

**You're Hired!**

# **Advice for PMs From an Executive Search Firm Managing Director**

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## A Behind The Scenes Look at the Hiring Process

As product managers (PMs), we spend our careers learning from the successes and failures of those around us. That shared collective knowledge is what Products That Count is all about. In this eBook, we'll go beyond the experiences of product leaders who have walked the walk and see things from the perspective of those doing the hiring. We're sharing advice from an executive recruiter for an inside look at how to advance in your product career.

Five years of Products That Count's existence may not seem like a long time to some people. However, we're very proud of the significant impact we've been able to make on the careers of more than **300,000 product leaders and managers**. PMs have come to rely on the wealth of knowledge shared by the extraordinary C/VP-level product innovators as they put themselves in a position to earn a promotion or their next PM dream job.

Our mission is to champion people and cultivate product. That's why I'm excited to share this eBook with all of you, as it should help to deliver on that promise.

## Advice From an Executive Search Firm Managing Director

Even if you're new to the role, you probably know that product management is a rapidly growing field. With that, there is a high demand for experienced PMs. That means you'll be facing a lot of competition when it comes time for a promotion or a senior-level position at another company.

It's helpful to have the inside scoop on what product executives are looking for during the hiring process. You may want to send Monica Bua a thank you note when the following advice helps you land your next dream role.

**Monica Bua is a C-level recruiter, advisor, and human capital strategist with a demonstrated track record in building successful technology organizations. She has expertise in the assessment, placement, and development of senior leaders and their teams. Monica has a 15-year track record in hiring next-gen thinkers to lead and grow emerging product sectors.**



**Monica Bua**  
C-level Recruiter

# Biggest Takeaways From Leading Product Hiring Searches

First and foremost, you can go into the process of looking for your next challenge with the knowledge that executive recruiters and hiring managers know that **individuals from the product function are especially qualified for leadership roles.**

“I have found hands down that the best CEOs have a product function in their background,” began Monica Bua. “Successful product leaders can hold the tension of opposites. People who have that skill set of sitting with ambiguity, embracing discomfort, and holding tensions of duality are the people that become the best leaders and the best CEOs.”

We can balance being comfortable in the grey area of building products while still delivering in the end – that makes the product function one that recruiters seek out.

“In my experience, product people learn early on that despite tensions, they still have to act. They still have to ship a product out the door. They have to combine the technical side with delighting the customer. They don’t have a choice. They have to operate and take action, despite some ambiguity. That’s a very important learned skill set.”

While recruiters and hiring managers may recognize that product makes us uniquely qualified for leadership roles, there are still certain things they’ll be looking for during the hiring process.

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## What Hiring Managers Want

We might not like to talk about it, but **failure is part of the job in product**. Every product, feature, and launch isn't going to be a winner. Please don't run from it. Keep the growth mindset and know-how to demonstrate how you've responded to those times when things didn't work out perfectly.

"When working with paradox, tensions, and ambiguity, you're going to fail. Some of it will be in your control, some of it won't. We don't want to hear from candidates or executives who never make mistakes or who blame other parts of the organization for their failures. Don't hesitate to tell the hiring manager about your biggest mess up. Your failures and your attempts to add things that didn't work out are just as important as your achievements. They'll appreciate you demonstrating self-awareness. Articulate what you did with those failures and how you incorporated that into managing your team or gaining a better customer focus."

It's also important to show that we know where we are the most valuable to a company. Just because we can do one thing to help out doesn't necessarily mean that's where we should put our focus.

**"You should be spending no less than 90% of your time on meaningful work.** It sounds simple, but take a day and map your time to identify where the majority of your time is going. It's a big eye-opener. Own the fact that your time is your most precious resource. The hiring managers that we work with want to make sure you understand this. Be super clear about what your goal is within product, why it's important, and how it ties to your company's overall mission."

Additionally, recruiters aren't necessarily looking for the product people who've had the most significant wins. They like to see a PM who **appreciates the process and small victories** that can be more valuable to a company.

"It's big to have an eye on iterative, smaller solutions versus always trying to solve bigger problems. That's



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always a lot more interesting to hiring managers. Product leaders sometimes get caught up in the successful launching of the product. However, that's just the starting line. What we're looking for is how you performed in the race and an understanding of why."

We also need to be able to demonstrate that we can make everyone on our teams better. That's what the best leaders accomplish.

**"The best leaders are servant-based leaders.** They empower their teams. You're only as good as your team. If someone comes to an interview where they're only presenting their work, but not the collective work of the team, that's always a big red flag to me."



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Now that we've covered why executive recruiters and hiring managers like to seek out individuals from the product function and some of the things they want to see let's look at some more actions PMs can take to get noticed for a dream job.

## Three things PMs can do to get noticed

Monica Bua offered these three pieces of advice to help PMs rise above the competition and stand out.

# 01

### **Having a diversity of perspective and background is essential, but so is knowing where our superpowers lie.**

Hiring managers want to see that we've learned from different challenges throughout our careers while honing in on our strengths.



We love seeing a mix of early-stage or v1 products or people who worked across B2B and B2C. However, there comes the point, usually a decade or more in someone's career, where you want to see that person take all that diversity and start doubling back on their superpower.

Rock stars in product could be more operational and be better in terms of keeping the train on the tracks. Then you have those more creative, idea-one product leaders. They're more right brain versus the left brain. Some people can be naturally good at both. I've always found that even the best CEOs tend to lean on one side or the other. So, at a certain point, you need to know what your superpower is and focus on that."



# 02

We know it will be hard to separate ourselves from our competition when looking for our next product roles. We've talked about how we can stand out. So, what's one of the simplest things we can do to get noticed?

## Just be ourselves.

“ When I talk to candidates, and every product leader sounds the same, it's like I'm talking to a carbon copy of that same person again and again. Be human. be the most YOU version of yourself. So many executives feel like they need to have those top CS degrees from the top schools or that they need to start their career at Google or another brand name. But one of the best areas for differentiation is just being yourself. No one can have your same background. No one has grown up the way you have. No one has had the unique vantage point of who you are. Don't be afraid to share who you are and how that shaped your view on product.”

# 03

The last thing that will help land a dream job is **having a proven record of taking risks.**

It's easy to stay in a current role by playing it safe, but PMs might find ourselves stuck there if we're not moving out of our comfort zone.

“ One of the biggest things is taking risks. Throw your hat into the ring on roles that you may not feel you're qualified or ready for. If it's something that speaks to you, if there's a product that you really love or a company you want to be part of, just don't give up and keep trying. There's much more demand than supply on the product side. As a product leader, you're going to learn on the job. So, be comfortable embracing risk and trying something new. That's one of the biggest pieces of career advice I would give product leaders.”

Now, take this inside look into the PM hiring process and use it to your advantage. In the Age of Product, the best products will win. However, you'll win by putting yourself in the best position for you to thrive.

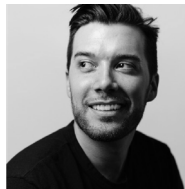
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## About Us

# Products That Count is the most influential Product Acceleration Platform in the world.

Empowers 300,000+ PMs via:

- 100+ events globally each year
- Thousands of videos, podcasts and articles online
- Best practices from Netflix product VP, Box CPO and more
- A focus on answering the question, “What makes a great product?”
- Its commitment to inclusion and increasing diversity in product



**Products That Count** is the original and most influential product acceleration platform in the world. Almost 300,000 product managers globally read, watch, attend and listen to our 3,000+ free blog posts, videos, webinars and podcasts.

C/VP-level product executives such as Netflix Product VP, Coinbase CPO, and Box CPO share best practices and raise their profile at our curated product salons, podcast show and mastermind circles. Leading brands such as Autodesk and Capital One join as corporate members to turn their product teams into a competitive advantage. Hyper-growth companies like Amplitude have generated 10X ROI from marketing partnerships.

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