

How I Became A Product Manager

by April Copes

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Two years ago, I graduated from a fulltime immersive software development program. Matt Wilkerson, my former employer, had graciously paid my tuition in full, allowing me to pursue a career in software development due to accomplishments achieved at his company, Wilkerson Conveyor Installations. During my time there, I was an industrial electrical supervisor. I studied how to implement some of the most complicated electrical circuitry in our modern world. In leading these projects, my job was to case a site, find anomalies that posed life-threatening risks to my team, and plan smooth ways to integrate significant improvements to conveyor systems used by Fortune 500 companies throughout the US. After three years of working under the industry's stresses and gains, it was time to apply everything I had learned into the next chapter of my life.

Upon graduation, Matt asked me to build an app for the conveyor company. At the time, I denied his request. I didn't believe I had the experience needed to make an app for a multi-million dollar conveyor company. I recommended Matt hire a senior dev who would have the knowledge he was seeking. Though Matt was adamant I lead the project, and after some relentless pressing, I finally caved and accepted his offer with one condition; the budget to build a team that I knew had the collective skills to execute his vision.

At the start of this journey, I didn't know my place in this new venture. I felt inadequate and unclear about my role. I felt if I wasn't coding the app myself and there were engineers with decades of experience doing the work, what value could I possibly provide? For the first few months, I watched and learned, convinced there was nothing I do as a "junior developer," placing the project's quality in the hands of those hired to do the job, thinking this would be what was needed to make this project a success. But while developing the app, it became clear that I could no longer play a passive role in the project's success no matter what skill level I thought I possessed. I sensed the CEO was unhappy with the app's current progress, and I could identify many things lacking in the project that I felt could be improved. I didn't know it then, but it was at that moment I became a product manager. This small shift completely changed the project's tone, stopped the app from being defunded, and I learned to see and believe in myself and the value of what an effective product manager brings to a team.

To change the course in which we set sail, I became involved with every aspect of the project. When the app designs given to us didn't hit the mark, I leveraged my JavaScript, HTML, and CSS skills and redesigned the app pixel by pixel to create a sketch for the mobile team to implement. I

held standups with the development team to capture realistic timeframes to share with the CEO to stop repeat letdowns. When the development team showed signs of resistance to writing technical documentation for the app thoroughly and methodically, I hired an expert QA Manager to write the technical documentation needed for the project, debug the app and write automated tests to decrease time spent manual testing. Because we weren't using any agile practices, this heavily affected each new app release. I then learned different Scrum practices to work with the development team to implement a strict agile Scrum/Kanban workflow. This allowed team members and the CEO to see the real progress of the app's status. When we had a new upgrade to the app, I debugged the app in parallel with the development team, leveraging my full-stack knowledge to find bugs and further stabilize the system, decreasing user frustration by finding the issues first. I handled hiring and talent scouting throughout the project to utilize resources that could meet our organizational requirements. During the night, I stayed up to work with developers in various time zones to ensure we had continued progress around the clock. Though I value work-life balance, I understood the company's dire situation without the app being completed and stabilized in a prompt timeframe. I enrolled in and studied digital marketing and business courses under multi-millionaires/billionaires and successful entrepreneurs to develop a work culture that incentivized and inspired teammates to build art.

As a result, the app continues to be privately funded and is now used live within the company. We were able to land meetings with major conveyor companies in the industry interested in buying the app and creating partnerships with our company. Though I could only see myself as "just a Junior JavaScript Developer" at the time, Matt Wilkerson believed in me when I couldn't see myself. He knew he didn't need a senior engineer to build this app. He needed someone to care relentlessly, someone who could solve any problem that came their way, someone who could get the job done independently, someone who could sense things before they happened, and someone who wouldn't give up. I now know I am a product manager in every sense of the word. I advocate for others' visions and dedicate myself to working with anyone and playing any role in executing and bringing these ideas to life. In short, in extending this opportunity to consider my candidacy, it is exceedingly implausible that your investments will be in vain. I believe my character is the outweighing factor that will ensure my continued success. My ambition is not fueled by monetary payout, convenience, or fleeting whims. It stems from an inner child's curiosity to explore and unearth new horizons. I appreciate the time taken in reading this inquiry and am looking forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

In this project, you will find screenshots of an app's lifecycle before and after stepping into a role as product manager. Not only was there a drastic change in aesthetics, and functionality but we also reduced development costs by over 33%. This project is still in progress.

<https://beforeandafter.webflow.io>