

# Doug Ringer

## Three Traits of an Effective Product Manager

Product management is a challenging role in any industry. The combination of being held accountable for revenue with no direct impact on it and for schedules with no authority over the dozen or so departments involved in the product development can make it a maddening career choice. I love the profession, but I will let you pass judgement on the soundness of my mind.

That said, there are many effective product managers and I've worked with some of them. The common traits I've noticed in these individuals are:

1. Communicates effectively
2. Multi-disciplinary competence
3. Constantly curious

The first topic is obvious. For any employee to be able to get things accomplished in a large organization, they must be able and willing to communicate effectively with all departments and at all levels in written and spoken forms.

Secondly, there is no "product management" specialty. The product management role is not like a design engineer in R&D or a logistics manager in Operations who have relatively narrow portions of the R&D responsibilities or of the product supply chain. To be effective, a PM (product manager) must take a pantological view of the company and market to determine the best path forward. She then must be able to convince and lead (communication again) the company through the morass of multiple processes and levels of approvals.

Finally, the effective PM must be curious almost to the point of obsession. She will ask questions of the sales force about why we did or didn't win the business. He will

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nitpick the wording in data sheets to the chagrin of the copywriters in the marketing department, and will most likely annoy the R&D department with barrages of questions about design implementations, cost structures, repeatability, and component selection. In this way, the PM will learn the details of the products, the processes, and most importantly she will get to know the people with whom she works. All of this combines to create a better product and a better working group.

Product management is a challenging role in any industry and each industry has its own set of specialized requirements in which the PM must be competent. Aside from these specific areas, these three traits of communicates effectively, competence in multiple disciplines, and curiosity, are common across all industries and specialties. These skills are transferrable to any industry or situation. Working to improve these skills will make the product manager more effective and more valuable.

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