inspiration, sometimes we all need a little bit of extra help. If you follow me on Twitter, you'll know I'm a passionate advocate for mentorship. I've tried to do my part, but there are always more people looking for help. So because of this, I've teamed up with a buddy to help more mentors and mentees find each other. If you want to find out more check out <https://oneknightinproduct.com/mentor>, where you can sign up to be a mentor and mentee, or both. That's <https://oneknightinproduct.com/mentor>. And by the way, we are really currently on the lookout for more mentors, specifically, on tonight's episode we ask ourselves is product management easier or harder when all your customers have PhDs and working on some of the hardest scientific problems out there and ponder whether there are exceptions to the rule that product managers don't need industry expertise. We also consider which product principles are sacred cows, which might as well be hamburgers, and talk about some coping strategies for the introverts among us to deal with that next big product presentation. For all this and much more, please join us on One Knight in Product.



Jason Knight 01:14

So my guest tonight is Dan Chapman. Dan's a scientist turned product manager turned product leader, and also an Arsenal Football Club fan, he's escaped the decline of his beloved team by fleeing the country entirely and taken up residence in Boston where he's no doubt wearing everyone with his flawless New England accent. Dan says he could eat pizza for the rest of his life but he's even more passionate about product management and says he's got opinions about just about all of it. So I'm anticipating we'll have an opinionated conversation tonight, and hopefully put the world of Product Management right while we're at it. Hi, Dan, how are you tonight?



Dan Chapman 01:44

I'm very good. Thank you. Thank you for the invite. I'm pleased to be here.



Jason Knight 01:48

I'm glad to have you here. So we can laugh at Arsenal just a little bit.



Dan Chapman 01:52

Hey, they got better since I since I left. So maybe I was a bad omen.



Jason Knight 01:57

You were holding them back. So first things first, you are a director and product line leader for Merck. Now I'm sure everyone's heard of Merck. But what are you working on now? And what product line are you leading?



Dan Chapman 02:07

Yeah, that's correct. And for perfect clarification purposes, that is Merck and Co based in Kenilworth, New Jersey, USA, otherwise known outside of the US and Canada by MSD. Not to be confused with the other Merck that's out there. There's 100 year old story around why there are two of them. And they started off as one company, and were split as a result of some, I guess, political and World War affairs over the period and slowly diverged. Merck and Co US was re bought by another one of the Merck family that moved out to the US. So there's an interesting story there for history buffs.



Jason Knight 02:50

Gonna say sounds like they could be awkward at family parties. But hopefully...



Dan Chapman 02:55

Yeah, they unfortunately... it was a long time ago. And I hope they've all got over it.



Jason Knight 03:00

You never know. So what are you working on?



Dan Chapman 03:02

Yeah, so right now I'm an internally facing product person, which is, it was new, when I took it on. My main role is to lead a team that enables our scientists internally. So we look after a lot of

the core tools that our scientists use day to day. So they would use things like electronic laboratory notebooks, and the systems they use to capture the sites that they're doing. We manage all of those, and are really looking at it as a change from what has historically been a more project centric organisation and running small things year on year with budgets. So a more holistic view. So that's been a journey internally for us to move from that. And we're getting settled at the moment. We are still kind of mid transformation, a little bit. But it's been a fun journey. And it's good to work with a scientist closely.



Jason Knight 03:56

Yeah, well, we'll come on to the scientists again in a minute, but my research tells me and I'm hoping it's the right Merck, that you're working for, like a \$50 billion revenue company, or something like that, right?



Jason Knight 04:07

Sitting in the bath waiting for that eureka moment?



Dan Chapman 04:07

Yeah, we're a big company. We're about 60,000 people, I think at the last count, scientists wise, we serve about 6,000 Scientists in total. And so the scientists I work with particularly are the the folks really at this discovery, and they're the ones not quite sitting around. But you know, certainly working out in terms of.



Dan Chapman 04:13

Yeah, exactly. There's a little bit of that goes on, I think, but looking for, you know, the next cure for cancer or Alzheimer's or heart disease, or you name it, I think, you know, we're really at that early stage. So, you know, a drug can take 10 plus years to come to market. And the attrition rate is somewhere in the region of about, you know, one might make it out of about 10 or even 100,000 candidates to get there. So it's a really tough process to get there. There's a lot of hurdles just to get through along the way in terms of showing proof, showing that it works, showing that it's not evil, showing that it's better than the therapies that are out there today. And also just proving to, you know, the regulatory bodies out there that it does what it says it does. And the systems that they're using, which is kind of where I fit in, are doing what they're supposed to do and work as they're supposed to do. And they're under control. There are a lot of extra kind of factors there in terms of regulatory concerns, and also just kind of burden of proof that we have to work through from and consider as, as part of our product offerings.



Jason Knight 05:34

Yeah, I mean, actually, one of the things I mean, I was gonna ask it a bit later, but it seems really relevant to that topic is around things like the thoroughness, debacle and stuff like that, where you're kind of not people trying to bring that more fast and break things mentality, you

where you've kind of got people trying to bring that move fast and break things mentality, you know, the sort of thing that you might bring to the or the approach that you might bring to building some kind of social media add on or something like that, and try to bring that to the high stakes world of medical science, like, I'm assuming? Well, first of all, I'm assuming that that is kind of almost like a cautionary tale for your team now. But like, I guess the question I was going to ask later is like, how much of that kind of move fast and break things mentality, sort of agile lean stuff? Is there within the company at all given what you've just said?

D

Dan Chapman 06:20

Yeah, it's interesting. And I think, yeah, there's definitely a desire to move faster. I don't know if fast for us means fast as it would for other folks. Life Science as a whole is it's a very deliberate industry, it's because of the regulation because of the direct impact on people's health as a whole. You know, it's, it's, it's a very conservative environment in which to work. And so yes, there are regulatory hurdles, there is, to some degree, you know, I mean, there's institutional inertia, naturally cautious. I mean, the one that kicked all of kind of, especially the tight regulation off was back with the, I think there was a solidified issue, right, which was way, way back when, and the science behind that is really interesting. But I mean, ultimately, what that did was, it really kind of caused a tightening of kind of the scrutiny. And rightly so and so, you know, within that life sites as a whole is pretty conservative in a lot of areas. And so that, that move fast and break things is a challenge for us. And then on top of that, you know, most of the companies in that space are large, there are processes, people like processes, because process means predictability. And predictability means compliance, and compliance is good. That means we don't get told off. So that's pervasive. So yeah, there is an element of yeah, okay, we want to move fast. But what can we move on? How do we move? And can we do this? And can we do that? And some of it is, kind of work with the system? Can we change things? And there's a little bit of kind of wisdom to know what you can or can't do within that. So it's a tricky balance.



Jason Knight 08:02

Yeah, I was gonna say they're like, how does product management specifically work in a big company like that with all of those regulations? And that conservatism? I mean, it sounds like that's the sort of environment where you're going to end up using basically things like Scaled Agile, SAFe, things like that. And really kind of top down procedures like, is that fair? Or are you kind of at least able to be agile in the way that you deliver things when you're kind of on a regular basis?

D

Dan Chapman 08:26

you went and use the magic word early didn't. So I am not a fan of SAFe. So I will say that very politically, at this point, I suppose you'll probably get me going a bit later on. So SAFe is one of those that is, in my opinion. And I will catch that before I make a bunch of consultants irate. It's waterfall in Agile clothes. In that sense. And I totally understand why is attractive to larger organisations, because of the illusion of predictability. And the challenge of trying to do product and be agile in a large organisation is really, I mean, especially for us, because we're a service organisation internally pointing. It's not like we're the core business, the core business is providing drugs to patients. So we're enabling our scientists. The rest of the organisation is

pretty waterfall, the finances and things are all annual budgeting and, and if you try and do something different within this, then you end up out of step or it's a mismatch. And I've encountered that in a couple of places. So it's not just within say where I am now. It's something I've experienced in other roles that I've been in before where you'll go through that transformation. And the rest of the organisation isn't in that mode, and then you're trying to them trying to fit a square peg in a round hole and it's difficult. So I get why SAFe is attractive because on the outside, the wrapper on the outside is all very waterfall and it fits. It's also very directive and top down and prevents change and all of the stuff that are the reasons why you want to be agile and in a product mindset to start with. So, yeah, it's not for me, I know that there are colleagues out there in other parts of the world that are using it. I can't speak for how successful they are or not whether it's not something that I would relish. Being very gentle on that.



Jason Knight 10:36

Just for the record, you're not using it at the moment?



Dan Chapman 10:39

We are not using SAFe.



Jason Knight 10:41

And I also have to say for the record, that keeping safe consultants happy or not annoyed is definitely low on my list of priorities as well.



Dan Chapman 10:50

I figured that was in safe company that...



Jason Knight 10:53

No pun intended.



Dan Chapman 10:54

Yes, it will. Yes, exactly. The opposite of safe. You know, I think with within that as well, it's, there are other companies out there, and I'm aware of other competitive companies out there that are using it. The challenge of for me always is the overhead. And you know, the, you always see that whatever the latest picture of the safe mechanism is, and it makes my eyes hurt just thinking about it. You know, that level of overhead? And how can you move fast and break without that. But I can see why people fall into that trap. Because if you really like process, and it gives you that safety blanket of process, we're still working things out a little bit. So you know, I'm not going to claim that perfect agile exists kind of in my life every day,

because I don't think it does. I don't really know what perfect Agile is in the grand sense of things. But the goal for us is to try to work in a flexible manner to be responsive to change, if the last two years have taught us nothing else is that the world can change on its head in a very short space of time, or you need to respond to it and try to set ourselves up to meet such changes, we are trying to move towards a more outcome driven approach rather than outputs. So we are working on various iterations of objectives and key results. So the outcome of the okay our methodology, that's actually quite tricky to do in terms of getting things right. And especially at an organisation the scale as well, I often use the analogy of it's kind of like trying to change the engineering of the car in the outside lane of the motorway at 65 miles an hour, you're gonna keep moving, whether you like it or not, and you're trying not to lose some parts on the way as you go along. So that's a challenge and try and match work that he's already moving and bringing new new methodologies like OKRs match that it does kind of attend you to kind of think, well, this key result is a bit specific, and maybe we should bring that up. But ultimately, for us to link our work that we're doing in our teams, through to problems that we're solving and match those problems up to the outcomes that we are trying to achieve and match those to the key results. That's, that's where we're trying to get to and then if we can do that correctly, maybe you know, it'll stop us going down the safe path.



Jason Knight 13:16

Fingers crossed. Keep giving you positive thoughts. But you've worked in this industry one way or another seemingly for your whole career. And I know you've studied chemistry at university as well. So I guess that suppose is that you've always been some kind of scientist at heart. Is that fair to say?



Dan Chapman 13:32

Yeah, I guess. So. I started off life actually, as an engineer. So classic. Yeah. So well, engineering engineer in the mechanical engineer sense. So yeah. I started off originally. So I set off on my, my eight levels, kind of my, my higher education is bright eyed and bushy tailed, and then went off to do aeronautical engineering. Well, about three months into that process, I realised that it wasn't gonna work. So I ended up taking some time out, I'm thinking about what I've done. But through that process, it's interesting. One of the guys that I ended up talking to, through that interview process has turned around and said, through one of the interviews, and I think it was, I studied engineering both for for a semester and then drops out. I think it was at Brunel. And he asked me the question, why do you want to be an engineer? And I said, Well, you know, I'm kind of I look at stuff and no one I know how it works. And he turned around to me, and he said, it's interesting. Why do you say that? And he said, Well, if you were really really an engineer, you'd look at something and not ask how it works, but how do you make it better? If you're looking at it and wondering how it works, maybe you're a scientist. And so yeah, so those words kind of run with me. Fast forward six or eight months as I was actually kind of getting my feet into the course and was finding myself spending more time with my buddies chemistry. How And worse than I was with my own as an engineer, I should have read maybe read the science back then and then made an immediate switch. But yeah, I studied chemistry after a year or so out, went back and ended up in Newcastle in the northeast of the UK, studied up there for a few years. Through that I did a work placement with what was Glaxo wellcome at the time and went through the merger period with SmithKline Beecham to become GSK. Today, and enjoyed the work there, but also kind of sets myself yeah, I like being in the

industry, maybe I don't want to be stuck, stuck in the lab forever. And so when I finished up, I'm gonna go and do get myself a business education as well. So I did a, an MA in International Business Management, got out and thought, right, let's get back into that life science industry, I was going to do something interesting, like marketing or something like that. And then realised I had bills to pay. So I called up my old boss. Have you got any work? So well, you know, we've Yeah, we've got some stuff. It's it's contract to start with, but you know, we can get you in and what have you. And then I blinked and it was like seven or eight years later. Okay, where's that plan, though. So I got the opportunity to step outside into a different role. And I was doing more IoT stuff as AI lab scientists, by then anyway, I was doing a lot of kind of level one support for some of the local systems that we were using. And I was leading the global kind of lead user team for an application there. So I got picked up by a software and instrument vendor in the space and join their field marketing team. So I did Field Marketing, pre sales, technical kind of consultancy business development for four and a half years there. And through that company, then moved into product management. So having been plugging it and marketing it and selling it for a while, kind of got to the point, you know, I really, I want to make this I want to make some more decisions here. I want to get closer to the product. And so they said to me, you can do it in the UK, you can do it in Germany, or you can do it in the US, hey, by the way us is head office, head head. And so they very nicely picked us up and moved us over. And that was seven years ago. And that was me into product management from there on and and I yeah, it's been a really good move, I kind of feel like I've found my people. If I look back across my career and things and even the way that various other activities and the way I've kind of approached things in the past, even now looking back, I realised that I was playing the role of product manager and kind of in that sense, without even knowing it and building a training package for one of the systems that I looked after, when I was at GSK. And it was, hey, you know what I was sitting with the designer, and we were working it through and we had our goals. And we were working every couple of days in iterations of how we do it, and what are we trying to get to and some of that activity looks familiar now when when the lens. So I felt like I've found found the spot that really kind of makes me interested and gives me the variety of different stuff to get into day by day and and over the last couple of years kind of moving from a team contributor into more of a product leader that offers its own challenges as well in terms of making that jump. And that's I know, it's something you've been through the kind of over the last few years as well. That's that's an interesting challenge in itself.



Jason Knight 18:29

Yeah, no, absolutely is. And we'll, we'll come back to leadership in a minute. But before we go there, I really wondered, like product managers, business type of people, people that are looking not just at the technical matters, but also looking at the go to market plans and some of the other stuff that you can do as a product manager, there can sometimes be a bit of a gap between the way that product managers think about things and the way that the for example, engineers think about things. And I'm wondering if that's an even bigger gap when you're talking to very, very clever scientists. What's the relationship like between your team and those heavy science people that are in there doing all these tests to try to make life changing drugs?



Dan Chapman 19:09

Yeah, it's interesting, right? There are some things that parallel really well. And there are some things that are wildly different, especially when, if you're especially working to convince scientists or you're marketing to scientists, that is a very different prospect. So I was about to

say we are, I don't know if I qualify as a scientist anymore. After so many years. Maybe I will use the way for the collective ways that I taught myself with the same brush as I go along. We are a cynical bunch, especially when it comes to the typical marketing and proof statements and, and things like that. So, so much that they're you know, they're I mean, there were even books written about it. So this guy called Hamid Garnet and who's on the west coast in the US who's who's written a couple of books, one of which was Thai. To persuading scientists. So even Yeah, even down to that somebody's actually deemed themselves to write a book about it. So you know, they, they're a tough bunch sometimes, in that sense. In other areas, there are lots of parallels. And incidentally, I think scientists make really good product managers, but maybe we'll touch that in a minute. But kind of with us in terms of are we trying to get to a kind of a more experimentation mindset, and we're following a path of work and don't know where it's going to end up. There are massive parallels in the work that they do in the lab in terms of the scientific method itself, starting out with, Hey, we've got a hypothesis, let's get out there and try and disprove it, etc. So there's massive parallels down there in that sense. And if you can have the language in the conversation, in those sense, then ever to come, yeah, I totally get that. They walk into the lab to start an experiment or a series of experiments, they've got no idea what direction it's gonna go in. And hey, you know what, sometimes when we do that with a product, and we open, hey, we're going to start this feature, we're in the same boat, and they totally get that. So it makes that discussion, a lot easier with them than it would be so you know, maybe some folks in a more predictable industry. So yeah, it's an interesting mix in that sense. And, you know, whether, so, right now, I'm facing internally, and I'm selling internally a little bit. And, you know, having an internal audience is an interesting situation to be in. I've also been on the vendor side, where I'm actively selling and trying to get scientists to part with their money in that sense, you know, and the various gatekeepers in enterprise B2B sales, right? So you know, you've got the finance guy, you've got to convince, you've got the scientists and their boss in the lab actually using it, you've got the quality people that you've got to get over, there's different types of conversations you have with each of those people to get over the relevant hurdles. But yeah, scientists generally, I think, as long as you can kind of get into their heads a little bit, it's not too bad. The challenge, and this is something this is where I kind of describe myself sometimes as a walk in hypocrite for product management in that space. It's a really tough nut to crack in terms of empathy. And so I firmly believe that products skills as a domain is perfectly transferable. And we can move from domain to domain with maybe not complete ease, but we should be able to transfer those skills and pick those up as we go along. Yeah, life science is one of those that I guess I always kind of then hold myself up and say, yeah, and there's kind of an exception to the rule. And I don't think it's insurmountable, but the learning curve is so vertical. As part of that, to put somebody in to say, you know, what, they've come in from a completely unrelated environment, and then say, right, in order to get this tool done, you have to work with a scientist, and hey, by the way, the unit operations in there, it really helps if you've at least got a BSc in chemistry to even wrap your brain around the concepts. And a PhD would be really useful, right? That's a massive learning curve to put somebody in that sense. So I always struggle with that one and say, Yes, broadly, I believe that we're transferable there are certain circumstances where that's really hard and life sciences, one of them.



Jason Knight 23:18

Yeah, now it does sound kind of full on. Again, I'm fairly fundamentalist when it comes to believing that product managers can be put out managers anywhere, because of course, product management is a skill, and it's something that people should be able to do and take

different places. But at the same time, it does sound fairly terrifying, trying to have discovery conversations about things I have no idea about. So I guess, yeah, that's probably not something a Udemy course can bridge right?

D

Dan Chapman 23:44

Not so much. I mean, ultimately, you can boil it down to you know, it is a unit operation. You take this data, you do something with it, you make a decision, and then you push that somewhere else, you can boil it down to that level of simplicity. But once you get beyond that, then it gets really complex.



Jason Knight 24:03

So switching tracks slightly, although kind of related in a way, because we're talking about, obviously, a lot of those conversations that you have to have. And obviously product management in general is a very cross functional discipline. There's lots of collaboration, there's lots of presentations, there's lots of interviewing of customers or internal stakeholders in your case. But you described yourself before this call is a bit of an introvert. Yeah. And yeah, that's definitely something that I that resonated with me, I would classify myself as an introvert or maybe one of those mythical extroverted introverts or extroverts or whatever you call them. But do you think that being an introvert is a barrier and something that you have to surmount? Or do you think that introversion is something that you can kind of turn and I don't know, use to your advantage, as you're kind of navigating the organisation or navigating your career in product management?

D

Dan Chapman 24:56

Yeah, it's a great question. And it's a double edged sword in that sense, but I do think that introverts make really good product managers. And it ties in back into I guess, some of the commentary in terms of I think scientists make really good product managers as well. And scientist, and introversion is very often you kind of see them kind of side by side in that sense. Yeah, there is a kind of innate self reflection, that kind of comes on board with being an introvert and an affinity for throwing yourself at data analysis that I think is really helpful for a product person, particularly around kind of the data analysis that a lot of the drivers why I think scientists make good product managers, I don't bump into many of them. And I'm feeling that quite painfully at the moment, because I'm trying to hire and so the, the market is thin out there at the moment, in that sense, but the social element can be hard. So kinda like you, I don't know if I'm a fully fully ambivert in that sense. But I know if you if you believe the Myers Briggs Type Indicator type stuff that I'm sure somebody will, happily informed me is complete twaddle. If I've always come out, and one of those is what they term kind of a social introvert. Yep. So I, I've got the ability to turn it on. And kind of, you know, do the Hey, look at me and my chocolate biscuit, you know, when maybe I learned some of that through being in a customer facing marketing role. Right, but it drains me. And you know, I would always kind of come back from you know, a customer event or a conference or something and get onto the plane at the end of the the end of the week, and just kind of let out a breath and be like, that was hard. Okay, and now I need some quiet time. So the flip side of that is, is managing that focus time, and thinking time more aggressively than maybe some other folks have to do on top of all of

the multitasking and context switching and kind of the normal stuff that goes in there. And that's something I really struggle with as a product person is preserving that focus time, time to think time to not be on back to back video or calls for six, seven hours a day, gets to the end of the day, and just be completely fried and full. And have enough of myself left at the end of the day for family and fun and whatever else. And I think yeah, I think I think it really can be a superpower for product managers. I think there's also an extra element of self care that goes with that as a result.



Jason Knight 27:30

Yeah, no, I absolutely agree. And I definitely feel it myself, this whole idea that you kind of have to work up to being able to be in one of those situations, like being the public face of yourself. And again, as you said, kind of just getting tired, like I think I explained it once was like, Yeah, you spend all day doing all of that stuff and having it on, but there's sort of a time limit on it. And also you kind of just kind of sag when you're in the lift on the way out sort of things. But you know, I guess you know, it's just one of those things that, I mean, I'm sure many people suffer from that in different ways. And it's, I think it's just about what you want to do. Like, if you want to put yourself in a position or put yourself in a situation, then those situations are going to arise, and you're going to have to find ways to cope with it. And I guess that's a question for you is like, what are some of your coping strategies in that sort of situation, when you've got a big presentation to do? Or you got a big meeting with a new stakeholder or an external person or some kind of something that would make a classic introvert just wither and die? Because you know, this is such an uncomfortable situation, like, are there ways that you've either made a fake it or ways that you've built your kind of resistance? Or your, I don't know, ambivert muscles to be able to get through those situations? Or do you kind of just take it as it comes and just do your best?



Dan Chapman 28:50

Little bit of column A little bit of column B? In that sense. So being prepared, always helps. So you know, the classic, you know, preparation. Yeah, getting your message clear. And, you know, if you're, if you're doing a presentation, kind of walk it through and what have you got, I've never been a massive fan of the perfect walkthrough word for word in that sense. But certainly having a really clear run through in terms of what's my messaging? What do I need to keep iterating on where do I need this to go and have a structure in my head around the messaging through that that's definitely been something that I've always worked on and tactics to use. The other part is just getting used to being uncomfortable. And I, I think back to some of my early days as a vendor, kind of on the vendor side in that sense, and we were on our way out to India for the first my first kind of long, long haul trip so back in the days I worked as part of the European organisation which for my old men, you Europe, Middle East and India, because geography was clearly a strong suit. So, all right, I'm going out there. And you know, I needed no, I'm good. I've had all my extra injections and things, all of the things that I didn't have topped up for travel and everything that they recommend you go for. And I'm on my way to the airport in the in the taxi. And I'm due to multiple presentations over a couple of weeks in various cities around India with my boss alongside me. The first one was, I think this was a Sunday lunchtime, we were going to land in, in India at like, three in the morning in Mumbai. And the first presentation set was a seminar in a hotel, they are at 9am. That morning, so gets better five hours get up, get go. And you know, so my boss sent me a note, text and I'm in the

car, hit traffic might be squeaky, we'll keep you posted. Okay, well, okay, so we'd like to go for about half an hour. And then and then she called me that, yeah, I'm stuck in traffic, if I don't make it, I will send you the presentations that I was gonna give tomorrow, you're gonna have to either give them or split them with a local team or workout, whoever you are going to do that. And good luck. By the way, I've only just learned the stuff that I was going to give. It was the first time in front of about 150 people to do that. They're the kinds of things that I guess you just pass through, and learn a little bit of think on your feet. Panic, and then get over it. In as much as Okay, well, I'm gonna land, I'm not going to have access to them until I land and I'm gonna have to cram. And then I'm gonna have to be able to do this in front of these people, because I haven't got a choice. You know, or the other one is, you know, you're out on tour in places like that. And then on the way back from somewhere, say, oh, yeah, we're gonna make a stop at this place on the way through, they'd like you to talk about this. Okay? Open up the laptop in the back of the car and grab important pull the relevant slide deck together. And off you go. And the little mantra is in the back of your head that I know this material. I'm standing here I am the expert. By control the direction this goes in, I can control the narrative, being able to manage and deflect in some cases, various questions or the various tactics around? Okay. That's a really great question. And take a breath and give yourself space to think and things like that. A lot of that, what if you could kind of get through that? Yeah, then it takes a lot of kind of the the internal pressure and the internal panic out. Once you can get over that panic, then you're in a much better place in that sense. So yeah, get used to being uncomfortable. Give yourself some tactics that when you are uncomfortable to deal with it, yeah, just get out there. And remember that, you know, you're in control. I mean, they have covered the mattress that always sitting in my mind.



Jason Knight 33:03

There are some excellent advice there for introverts around the world. And you told me recently, you want people to be firm on principles, but be flexible on how you meet them. So what are some of those principles that you're focused on? And what does being flexible, like in those situations?



Dan Chapman 33:19

Yeah, it's a great question. And timely in terms of so we're trying to move towards this more kind of product led model right now for more of a project lead one. And having been through a previous things around Agile transformations and things in the past, they're really pertinent questions right now. So you know, firmly held principles for me, I mean, I, I always will get a little bit frustrated by those folks out there that are totally black and white. And you know, if you're not doing it in this particular fashion, then you're not doing it. Or if it doesn't look like this, then you know, you're a failure or whatever else. It's for me, it's always right. Why are we here? Why, what are we trying to do for me right now? It's, How do I make my scientists more successful? How do I make their lives easier? How I get there, is broadly irrelevant in the grand scheme of things, they don't care, as long as their lives are getting easier, and they're getting better tools and what have you. So yeah, certainly keep in context, you know, the famous product manager kind of mantra is why, you know, and it's always, you know, as a as somebody with a with a toddler in the house that is slowly approaching that kind of period in their life, where it's all going to be why, why why there's an element of that in kind of the product managers in terms of you know, you get the long story and you're like, Okay, so why

are we doing this? What value does it give us? What does it mean for our end users in that sense? So I mean, certainly in terms of principles, I mean, I'm always going to come back to number one, why are we doing it? The other part of that for me is around being transparent, and being honest and straight with decision making, even if sometimes that's uncomfortable. Generally, my mantra is actually yes. If it feels a little bit uncomfortable, we're probably about right in terms of transparency, because it should feel a little bit awkward. But having very honest conversations with bit stakeholders, or people around you in either why you're doing something or why we're not doing something or what we get out of that. I think that's, you know, that's definitely a principle for me in the for, for within products as to what we get into, do I get hung up on how agile we are? Not particularly right, I do firmly believe that. Agile is a really great complement, or the agile mindset is a really great complement for products because what it does is shortens our our learning loop. Agile, done properly is a learning engine. So it shortens our feedback loops and helps us as product people make better decisions. Do I particularly care if it's Scrum, Kanban, XP, Lean? You know, in that sense? No, not really. And you know, what, in in some cases, you know, what waterfall is perfectly adequate as well, right? In certain cases. I know. And I know that's controversial, right. But in some, in some cases, and I'll even sit there and say, if it's a well bounded thing, so like, within our group, we do upgrades I've, because a lot of the lot of what we do is commercial off the shelf software. A lot of our internal product management work is vendor management, and working with COTS software, our build versus bias is completely backwards to how you are as you're building something. And so if we're just going from one version to the next, do I have to go and do it again? Do I have to go and do a bunch of discovery? No, not really. Do we have to have daily sprints and what have you and iterations and chase things down? I mean, we can. But because, you know, we're starting at unknown point, we're ending at unknown point. We know what we've got to do in between might be controversial, but it doesn't matter if you run it waterfall with a as as more of a project in that sense. As long as it gets us there. And it's, it's well bounded. I'm alright with that. I'm a pragmatist. Yeah, some of that as well is part of being in a, you know, in a bigger organisation, as well, as you know, I've never been in an organisation less than about 6,000 people. That's the smallest organisation I've ever been in. So, sometimes you've got to know when to fight and when to not, and, you know, digging my heels in over something that really, in the grand scheme of things doesn't matter. I lose, I lose a certain level of kind of political capital, I guess about that. And, you know, it's, I hate politics in that sense. But the reality is, is that you know, there is there is a certain amount of it wherever you are, I'd rather save my, the goodwill around it for something that really matters, and chase somebody down for something that I'm really passionate about, that makes a really big difference to what we're doing. So, I mean, I guess Yeah, and maybe that's another principle there that I fall back on there, which is, you know, being careful where you put your feet in that sense. So, every so often I take out and if you've ever seen them, there's the US General Colin Powell, if you remember him from so he has a set of 13 rules that I go back to every so often and they're always they're always a good look up I kind of feel like it's a really good mantra for a product manager and in that sense to kind of walk through I mean, I forget the order that they're in but there's kind of you know, get mad and then get over it was the other one don't get your ego so close to a position that when you know when the position goes your ego goes with it and a few other things there's some red this really good ones in there for and if you look at it through a product management lens you like it kind of resonates. Yeah, so yeah, I go back to those every so often.



Jason Knight 39:05

Fair enough, I'll dig them out and see what I can find out and what I can learn. But where can

people find you after this if they want to chat about product management or life sciences or try and get us to do one of your best Boston accents?

 Dan Chapman 39:21

Yeah, okay and that one out it's awful I'm I'm too dyed in the wool for for that one. It was too late to change. Yeah, if you want to find me so I'm around on LinkedIn in there. I'm sure you will tack the relevant links in on there yep, I'm I'm a big fan of product Twitter at the moment. Twitter as a whole is can be a bit of a swamp but the product community on Twitter is a a wonderful little oasis of fabulous people like yourself that will shuffle site and and help people out and really just acts as a nice little community. So I've made a pact with myself to try and be a little bit more kind of Be active and share some things along the way as as I go along and participate a bit more. So yeah, either of those two, you'll find me.



Jason Knight 40:08

Well, as you say, I'll make sure to link those into the show notes. And hopefully some people will come and force you to participate a bit more. Sounds good. Well, that's been a fantastic chat obviously really interesting to get the life sciences version of products and start to dig into some of the challenges and some of the opportunities you got there and some of the things you can and can't do. Obviously, we'll stay in touch but yeah, as for now, thanks for taking the time.

 Dan Chapman 40:30

Awesome. Thanks for having me.



Jason Knight 40:33

As always, thanks for listening. I hope you found the episode inspiring and insightful. If you did again, I can only encourage you to pop over to oneknightinproduct.com, check out some of my other fantastic guests, sign up to the mailing list or subscribe on your favourite podcast app and make sure you share your friends so if you and they can never miss another episode again. I'll be back soon with another inspiring guest but as for now, thanks and good night.