

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

We have this mental metaphor that we talk a lot about, getting to the next hill.

The actual wording is, take bigger, bolder bets.

I think teams can often get lost crawling up that hill, not realizing that there's a huge, incredibly beautiful range behind it, where you've over time freighted kind of new teams from scratch that YouTube had in a new area before the area's mature.

So we did that with a lot of these kind of native audio-visual products like huddles and clips early in the pandemic because our customers were demanding it from us.

And I think in the AI space, we're trying to hear from customers, what do you wish Slack could do if it had these new superpowers?

And let's incubate a couple of teams.

The prototype gives them space to run and pilot and then get something to launch that's amazing blows people away.

That's kind of the formula that we've seen.

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 Noah Weiss.

Noah is Chief Product Officer at Slack, where he spent the last seven years.

Prior to that, he was Head of Product at Foursquare, which is near and dear to my heart, as you'll hear at the top of this episode.

Prior to that, he was a PM at Google and at Faw Creek Software.

And in our conversation, we cover the 10 traits of great product managers, how to work effectively with strongly opinionated and product-minded founders, what Noah has learned about working effectively with AI in your product over his last 15 years at Google at Foursquare and now at Slack.

We talk about a process called Complaint Storms that helps Slack build better product, plus what he's learned from Slack's self-service business plateauing back in 2019 and how they turned it around

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

and what they took away from that experience.
Also, how he thinks about competition
with Microsoft Teams and with Discord.
Also a bunch of new data advice, which I found very helpful.
This was such a great in-depth conversation
about all things product and leadership,
and I'm really excited for you to hear this episode.
With that, I bring you Noah Weiss
after a short word from our sponsors.
This episode is brought to you by Sidebar.
Are you looking to land your next big career move
or start your own thing?
One of the most effective ways to create a big leap
in your career and something that worked really well
for me a few years ago is to create
a personal board of directors, a trusted peer group
where you can discuss challenges you're having,
get career advice, and just kind of gut check
how you're thinking about your work,
your career, and your life.
This has been a big trajectory changer for me,
but it's hard to build this trusted group.
With Sidebar, senior leaders are matched
with highly vetted, private, supportive peer groups
to lean on for unbiased opinions,
diverse perspectives, and raw feedback.
Everyone has their own zone of genius,
so together we're better prepared
to navigate professional pitfalls,
leading to more responsibility,
faster promotions, and bigger impact.
Guided by world-class programming and facilitation,
Sidebar enables you to get focused, tactical feedback
at every step of your journey.
If you're a listener of this podcast,
you're likely already driven and committed to growth.
A Sidebar personal board of directors
is the missing piece to catalyze that journey.
Why spend a decade finding your people
when you could meet them at Sidebar today?
Jump the growing weight list of thousands of leaders
from top tech companies by visiting sidebar.com

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

slash Lenny to learn more.
That's sidebar.com slash Lenny.
This episode is brought to you by Superhuman.
How much time do you spend in email each day?
How about your team?
You may not realize this,
but your email tools are wasting your time.
Superhuman is blazingly fast email
for high-performing teams.
Built to work with Gmail and Outlook,
teams who use Superhuman spend half the time
in their inboxes, respond to twice the number of emails,
and save over four hours a week.
That's over a month of save time per year.
With Superhuman, you can split your inbox into streams
or VIPs, team members, and emails
from your favorite products.
To reduce context switching,
and make sure you never miss an important email,
you can set reminders if you don't hear back
so that you can follow up and never drop the ball
on an email thread.
You can also work faster than ever before
with powerful AI features, like writing, editing,
summarizing, and even translating.
Join the ranks of the most productive teams
and unleash the power of Superhuman.
Try one month free at superhuman.com slash Lenny.
That's superhuman.com slash Lenny.
Noa, welcome to the podcast.
Thank you for having me.
I'm excited to finally get to join
and be a long-time listener.
I feel the same way in reverse.
I've been really excited that you're finally on the podcast.
And I don't know if you know this,
but this is actually going to be the last podcast
I'm recording before I go on Pat Leave.
This is going to play while I'm on break.
And coincidentally, you're actually just returning
from Pat Leave is what I just learned.
Yeah.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

And so let me ask you a question.

What advice do you have for someone about to enter the beginning of baby life from someone that is exiting that and going back to work?

So first off, I mean, obviously, congratulations.

You're about to go on a roller coaster of emotion, sleep, and everything else.

You know, I literally went back to work two days ago.

So I think my, maybe advice about being a new parent is better than my advice about being a PM right now.

Here are the three, my wife and I want to come up with like three maxims that we want to be using throughout the first two months to keep ourselves grounded.

So first one, I would say a little bit better every day, no matter how many books you read, you know, and how much Emily Oster you consume, there's nothing like actually doing it.

And it's a physical thing being a new parent.

And so getting a little bit better every day, giving yourself permission to be like that, didn't go great and that's okay.

That's number one.

Number two, don't over extrapolate from the early days.

Like they are, you know, the fourth trimester is a real thing.

Babies come out, they are not fully baked.

They can't even support their own heads.

So if you try to extrapolate, I think the next 18 years are gonna be like the first 18 days, it's gonna be sobering.

So like keep that perspective.

It gets, they develop so much every week with part of the fun.

And then the third thing, which I got advice from this from a good friend is like, you got to fully get into it as a parent.

If there's nothing that replaces, actually you got to change the diapers.

You got to do the feeds when they're up, even though they can't talk.

You got to talk to them.

You got to like listen to what they're saying and just be fully kind of present during the moment.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

I kind of realized for myself
and then like basically at full digital detox,
you saw how long it took for me to reply to your emails.
I was like, put all the devices away,
just kind of be fully with our daughter,
with them and our family.
And I thought it was so much more rewarding.
I felt really connected with her now
after just a couple of months.
So it's a crazy time.
You're gonna love it.
It's gonna drive you mad at that times as well.
And that's all okay.
All right, we're gonna be pivoting this podcast
into a parenting podcast.
This was awesome advice.
I wrote everything you just said
on this little post it as you're talking.
So I'm gonna put that up in my inner nursery
and see how it all goes.
One thing that's tough about my career path
in this weird life is I don't get a nice paid Pat leave
from a big company.
So I've actually been working on stacking guest posts
and podcast ahead of my leave
so that I can actually,
as exactly as you said, just get fully into it.
I have six awesome, yeah.
So I have awesome guest posts coming,
all these podcasters backlogs.
So I'm hoping it all works out.
That's just not what I'm gonna do, yeah.
On a totally different topic,
you're ahead of product at Foursquare.
And I don't know if you know this.
I actually built a startup on Foursquare's API.
This company called Local Mind.
And for folks that don't know about it,
the way it worked is basically let you talk to someone,
checked in on Foursquare anywhere in the world
if you're thinking about going there.
So you could be like,

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

hey, this is bar fun right now.
What's happening there
where we actually show up.
And we ended up selling the company to Airbnb.
It ended up not being a big problem for enough people.
And that's how I ended up at Airbnb.
But it was like quite magical and API was amazing.
And so I guess just to say,
I just wanna say thank you for building an awesome product
and awesome API.
Thank you for being a developer
on top of the ecosystem.
I mean, it's interesting with Foursquare.
I will talk about that some sure later.
I feel like I have more lessons learned
and more scar tissue from the crazy up and down
of what was 2010 to 2015 roughly.
And I think there's something actually where you learn more
from the things that don't fully work out
or don't quite achieve what you want it to achieve.
And you actually have a feedback loop
where you get a lot of negative signal
about like, if that didn't work, that didn't work.
What can I actually learn and take away from that?
So it's so great.
I still love using Foursquare.
I think we got caught in the Death Star Instagram's ascent
back in 2012 to 2013.
But I hope a product like that exists forever in the future.
And I'm glad you got to build a company
and land an Airbnb through it to create a story.
Looking back at Foursquare,
do you think there was a path
to building a massive consumer app type business
or is that just never gonna work out?
And I know they went in direction of B2B data
sort of business.
So I guess was there a path
or was it just like, no, that was never gonna work out?
It's true.
I'm not gonna do like 30 minute post-mortem
because that would probably bore everyone.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

But I thought about this.
We've all thought about this a lot
kind of on the early team there.
I think the biggest, probably the lesson learned, frankly,
is that we were really close with Instagram folks early on.
They were like big developers on our platform.
They used the Foursquare API
before they were bought by Facebook.
And I think in hindsight,
we were a little bit mistaken to believe
that the idea that the atomic unit
would be a person talking about a place that they're at
and you have to have a physical place to type to
versus a person sharing a moment
or an experience that they're having in the world.
And sometimes I might have a place connected to it.
I think that one change in framing
on what you would say like the customer actually wanted to do,
that probably was the thing that took us away
on the social side.
I think on the more kind of local discovery side,
it's actually what people want to be using the product
much more for over time,
getting kind of personalized recommendations
and getting tips when you go to a place
and all the push notifications.
But I think there, again,
it was kind of hard to stay ahead,
I think specifically of Google
because they had billion plus Google Maps users
distributed on Android and iOS.
And even though they might only take a couple of years,
eventually they would wind up replicating
a lot of the functionality.
And then I think it was hard to regain that momentum.
So, so much of this stuff is luck and timing
and just coincidences of history.
I think there was a path.
I think in the end we kind of lost our social sales
and then Google was able to catch up on the utility side.
And now the company's built a really valuable
kind of B2B API company, which offers a story.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

I mean, Slack is in some ways a pivot, obviously from a consumer company to a B2B company. But yeah, that's my mini postmortem. What could have been with Foursquare? It's interesting how many consumer companies pivot to B2B because turns out that's where the money ends up being. Yeah, and I think the feedbacks that you get from our people willing to pay for the product that you're building is so much faster than can I build a large-scale consumer business in one day hope to have enough reach to then slap ads onto it. That's a much more of a kind of try to hit a home run and hope it works out. But you don't really know if you're doing it a long way. So yeah, I think B2B is easier to have an incremental successfully business than pure consumer. Okay, so speaking of Foursquare, Dennis Crowley was the CEO and founder, a very strong product-minded founder. I know you've worked with a number of very strong product-minded founders, including Stuart Butterfield, Dennis, obviously we just talked about, maybe others. I'm curious what you've learned as a product leader, working with very opinionated founders. And I think this is interesting, not just as like a product leader, working with very product-minded CEOs, but also as a first PM at a startup. You're often put in this tough spot of just like, the founder's just telling you what to do and you have to go build it versus having a lot of say and agency. So I'm curious what you've learned about working and being successful in that position, which is often really hard. So coming, say to folks in general, if you're a joining company and the CEO does the role that is your functional area of expertise, it's probably the area where you'll learn the most because they're hopefully world-class at it,

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

but also when will you leave the most fresher than at times because you're gonna feel like you have less agency. And so you just know that going through it. If you go to a company that's run by a former marketer and you're in marketing, they'll probably wanna have a lot of say and influence over that and I think just going into knowing that is good. Looking back, I'd say probably too many things stand out of what's really worked with both Dennis and Stuart, not just for me, but I think for the teams that kind of work with them as well. The first is, I think as much as possible, I think we will talk about this a little bit later as well, is kind of getting to the point where you have alignment on the principles for what it means to build a great product of that company. Not just about if the intuition and tasting gut, but how do you distill that to principles that become the language of the company so that everybody else can start thinking through a similar frame or a similar lens when you're designing a product. Because otherwise it can feel a little bit kind of Goldilocks every time a team builds at something and they take it to the CEO. The CEO is like, no, not quite right. Again, no, not exactly that. And then you don't have the language to actually have a more constructive review. And then doing that at a little strategy as well. I think the product founder CEO is always gonna be the holder of the vision for the company. I'm sure at Airbnb, I imagine and Brian was very much like that as well. Absolutely. And I think it's actually great to say, okay, the overall vision for the company is if the responsibility of any one team have everyone buying to that vision, but then to have space for teams to be able to actually do creative work, to do explorations because you know

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

that it's aligned with that high-level vision.
So if you can get that alignment
and you can get those principles
as the common language of what great software looks like,
I think you can have a really good working relationship.
And then the other bit I would just say is
I think when to involve the founder CEO
in a project is really important.
And the short version I think that works the best is
almost like a U-curve where the x-axis is time
and the y-axis is level of involvement.
I think you wanna get the founders,
you know, really evolved early on,
especially this is a big new project
to make sure that they're strategic buy-in,
you agree on the principles for how you're gonna approach it,
you agree on the goals and the anti-goals,
getting that so then the team can run and explore.
And then I think at the very end,
you want them to really be bought in that,
did you build something that's up to the quality
of a company?
Is this something that's meant to like customers,
like literally taste the soup?
What's missing in it?
And I think at most companies that have a maniacally
kind of customer-focused founder,
if you don't do that last step,
it's gonna be much more painful after you launch
because they weren't part of that co-creation of the team.
And so I think that kind of formula
winds up working pretty well
if you throw in that kind of line
and on principles and vision.
That usually sounds nice in theory,
but I often imagine you get to that final step
and the founder is like, what the hell is this?
This is not at all what I was hoping it'd be.
There's an example of that that comes to mind
where you maybe went through that
and then it's just like, no,
that did not work out the way we expected

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

and if not, no problem.
Yeah, I mean, I think that does happen.
The issue is maybe the end of the year
is kind of like the level of engagement
and often that last level of engagement,
that's where there's actually the most
rapid refining that you're doing.
And I think what's important there
is that hopefully you're refining in code
and you're not still at like static design mocks
because using the software is so different
than looking at what the software will visually appear.
And so I think what we would want to do
with Stuart at Slack, for example,
is like we would get the entire development team
engineers, design, product, user research
and Stuart together in a room
and we kind of almost do like a bug bash together.
And the idea was like, we're doing all together,
we're trying to make the best product possible,
making great softwares really messy
and we're all trying to kind of clean up the mess together.
You know, sometimes you might find things like,
okay, this entry point really isn't working
and maybe we have to move this entry point
with maybe a bigger change.
But I think often what you'd find is just
all those bits of polish and refinement
and doing the little delightful things
that might otherwise be missing
to kind of raise that craft bar
and doing a real collective way.
So it doesn't just feel like the team says, we want to ship.
And the founder says, no, it's not ready.
Ideally, as a group you're saying,
we want to get it to a bar that's going to delight our users.
And here's the gap from where we are today
to what we want to ship.
I think that mentality winds up being a lot more constructive,
but that's not always easy to do.
You talked about creating these principles,
which is an awesome approach of just like

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

creating guardrails for the team.

So they kind of think the way the founder
and the head of product think.

What are some examples of principles you have
and had early on maybe at Foursquare or Slack?

I mean, Slack, I think of where we kind of enshrined
them much more because we scaled the org
so much more than we needed principles.

And I think for us, they were really about unpacking
just the mission, which for Slack
is making people's working life simpler, more pleasant,
more productive.

That's the mission of the company.

The question is, how does software help do that?

That's what the principles are there to answer.

So for us, we've got five, four principles.

They've largely stayed the same.

Some of the language has changed over the last couple of years,
but at least for the last four or five years, we've had these.

So the first is Be A Great Host, which
is all about kind of that level of craft,
that relentlessly saving people's steps.

If you're, let's say, a host at Airbnb,
it's like putting clean towels on the bed.

So no one has to wonder, are these for me?

That type of foresight.

That's actually a value at Airbnb, exactly.

It's like, be a host at Airbnb is one of the four core values.

Right.

So maybe we borrowed that, or someone was inspired by it.

But Be A Great Host sounded aspirational.

I love that.

Yeah, yeah, it's a little bigger.

There's a famous user design book called

Don't Make Me Think, which we sold the title of for our next
principle.

And that's really just about, as people building the software,
you know how it works so well.

You care about all the nuances and intricacies.

And you really want your users to love it as much as you do.

But often, actually, that kind of odors
delusion that someone else will care as much about the software

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

that you built as you do prevents you from actually making something that's simple, comprehensible, understandable. And so one of the core tenets, because Slack is pretty complex under the surface, is how do we actually make people not have to think? How do we not reinvent the wheel if there's existing design patterns to use? How do we actually wind up designing for people who come from many different backgrounds, and we kind of cater to their needs in ways that don't make them have to customize it too much? There's a saying we also have, which is more clits can often be OK. You often have in optimization experimentation circles, every click, remove it. But I actually think in a lot of software, when it's not transactional, helping people understand what they're doing, giving them confidence, helping them have trust in the steps, we've seen that that can actually be a better experience. And that's another example of still being a trustful, help people chill out when they're using the software. That's the idea behind that one. Shifting a little bit. I know you guys have been working on a bunch of AI stuff at Slack. And I believe you've been working on AI related stuff for many years. I think at Google, you worked on a lot of AI related products. I feel like a lot of people are just getting into this and trying to figure out, how do we integrate AI and ML and LLMs into our product? And how do we not just waste our time chasing things? So I want to ask you, just in your time working with AI over the many years you've been doing and share a little bit about what you've been doing there, what are some things you've learned about how to be actually effective and build valuable products and not just kind of fall for the shiny object issue and trap? I mean, it's almost 15 years ago now that I was working at Google in search on what later became called the knowledge graph.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

So this idea of building kind of a canonical repository of information that people place these things in the world and relationships between them.

And back then, it was a lot of the same ideas but obviously the techniques have got a lot more mature.

So we used natural language processing to extract all this information from the web and try to build this kind of database of facts.

And the idea then was, could you take queries people have? Like, what are the tallest mountains in Europe? Or one of the most popular beaches in Southern California? And you know what I should give answers, not just 10 blue links.

I think the thing that's really changed, it's super exciting. In the last six, 12 months with LLMs and chat GPT and everything else is the idea that now you can take not just knowledge about the world but actually have natural language generation, where suddenly the computer can kind of talk back to you in a way that feels extremely human.

And then the creative applications of that are pretty massive and exciting.

So that's kind of, I guess, the lineage there.

I think from over the years back at Google, at Force Fair, we did a lot of personalization and recommendations at Slack.

We have search and ML that's kind of used out the product.

I think a couple things come out as kind of, I guess the principles that we've kind of used over the years, back then at Google, one of the big ones was that the promise of the UI has to match the quality of that underlying data. Which is to say, and I think there's actually one of the failings of the various LLMs right now is they all appear supremely confident even when they're completely hallucinating.

And I think that's going to be something that people are going to have to work on a lot, which is to figure out how to be not so faultless to acknowledge when you're not sure, because otherwise it undermines the trust people have in the system.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

Using a lot of transparency about where the data comes from so people can actually build credibility and the tool is really important.

And then I think making sure that as you're designing the products that you have, virtuous cycles that are naturally part of the project experience where you can get training data as a byproduct of people naturally using the software and then can make the model that you're building behind the scenes smarter, more accurate, more predictive. So you get a classic example that would be Netflix back in the day of their reading system.

They actually have a feedback loop from their customers that make the system better at predicting.

I think you are still trying to figure out what does that look like in this world of LLMs.

Something I hope that you're all building at Slack is a way to ask a bot questions based on all the conversations in the Slack.

I've been looking for that product for a while now.

I can safely say we have a lot of prototypes internally where we are playing this.

And I think it's actually as funny as it aside in one of the original Slack, I don't know, product vision decks back in 2014, there was our whole strategy, there's four parts.

And then part number four, which was a joke at the time was then do magic AI stuff on top.

And I think we didn't even know what the city of AI would be by the time hopefully companies had their collective knowledge in Slack.

And now we're finally at the period where magic AI stuff seems finally pretty amazing, pretty magical.

So yeah, we're doing a lot of prototyping internally and also trying to work with the ecosystem around as well because there's so many companies doing amazing work in the space so that if you work at a company where you have so much knowledge in your kind of Slack channel repository that you can certainly get amazing leaps in productivity to help you better do your job because that knowledge is in Slack

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

but it's sometimes hard to reach.

And I think these technologies can make that possible.

This reminds me of something Gustav, the CPO and CTO and co-president of Spotify share that they always have a deck and a vision of just like a play button within Spotify.

You just play and all magic happens and it's the best music and exactly what you wanna hear and just how that isn't actually possible and it's still not possible.

And so exactly to your point, you have to like really think about how does it act? Like how close is it to the reality?

And if it's not actually there, like he's like, he was saying how like, we'll pick two songs that are correct at a 10 just cause we don't really know exactly what you wanna hear right now.

And it's just, there's no point in trying to design that right now cause it's not actually gonna be delivering the promise.

Right, yeah, I think I love that.

Our version of that has always been that you open up Slack and suddenly instead of having to read through dozens of channels or final these mentions that magically Slack could just tell you in the order that you would care about, kind of a summary of all the interesting things that have happened and then like you dig in if you want to like your very own kind of like personal chief of staff who knew everything that you cared about and read everything that you could read.

I don't think that's gonna quite be possible anytime soon but I think like Spotify heading towards that North Star, you might have developing,

I hope a lot of really compelling project experiences along the way.

Yeah, man.

The more I think about it, the more amazing opportunities exist in Slack. It's like all texts amazing.

Okay, there's a lot of cool stuff coming I imagine.

Yes.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

I can't wait.

Yes.

On that topic, how do you think about

creating teams within Slack and AI?

Specifically, are you like recommending each team,

think about how AI can make their stuff better

or are you dedicating, here's the AI team

and they're gonna work on stuff

and you guys just keep shipping what you're shipping

and keep moving your metrics.

Me, the unfair answer is a hybrid of the two,

which is to say we have a kind of central machine learning

and search team with a lot of expertise in this field

to build infrastructure that everybody can use.

And what we've done is

because the spaces evolve them so quickly,

like literally every month,

like the capabilities are evolving,

the risks and trade-offs are evolving in time,

what we want to do is actually kind of spin up

a couple different teams that are focused on prototyping,

using that common infrastructure,

but in specific directions that are all a little bit different.

So we've got a common ML, let's say, search team,

and now we have a bunch of teams

that are kind of working in parallel

in different kind of customer problems

that we're trying to solve using that trade infrastructure.

So I think this isn't the steady state.

I think over time,

what it'll probably look like is that

all the existing product areas,

as soon as we kind of know more of the shape

of what the technology is capable of,

we'll just have AI capabilities as part of their roadmaps,

just like every product team is responsible

for their own mobile roadmap.

They don't have sources to someone else,

but I think today when things are moving so quickly,

you actually want a little bit of a more kind of ad hoc,

flexible approach to move quickly,

and that's what we're doing.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

That's kind of what I've been hearing from everyone
I've been asking this question.

The search ranking team
is always seems to be the center of all this,
and then it's a few experiments here and there.
So that's an interesting pattern I've been noticing.
Good to know.

I heard that you have a process internally
called Complaint Storms,
and I'd love to understand what that is.
It's something that started, I want to say,
back in the 2019, maybe early 2020,
and the idea a little bit was,
how do we help as a team look at the software
that we build with FreshEyes?
Because we've been starting at Slack for a long time,
and Slack, maybe more than almost any other company,
maybe like Figma is probably similar,
as I've seen through the podcast just earlier today,
where if you work on Figma, you work on Slack,
you also live in Slack and you live in Figma all day,
so you can become more of a power user
than anyone else on Earth.

And what we're realizing, especially for people
trying to build Slack for the next million customers,
that people have never used Slack before,
it was becoming increasingly hard
to have empathy for what their usage of Slack would look like.
How would they look at it in a more critical way?
How would they care less than we care?

And so what we started doing was these Complaint Storms,
and the idea was really simple,
which is we'd get a team together,
often Stuart or myself would also join,
and we'd actually start off with other products first,
like in adjacent spaces,
and we'd say, okay, as a group,
we're gonna go through the customer journey
from the moment you land on the website
through, let's say it's a workplace product,
getting your first account going,
getting the first couple of users on board,

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

getting to the point of value,
we're gonna do it on one screen,
someone's gonna project,
and then people are gonna fill in every issue,
everything that's confusing, every pinpoint, not bugs,
but ways in which if you didn't care about the software,
you don't work on it,
what would actually confuse you?
What would stop you in your tracks?
And from that, you went to generating
a bunch of amazing inspiration
by looking at someone else's product
in a really critical way
for things you might wanna try in your own product.
Once you get to that,
then it becomes easier to actually do with your own software,
but it is a little painful,
obviously same with watching usability tests
to look at your own baby in a way that is,
okay, I'm trying to find all the words,
I'm trying to find all the problems,
but that's why being a pretty great source
whenever a team I think either gets stuck
or feels like they reach a dead end in a direction,
is doing complaints stores about the product area
and we're using adjacent products
just to get inspiration.
And then I think it kind of unlocks a lot more
kind of creative views of the problem space.
It's similar to a process
that I learned Stripe has called friction logging,
but I love the nuance here of starting
with someone else's product
because I could totally see how that makes you feel better
looking at your product and real life,
like it's not like we suck,
it's okay, everyone's got so much opportunity.
Exactly, yeah, I've heard that from Stripe too.
I think it gets a similar place.
And I think it's the doing,
I think the byproducts is that you also get like calibration
on product taste, product quality,

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

and as a team, you kind of develop that together.
Again, similar to the principles,
it's like how do you get these things
that are kind of hard to actually feel collectively
on the same page about and how to calibrate?
It's another good way to do it.
I'm imagining some PMs might be hearing this and wonder,
okay, great, now the founders and the execs
have all these things that they want us to fix.
I have like goals to hit, I got a roadmap.
How do you think about prioritizing things
that come up in these sorts of sessions for the team
and how do they mix and match
versus all the other stuff they wanna do?
Or is it just like they don't actually have a huge roadmap
and this is a way to inform the roadmap?
No, I mean, I think more broadly,
I think the way that we think about it,
or I like us to think about our roadmap
for any feature team at Slack is that it's a portfolio
and it's meant to be a portfolio
that's diversified a couple of different ways, right?
I think one is you wanna diversify things
that are meant to be new capabilities
versus making the thing you've already built
a little bit better every day, similar to parenting.
Are there things that are meant to be risky
that you aren't sure are gonna work
but might have a lot of upside
versus things that are kind of known bets?
And then I think often you're kind of balancing,
are you doing things that are meant to have impact
that you're already very confident in
versus things that are meant to learn
about a new possibility space?
And so I think for most teams,
this stuff usually wind up tactically filling up
that bucket of let's make the existing product
a little bit better every day for users.
And at Slack, we have this thing
we call customer love sprints,
which is an interesting way a team

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

to figure out how to get this on the roadmap
is it's hard to allocate that work throughout the quarter.
So what we wind up doing often
is have a team do a truly customer love sprint,
almost like a hackathon,
but with that kind of burn down list
of what we think is the lowest effort, highest impact
changes that we can make to generate more love
from our customers and whatever that feature area is.
And then people just sprint for two weeks,
design, product engineering,
and then you have a bunch of things
that you sell there at the end,
and the goal is to ship all of them.
So this isn't like hacks that you throw away.
So that's kind of how we wind up prioritizing
often that kind of work is actually kind of making it
this really fun total change of pace throughout the quarter
to not do big feature work that may take months,
but to do always small delightful things
that you know customers are gonna love at the end.
So that's the other way
that we kind of figure out how to balance it in.
I love that.
And how often do you do these sorts of customer love sprints?
I think teams that work on very user facing products
do it at least once a quarter.
So I think other teams that work on maybe less user facing
might do it maybe twice a year,
but quarterly is a pretty healthy cadence.
Wow, I didn't know about that.
And that kind of connects to Slack
has always been a very delightful product.
I remember early on the animations were so awesome,
the little twirly, I don't know, pound hashtag thing.
And it feels like Slack has always invested in delight.
How do you operationalize that?
How do you, is it these customer love sprints?
Is there something else that's just like
we need to allocate some percentage
just like make things really fun
even though it's not gonna move any metric?

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

I would say it's a little bit the DNA of the company, honestly, which is that four co-founders were trying to build a massive online role playing game for many years that was called Glitch. And their kind of background was all in like building delightful, playful experiences. Glitch didn't work out, but you know, there's a whole long backstory, but the short version is a tool they built internally that they then wound up spitting out a company name from which became Slack. I think that DNA, we're trying to build a consumer grade experience that just happens to be for work is really right in the company. It's also a big part of how we hire, I would say certainly the majority of PMs, designers and engineers who will join Slack had never worked at enterprise software company before. It's not like most people had worked at Oracle or SAP, it's most people had worked at consumer companies or game companies. And so they bring that focus in the spirit. And then to the last bit beyond kind of the principles that are the complaint storms and the customer love is that we have this amazing team that we call the CE team, the customer experience team. And they're kind of in some ways the team that is doing our scale to work but is most often in touch with our customers. And from the very early days, people used to do CE shifts if you worked in product so that you can actually figure out what's frustrating, what's confusing. And we have a really great kind of pipeline for getting the insights from the CE team or the obstacles, the pain points, the most frequent complaints into the hands of the product teams to be able to prioritize to figure out, yeah, not all of these are gonna move a given metric. You might not achieve something for the business

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

but collectively, I think the way that Slack thinks about competition is we obsess about customers. We build something they'll love enough to tell their co-workers and the rest kind of takes care of itself. Speaking of competition, something I wanted to ask you a bit about. So early on Slack was competing against this product called HipChat. And that's actually what I used at our startup and we love HipChat, it's so hilarious. Just these memes everywhere and their billboards were amazing. But then Slack ate their lunch. Later on, I'm just kind of thinking out loud, Discord feels like that was the big threat and now Microsoft Teams, obviously. I'm curious just how you think about competition and even just what you've learned about working in open space where there's a lot of competition and thinking about that long-term and even short-term. Yeah, I mean, each of those is kind of like an interesting, mini kind of lesson learned about those. And I think the through line for all of them, I would say is still the maximum that we have in Toronto which is where customer obsess, but competitor aware. So I think it's a little bit different. I think some companies are like Uber, for example, I think was notorious like competitor obsess and tried to tell customers when they could. I think HipChat, I don't think Slack sought out to like kill HipChat and force where we used, I think it was all campfire back in the day if we had 37 single people. So the whole generation of those products and I think Slack came along. I think they had a couple of innovations. One was they had a great mobile experience that synced across every client. Search actually worked. And then they brought a lot of the best parts

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

of like consumer messaging into the workplace
like the emoji and reactions and all those bits.
And I think it turns out that,
if you're 10x better on a couple of those axes,
then you can see a huge change in behavior.
And so I think that's what happened with that.
Move from like the HipChat campfire to Slack world.
Discord's interesting.
I mean, we keep aware of Discord,
but it is so much more focused on the kind of consumer,
it really is gaming now for community space.
And I think at Slack, the lesson I would have,
I think we learned in a good way is
we've always been really focused on groups of people
who are trying to do work together.
And that went to being a completely different audience
to build for than communities.
And so I think that focus has been really helpful.
And I think Discord's amazing and many people love it.
And the people who use Discord,
it's really used it in a very different way
than people who use Slack at work.
I think Microsoft obviously has become,
over time, the biggest competitor there.
I think the origin of Teams really was
a defensive move for them to protect Office,
because Office is an incredible, very profitable,
kind of monopoly in the productivity space.
And so I think when they built Teams,
it was more of a kind of covering their flank
versus Slack kind of on the ascent.
I think as Teams has evolved over time,
it's become much more of a video conferencing product
that competes with like Zoom and Google Meet.
The people who use Teams use it completely different
than Slack where you live and breathe and channels
and work in kind of workflows all day long.
And I think what we've seen there too
is that like a lot of our customers,
they happily use both.
Most Fortune 500 companies have either
an Office subscription or a Google Workplace subscription.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

And all of those customers who use those also use Slack.
And we like to say that Slack is this connected tissue
that makes all the rest of your tools that much better.
So I think there we've kind of taken very much
an open ecosystem and platform approach.
And we've just been focused on how do we keep building
the best version of what Slack can be
as a new category of software for our customers
and saying we're our competitors,
but really obsessed on what are the new ways
that we can delight our users as the years go by.
So Slack is kind of a big-ish company
within now, let's say a big company,
but it feels like you still are launching
really interesting stuff.
You launch huddles, clips,
there's this AI stuff coming sounds like.
I'm curious what you have done at Slack
to enable these sorts of zero to one bets
and what you've seen is important to allow
for sort of for innovation along those lines.
I think people were all a little self-delusional
because I think everyone who works at Slack likes to think
that we're still at a small startup.
And I think keeping that spirit alive,
honestly culturally has been a big part of it.
You know, I think good maximum principles early on,
one of the ones that we need to talk about literally one of
the actual wording is take bigger, bolder bets.
And the idea there is that it's really easy to fall
into the trap of just constant incrementalism.
You know the concept, it's a feature team
and you have like a KPI and you feel like your whole life
is measured by that similar KPI going up 1% a quarter.
And then you kind of lose sight of what's beyond the horizon.
And so we have this kind of mental metaphor
that we talk a lot about getting to the next hill.
And the idea is that if you're in a mountain range,
you're maybe in a little valley,
you can kind of see what's right in front of you,
but you have no idea how tall the mountains are behind.
I think teams can often get lost,

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

kind of crawling up that hill, not really,
there's a huge, incredibly beautiful range behind it.
So take bigger, bolder bets, get to the next hill
to see what the horizon looks like around you.
That's kind of how we think about it strategically.
And then I think structurally,
the way that we've approached it is that we've over time
freighted kind of new teams from scratch
that you can get in a new area before the area is mature.
So we did that with a lot of these kind of native
audio-visual products like Huttles and Clips
early in the pandemic,
because our customers were demanding it from us.
They were like, we love living in Slack all day,
but we feel disconnected from our teammates
when we can't be in the same physical place.
Like, what can you do to help us
and match where that came from?
And I think in the AI space now,
it's a similar thing, which is what we're trying to hear
from customers like, what did you wish Slack could do
if it had these new superpowers?
And let's incubate a couple teams or prototype there
and then figure out what can get to real product market fit.
And I think when we have those teams,
I think it's important to just give them space to run
to give them kind of a get a jail-free car
for maybe the normal process of,
okay, our planning quarterly reviews
and make it feel something that is like the pace
of learning is what matters.
Like how fast are you prototyping?
How fast are you learning from users?
And then getting to do that publicly and pilot
and then get something to launch
that's amazing blows people away.
That's kind of the formula that we've seen.
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

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

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/slashLenny).
That's V-A-N-T-A dot com slash Lenny
to learn more and to claim your discounts.
Get started today.
One of the things I love learning about from product teams
is their unique rituals and traditions.
And I'm curious what's maybe the most interesting
or unique or funny ritual or tradition on the product team
of things that you all maybe do regularly?
One of the things that we do,
which is kind of always a little bit funny,
Amy, it's more of like an emotional thing
rather than a practical thing,
is that at all hands we'll often wind up
taking like specific tweets
that people had about the product and Twitter.
People say the craziest things sometimes.
And sometimes they're like really heartwarming,
like customer love,
but often it's just the meanest,
most frustrated complaints that people have.
And it's honestly meant for us to just have a pulse on
like where people are actually saying and feeling in the wild.
And not thinking too seriously,
but keeping that sense of,
I think that the distance you have from your user
as your user base gets more and more diverse and larger,

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

I think can kind of make it harder
to actually develop the product
because you're not designing for yourself anymore.
And so I think all the ways that we help
keep people grounded in like,
what are actual users actually saying?
That's one big way.
And the other that reminding me of,
which is actually probably better,
maybe delete that last one because it's kind of boring.
No, it's great.
We're not deleting nothing.
Fine.
You know, so I'm a big believer in,
you want to be data informed,
but you don't want to be so data driven
that you actually don't have a pulse
on what real people feel when they're using your product.
So we're really big into user research,
not as it gives you the answer,
but it helps at least pose a lot of questions for you
when you watch how someone actually uses the software.
And historically, it's really hard to get PMs,
little engineers to actually like attend
user research sessions.
And so what we want to be doing,
especially in the pandemic when we first want to promote,
is now you can dial into usability sessions.
And to make it really attractive for the team,
what we would do is have people live kind of like
in a thread, write their real time thoughts of,
so people have to use that,
or I can't believe they missed that,
or oh, that gave me this idea
from seeing how they were doing that,
to do this other thing.
And so then you wind up having the PMs,
engineers, designers, and the user researcher
all in one slack thread,
like live or spawning or reacting to usability session.
And then suddenly that thread becomes actually
the best source of truth for the research report

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

that then gets rid of.
But I think most importantly, it gets the team,
almost at the complaint source,
but actually watching someone else do it,
like in the shoes of an actual human being,
trying to use the thing that you thought was so brilliant,
and yet has all these flaws.
And it's humbling, it's filled with humor,
and also it's, I think,
really constructive for the teams to do it that way.
I was gonna ask where they actually share these thoughts
and in Slack makes a lot of sense.
Yeah, I mean, turn to your report at some point,
but literally just link back to the original thread,
and then you have like a hundred people's reactions
as the report is kind of ongoing.
If only there was a AI tool to summarize
all of your thoughts.
We've got a prototype for that.
Hopefully it'll work well enough
that actually it'll be useful for customers too.
You tweeted once about how,
I think maybe around the time you joined Slack around 2019,
that the self-service business of Slack
basically plateaued and it wasn't clear why.
I'm curious just what that period was like
and how did you kind of get to the bottom
of what was going on and turn things around?
Yeah, it was actually a clue after I joined,
but it was a point where I was kind of focused
on the self-service business
because we had this period with Slack
where I would say maybe 2014 to 2017
where it was almost all self-service
and it was just growing like gamebusters.
And then we started spinning up a sales team
and an enterprise team
which were focusing mostly on that.
And I think we kind of,
we saw the team that was working on self-serve
but it was primarily the company's focus
was all driving enterprise deals,

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

kind of getting to that next level of maturity.
And then in 2019, I think we started to see that
when we looked beneath the surface,
the fundamentals of the self-service business
weren't looking as healthy as they used to be.
I think kind of the biggest thing
as we kind of dug into it was
a little bit to what we were talking about earlier
with the motivation and complaints terms is
it was getting harder to understand
what the next generation of Slack customers
really want from the product.
And whether you're thinking about
the since crossing the chasm
or moving from like kind of early adopters
the needs of kind of the more majority
or the later adopters,
I think we're at that point where
not every technologically sophisticated company
on Earth was using Slack, but most were.
And we were getting into a market
that customers just had different needs
at different levels of sophistication.
And so we get a lot of user research
where you look at all these coworkers
or as you can imagine,
suddenly they're like,
how they're not as healthy as they used to be,
like what's going on?
And I think, we got that,
got a bunch of insights on it,
but I think really what we want to change
about how we were operating was instead of
to continue to try to optimize
the things that had worked over the last couple of years,
we said, okay, let's kind of throw the whole roadmap away.
And instead, let's come up with a bunch of hypotheses
about what could be new levers
that can actually help based on the insights
that we now have about the next set of customers.
And we're going to try to quickly learn
which of these levers are real

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

and which of these are just totally off the mark.
And we kind of had to say for the next like six months,
we're probably not going to drive any impact at all.
It's only going to be about learning.
But at the end of that,
hopefully we wound up finding a couple of different levers
that had years of room to run.
And that's what wound up happening.
We wound up kind of doubling the rate
of our new paid customer growth in the year
and a couple of years after that
and kind of re-accelerating the self-service business.
And I think it really came from stepping back,
being humble, not feeling like we deserve
to have every company that would sign up
and then figuring out how to optimize for learning
so in the long term, you could get the impact.
But knowing that for the next couple of quarters,
we're going to sacrifice impact for the sake of learning.
And I think there's a good muscle to build
but it was definitely not easy to do at the time.
Well, the story begs the question,
what are the levers that worked, whatever you can share.
One of the big things that we wound up focusing on
is what we talk about is comprehension and desirability.
So the fundamental challenge,
I think for new users or new teams using your product,
once you get past the tech early adopters is,
do they comprehend what this thing is for?
Do they understand how it works?
And then desirability is, why should they care?
Most people at work are not like,
hey, you know what I want to do today
is start using entirely new tool
and convince all my coworkers to get on board.
That is not like part of your job.
Your job has goals and measurements and everything else.
So really deeply understanding that
and how do you push them that in that new user experience.
It sounds maybe a little ludicrous,
but Slack always has a freemium product.
Obviously there's a free tier that you can use,

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

but we had never actually figured out a trial strategy where we actually gave you a taste of the paid product. Either we're on the free tier or you have to pay for the paid tier. And that one of being one of, I think the right perspective is figuring out how to give people a taste of the full premium Slack experience so that they would never want to go back and doing them in a variety of different points in the customer journey. And actually the other biggest thing I would call the one out is we really need to figure out a new North Star metric for motivating the teams across Slack. At that point in time, we basically had paid customers and then we had credit teams, which is like the very, very beginning, very, very end of the journey. And we did a lot of quantitative research and data science and one coming up with this new metric we called successful teams, which is a little bit, you know, I feel like I'm gonna have this like Facebook, I don't know, looking number seven or whatever it was, where what we found was that if you could get five people using Slack, the majority of the work week to just communicate at all, that would be a successful team. They're gonna be 400% more likely to upgrade over the next six months. And that seems like a very low bar, like five people to use Slack throughout the work week, not even every day. But it turns out that if you could get that level of critical mass, kind of the rest would take care of itself. And we want to motivate not just the team that's focused on self-service, but all these other feature teams across the company to drive more new successful teams, knowing that if we can move that, which is much earlier than the funnel, but not a top of funnel metric, that it would actually drive,

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

afraid to pay customers and thus revenue longterm.
And that was a huge kind of turning point
for how we rally product teams around so we would actually
drive that self-service business.
Man, this feels like its own podcast,
just to analyze the things you learned down this journey.
And there's so many takeaways here.
One is just the importance of an activation metric
that is predictive of retention.
So it sounds like you landed on five people in a company,
like DAU basically for a week, something like that.
That's awesome.
And then the other interesting takeaway here
is I'm actually doing a bunch of interviews
with founders of the most successful B2B companies.
And interestingly, they all, not all,
maybe half are like,
I still don't think we have product market fit.
Like they're at like a billion dollars valuation,
growing like crazy.
And they're like,
I feel like I have product market fit with the current users,
but I don't with the people I want.
And that's what you're describing, right?
It's like the new,
you stopped having product market fit
with people that you wanted next.
I think that's exactly right.
I think of the like product market fit is almost like,
you keep stacking these S curves
where you get product market fit in a small group
and then you certainly reach like exponential growth
because you can crack that whole group,
that type of audience.
But then you start declining
because you start hitting the ceiling of like,
we've got him,
I don't know what it might be,
every development team in the US to be using this product.
And then you jump up to the next S curve,
which is like, how do we get technology savvy
and new teams that aren't developers?

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

Or how do we get people who are, you know,
even large enterprises who are outside the US,
these each kind of be,
these each become new curves
that you have to build product market fit for.
And I think it's just all a huge exercise
in like being self-critical,
being humble, not presuming that you've cracked this thing
forever and keeping kind of a very beginner's mindset of,
what does the next audience need?
They are previous audience, didn't need it all.
If you think about the pie chart
of what you had to change to make it work,
how much of it was like messaging,
positioning, onboarding, optimization
versus like product features?
I would say maybe 60, 40 in the sense of the early journey.
I mean, not just obviously positioning, messaging,
but like the entire experience of like unboxing Slack,
if you will, with your team.
You know, we called it the day one journey,
but extended to really kind of like day 30 in reality.
And it's a single player and multiplayer experience.
It is really complex.
But then I think what we realized was,
you can make that incredible,
but if fundamental parts of the product were missing
that would make it comprehensible to the next audience,
then you're gonna have problems.
So like it sounds maybe impossible to remember,
but Slack used to not have wissy wig message composition.
You just have to use markdown.
And so making that wissy wig was a huge boost,
making mobile work offline.
So work no matter where you were in the world
was another big one.
All the things about configuring your sidebar notifications
so that as you scale it,
you should just like it didn't become overwhelming.
Those are some of the kind of foundational product
they're missing that we want it making
so that that next generation of Slack customers

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

could get value and not be overwhelmed or daunted by it.

Maybe one last question along these lines.

People look at Slack as kind of the,
maybe the first major product led growth success story.

And they always look at a Slack of like,

oh, we just want to grow like Slack.

Let's see what they did.

For people that are studying Slack's journey and success,

what do you think Slack did right early on

that maybe people don't recognize

or don't appreciate enough that founders today

should be thinking about more so

versus just like, let's just make a freemium product.

Right.

I mean, I think maybe the most telling thing is

when Slack started truly when I joined,

so I don't think a word or acronym,

product led growth existed.

So it wasn't like we were really good

at taking this plate off and applying it.

I think it was more that whole term of art became a thing

as maybe many other kind of freemium SaaS products

kind of took off.

You know, I really think, not to be repetitive,

but I think the core of it really was building a product

that customers loved enough that they would put their own

social cap on the line to get their coworkers on board.

And that was easy enough to use and get the value from

that without it for talking to a salesperson,

you could put a credit card down or expensive

if you wanted to for just your team.

And I think when people think about this product

like growth notion,

I think there are really two very different audiences

and I think Slack was able to crack both.

One is when your team is small and your company is small,

it is the entire company if you're an SMB.

And I think that's almost like Slack's sweet spot

when the original pitch deck came to the investors,

they said Slack is for companies of five to 50 people.

At the time, the biggest company I imagined using Slack

was 50 people because I don't know how this is gonna work

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

beyond that, it'll become pandemonium.

Obviously that was initial, I think real, real strong product market fit.

But the other bit, which then was what powered the enterprise business was teams of five to 50 people who worked at larger companies.

And I think what wound up happening was that you would have teams that was independently at a company like IBM or Disney or Capital One or whoever it might be of Comcast discovering Slack, using it for themselves because they thought it would just make their working lives similar, more pleasant, more productive and maybe not even know that the company was using Slack. And then by the time we then scaled our enterprise sales team, I mean, truly the exercise initially was just take customer domain, sort by number of active users and call them in the order of that, which is, you know, hey, by the way, you have a couple of thousand people actually using Slack at your company, like, do you want to think about a broader deployment or controls or analytics?

And so I think that that was it.

That's consumer grade experience that customers love enough to get their coworkers on and pay for themselves.

And then at enterprise companies, like having a bunch of different flowers sprouting so that eventually you could roll up at enterprise wide kind of deal.

And then was all the tactics, but I think that that was where it started.

The way you described it at the beginning, make a product that people want to share with their colleagues reminds me of a, I was just listening to an interview with Seth Godin, who's this, you know, marketing legend. He, I think he has a new book, so he's on every podcast. And he had this really great quote that the products that win are ones that you want to tell your friends about. And it's a really simple concept.

And basically it's like, it's word of mouth is how you have to win, but, but I think that's so true.

And like every successful company I talk to ends up being like, we just want to build something people want to share with their friends.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

Even if it's growing in some other way, SEO paid, feels like that's always at the root of it. Cause you just like want to tell your friends about it cause you love it.

And Slack, I think is a great example of that.

I think that's true.

And I mean, obviously there are categories of enterprise software that isn't true for like insecurity or like I think they, if it's an awesome security product, you're like, Hey, you got to check out this like Sentry or whatever or sneak.

Yeah. Like good friends as Vantus, you know, Christina and I thought they'd be one of those stories where whoever would have thought like a compliance company would be something that people raved about to their other startup friends like, Oh my God, you don't want to deal with like socks compliance.

You got to an advantage.

It's amazing.

So yeah, maybe that is true.

I think, especially in this day and age where all the marketing acquisition channels have been so saturated, people are optimizing them so much.

I think it's really hard to like scale big enough business if you don't have some amount of word of mouth and customer love, driven growth.

I think it's hard to scale it on like we're going to just play the cat game and hope that the numbers work out.

I remember Slack rolling out at Airbnb and all the designers getting so excited about it, creating their channels and everyone's just like, what the hell are they doing?

What is this thing?

And then it did exactly what you're describing, just spread.

Everyone's just like, Whoa, this is cool.

And they're all telling each other that how useful it is to them and spread like crazy.

I love that.

Is there anything else on Slack that you think would be interesting to share in terms of what makes it a successful product team, product business before I move on to another topic?

The other thing I think is maybe a little bit interesting in

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

terms of how we develop product.

And it's really a different change over time, which is that obviously the easiest person to build for is yourself.

And the next easiest is people who look almost exactly like you or have similar preferences and sophistication.

And I think in the early days of Slack, that's basically what we did.

I mean, it was like really just trying to build for small technologically savvy teams in terms of you could build a pretty big business, making a great product for them over the years, obviously that's changed.

And so one of the things I think that we've done, which has worked really well, one obviously is we figured out how to do experimentation in a SaaS product, which is not always obvious because the metrics are much longer term than you land on a checkout page and then you check it out.

But I think the other thing is we figured out how to scale up getting real customers using Slack in the wild for new functionality.

And so we have this really robust program that we call kind of our pilot program where we have probably thousands of different customers that have all signed different agreements now where we can actually roll out to progressively larger user bases because Slack is a multiplayer product.

You often have to roll out real net functionality to a whole company or whole team because otherwise you can't use huddles by yourself, for example.

And then we have a really great program for actually getting feedback from those customers through Slack Connect itself, through surveys.

And this winds up being kind of a lifeblood of feature teams where you can by the time you actually launch a big net new feature for Slack, have gotten so much customer feedback from people actually using in the wild to get work done and so much more confidence in what you're building from the metrics and the surveys that we do that you can't guarantee it's going to be a hit, but you can be really confident, not because it just worked well eternally, which is no longer that predictive, but because it worked well for a thousand different companies, 50 different countries in 20 different industries.

And so I think early on, SaaS companies don't need to

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

figure that out, but I think as you grow and as you have a more diverse customer base, as you said, all these SaaS founders who said, hey, you got to keep reestablishing your product market fit, I think that is like a programmatic way of being able to do that with your product development process. That's pretty interesting.

Any tips for how to choose who to include in this group if someone wants to build something like this for themselves? I think the two most important things are you want a lot of diversity in terms of industry, company size, location, and so on.

And then I think you want to pick people who are actually motivated to want to be part of the developer process and have a slightly higher risk tolerance.

Not every company wants to actually be beta testing new functionality that might get removed.

So making sure we have kind of a there's like champion network that we built that people who love Slack enough that are willing to put up with a little bit of pain in that refer period or willing to have something that they tried to use and then we decided actually we're going to fill that feature before we ever shift it to everybody.

So diversity and, you know, pain tolerance.

This reminds me of something else the CTO of Stripe shared of how they build new product, which is they pick a couple customers that need a problem solved and they just build it with for them essentially and with them.

And in B2B, generally, it's a lot easier to build something people really want because they are very motivated for you to solve their problem and they're going to put in the time.

And there's like, you don't need thousands of people involved. You just need a couple.

Yeah, I definitely think it's one of those things where if you do it away and they say like, I can't live without it, like the classic like, not like, you know, do you like it?

Sure. But can you can you work without this thing?

If the answer is definitely not, you built something that probably a lot of other companies will want to.

All right, I'm going to shift to a totally different topic, which could also be its own whole podcast.

But let's just see how it goes.

So you're at this, I'd say famous block post on product

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

management called the 10 traits of great product managers. And I want to just try to go through this list briefly and just see how it goes.

I don't want to, you know, this could be an hour of conversation, but I just kind of run through it because I think it'd be useful for people to hear.

And I think these are all 100% true, even though you wrote this number of years ago at this point.

And just let's just see what comes up and then I have a few follow up questions on this list.

These traits are kind of came after, I've written this other thing, which is like the five minutes that product management, which are all the things that people think product management is and why they switched to the job and they're disappointed by.

And then I was like, let me actually write the positive version of this, which is the things that the job actually is about.

It's not a career ladder.

It's not like the, you know, here's the structured interview things that you should interview for.

But I think it's the actual job of product management.

What is it about?

What does success look like?

And I don't think they're really in a particular order in hindsight, but I'll read them in order.

So living the future and work backwards, I think it's very much kind of the idea of as a PM, this is one thing that you're responsible for.

It's kind of having a longer term vision and time horizon.

So how do you carve out time to not just be what we do in the next two weeks, but six months, a year, two years from now, how do you immerse yourself in that and then bring ideas back, bring inspiration back to the team?

I'm going to just going to throw comments out as you're going through and just add to them.

So I love that this is like exactly Amazon's like approach of like work backwards, working backwards process.

And there being B, this is actually like the main

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

thing Brian pushed everyone to do is just think about the idealized product of like a magical world where this is totally solved and then work backwards from that.

And then Paul Graham talks about this too, right?

Just like live in the future and build it.

I definitely rift off at least the Paul Graham thing, because I remember reading an essay of he thinks, everyone thinks they can give sort of ideas by like sitting in their co-founder, laying in Delores Park, looking up at the sky and like conjuring up the next unicorn or something.

Definitely not how that works.

You have to actually like immerse yourself in the problem space and try to imagine what the future world looks like.

And then what's missing for people to get to that future state?

So I agree.

I also saw a great tweet by Shreyas the other day about how if you're working at a company with good leaders, they're never going to be sad that your vision is too big and too ambitious if there's some reality to it that often they want that.

Just like, let's go.

Let's think bigger.

Let's how do we change the way we think about the future of all this stuff?

Yeah.

I mean, that was when I was at Google, the thing I took away most from any review with Larry and Sergey was they would ask like, how could we get like 100x the scale?

Or how could this work for this?

Would seem like an outlandish use case, but would like push the team to think much further into the future.

Yeah.

I think the founders always want.

That's what Brian Jesky always said too.

Just like, how do we 10x this?

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

What would it take to 10x this idea?

Yeah.

So awesome.

Okay.

Okay.

The second one, which is maybe obvious, but thinking about how do you actually amplify your team?

So how do you facilitate ideas?

How do you create energy?

How do you create momentum?

A PM role, I think, can be a little bit unsatisfying if you're usual where you create things yourself, opposed to you are the one who's amplifying what the work that's being created by everyone else is.

So you have to kind of get into that where a facilitator mindset.

What I think about here is a lot of teams like don't want PMs on their team or don't like PMs or don't think PMs are valuable.

What I find is that just means your PM is not good because if you have a good PM, they're just going to help you do the best work of your life.

They're going to help you clarify things, prioritize well, unblock you, all that stuff.

Totally.

And we should find out who wrote that expression early on of like PMs should be many CEOs.

I think that's the most dangerous piece of advice ever in the history of product management because I think that is how you end up having PMs who try to act like dictators instead of leaders and facilitators.

Because if you're acting like that, yeah, your team can completely reject you because they never want another PM again.

Yeah.

Like so many new PMs are just like, I'm finally going to have the power.

Finally, like if they move from engineering or some other role and then they get there

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

and they're like, oh, what the hell?

Yeah.

They've got to convince everyone of all these things they want to do.

Then actually, I'm going to skip in a slightly different direction of the order of this post.

But the fifth one that I wrote on there was, your job is to facilitate the pace and quality of decision making.

And that is very different than you are the person who makes all the decisions.

And in fact, I think one of the things that PMs struggle with early on is how do you actually get the team to be able to make high-quality decisions quickly without you kind of arbitrarily playing tie brick all the time?

And it's a soft art to be able to do that.

But I think that is actually how you have a really healthy team dynamic.

Instead of PMs who want to say, okay, now it's my turn to get to make the decisions.

It's definitely not the job's amount.

What that makes me think about is I taught a course on product management at one point that I've paused for now.

I have just like the core job of a PM is to figure out what's next for every single person on the team.

And there's this meme or gif of a dog on a train and he's just laying the tracks as the team is moving forward ahead of them just one step at a time.

And to do that, this is such an important part of that.

It's just to help people make decisions and block them.

Totally.

I'll kind of combine two of these together.

So one is you do have to have impeccable execution.

This is kind of more of a baseline thing.

But I've never seen a PM who is like disorganized or didn't do follow-up or wasn't clear about expectations or timelines.

It's not high in ASL's hierarchy of kind of PM enjoyment, but I do think it's like a baseline expectation.

The thing I think is more enjoyable

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

and probably the most important thing in the long term is focusing on impact primarily to the customer experience but also to the business.

And I think there's that saying like worth solves all problems.

I think impact solves all like PM issues, which is if the team is consistently building things people love and changing the direction of the business, everything else is an input.

And so I think that focus and understanding as you pointed out laying the tracks is like what direction do you need to go as a team to actually drive that impact?

That's probably the single thing that PM can most control. I love that.

I always recommend exactly that.

If your career is not going as well as you'd hoped or you're not getting promoted, it's usually you're not delivering impact, whatever that means to the company.

Like it may be moving a metric, maybe in building great product that the founders really love. The main impact can mean a lot of different things, but it's so true.

On the execution, executing impeccably, Bucket, the way I think about that is as a great PM, you need to kind of have this aura of I've got this.

Anytime someone puts something on your plate, it's not going to fall off.

You're not going to forget about it.

You're not going to let a ball drop.

That if the more you can create this aura of like I got this, the more responsibility people are going to give you, the more impact you'll end up having, the more people want to work with you and all that.

Yeah, Ben Horowitz was a board member back at Foursquare.

And I just remember you should have this saying, it's very new to like of, you know, good leaders need to say what they're going to do and then do what they said.

And if they can't, then they need to follow up and explain why.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

I mean, that's like the amendment.
And I think that is kind of a good execution looks like.
That last point is so important.
Like you may not be able to do all the things in your plate,
but just telling people,
hey, I'm not going to get to this thing.
Let's re-paratize is such a small thing you could do
and really creates that aura of you got this,
that you're not going to forget about this thing I asked you to do.
Yeah, you're kind of the shock absorber for the team.
You're the thing that builds people's confidence
that things are going to be running smoothly
and you'll get over the net,
but we'll speed bumps and whatever else.
So I'll combine two or three of these
that are kind of related or just more skills.
I said, right.
Well, like I actually think,
so as you get to more senior positions,
writing is the only scalable way of having influence
on a larger and larger product org.
There's a book called on writing by Stephen King,
which I recommend to literally everybody.
Stephen King, you're like,
you see, he's not maybe the most like literary,
like critical, acclaimed author,
but he's a probabilistic author
who publishes things that people love
and tell their friends about.
And he has a great short book on like the practice of writing
high quality, high volume production.
Before we move on, I'll throw out a couple more books
that I found useful in my writing.
One is actually called on writing well.
So that's kind of funny that they're so similarly titled,
which basically every chapter is just another way
to cut more from your writing,
like more and more parts you should cut.
And interestingly, I do have a lot of guest posts
on my newsletter and I find 90% of the time,
if I just cut the first paragraph
of what they first took a crack at

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

and jumped straight into the thing,
immediately gets better.
This book talks a lot about that.
Another book that is amazing for writing better is
Nobody Wants to Read Your Shit
by the guy that wrote The War of Art.
Forget his name, but that book is awesome
and it's just like nobody wants to read what you're writing.
Here's how to maybe make it something people want to read.
And then recently I read one called
Several Short Sentences or something like that.
And it's all about just writing short sentences
and that helps a lot.
So there you go, three more recommendations.
Okay, I got to read the last two.
I haven't read those, but they sound perfect, so.
Okay, maybe I'll throw one or let's say,
we talked about it earlier,
but actually what this is going to put many years ago
is optimizing for the pace of learning
and knowing that long-term massive thing
that's going to drive impact.
I think it can be hard if you're a PM for a feature team,
you're part of a big company,
I don't know, making this up.
You're on the AdWords team at Google
and you're responsible for the big input selector
or something, and it probably is a whole team honestly now
at this point.
You've got such a set of blinders on
that I think it can be hard to think about
what else could this team become?
What else could you drive beyond the thing
that's right in front of you?
So opt-in for learning,
being willing to take those bolder bets,
knowing you can be wrong in the short term,
but that you'll learn new levers
that will be really fruitful in the long term.
It's a portfolio approach to product,
but I think a really important one.
I was just interviewing a product leader at Asana

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

Paige Costello, and we were talking about how she's often the youngest person in the room and often manages people that are much older than her and more experienced than her and asked her just, how do you do that? How do you succeed in that sort of environment? What she's found is just being the person that has the answers and the insights in meetings, people obviously run to her like, hey, what do you think of this? Because she just knows what people are going to need. And so I think that's exactly what you're talking about here, is just be the person that knows the most about the problem, the customers, the space. And then I'll come back to the last two, just because I know the time, but the combination of data fluency, which is not to say that every PM needs to be a statistician. It's great. I mean, you've had a lot of great posts about how to understand some of the basics of experimentation, correlation causation, statistical significance. That felt great, but by data fluency, I think it's more actually what you were just saying, which is you know enough about the insights about your customers that it can then inform making higher likelihood product bets. And that data can be quantitative, that data can be survey-based, it can be from doing 100 meetings with customers yourself. Those are all types of data or inputs to me, so being really fluent. And then combining that with great product taste, I know it's like a controversial statement now, let's just say that there is taste for product. But I do think in all the love of the frameworks and the analytics and everything else in the field of product, I think people sometimes lose sight of, it's a creative field. It's not on its own, but you get all the inspiration from our,

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

and I actually think there's a,
there's a, okay, it's called like creative selection.
I forget the exact name of it about some of the early,
like iPhone development teams at Apple
and working with two jobs there.
And I never worked at Apple,
but I actually think it's the best book I've read about,
the just iterative creative work of building new products.
And what it means to have taste,
which is to say you've developed some amount of intuition
for what people will likely love
before you're able to test it.
So anyway, I think taste plus fluency and data,
that too is a combination,
is a pretty powerful comment.
Let me ask you just a couple of questions about this list
before we get to our very exciting lighting round
and I can let you go.
Okay.
Of these 10 attributes,
say you're a new product manager,
if you had to pick two or three,
that you think are most important to get right
and focus on in your early career,
which would you say they would be?
I think for early on in your career,
what I would say is getting great execution,
it's a thing that you can most control.
Then I think building that news for impact,
even if the impact is more local,
because that's how you actually will demonstrate momentum
and build credibility.
And then actually do you think early on,
getting really fluent on the data and the research sides
that you can have insights that you can read back to your team?
Those are to me like the most slammed up ways
of becoming someone who starts to build credibility
as a product manager in any organization.
Awesome.
That's what I always tell in UPMs too,
just get really good at execution
because that creates that aura of,

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

oh, this person's just killing it.
They're just shipping on time.
People know what's happening.
They're hitting dates, things like that.
The last question is just say you're a senior,
more of a senior product leader.
Say, I don't know, director,
are there three other attributes you think are
ones they should focus on most or maybe not?
I mean, I think this is where that piece of quality decision
making starts to matter a lot more
because you're still irresponsible sometimes
for like teams of teams
and you're helping to facilitate high quality decisions,
often ones that have a lot of uncertainty or risk or ambiguity.
So how do you keep the organization unblocked,
not just a team moving well?
I think the living in the future and working backwards,
I think the more senior you get,
it's always going to be the product founder
who is responsible for the ultimate vision,
but you become more responsible for the meeting
and the long-term strategy to realize that vision.
And so becoming just someone who can dedicate more of their time
to the out of the fray of the day-to-day
and think more about the longer-term strategy
that you want to pursue.
And the last one, and we talked just earlier about,
I think being a really good writer,
it is just the highest leverage usage of your time
if you want to influence an organization,
at least for one that doesn't just spend all day meetings.
But I think it's really hard to dedicate the time to it
because you're probably spending most of your day in meetings.
So it's the antidote to that,
to kind of scale your ability to influence the product direction
and maybe even the principles and how you develop product
at the company.
Well, with that, we've reached our very exciting lightning round.
I've got six questions for you.
Are you ready?
Let's do it.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

What are two or three books that you've recommended most to other people?

These may not be the most unique, but I will say them, which is Interviews Alenna by Clinton Christensen, whether you're working at a large company and you're suffering it or you're working to start up and you're trying to outflank an incumbent.

I still do think that and Interviews Alenna are the best books on product strategy to read.

If you're moving to one of the leadership or management position, I think Radical Candor by Kim Scott, it's just incredible and worth everyone reading.

Frankly, if you're a PM and you're doing kind of soft kind of influence, I think it's really important.

And then the third one, which is a little off the beaten path, there's a book called Leadership in Turbulent Times by Doris Goodwin, who's a kind of presidential historian.

And it's this amazing book that looks at four of the most notable presidents and how their leadership style evolved when they were in really critical hard times in their presidency.

And I just think it's actually the best book about leadership style and how do you evolve and how do you deal with crises, which I guess maybe later on in your career,

but I love getting inspiration from not just reading books about tech and product. And I think that's one of the best ones.

What is a favorite recent movie or TV show you've really enjoyed?

The obvious answer, which I'm sure many people would say would be succession. I'm not going to ruin anything for the finale, because people haven't seen it all.

But they're writing the Shakespearean level drama at all.

It's just incredible and just part-wrenching that you wind up kind of losing most of the characters, but you can't take yourself out of it.

The one that's really less common, and I watched right when we started Paternity Leave, is The Bear. I don't know if you've heard about it.

The Restaurant.

Yeah.

Yeah.

See that?

I was suffered for incredible cinematography and just what they do, and basically the single room of this restaurant and kitchen,

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

and just the pace of it.

I think it's just an incredible piece of art.

I don't know if it's the best show ever,

but it is a really moving, emotionally jarring piece of TV.

Also quite stressful to watch.

Very stressful.

I would not relax to go to see that.

But awesome.

Okay.

Favorite interview question that you'd like to ask candidates?

You know, that would depend a lot, I think,

on obviously the scenery level and things like that.

But I think the more general and I always look at people is,

what unfair secrets have you learned to improve the velocity and energy level of a product to you?

In my opinion, unfair.

Are you in secret Asia?

I mean, not something that you probably

read on a media input that would have you learned how to learn it,

and how does it work, and how do you apply it?

You also just get amazing, interesting bits of inspiration from asking that.

What is a favorite product you've recently discovered that you love?

This will also serve for recommendations for you,

based on what you've not read about.

Apparently, it's because none of the products I've learned or loved recently have been software.

But they're all software enables.

So the Nannit, which is a weird name,

but it's this AI-enabled camera for basically watching your videos as they sleep.

It's incredible.

It gives you sleep analytics and really helps you be a less neurotic parent.

I would highly recommend it.

The SNU, which is basically this amazing device that can help soothe your kid

when all they need is a little bit of soothing while they sleep

so that you can sleep a little bit more.

You can tell the theme here is sleep.

And the last one is going to go up a baby that has this whole elaborate stroller system with interchangeable parts.

And honestly, it's just an incredibly well-designed piece of hardware that works to now the car.

So yeah, I think I've re-appreciated really well-designed hard products that are not necessarily hardware from Apple.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

And that has been what Bayview Parents is about.

I have all three.

Also a huge shout out to the Nannit team who sent me a Nannit and all the stuff around the Nannit.

So thank you.

I'm not going to name the specific PM who sent it to me because I don't remember his name off the top of my head.

But thank you, Nannit.

Yeah.

It turned out there's a whole world of baby tech, which I had no idea.

I mean, it makes sense that it exists, but you never know about it.

So you're a parent and now I'm obsessed.

One tip that we, for Nannit,

so my wife and I have been playing with different names for our kid and we have been changing his name in the Nannit so that anytime we go into the room, it sends us a push.

Hey, there's activity in the room with the names so that we could kind of feel the different names.

I really love that.

Yeah.

My wife and I did something similar where we had like three or four final name contenders and we didn't use the Nannit for it.

But we literally just picked a week and said on Monday, we're going to like refer to the future baby by that name for the entire week

and like give some, you know, personification to it.

And that helped us get down from four to one.

So yeah.

What a ride-ranging set of pieces of advice we got on this podcast.

Two more questions.

What is something relatively minor you've changed in how you develop product at Slack

that has had a lot of impact on your ability to execute?

By far, the biggest thing which is more of a cultural shift is that we stopped spending so many cycles

on design explorations of like static mocks or walkthroughs and said how quickly can we get into prototyping the path in real software, even if it's messy and you throw it away, at least for something like Slack.

Like you got to kind of live and touch and smell the software

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

and you can't just look at it.
And that's been a huge unlock for avoiding spending months on design debates and just getting to it.
Well, how does the software feel?
That's what matters.
Speaking of Slack, final question.
What is your favorite Slack pro tip that people may not be aware of?
I'm going to give two because if someone asks me this, I'm like, these are the two things that if you're not in love with Slack, you'll fall in love with Slack.
So the first is obviously you have a sidebar.
It can be unruly, but you can customize the sidebar into sections and each of those sections, you can have settings like show and read only or sort by recency or sort by alphabetical, whatever it might be, and you can collapse the section so you don't see it all at once.
So I think having a well-managed sidebar, which doesn't actually take that long, it's like this amazing thing because then all this inbound is structured in an order and a grouping that fits how you want to view your working life.
So customize the sidebar.
And the second thing is just use the quick switcher for everything.
Just hit Apple K and just start typing.
And it feels like you're playing a video game, just hopping around, channels, people, files, search, pretty much all the actions you can take on as well.
I think most SaaS products now have borrowed that pattern.
So you can use another software, but it works particularly well in Slack.
No, I know the last thing you needed was to record a podcast your first week back to work.
I so appreciate you making your time.
It feels like we're two ships passing in the night from Pat Leave into Pat Leave.
And so two final questions.
Working folks find you online if they want to reach out

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / The 10 traits of great PMs, how AI will impact your product, and Slack's product development process | Noah Weiss (Slack, Foursquare, Google)

and learn more.

And how can listeners be useful to you?

I will confess that I haven't used Twitter in months

because I was doing digital detox,

but still I think at no other store,

Weiss is a pretty good place to find me online

and whether there or anywhere else.

Still love to have people like Slack feature requests,

especially about things that you wish were possible

or that would get the rest of your company to join on Slack

because you love it, but you can't convince them.

Those are always golden nuggets.

Awesome, Noah.

Thank you so much for being here.

Thank you so much for having me.

Bye, everyone.

Thank you so much for listening.

If you found this valuable,

you can subscribe to the show on Apple Podcasts,

Spotify, or your favorite podcast app.

Also, please consider giving us a rating or leaving a review

as that really helps other listeners find the podcast.

You can find all past episodes

or learn more about the show at LenniesPodcast.com.

See you in the next episode.