

## **17. It Is Important to Build Around a Highly Technical Product Line Manager Who Can Work Effectively Between Sales and Product Development - Engineering**

The overwhelming majority of startups that I have worked with in any capacity through the years have been technology companies founded by entrepreneurs that are also highly-skilled technologists. Not surprisingly, a very high percentage of the early hires tend to share a similar technical prowess and their discussions are centered on defining the architecture. As the team begins to assemble its list of priorities and the critical set of features to include, the need for a dedicated resource to shepherd that process forward emerges. This function naturally falls into the hands of product management—the keeper of the roadmap, release schedule, and the one responsible for ultimately deciding which key features are included in each revision of the code. The early product development conversations often yield contentious debate between engineering factions that oftentimes are sharing resources. For this reason, it is critical to build a Products Group around a highly technical leader who is respected by the company's developers.

With so much of the early work centered around designing and building the product, I have witnessed a fairly common mindset that pervades even the most storied startup successes—if you are not building the product or selling the product, you are considered to be overhead. The reality is that Product Marketing and Product Management can and should play meaningful roles in carving out an image and identity for the company. When deployed most appropriately, Product Management also stirs constructive dialogue among the product development team and instills accountability to prevent a Darwinesque land grab for resources. This is only made

possible when the Head of Products is able to establish a level of respect and credibility with the design engineers. Inevitably, that trust is built on the foundation of a proven technology background and the ability to quickly grasp the strategy concepts being discussed at the architecture level. When Product Management can speak the same language as the sacred technology leaders, the stage is set for collaboration and productivity. The upstarts that put the right focus on this underrated part of the business and build around an ideal technology leader to lead products have found this winning combination to be a force multiplier.