



mind the
PRODUCT

Leading product teams through change

Stories and advice from five seasoned product leaders

Successfully navigating change as a product leader demands strong strategic and leadership abilities. They bear the responsibility of leading and motivating teams, championing their products, devising strategies, and taking on numerous other vital responsibilities. Additionally, product leaders have recently grappled with the effects of COVID-19, the complexities of inflation, and the swiftly changing landscape of artificial intelligence.

Here, we explore the stories of **five product leaders who have effectively navigated change** in their current and past positions. Each case study shines a light on these leaders' experiences, unveiling **crucial lessons and the principles** they embrace while tackling challenges in their leadership roles.



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A photograph of Ben Foster, a man with a beard and short brown hair, wearing a grey polo shirt and blue jeans. He is standing outdoors with his hands in his pockets, smiling slightly. The background consists of lush green tropical plants, including banana leaves and a pink flower.

Hiring and dealing with strategy during hypergrowth with Ben Foster

Ben Foster is a product thought leader, advisor, strategist, mentor, and former CPO at fitness technology company [WHOOOP](#). He shares his experiences in managing budget whilst looking to hire and onboard product teams.

When I was CPO at WHOOP, I was asked to produce a three-year hiring plan and budget for R&D on the heels of a massive fundraise. This was a standard enough request that demanded an equally straightforward answer. However, there was a catch. It was late 2020, and the company was experiencing high growth, fueled in part by the “COVID boost”, where demand for wearables skyrocketed.

We were already behind on hiring. How could we catch up to where we needed to be, keep pace with customer growth, and pour more fuel on the fire by anticipating future customer needs and important differentiators in a dynamic market? While I could mostly wing it for the sake of budget planning, it

was a wake-up call that substantial change was required to support – and ultimately drive – continued hypergrowth.

We didn't have the time to make these changes sequentially. It all needed to happen at once while preserving the principles and culture that got us there. There was a lot to be figured out and very little time to do so. Oh, and my tenure at the company? 60 days.

We needed to identify a coherent product strategy that would clarify areas of ownership for product managers, frequently redistribute responsibilities as new product managers were hired, stay a

Ben Foster
former CPO at WHOOP

step ahead of engineering with our hiring, define completely new roles and areas of specialisation, new methods of communicating, new decision-making processes that would push decisions down, and the list went on. Any of these could have been easily solved on their own, given enough time. If there was a single biggest challenge, it was the meta-challenge to get them all done quickly without causing the rocket ship to burst into flames.

Solving that meta-challenge required being strategic and intentional with my time and attention. I established a few principles for myself to make it feasible:

Principle 1: Delegate everything you can, and if you can't, figure out how you can.

Principle 2: Solving a problem also means never having to personally solve it again.

Principle 3: Your product strategy is only good if it can be repeated back to you.

PRINCIPLE 1

Delegate everything you can, and if you can't, figure out how you can

Delegating things you've been doing yourself is difficult. It's not ego getting in the way. It's needing sufficient trust that the other person can do as good a job (or ideally a better job) than you. Barriers could include concerns about their skillset, background knowledge, whether they'll understand the nuances involved, or even clarity around the goal. These aren't reasons to avoid delegating, though. These are reasons you, as the product leader, need to invest more in communicating objectives, success measures, design principles, business context, and developing the skills of your team members. It's critical to actively create channels for these to be shared with your team members and to maintain a culture in which they are comfortable admitting they don't know and are willing to ask the right questions. During hypergrowth, another frequent barrier to delegation is not having a person to delegate to, so you should also prioritise your hiring plan accordingly.

PRINCIPLE 2

Solving a problem also means never having to personally solve it again

People say you should try to put yourself out of a job. I would take it a step further: the only way to keep your job is to put yourself out of it. Anytime I realised I was a critical dependency in an operational process, I took that as a cue that the real problem to be addressed wasn't the immediate one at hand, but that I was a cog in the machinery in the first place.



PRINCIPLE 3

Your product strategy is only good if it can be repeated back to you

With this much change happening at once, it's easy for things to go flying off the rails. As an advisor to many companies before my time at WHOOP, I had seen countless product leaders struggle with keeping their teams aligned despite having developed a solid product vision and strategy. That's because they underinvested in communicating it or never verified that what they communicated stuck. Whether you like it or not, your product strategy is whatever your team is working towards. At WHOOP, I realised I was guilty of keeping too much in my head, so I invested in documentation and repeated live presentations.

Lessons learned from hiring during hypergrowth



When dealing with any change in the organisation, the most important consideration for a product leader, one that is often overlooked, is how the members of their team will understand it, embrace it, and work through it. As individual contributor product managers, we were constantly reminded that "you are not your user" and to exhibit customer empathy to design a product that works for customers.

As a product leader, your product is your team and its practices. Your users are the product managers. You may be wrestling with politics, budget constraints, and other organisational complexities that your team members won't see and shouldn't have to. Create a "product" for your team members that allows them to work efficiently, make great decisions, hit their targets, and develop professionally. Build for your "users" by understanding from your product managers what they need to be successful and then finding ways to manage current change (and to actively guide future change) so that they can thrive.

If you do that one thing well, most of the other factors you might need to consider will simply take care of themselves.

When dealing with any change in the organisation, the most important consideration for a product leader... is how the members of their team will understand it, embrace it, and work through it.

Recommended resources from Ben

-  [Vision-Led Product Management](#)
-  [Product vision and strategy – Ben Foster on The Product Experience](#)

A photograph of Navya Rehani Gupta, CPO at Peek, speaking on a stage. She is a woman with long dark hair, wearing a dark blue long-sleeved top and a purple and black vertically striped skirt. She is holding a small black object in her right hand and gesturing with her left hand. Behind her is a large white 'M' logo on a blue background.

Navigating a travel business during COVID with Navya Rehani Gupta

[Navya Rehani Gupta](#) is the CPO at software and travel company [Peek](#). She shared her story on how the organisation navigated the COVID-19 pandemic during a stagnant time for travel.

Peek's story about navigating the COVID-19 pandemic is one worth telling. At Peek, our mission is to connect the world through experiences. When March 2020 hit, our revenue went from millions of dollars to zero. It was an overnight change. All our tours and activity operators were not allowed to operate as the world came to a standstill. We immediately had to do layoffs. We were one of the very first companies to do that, just so we knew we could survive the pandemic and be there to help our customers.

On the product side, I led company-wide brainstorming. We had a very strong culture as a company as we used to have a number of offices in Utah, in San Francisco, in Seattle, in New York and

in Santiago, so it was a new experience for us, too, when we moved remote. As soon as we did that, we started company-wide brainstorming to ask: 'how can we get out of this situation?', 'how do we thrive in this situation?', 'how can we help our customers?'. That was the biggest source of inspiration as we defined the new product direction.

I also put our roadmap to a complete stop. Instead of doing what we had planned to do, we decided to be nimble and plan in four-week chunks because there was a lot of unpredictability as we looked ahead. Different states and different countries were having different regulations when it came to closing and offering experiences, so we created four-week milestones and we immediately prioritised some of

Navya Rehani Gupta
CPO at Peek

the top ideas that came out of those company-wide brainstorms and through our customer conversations such as contactless payments, revenue retention features to allow easy distribution of store credit rather than giving refunds, etc.

We supported our customers by immediately getting them access to Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). We also helped companies move virtual. So if somebody in New York was providing a walking tour, for example, we immediately helped them take that tour online. If somebody was providing food tours, we helped them get into a virtual cooking class setup.

By summer of 2020, we had our best summer in the company at that time and the New York Times featured us as one of the very few travel companies that ended up thriving in the pandemic.



The impact of remote work on workplace culture and communication

We were among the first few companies to experiment with **virtual team bonding**, from leading meetings with a joke to setting up one-on-one water-cooler sessions. We tried everything under the sun to check on team members. Even though we didn't go with the classic virtual Happy Hour route, we knew we wanted to try something different that suited our culture. So when we would get the groups together, people would feel authentic and comfortable conversing in a small group setting.

I also took the initiative with several other leaders to create the **company's first remote manifesto**. That meant considering that everybody has their preconceived notions on how to get the right answer, whether it's through email, Slack, or meetings. The remote manifesto standardised all of that by defining the right tool for every situation. It was a very clear checklist which stated when to use an email, when to call a meeting, when to use Slack, what a good Slack message

looks like and what a good email looks like, in addition to some of the best practices around using each tool.

Further, the Director of Design and I created a strategy for efficient communication named the '**cake of communication**'. **CAKE** stands for:

- **Context** is key
- **Assuming** good intent
- **Keeping space** for quiet
- **Embracing** responsibility

With that, we were able to always define to our team that:

- Whenever you're talking to people, give them the right context and set the right expectations before you send a blast of Slack messages.
- Be slow to take offence, take a step back and assume good intentions.
- Know that you're all working through different time zones, so keep space for quiet. If something can wait, schedule a message as opposed to ruining somebody's evening. Or if people are trying to focus, give them that space.

- In a virtual world, everybody should proactively communicate, embrace responsibility and not want to be chased.

The culture adapted to the remote environment and changed for the better. The way we got there was by being intentional around how we wanted the culture to shape in a remote environment.

There was a time when we were doing either weekly or bi-weekly anonymous Town Halls. Even when the revenue was zero, we would say 'it's zero', 'it's gone a little bit up' or 'it's going down', 'here are the five things that we're trying to do to bring the revenue back up'. By being so transparent and by being so proactive, it got people excited to jump on the train and make a difference to the final outcome.

Lessons from pivoting

I would recommend that product leaders have clear decision-making frameworks in place before crisis mode hits. I always tell my team that they need to be able to communicate effectively: the decisions that we're making; how our priorities are being determined; who's making the business decisions; how we measure success; who gets consulted when decisions are made and who actually agrees.

So, we use a framework called **RAPIDS**, Bain's tool to clarify decision accountability. It stands for:

R is the **recommender**

A are the people who need to formally **agree**

P is for the people who **perform** once a decision is made

I is who gives **input**

D is the **final decision-maker** and commits the organisation to action

and...


S is who do we actually **share the decision with?** (This is the S that we added.)


Having this clear decision-making framework allows us to say 'here's the person who is going to run the show', 'here are the people who are going to get input', 'this is the final person who will make the decision' and 'this is who we want to share the decision with'.

I would recommend that product leaders have clear decision-making frameworks in place before crisis mode hits.

Recommended resources from Navya

 [Pivoting Product Roadmaps in the World of Change](#)

 [Mastering perspective – zoom in, zoom out as a product leader](#)

 [RAPID framework](#)



Dave Wascha
former CPTO at Zoopla

Undergoing business transformation while remaining competitive with Dave Wascha

[Dave Wascha](#) has over 13 years of experience in business transformation. He was previously Chief Product and Technology Officer at [Zoopla](#), and is currently an advisor at [Kindred Capital VC](#) and founder of Elegant Rampage, an advisory firm focused on organisational change and product-led growth. Based on his experience managing change, he shares his business transformation story, specifically at Zoopla.

The single biggest challenge that a product leader or any leader faces, frankly, isn't product, it's not innovation, it's not growth, it's trying to get a group of human beings to change how they behave. It's only really when the business is under an existential threat that the motivation to change supersedes the resistance to change. Unfortunately, when you reach that point, you're already under duress and dealing with a challenge, so it's incredibly difficult.

Driving change includes dealing with the response of the humans in the business to the change, and

many of those responses are driven out of fear. I had a real education on how extreme the fear response is at Travelex. I walked in one morning, sat down at my desk only to see that it had been vandalised and my laptop had been destroyed. Someone had upended a glass of water on my keyboard and just left it there to leave a clear message about how unhappy they were that I was there creating this new team and new products. My initial response was one of shock, anger and frustration. In hindsight, as I've reflected on this more over time, I've realised that it was done by someone or some people

The single biggest challenge that a product leader or any leader faces... [is] trying to get a group of human beings to change how they behave.

who are really scared. That experience was a real visceral education in just how extreme a fear response can be.

But specifically, I applied all my learning from my previous experiences to my role at Zoopla. Zoopla was purchased by Silver Lake, a private equity firm based in the US. They rebooted the executive team, and I joined as the Chief Product and Technology Officer. We had a very clear mandate to reinvent the business. Zoopla was a distant number two in terms of property classifieds after Rightmove. Our mandate was to do whatever we needed to do to drive growth. We went through all of the trials and tribulations and were very clear on what kind of people we would need for the journey.

Zoopla has been very commercially led for its entire history. We were trying to transition into bringing

more product-led elements to the culture, because there are very few examples in history of a number two marketplace overtaking a number one marketplace. We took the product, technology and design team from about 90 to 40/45. Then we built it back up, including through COVID, to about 300 people. That included staffing across multiple businesses and creating functions that weren't there before. We also tried to educate the rest of the company on how the dynamics of time horizons play with the short-term commercial drivers and how to become more customer-centric / product-led. That was probably the most successful change program I'd driven, and that was working for a real estate business through lockdown and then through the cost of living crisis from 2020 – 2023.

It wasn't the intention at the outset to change everything completely, but it became very clear that was going to be the case. There were two designers for nine teams, and they were working as a centralised agency across those nine teams. Everyone was blocked when they needed design because there were only two people. So, the ratios were way off. There was no continuous integration and continuous delivery (CI/CD) or any kind of automation in engineering. Everything was manual. We were also trying to ship things across multiple platforms. So we made the teams the right size. We

also hired proper product managers. We brought SRE / DevOps into the business as well. There was no security practice or function, despite it having been a publicly listed business, so we introduced that to the business.

If our plan for being successful was to run faster than Rightmove, a business that was four times the size of Zoopla, that was not going to be a success. So, we needed to create a different proposition for users, and so we shifted away from just thinking about buying and selling your house to





thinking about owning your house—the intervening seven to 20 years, where you actually own your house, and you need to refinance, renovate or take out loans against it. We tried to become a more central proposition in home ownership instead of being a bit player in the transactional sale of a house. That was our definition of success, and that was how we sized and shaped up the organisation. As the CPTO, my job was to mitigate risk reasonably. The business didn't understand the exposure in terms of cybersecurity and GDPR, so I needed to educate it on that risk and then make the business case to deal with it.

One of the biggest challenges that people have to deal with is educating the stakeholders on the need for these things in the first place.

You must frequently acknowledge that changes will happen and agree as a leadership team about how you will deal with these issues as they arise. For instance, explicitly recognise that there will be lots of problems as it is impossible to predict how driving a change program will impact the business in the short term. We did that at Zoopla and it was incredibly powerful. It got everybody on board.

Lessons learned from business transformation

If I synthesise the aspects that either I knew went well, or I would do differently over again, I would summarise them in a couple of steps.

Acknowledge the change, and be transparent.

It's important to explicitly acknowledge that the company is entering a period of transition. The leadership team is often in such an echo chamber that they assume it's obvious to the rest of the business that they're going through transition.

Communicate the change. At Zoopla, we did this by illustrating how our users' experiences would evolve over time. We hired illustrators to draw these stories out, and we spoke about different time horizons and what the different experiences of our users were, how they were going to shift over time. That allowed us to create a shared understanding across the business of where we were headed at the right altitude.

Make the change an opt-in choice. It is also important to make the change explicitly opt-in versus opt-out. At Zoopla, we communicated that we were going to administer change and what we

expected, but also said, 'this may not be for you, that is perfectly okay.' It made people say 'yes, I understand this, and I am choosing to stay here.' For me, that was one of the most important actions that we took. If you don't do that, then people cause friction and become obstructive, scared and / or toxic. It has been universally true every time I've administered change. Change leads to contingents of people who want to obstruct you from achieving your goals – intentionally, unintentionally, and unconsciously. For those who decide that the change isn't for them, it is important to celebrate them and help them find a new role. For the people that say yes, then, great, we have a contract with you regarding how we expect you to behave during the change.

To identify who wanted to stay, I met with people at every layer of the organisation and I went through periods of time, where in a week, I would speak personally with five or 15 different people in the organisation that I wouldn't normally interact with to get a sense of what was going on. We also had an anonymous survey with just one question every two weeks. The question was simply 'how's it going?'. The answer section was made up of an open-ended text box and a scale one to 10. We would get these flash pulses of the sentiment through 50, 60, 70 comments, sometimes a lot more than that. I would

read them, and I made my leadership team read every single one of them, and we would discuss them at our next opportunity.

In general, the marching orders for our line managers and our leaders were to dispatch toxic elements with extreme prejudice as fast as possible. You have to remove those people from the organisation; unfortunately, in an organisation of any size, there will be pockets of that.

Over-communicate with stakeholders. It sounds like stating the obvious, but however much you think you're doing it, you're not doing it enough. I guarantee it.

Things will get worse before they get better. Many people lose their will halfway through because they think things are getting worse, so they want to scrap this whole thing. At Zoopla, we didn't commit a line of code for a couple of months in one period. If you don't acknowledge that things will worsen before they improve, you just shouldn't do it.

You can't change one part of the business and hope for the best. You can't just change a product and technology organisation and hope things will get better. This is because product and technology organisations have interfaces throughout the

business and if those other parts of the business don't adapt and change, then the body will reject the organ. It happened at Travelex. We started with myself, I hired my lieutenant and then we built the team up to 120 people across product tech, design and data science. It became one of the best teams I ever built. We were the second company in the UK after Monzo to build a bank on AWS. We had a travel money card with 0% fees before Wise and Revolut. We made some great innovations but because of other challenges, the team and products do not exist anymore. I learned the hard way that you can't just change one part of the business and hope for the best.

Recommended resources from Dave

- 📺 [20 years of product management in 25 minutes by Dave Wascha](#)
- 📺 [Fighting product-market drift by Dave Wascha](#)



Inês Liberato
Product & Venture Coach

Dealing with risk when leading change with Inês Liberato

Product leader [Inês Liberato](#) has worked in product for over eight years with experience in big data, gambling, IoT and several tech practices. Inês shares her story on dealing with risk during the product launch phase.

I've gone through change a few times. The first thing that most people will tell you is that there's no magic wand. When you throw people into the mix, you're now managing different layers, cycles, perspectives, contexts, emotions and mental capabilities. There are a lot of things that need to be taken into consideration when you think about transformation.

I experienced one specific transformation that didn't go well a few years ago. The business decided that it wanted to transition into a SaaS business, but it didn't go to plan. We had an excellent leadership team. In the space of 10 months, we managed to launch a product, launch an NML functionality and change the contracts from 4k a year to 10k a year

with a three-year lock. We were doing incredible stuff, but it became too much, and parts of the leadership team left the company. Months later, they made the whole of the product team and half of the sales team redundant just before the start of the pandemic. I think the issue was a mix between it being the wrong CEO for the type of business that we were all building, but also it was the wrong investment team.

We were one of their first tech investments so they weren't prepared. Any other tech investor would have seen our results and our KPIs were incredibly successful, but they were more risk-averse than normal.

I've gone through change a few times. The first thing that most people will tell you is that there's no magic wand.

Lessons learned from leading innovation

Transformation is something that you need to run for a few cycles. When I say cycle, I mean that the first layer is a starting point or a preparation set-up action and then organisations should learn from those actions in a more or less structured way and then see the results. Then organisations must keep layering these cycles, one on top of the other. I have learnt that it is impossible for people to get on board in one go. It is a big mistake for companies to enter a meeting and say 'this is what we're going to do now and everybody needs to get on board'. It just doesn't work that way.

Companies need to invest in organisations and teams to make sure that that information is present everywhere. Remind team members that things are going to be done differently, so they should have a different mindset. Or that the company will need different tools and how to work with those. All of those things require people to keep being reminded constantly. It's important to leave messages that stick at the back of your mind. In essence, it is about changing language. Instead of one communication, ensure the message is everywhere in different formats at different times. It's a bit like

a marketing campaign – you need to see a full campaign, not just an Instagram post.

It is also important to support people so they have the time to process the information and understand what that means to them. Personally, for me, the biggest challenge has been in times where I'm very worried about how people will take on new information, for instance when I have needed to let someone go from the team. It becomes a balance between being transparent and straight to the point, while being careful and kind, but not trying to fill in the blanks and over-explain so as not to dig yourself into a hole. That is something I have been learning throughout my career.

Things in the industry are constantly changing. I have never seen so many good companies denied investments — it's just the current market. So, it's important to be resilient – for instance, be prepared to look at other revenue sources. There is also a need to think more laterally because things are more connected than ever.

Regardless of the size of the organisation, there are four areas that I always analyse to help me better understand my work. I first look at the business context through an almost [PESTEL analysis](#). I examine the company's history – where it's been,

where it is, where it wants to go.

Then, I try to understand the company's cycles as external and internal factors might impact them. For example, a pharma business will have completely different cycles from an agriculture or retail business. I also look at how these cycles impact the speed of the change and transformation.





Then, I look at people – who are the actors in this play? Considering where we want to go or have been, do we have the right skills or mindset?

The final one is looking at the system. The systems are normally what I look at to understand motivations and layers. For example, many companies say they want to work more collaboratively, but people get individual incentives.

All the lessons I have learnt have allowed me to understand better what I am looking after when leading change. The type of risk factor I identify will massively change how I communicate. For example, if it is a larger organisation with a lower risk appetite, I will likely have to be more serious in how I communicate things. I will need to be more stratified in how I make general communication, my presentations will be more polished, and my conversations will be backed up with HR. If it is a

smaller organisation, I will get everyone in the room, have a chat, have a bit of a laugh, call meetings with funny names, and that will be okay. These things will define my tone, approach and communication frequency.

Recommended resources from Inês

-  [UNO! Losing Ideas to Win the Game from Agile on the Beach \(talk slides\)](#)
-  [Level 10 meetings](#)
-  ['Emotional Agility' by Susan Davis](#)
-  ['Five Dysfunctions of a Team' by Patrick Lencioni](#)



Kate Leto
Product Leadership Coach

Coaching product leaders through uncertainty with Kate Leto

Kate Leto is a Product Leadership Executive Coach with 25+ years of experience. She shared some of the key learnings and principles that she has picked up from her vast experience in product leadership roles and coaching product leaders.

Every coaching conversation I have is about change in one way or another. It's really at the heart of coaching – how to negotiate change.

Recently I had a conversation with someone very high up, above VP level, at a larger organisation. She's going through a lot of change and reorganising her part of the organisation. She's done this many times before, so she's well-versed in it, what works and what doesn't. As a result, she was trying to be very mindful about her approach and really think about her team. She was putting the user at the heart of it by thinking about the people within her team that are going to be going through the change.

She is also trying to make sure that she does things in a way that clarifies upfront what's going on. She's very transparent with the process of the change that will be happening and how it might impact each individual.

She has good one-on-one relationships with many people in this part of the organisation, so she can have those somewhat challenging conversations about what's working for them with the change and what's not working for them and how she can help. Because, at the heart of it, she's had various conversations where people have said, 'it might be just another change for you, but for me, that means I've got to build all new relationships', 'I've got to

get to know people in a different way again', 'I've got to present myself again, it's starting over'.

I thought it was a really interesting case study as it shows how some of the leaders I am working with are trying to take a personal approach and be very mindful of the impact the change will have.

Change needs to be approached with consideration by leaders otherwise they are likely to face friction from colleagues below them.

In the case I referred to, the leader felt a personal responsibility to her organisation rather than



Change needs to be approached with consideration by leaders otherwise they are likely to face friction from colleagues below them.

because she received pushback from above or from colleagues. If she wasn't trying to be so mindful and considerate of the change that was going on, it could erupt and go wrong. There are a lot of commonalities and themes in the challenges that product leaders face. But every individual is unique. As a coach working with product leaders, it is about having the patience and the curiosity to slow down and really get to know the person in front of you.

Many of my conversations are about leading a team that the leader has been with in a different way. The questions are 'how do I become that person who steps up?', 'how do I influence others?', 'how do I get a good understanding of everything that is going on in the organisation?', 'how can I grow my virtual authority while keeping my day job going?'.

There is a tool called the '[sphere of influence](#)' that I have previously written about, that helps individuals

realise that they can't control and influence everything. It is about reframing those questions and dealing with tension and conflict.

Lessons learned from coaching product leaders

There are some really baseline things leaders can do to manage change, such as making space for yourself to do some reflection, thinking, and writing. One of the big things I hear from leaders – and everyone – is, 'there's no time to think'. With a lot of my new clients, I am sending them journals to write in because I want them to make time to think, even if it's just for five to ten minutes a day. At moments of change, that's number one – create some time to think about what's going on and digest it.

Working with teams is a challenging thing. If it weren't, I probably wouldn't have a job. It can be completely rewarding, but it's not something to take lightly. To be a good leader of a team, you have to be in touch with yourself because that brings a whole new presence to your team and your potential to grow in an organisation. I encourage people to build self-awareness, do some self-


reflection, talk to somebody – be it a coach, a partner, a friend – and make some space for yourself to do that work. That can help you grow as a team leader and help your team through some crazy changes that everybody's still going through.

Emotional intelligence in product is hugely important. One of the main competencies in emotional intelligence is self-awareness. As a skill, self-awareness has a couple of layers. It is understanding yourself and how others see you and how you fit into the world around you. That impacts "everything we do as a product person, because we have to work with so many different types of personalities in different areas of the business. So, having self-awareness is the meta skill of product management."

Empathy and compassion are also important as they are other competencies of emotional intelligence. Having a positive outlook and being able to coach and mentor other people are also other competencies. I write and talk about it all the time. They're hugely important, but the foundational competency is self-awareness.

“As a coach working with product leaders, it is about having the patience and the curiosity to slow down and really get to know the person in front of you.”

Recommended resources from Kate

-  [Sphere of Influence](#)
-  [The Essentials of Teamwork for Product Leaders](#)

BONUS ADVICE

Looking after yourself as a leader

When communicating change and leading products, taking care of your own well-being and health is often a secondary consideration. Here are a few strategies these product leaders employ to prioritise self-care while leading change.

"Create boundaries and feel comfortable and competent doing that. A lot of product leaders feel as though they don't have the right to say no.

It is important to understand where that is coming from."



Kate Leto

"As senior product people, we need to approach work the way a professional athlete does... be intentional about where and when you deploy effort and where and when you recover mentally, emotionally and physically... making sure that you do things you get joy from and fulfilment from..."



Dave Wascha

"I have a big network, and I continue to invest in it... by being active in the product community, whether it's doing podcasts or writing blogs... That's been the most effective way for me to get to know other thought leaders because I read their content, they read my content, and people are willing to help..."



Navya Rehani Gupta

"Realising and understanding that there will be weeks where things will be difficult, but there should not be months where things will be difficult... It is important to establish boundaries."



Inês Liberato

"Regarding companies, we all appreciate that stagnation is like death. The same is true for people... You have to continue to grow, and that usually requires finding external mentors. As CPO at WHOOP, I had several advisors outside of the company, and they were invaluable to me. They got me thinking in new ways, challenged my assumptions, and honestly just kept me sane..."



Ben Foster

Where to next?

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Further resources

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