

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Monetizing passions, scaling marketplaces, and stories from a creator economy vet | Camille Hearst (Spotify, Patreon, Apple, YouTube)

Though Steve Jobs' lore was that if you were in an elevator with him, you better be prepared to talk about what you do at the company because he had a habit of getting in the elevator and looking at you and saying, what do you do? What do you do here?

And there were also rumors that people had not given him a good answer.

That ended up being their last day at Apple.

So there was someone who I didn't know personally,

but worked in my department before I got there,

who got in an elevator and looked up and Steve was approaching him.

And so he went to press the button to open the door

and accidentally press the one to close the door.

And it's like doing this press.

You can't see me if you're listening on podcast,

but like frantically pressing the button, trying to open the door,

but accidentally pressing the closed door button

and the elevator going to its destination.

And apparently he got off and just bolted,

like straight up, ran down the hall and hit him.

I'll never remember my face.

Yeah, exactly.

I had to disappear.

Welcome to Lenny's podcast,

where I interview world-class product leaders and growth experts

to learn from their hard-won experiences,

building and growing today's most successful products.

Today, my guest is Camille Hurst.

Camille is head of fan monetization at Spotify.

Before that, she was head of product for creators of Patreon.

She was product marketing manager at YouTube

and the second PM on iTunes.

She's also a former founder.

She started a company called KIT that she sold to Patreon.

And this episode is for anyone who's curious about the creator space,

either from the creator side or the platform side.

Or if you just like to hear a bunch of fun stories from an awesome product leader.

We chat about the future of creator platforms,

how to be successful as a creator and also as a new creator platform,

the downsides of creator life,

plus frameworks, stories from Steve Jobs,

ways to monetize being a creator,

and so much more.

Enjoy this episode with Camille Hurst after a short word from our sponsors.

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Camille, thank you so much for being here. Welcome to the podcast.

Thank you so much for having me, Lenny.

I first wanted to just give a big thank you to Adam Fishman for introducing us,

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who had just so many nice things to say about you.

And so I'm really excited to be chatting.

I want to start with talking about your current role at Spotify

and I believe your role is head of fan monetization.

What does that actually entail and what are you responsible for within Spotify?

As head of fan monetization, I have a team of folks who are really passionate about figuring out new ways to help artists and fans connect and also figure out ways to make those connections result in new monetization opportunities for the artists.

So one of the things that we all know and we've seen is how passionate fans are about the artists that they love. You've been following any of the latest bits about the Taylor Swift tour, the Beyonce tour that's been happening this summer and their effect on local economies.

It's been pretty, pretty impressive.

But one of the things that we also know is it's not just the big huge superstars who have those kind of rabid and super engaged fan bases.

People are really passionate just about supporting the artists that they love in general.

And on Spotify, we want to figure out ways we can help that result in more money that goes directly to the artist. What are some of those ways just to give people a sense of what might be happening? Yeah, so one of the ones that most mature is merch, which is funny to say because most people probably don't realize that you can purchase merch on Spotify.

That's one that's been around for a bit of time. And my team's recently been working on making it more prominent, giving artists more ways to offer that merch in the form of like a reward for fans. So things like an exclusive discount or an exclusive design or early access,

because you're a top listener on Spotify. Really thinking about thank yous and rewards for your Spotify listenership and fandom. And then other things we've been looking at have been listening parties. We ran a few of those over the past year. I think I talked about it actually on a Spotify event a few years ago. We were like running, sorry, wasn't a few years ago last year.

But listening parties is another way. And then we've got some new ideas we're exploring.

I've heard people do listening parties with this podcast actually. And I hope that you roll that out to podcasts too, because that would be very cool.

Yeah, we have all kinds of ideas of really interesting ways we can bring groups of people together and get the monetization going. All right, mysterious but exciting. Speaking of

Taylor Swift, I was watching a TikTok the other day and they showed a video of someone inside the concert showing the whole concert. And then they pan to the parking lot.

And there's just like tens of thousands of people just standing around in the parking lot listening to the second order music out at the stadium. And I wonder how can you monetize that? There's an opportunity. Yeah, I think they often have the merch trucks in those parking lots.

Probably an official merch. So you work with artists and I actually wanted to ask this question, what's the best part about working with artists, musical artists, and what's the worst part?

I think the best part is working with people who really lean into their creativity and their passion so much so that they do it for a living. And I think a lot of us have creative pursuits and passions and things we love to do. And like if we made millions of dollars and could retire, like what would you do full time? Usually it's one of these pursuits. I think it takes an element

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of bravery, not to mention talent, but you really have to go out on a limb. And so that's this equality that exists in this group of people. And it's fun to be around and feel that rub off on you and think, oh, maybe I could take the dive one day. And I don't know, go do my calligraphy or learn my ukulele and do it full time. But that's the best part. And I grew up in a musical household. My dad's a drummer, although his joke when we were growing up was real musicians have

day jobs because he had to actually have a job with benefit to support the family and couldn't just be gigging full time, which actually brings me to the flip side of the question, which you asked, like, what is the hardest part? I do think we saw this a lot at Patreon. And I think you see it especially with musicians and artists, this kind of feeling that, you know, you want to give your fans everything that you create and you want to do it for free, because you're so enamored with this idea that people really love you and want to support you and they're really responding to your creativity and everything that you're making, you don't want to charge them. But what comes with that

is, well, how are you going to make a living? Like, to some degree, there has to be a value exchange that happens in order for a creative person to live from their art. And I've found that that's much more pronounced with musicians, kind of this starving artist ethos, which makes what I'm trying to do actually quite difficult because hot of the feedback we get is, oh, that's awesome. I want to have a listening party, have everything be free and just have everyone show up and don't sell anything. And we're really looking at it as a way to fans want to support the artists. They love, they want to open up their wallets. I mean, you see nothing else from a sub-stack and then patrons that people are actually really happy to be a patron of the arts and they look at it as like a badge of honor. But musicians in particular, I think, kind of tend to shy away from that, which makes the kind of thing that I'm working on more difficult. This is a great segue to an area I want to spend time on is kind of the creative economy and creators and artists and things like that. And along these lines, I think, like I have this issue too, I feel bad charging people, but there's also, I don't think my stuff is worth enough to charge for and why would anyone ever pay anything for it. And so I imagine you see that too. It's just like, no one's going to pay for this. It's crazy. Yeah, it's funny because we live in a very capitalist and market dictate the price kind of society, but on an individual level, particularly when the commodity, so to speak, is art. There's so many emotions and feelings involved in that, that it's hard for someone who's the creator to kind of disassociate themselves from it and like, see what the market will bear, which is why I actually think it's great that there's platforms who have stepped in and said, hey, we see an opportunity, let us insert ourselves in the center, let us aggregate and let us do the hard work of pricing and payment and tax and finance and actually create value where it would be really hard for an individual person who's a creator to do all of this work and facilitate that connection. It's almost like the perfect marketplace solution. But again, it's hard because if the supplier doesn't actually make money, in some cases, or is shy away from optimizing for making money. And then there's the creative process, right? Like sometimes you're in a flow mode and you're producing a lot and then other times you're in a drought spell and that's kind of like the things ebb and flow, which is why I think companies like Patreon and Substack are really cool because what they try to do is smooth

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out that revenue and make it so an artist can actually have a predictable, they're not even artists, a creator can have a predictable, sustainable paycheck so that they aren't, you know, bouncing around from job to job and like losing the ability to have that burst of creativity because they're worried about their bill.

I have that experience myself with Substack, which is a subscription newsletter. And one of the big downsides people don't think about with this life is once you start charging, people start buying, say, an annual subscription. And that means I have to at least go for another year. And in reality, I never really want to stop it because the revenue would just stop and that would be really sad. So you kind of get on this treadmill where you don't really have an exit path. And I'm not sure exactly where this all goes. But it's been great. But that's something people don't think a lot about is like this never ending, keep creating life.

We call it internally the hamster wheel of content creation. I like get on because you love it. And then how do you get off? So it's actually an interesting challenge again for platforms to think about where can they add value? Are there ways to either make the content creation process that much easier? And I don't want to say less of a burden, it's not a burden.

But sometimes if you don't have time, you're just at a point in life where you can't do it. Are there services or things that can be offered? Are there things like financing that make sense for creators that banks or traditional institutions wouldn't offer because of just the difference in the type of work that's being produced? Or another potential solution is, are there ways that platform

can create content? Maybe it's automated so that the creator can take a break. So maybe they're not AI necessarily. Maybe it's more just like aggregating data or doing summaries or maybe there's other ideas that haven't been explored out there. But it's a real problem.

So I have this Lennybot.com site, which is an AI chatbot based on all my content, including the podcast episodes. And actually an engineer who was listening to this podcast reached out and offered to help me build it and he did and it's awesome. And I'm curious if that becomes my retirement plan as this bot ends up just doing this and learns enough. I highly doubt it, but it's fun to experiment with. Yeah, use your own content as your large language model, right? Exactly. That's exactly what it is. And I'm curious where this goes.

I want to follow the thread of the creator economy. It feels like there's this huge wave of the creator economy is the future of work and all these platforms launch to allow creators to make money. But it feels like over the past couple of years, it feels like it faded away and these like very small number of platforms essentially want YouTube, Spotify, Instagram, TikTok, Patreon, maybe Substack. And there was also the sense that like the future of work is freelance, everyone's going to be working for themselves, creating stuff. And it feels like people are still working regular jobs. A lot of these startups haven't done great. So I guess I'm just curious what you think happens maybe in the next five or 10 years from a perspective of platforms emerging and also just from creators. Do you think things stay the same? Do you think there's another wave? Where do you think things go? I think it was probably predictable to some degree that platforms would win because just of the nature of aggregation, once you have either all of the supply or you've aggregated the demand, it's really a strong network effect. So investors love to invest in these types of businesses. It's hard to break out.

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I wouldn't underestimate the strategic ability either of some of the big platforms. Like they were definitely thinking ahead and building features and thinking about whether or not they saw it as a monetization opportunity. It certainly is a great strategic play to make sure that creators felt like they were on the platform that made the most sense for them and they weren't churn or leave or tried too many other places out. So I think the rush and the funding was to figure out is there room for any other new platforms? Are there specific verticals that maybe there's an opportunity to create vertical specific features and tooling? I think we saw a huge massive creation there in Twitch. Twitch did not exist and they are just a juggernaut. I think TikTok's another one that came out of this era. Maybe they weren't positioned as creator economy-type startups, but effectively... Did you see what happened in Union Square here with Kai, the gaming streamer? So I'm in New York. And last week, there was a mob and a riot because a Twitch streamer announced that he was going to be giving away playstations and computer gear in Union Square. And something like a million teenage boys showed up and they had to shut down the center of New York City to clear what turned into protest riot mob of teenagers who came for this one creator that probably no one listening to me right now is even heard of. So I do think a lot of the predictions have come to bear. There are tons of people making money and making a living from creating content on the internet. There have been studies too where they ask young people what they want to do and what they want to be when they grow up. We have to quote these at Patreon and over 60% want to create content for a living. So those trends I don't think are going anywhere. Maybe it'll be supplemental income. Maybe it'll be something you do for a period of your life. But I do think that this area continues to be untapped. I just don't see a world where I think of like Michelle Fan, right? She's basically a mini Disney. And when you think of it like that, she's created IP. What can you do with IP? Comic books, movies, TV shows, plushies, merch, like how many millions of Michelle fans are we going to have seen? Look at like what's happening in China. There's tons of creators like this. So whether or not the VCs have won or the startups have succeeded, there's no way that you can lower the costs of content creation and increase the scale of distribution and not see this emerge, this creator economy I think emerge. But I just, I think that maybe there's still opportunity for more companies to blossom and to grow. And certainly for more individuals, maybe do this, figure it out on their own and do it without too many big platforms getting paid off of their creative pursuit. Have you seen the NPC trend on TikTok slash maybe Instagram reels where people pretend to be NPCs non-playable characters from a video game? I have not. Okay, it's crazy. People just pretend to be a computer character and people pay them little gifts to like do a thing. Is this the, yes, have seen it. First do fly. Ice cream, ice cream. Yeah, I didn't realize that. They're making like tens of thousands of dollars a day just so that's one way to make a living. On the thread of becoming a creator, you've seen a lot of creators try to do this on Patreon, back at Apple, even with iTunes. I want to chat about that at Spotify now and even your startup. I'm curious what you've seen is important to success in the creator life, especially things that are maybe not obvious to people. What do you, what do people need to get right if they

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want to pursue that path? One of the things that I've seen that I don't know if people realize is consistency and predictability of content creation, which is where this idea that we're talking about earlier of a hamster wheel kind of comes on. But there is something to churning out consistent quality work and putting it out there for your audience to consume and respond and react to that goes a long way. It's almost like the 10,000 hours. You have to do 10,000 hours of something in order to truly master it. But I've seen that time and again. I started at YouTube in, let's see, how old am I? It must have been 2010. And that was when I really think this whole thing kind of was just first getting going. And we used to put together these playbooks of what made a creator successful. So a lot of the effort there was trying to support this burgeoning economy. And I remember even back then in 2010 and to this day, that continues to be like one of the top pieces of advice. Another one is collaboration. So working with other great creators, sharing audience, exposing one another to those audiences. And then this was something we tried to employ at my startup kit. We would actually host events for creators to get together to facilitate meeting and cross pollination. And in the hopes that it would just benefit their careers that they were doing YouTube videos with someone they met at the party, then it would be great for all parties all around. So those are two things. And then I do think in a world with all of this content, there continues to be a need and a space for the curator. And you know, curators as creators kind of an interesting concept. But a curator is almost like what the role a book publishing company plays or a music record label plays or a radio station plays, right? There is a degree of having a brand, having something you stand for, having a vibe or an ethos. And that person being almost not a gatekeeper in a bad way, but like, I Camille can't consume anywhere near all this content, you I trust your vibe, tell me what I should be listening to. And so that would be the third thing I would say is like figure out who are those curators who he really can associate your content with who are on the same page as you have an audience who you think would like your stuff and just try and get associated with them. Yeah, the last piece is so I totally see that all the time. If there's someone I super respect, and they recommend something, I'm obviously going to value that recommendation highly. That's like we're influencing emerged from organically, right? People just there's something you should check out. And then, oh, let's pay you to share things so that people try our product. That was the exact concept behind my startup kit. It was all about curating, finding people who are great recommenders for gear, having them curate that gear. And then

you could follow the curators you have you who wants to go look on Amazon and see reviews from people you've never heard of. Oftentimes, if it's your brother in law, who's a great cyclist, and they say buy this, you just buy it, you don't even care what the reviews say because you trust that person. What happened with the startup and what did you learn from that experience? I started working on the startup in 2015. We managed to raise some money raised over \$2 million, which is a huge accomplishment, especially if you know anything about venture capital. They have a horrible track record when it comes to funding people of color, women, people who are non cis gender, white male, just kind of the track record. And we had an amazing experience building this company over several years, grew a bunch of the key metrics up into the right. And that to a point where we were trying to figure out what the next move was. And should we get a bridge round? We were trying to raise series A. We were, I think, early on the creator economy trend. Probably

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about a year and a half later, it would have been, I think, I hope, a test nap to raise money. But anyway, we were battling a bunch of different choices, different options. And I actually did this startup accelerator called Thardep that ran out of Stanford, which is my alma mater. And we learned a lot about how to sell a company and what M&A looks like. So we started exploring that path. And in the end, it made the most sense for us to have an exit and join forces with Patreon. And so that's what we ended up doing. Sold the company in 2018, joined Patreon, worked there a couple of years, and that's where I met Adam.

Amazing. And I wanted to ask actually about that experience of selling a company. There's a lot of people listening right now who are thinking about selling their company, or maybe hope to sell their company someday. And I think there's like a reality of it. And then there's like the idea of how it might go. I'm curious what you've taken away from that experience. And I guess specifically, is there any advice you could share with folks that are thinking about selling their company someday, what you think maybe you could have done earlier, or also just share a glimpse of the reality of acquisitions? I think it's different for every company, for sure. Some companies get swooped in and get bought, and other companies actively sell themselves. We were definitely in the latter camp, which means that we managed a process similar to how you manage a process for fundraising, right? Like not every company just meets the BC and raises money on the first try. They go through a process and meet tons of BCs and put them through the funnel and end up on the other side, hopefully with a successful round. So I think that's one takeaway is treat it like a process and manage it like a process. If it is something you're interested in, it doesn't really just promote most companies out there, it doesn't just happen. And then the second piece of advice I would give, I think we should have been talking to potential acquirers from the beginning, and sharing our vision and what we were trying to accomplish, because we started those quite late in our journey as a company, and it just meant it took, you know, when I met a potential CPO who would acquire the company who would end up being my boss or CEO, it was like their first time meeting me, whereas if it had been their fifth time, we would have had a relationship established, and they would have known more about the vision and what we were trying to do, and hopefully it would have had some more time to think about it. So those would be my two pieces of advice. Start preparing to tell your company from the moment you found it, which is kind of a weird thing, because obviously if you're starting a company for most founders, they want it to be the next big thing, they're not starting it in order to sell it. But it's just a good thing to have on your radar, because you never know what the future holds. And then choose to treat it like a process. Yeah, on that piece of knowing people who may acquire you, I found that to be a thousand percent true. We sold our company to Airbnb, and that's how it got to Airbnb. And what I realized is you just need people who may buy you in the future to have you in their head when they have a problem, so that they could be like, oh, Camille and her team could solve this problem for us. Let's go chat with her and see if we could, if they're interested in acquisition. And on a process piece to 1000% resonates, we basically, when we started chatting with a company, we're just like, okay, who else could potentially acquire us? Let's make a big list and who we can talk to at that company as soon as possible and just explore. But it's more challenging there because it's you reaching out to them, being like, hey, you want to chat about buying your company versus them reaching out to you. So it's your point. Always goes better if they reach out to you,

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but you can't always control that. Right. Or if the meeting is not under the context of buying it all. It's like, we're working on something cool. We have a great vision and aligns with what you're doing. Maybe there's a partnership here. Yeah. We'll just tell you what we're doing. And then when I contact you in 12 months about buying me, you've heard of me before.

I find even when you're starting to chat about acquisitions, you never want to say directly, hey, you want to buy us? It's like, hey, you want to have a strategic partnership of some kind? Yes. Your office floor partnership. So funny. Like dating. Yeah. Yeah. You can't just be too direct sometimes. So when you got to Patreon, I don't know if it was immediate or eventually you ended up leading the creator side of the marketplace. And I find that looking at your background, you basically stayed on the supply side of marketplaces through your career mostly.

And I actually did the same thing. All I worked on that are being especially or mostly was the host side. And I think it takes a specific kind of mindset in person to be excited about that side of the marketplace versus the consumer side, which is where everyone always generally wants to go to the customer side. So I'm curious what it is that's drawing you to that side of the business across all the places you work. And then just what you found to be important to be successful in that role and on that side. What drew me to that side of the business probably was kind of, I don't maybe accidental at the beginning, just again, coming from this kind of musical family and background always had like a natural interest in helping artists make a living. So I think that interest was there. At Apple, I did, there were only two PMs there, we did everything. At YouTube, I accidentally ended up in Creator. But where I started understanding deeply the dynamics of a marketplace was actually my experience.

And the one job I've had that's like not been in the Creator or on these big consumer platforms or Creator economy, which was at a startup called Halo, based out of London. And at the time was a huge competitor to Uber and Lyft in the ride hailing, ride sharing and ride hailing space. And I worked on the supply side, making sure that there were enough cars to fuel the demand. And in a marketplace like that, where real time people trying to get a cab to go from uptown to downtown, you see firsthand the inexperience firsthand the impact to your business. If you don't have suppliers, if your suppliers aren't happy, if they go on strike, if there's regulations, that means you can't use your service. And there I think I was so one of the projects that I worked on that I launched was the US Uber competitor, because Halo in Europe was all about getting taxi cabs and did not play in the the livery is what it's called in New York or the private private rides. Basically, it's like your uncle or your your on or your cousin who can switch on Lyft and go pick it up whoever like that just was not a thing in Europe.

And so we had to figure out how to launch that in the US how to get drivers on how to create this supply. And it was like, it doesn't matter how nice the user experiences, how great the marketing is how much demand you can generate if when someone opens that app, there are no cars available. So, you know, a lot of people talk about marketplaces is chicken and egg. I actually just think they're two sided. And you start with the supply. And at the end of the day, you can kind of optimize for the demand side or choose who you're going to prioritize in terms of if there's a conflict, we're going to pick this side or the other. And yes, you won't be successful with one side or the other. But I just experienced and like lived firsthand the

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pain of having built this great operations back in that fed into this great UI. And then you open that app and you can't get a ride because there are enough cars available. So I think that kind of solidified my feeling that with marketplaces, it's you can't lose sight of the solving real pain points and needs for the supply side in order to make sure the entire business can operate. I've done a bunch of research into marketplaces and I found basically the same thing that supplies almost always where you need to focus almost all your time, especially at the beginning. The way I think about it is that's like, if you have a store, that's the stuff on your shelves. And you're not going to have a business if you don't have anything on the shelves. Exactly. There's a few rare cases, I forget exactly which they were where demand was actually the bigger challenge and supplies really easy. You know, it was a rover. Rover had no problem. It turns out with supply because who wouldn't want to make 50 bucks watching a dog for a few hours? Like it was a really easy sell. And a lot of people could do it and wanted to do it. So they actually found supply was not an issue. But but in most cases, exactly how you said most times, supplies what people are looking for. Totally. I find that the the counter example I hear a lot is eBay, right? How they were so good at aggregating demand, they were basically able to force suppliers to the terms of daylight. But I can't imagine, I mean, it'd be interesting to talk to some folks who are at eBay in their early days that the whole thing didn't start up without them going out and figuring out who are the key suppliers we need to get on this thing so that we can begin aggregating demand. Yeah, you gotta have some good stuff on eBay. I wonder if Beanie Babies or whatever they started with. Yeah, exactly. This episode is brought to you by Vanta, helping you streamline your security compliance to accelerate your growth. Thousands of fast growing companies like Gusto, Com, Quora and Modern Treasury trust Vanta to help build, scale, manage and demonstrate their security compliance programs and get ready for audits in weeks, not months. By offering the most in demand security and privacy frameworks such as SOC2, ISO 27001, GDPR, HIPAA and many more, Vanta helps companies obtain the reports they need to accelerate growth, build efficient compliance processes, mitigate risks to their businesses and build trust with external stakeholders. Over 5,000 fast growing companies use Vanta to automate up to 90% of the work involved with SOC2 and these other frameworks. For a limited time, Lenny's podcast listeners get \$1,000 off Vanta. Go to [Vanta.com slash Lenny](https://vanta.com/slash/Lenny). That's V-A-N-T-A dot com slash Lenny to learn more and to claim your discounts. Get started today. You mentioned Apple and when I spent a little time there, so you said you were the second PM on iTunes back in the day and I'm curious what you learned from the experience you had working at Apple. I think I read somewhere you worked maybe closely with Steve Jobs and Johnny Eib. I don't know if that's true, but I'm curious just, no, okay. But you do have a Steve Jobs story. Yes. Okay. Yes, so I was very early on in the iTunes days. I started interning there when I came out of grad school and my internship was actually in label relation and then I started a full-time job doing product marketing and that Apple at the time, I think even to this day, they didn't have a product manager title. They had product marketing managers. And so one of my colleagues who remains good friends to this day, Steve was the first,

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also named Steve, not Steve Jobs, that was the first PMM working on iTunes and he primarily was doing all the client stuff. He launched the store and everything, but I think I was the second person in the iTunes group with that title. So that was really cool. And then as far as the Steve Jobs story, I would think I mentioned to you, people like hearing this story, nothing happened. I just went up to him and said, hi, I'll tell the story. But I think the context of why people find it interesting is because of other stories about Steve. So let me give a little context. Though Steve Jobs' lore was that if you were in an elevator with him, you better be prepared to talk about what you do at the company because he had a habit of getting in the elevator and looking at you and saying, what do you do? What do you do here? And there were also rumors that people had not given him a good answer. That ended up being their last day at Apple. So there was someone who I didn't know personally, but worked in my department before I got there who got in an elevator and looked up and Steve was approaching him. And so he went to press the button to open the door and accidentally press the one to close the door. And then he was like, Dylan, you can't see me if you're listening on podcasts, but frantically pressing the button, trying to open the door, but accidentally pressing the close door button and the elevator going to its destination. And apparently he got off and just bolted straight up, ran down the hallway. I'll never remember my face. Yeah, exactly. So that's the context. So in 2005, it's my first day of my internship at Apple. And I had this situation where I attended graduation because I only had one semester left to go back to. So I just decided to attend the graduation that happened basically the week before. And if for those of you who are the Jobs fans, this is when he gave his really inspiring and famous Stanford commencement speech and an awesome, awesome thing to listen to. You were at that speech? I was there. Yeah. Whoa. People love that speech. It's a good one. What did you feel being there listening to it in the moment? Totally inspired. I mean, Apple was not quite what it is today in terms of brand and influence and just like it's at the peak, you know, like it's really come a long way. It was still when I met the recruiter at a conference, I was like, Apple, what do they do again? Like my roommate had a Mac, but what's I send? Oh, yeah, I think I've heard of that. I think that, you know, the dancing iPod silhouette ads, which really sent Apple over the top, those hadn't even really dropped yet. But it was starting, right? It was starting to percolate and bubble and you heard more and more about it and just the association with music was making Apple more cool. But that speech is like talk about a commencement speech like that is his top notch and and seems great at those. He's phenomenal storyteller. So graduation is what Saturday, I go home Sunday, the Monday I started my internship. And here we are at Cafe Max with my new coworkers. And Steve is sitting literally at the table next to me. And so I was like, Oh my gosh, there's Steve. I would love to say hi and introduce myself. And everyone at the table, now mind you, I hadn't heard this story about the elevator, but in the full of that yet, because it was my first day. But they're all looking at each other, they're like, I mean, yeah, they'll say hi to him if you want, but like, you're an intern,

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say, hopefully doesn't fire you on your day first day. But I've always been my family and in my life have always had this encouragement to say hi to people when you see them and let them know that you appreciate what they do and just like, thank them, because it doesn't happen often. A lot of times people go and they ask for a picture or an autograph. But this idea of just like introducing yourself saying hello and thanking someone for something that they've done that impacted you, just something that's kind of been a way that my parents have encouraged me to behave in the world and something that I saw them do and saw them model. Probably again, coming from my dad being a musician and being fans of other musicians like a thing in music, the artist culture, they'll like talk to one another about how something you created influenced you or whatnot.

So I went up to him and I just, I got up from my lunch table and walked over and I said, hi, my name's Camille. I'm interning here this summer. It's my first day. I was at graduation at Stanford on Saturday and your speech was amazing. I was really inspired. I'm so excited to be here

and so excited to work on the company. And I just wanted to say thank you for spending your time doing that speech for us on Saturday. And he was like, who are you? You're an intern? Well, what are you doing here? It was a little like, we had a little bit of an exchange. I'd be like, terrified. Like, yeah, I graduated, but I'm interning and I have another semester left. And he was like, okay, well, you know, welcome to Apple and good luck. And I hope you have a really great experience this summer. And that was it. I didn't get fired. And I said hello to Steve. And after that, I felt like I knew him. Like every time I'd see him around campus, I'd wave high. And I think he had no idea who I was, but he would look at me kind of confused and then wave back. Hello. She's so friendly. Who's this person? Yeah. Do you still remember how you would have described what you do? I have a feeling it's like seared in your head, but if not, then never mind. Oh, my statement. If he had asked me. Yeah, exactly. Well, yeah, I was lucky because one of the things that I did, he would actually know exactly what it is, which is I would manage press rooms whenever there was an iTunes launch. So this is like very much grunt work. But like when there would be a press event for one of the like the new iTunes 6 launch or whatever, they would have interviews with Walter Isaacs in there. I don't know if Kara Swisher was working back then, but like whoever the journalist and Steve would have a room set up with an iMac computer with an iTunes library full of track. There would be whatever the new iPod was, think to that computer and all of the track. And after every interview, everything would have to be reset. Also, the library was crafted. So he would give feedback for months on the content of the library because he would do demos. And so he wanted to know, you know, make sure all my favorite tracks are in there, my favorite Beatles records, my favorite Bob Dylan records. And who's this artist? Let me check them out. Okay, they don't cross the bar. Oh, what's this song? I love this song. Oh, add this. So he was like very involved in the entire presentation. And someone had to go do all that. So who better than the, you know, fresh out of Masters of Engineering and Stanford graduate students to go do all the grunt work of making library. But like those are the kinds of details that he paid attention to. And so I would have just told him that I did product marketing. And one of my main responsibilities was fixing the press room for him. Oh, okay. You mentioned that your title is product marketing manager. And there was a recent kind of hubbub on Twitter where Brian Chesky at Airbnb shared

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that

they shifted the role of product manager to essentially the Apple model. And I'm curious what your perspective is on that approach to product, the Apple kind of way versus a traditional product manager. They have done this very intentionally from what I've seen. I know they hired Hiroki actually from Apple. Yeah, a lot of Apple people. Yeah. And actually, one of the new leaders they've hired, I don't know if you know Judson Copeland, dear friend of mine, we interned that same summer at Apple. And he worked there for like 15 years before heading over to Airbnb. But yeah, I mean, the Apple Constr, it's much more of like design and engineering kind of led organizations, crafts people, I would say, more so than strategy people. So that was one of the stark differences I saw in my transition from Apple to Google.

There are a lot more like people from Coca-Cola and McKinsey and Bain at Google. I don't think any of those people have been existed at Apple. And it was very much like, let's 3D chess our way into what our next move is going to be. Whereas at Apple, it was let tinker and let craft and let's build and let's see what feels right. It's different approaches. As a result, the approach to product management was quite different. So I think it makes sense. Brian Chesky's background is a designer,

so probably resonates a bit more within the Apple way. And then in terms of what it means for product managers on an individual level. So again, there weren't product managers. The closest thing

would have been TPNs, technical program managers who kind of helped manage the sprints and managed

to schedule and listing out what features would happen. I spent a lot of my time with the incredibly talented design team and would, if I had ideas of product features or we would think months ahead of time, what's the anchor story or what are the three key messages for the launch of iTunes 10 or whatever. And we might have ideas for new features that would go in that. But because we had that moment in time, we knew well ahead we were planning for and you were working on the messaging and

working on the consumer positioning, again, well in advance of anything actually being live or built, like that kind of was what framed what features you wanted to build and what problems you would put on the table to be solved, as opposed to a clear cut metric you're trying to drive forward, which is how product management has kind of evolved in another capacity.

Yeah, and that's how it works at most companies. I want to come back actually to the creator economy stuff. I feel like you've worked in the creator economy longer than most anyone.

And so I wanted to use our time to spend a little more time there.

What about on the platform side? If someone was thinking about starting a company,

to cater to creators, to build a new platform maybe for creators to make a living,

do you have any advice for them? Where do you think maybe there's opportunity? Where do you think it's like, no, probably you don't want to spend time here.

I think with any company, solving a real problem is the most important thing.

So creators have lots of challenges and things that can be solved. Some painful things are more acutely felt than others. I think at the core, every creator needs two things. They need to grow an audience and they need to get paid so that they can make a living. And in some ways,

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I do think that growing an audience is more important because with that audience, it opens up opportunities in ways that you can monetize. But there are all kinds of other things like we were talking about financing, health insurance, the list goes on, things we face as human beings trying to be freelancers in the world often apply equally to people who are creative for a living. And then there are unique things about the creator space, like the spurts of energy, the spurts of creative flow that maybe don't apply in a salary job or an hourly job.

So there are lots of problems out there still to be solved for creators. I don't think that this space is nearly solved, done, stick a fork in it. So my advice would be to look at the problems that exist and pick a real one and go for it.

Why is advice? Have you seen this podcaster, Bobby? I forget her last name. She rocketed up to the fourth biggest podcast in America with a few episodes of her podcast. She interviews like Drake and a few comedians. Have you seen this person?

I feel like I should, but as we said at the beginning, I'm such a music head. I don't need podcasts. The reason I thought of her is I was watching a clip of her on an interview show and she hasn't made any money from this, even though she's got like the hottest podcast in America right now. And we're going to link to her in the show notes, but she's hilarious or something about her that just is really fun to watch. But okay, no podcast for you right now. We'll get you on a podcast. You're on the podcast. I'm on a podcast. There we go. You mentioned your parents and as reading your Wikipedia page and the way your parents are described on there is radical Buddhist artist technologists. I'm curious what that means maybe and then also just like, is there a memory or moment of growing up that highlights that aspect of them?

What's funny about this is I had no idea how to Wikipedia page until he's done that. I don't know what it's thinking from. Exactly. I'm on Wikipedia, so that was funny.

So let's see. I grew up in San Francisco in the 80s and 90s. My parents started practicing Buddhism on the East Coast in the 70s and my dad was, I mentioned he's a drummer and a musician and he also had a studio. We had this closet under the stairs that he turned into a production studio and he was an artist. He worked for the city. My mom worked for the city. We didn't have a ton of money growing up and so a lot of the computer equipment came from the street. He would find somebody put a PC out. He was building PCs before the gamers were doing it and I remember he

would come home with boxes and boards and chips and would literally go get a book from the library or the store and would figure out how to assemble these computers. Keyboards that were broken, he would just fix them. Probably should have been a mechanical engineer, super talented at Pista, but basically he had this entire production studio with drum machines and all the equipment and I was his helper. I would help him solder stuff together and tinker and actually put these computers together. That's probably, I don't know where the quote came from. I have to go click the link of what the reference is from, but that's some of the background there.

The other thing that happened back in San Francisco in the 80s and 90s, we used to host Buddhist meetings in our house. Back then, there was a lot of what was called street propagation. The Hare Krishna used to be up and down H Street right around the corner for me. The nation of Islam, which my brother joined for a period of time, would be selling final calls and being five brothers on the corner. The final call is the newspaper at the time for the nation of

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Islam. And so it was just a different era, completely different from today. And us being practiced in nature and Buddhism, we had pamphlet that said, Nam-yohorin-ge-kyo on them. And I would

stand on the steps of our house and we had a gate. So I would stand behind the gate and I was probably

seven or eight years old. Just ask people walking by, Hey, if you heard Nam-yohorin-ge-kyo, here's a pamphlet. Learn a little more. We're having a meeting at our house. I'd laugh with my mom now. She's like, I can't believe we're doing that. It seems totally crazy now. But at the time, it was just again, like coming off of the seventies, it was a very different era.

If you've ever seen what's love got to do with it, Tina Turner is probably who recently passed away, probably one of the more famous, more well-known practitioners of nature and Buddhism. And she actually started practicing in the same kind of era, seventies and eighties, seventies probably.

So that's what that means. And those are a couple of memories that illustrate that moment.

But you can kind of see music, technology, helping creators get paid. It's certainly influenced everything about how I am today. That was a perfect description of your parents based on those stories. And it feels inevitable that you would have ended up doing what you're doing now, product, technology, music, artists, creators. So that's amazing. I'm going to ask one more question before we get to our very exciting lightning round. And the question is just around frameworks. Is there just like a favorite framework or process or system or approach to building product or teams that you come back to and or like to share often that you think might be useful to listeners? I have this great manager in my experience at Halo who turned me on to Marty Kagan, who I've been befriended and learned a ton from. And I just love the way that yeah, he's awesome. Actually, I should ask him about early days at eBay,

because I think he was he was there, probably one of the people who got off the ground. But you know, one of the things that I learned and that we we really emphasized during that time is this idea of having dual track agile going where you're doing discovery and delivery simultaneously and doing it in a way that's not waterfall. It's not like, all right, the designers are going to go over here and tinker for months. And then once we've figured it out, we'll lob it over the wall to the coders and like cross our fingers and hope everything works, but rather having like this continuous cycle of essentially de risking your assumption and getting to a point where you're able to do that with speed so that you can chart your way to new paths into innovation by constantly figuring out where the errors are in your in your thinking or where, you know, things that you didn't expect to happen, we're going to happen. So I think everyone knows like a an impact effort or risk reward two by two, and can map out different opportunities and things you might do on that two by two. But one of my favorite takeaways from that is that from this way of working around this like dual track agile, de risking your riskiest ideas first kind of approach, there's a concept of taking the things in the top right, the biggest swings. And actually prioritizing those first in terms of product discovery, and figuring out what can you do to start de risking, because if you constantly put those off in favor of the lower risk or more predictable, smaller swings, how are you ever going to truly innovate and get to the next level? It's a less safe choice. So it's someone that as a leader, you kind of are in the hot seat, and you can take accountability. So some of these things don't pan out on you and

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not on your team and kind of give your team permission to fail and try things and de risk those risky assumptions and get them to a point where they become low risk and they become predictable

and you can just put them in the delivery column and execute them. It reminds me of this piece of advice that people call eat the frog, which is the first thing in the morning, eat the frog, which essentially is do the hardest thing first, and then the rest of the day becomes easier.

I don't know why you have to eat a frog, I don't know where that comes from.

I don't know either. I like draw the owl. That's one of my favorite values that the Twilio was.

Say more. I would say more. What is that? They have a, you know, companies have their values.

One of them is draw the owl. It's really draw the effing owl. And the meme is how do you draw an owl

in it? You draw some circles and then you draw the effing owl.

So it's like, just do it. At some point you got to just figure it out and figure out how to do it.

So use my language, but kind of funny here when you say what the value actually is, which is sometimes you got to just go for it. You're not going to know the exact path to get there.

And maybe you won't have de risk everything, but you start with some circles and then you get it done.

I love it. Cursing is very loud on this podcast. So I'm glad you went there.

And with that, we've reached our very exciting lightning round. Are you ready?

I hope so. I didn't prepare it because I thought I figured it out on the spot.

Great. Perfect. What are two or three books that you recommended most to other people?

Three Body Problem, A Wrinkle in Time, and Octavia Butler's Kindred.

Three Body Problems come up a number of times recently and there's a show coming out actually based on the books. I'm so excited. I've been watching Foundation, which is also another series I've been excited to see, but it's like, I don't know what's going on.

There's just so, so complicated. How is it? I've been waiting, so I'm a huge buy-head.

I watched Battlestar Galactica classic, The Expan. And so I've been waiting to see what happens with Foundation because I just don't have that kind of commitment in me these days.

Yeah. I don't know what to think of it. It's beautiful and there's a lot of interesting pieces, but it just kind of goes out. I think they're making a lot of stuff up.

I don't know if you've read Silo. Have you read Silo?

No, but I saw the preview for the show, another one on season two.

That's like a good one to read because in the show, they're just making up stories.

I don't know what they're doing. There's like, like 90% of it is totally invent for the show.

And then there's like a little bit that's connected to the story. So I don't know what's going on. Cool. I didn't really know it was a book. I'll read it.

Oh, yeah. It's really good. There's three of them, but the first one's the only good one.

Anyway, moving on, speaking of this topic, actually, any favorite recent movies or TV shows that you really enjoyed? I've been watching hijack over the last week with the Dritzbo. So that's been fun.

Got a couple episodes left there. And then movies, I mean, I'm a huge Kristen Olin van.

So I haven't seen Oppenheimer yet, but I can't wait to see it. Most of his movies I'm like confused by, but the visuals are just so stunning. You let it go. Yeah. I'm excited to see it too. I've not

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seen it either. I have a new child and it's harder to see movies. Oh, another good one, Shadow and Bone on Netflix. Shadow and Bone. Way better than the book, I have to say. Well, I read one series, The Six of Crows. This is my like young adult sci-fi fantasy streak, thinking coming to the fore. But the show is incredible. It is so good. So if you're into this kind of vibe, go for it. Okay, I'm going to check that out. What is a favorite interview question that you like to ask people when you're interviewing them? I like to ask people to tell me about something they're really proud of, that they accomplished, and take me through the process

and talk to me about why they're proud of it. I find you can learn so much about a person's motivations, about their work ethic, about what they care about, like what good looks like to them. And I think those are all really important things to understand about a person if you're going to work closely with them. What is a favorite life motto that you just really like to share or often come back to either in work or in life? Yeah, so there is one which is actually a Japanese proverb. I took Japanese in high school and college. But this phrase is a frog in a well cannot know the ocean. And so the idea is to push yourself to expand your limits and your horizons and get out of the well so that you can experience the ocean. I love that. I got a better one. Sorry. Okay, great. Another one. Sure. Tell me. I learned this one from someone at Patreon because someone

was posting this around the streets of San Francisco. It's become more known recently. Apparently, it's a Chinese proverb. I don't know if it's true or not. But it is that the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is now. So this idea that don't delay, maybe you miss the prime opportunity, but waiting any longer, is it certainly going, it certainly isn't going to help. I heard that one. Actually, I was at the park in San Francisco, and there was this piano thing I think it was called. It's like a botanical garden, and people play piano all throughout once a year. And there's a guy that was just playing incredibly well. And I left, and he left around the same time, and I was standing next to him. I'm like, man, I wish I studied piano when I was younger. And he's like, the best time to have studied piano was 10 years ago. The second best time is to start now. And I couldn't get off the hook there. And he's like, you're right. And he's still not going to do it, I guess. Final question. Who's a favorite artist right now? Who are you? Who are you liking?

So I've been for probably like a good three years now, really into Afrobeat. And right now, there's this artist called Remma, R-E-M-A, who I first heard a couple years ago. He's got this track called Dumebi. But he has sung out right now that is my opinion, sung in the summer called Calm Down. I think Ariana Grande is it, came out and did a verse on it. But I just been listening to Remma radio, Calm Down radio on Spotify and tons of Afro beats artists. So that's the vibe I'm on right now. I love it. I actually, once someone suggested some music at the end of a podcast, and I was just like, hey, we're going to end the podcast with that tune. And it turned out, we did that, and then YouTube shut us down because it's copyrighted. And so I'm not going to offer that we're going to do that again. So we're just ending with regular music, but we will link. I know. So tough. Come on. It's just like a few seconds. Give us a break. You should have 30 seconds fair play, right? Don't ask me, I'm not a lawyer. We'll send you the bill. Yeah. Camille, this was amazing. I think we're living the creator

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economy here. I really appreciate you making time for this. Two final questions. Working folks, finding a line if they want to reach out and maybe ask any additional questions. And then how can listeners be useful to you? I used to be real big on Twitter, but that ship has sailed. Still on there. You can find me on X now. Yes, on X. Chameleons is my handle. C-A-M-I-L-L-I-O-N-Z. Also on threads

these days, trying that out, seeing how that sticks. So probably LinkedIn. You can find me on LinkedIn. I don't think anyone ever promotes that. They do. Most people actually do. Okay.

And how can listeners be useful to me? Hey, go support your favorite creator.

Find out. Go to the show. Find out if they have a Patreon. I would love to see more and more people feeling like they are patrons of the arts. Amazing. Maybe buy some merch. Buy some merch. Yeah.

Chamele, thank you again for being here. Thanks, Lenny. Bye, everyone.

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