

# Four Secrets to Successful Product Leadership



## INTRODUCTION



***“Leadership is about recognizing there’s a greatness in everyone, and your job is to create an environment where that greatness can emerge.”***



**Marty Cagan**

Marty Cagan, the “godfather” of product management, has met numerous product teams in Silicon Valley and beyond. Some of these product teams are successfully solving complex business problems and delighting their customers, but many others fall victim to common traps. In the most unfortunate examples, teams lose motivation, become disengaged from the customers they’re supposed to serve, and fail to deliver the innovation their companies need to stay competitive.

Why? There is usually not a single reason. Product leaders don’t share inspiring product visions. They lack a clear product strategy and well-defined objectives. They don’t prioritize empowering their Product Managers (PMs). They haven’t invested in upskilling their team.

So how can product leaders tackle these challenges head-on? How do they build high-functioning product teams that have the necessary skills — and the agency — to solve complex business problems?

In the following essays, we explore the challenges in structuring and scaling high-performing product teams that are empowered to deliver products that people use and love.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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1. The 30/30/30 Rule of Product Management.....	4
2. Product Strategy Building Blocks for Product Leaders.....	9
3. Defining Objectives and Key Results for Your Product Team.....	15
4. Storytelling Techniques for Product Leaders.....	26

**Essay 1:**

# **The 30/30/30 Rule of Product Management — Balancing Growth, Retention, and Debt Goals**



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Prioritization is one of the biggest challenges product managers face. And [effective prioritization](#) balances concerns related to growth, retention, and debt.


**Growth** involves activities that lead to new customers, which often corresponds to the requests you receive from sales. **Retention** involves activities to keep existing customers, such as the requests you receive from customer success or directly from customers themselves. And **debt** involves any internal issues that have been accumulating over time that have yet to be addressed, which can include technical, design, process, or even culture debt.

As you create your roadmap, you're constantly balancing growth, retention, and debt. You're likely negotiating with stakeholders from different parts of your organization (and maybe a [dangerous animal](#) or two).

So how do you ensure you don't go too far in any single direction? This is where having a framework like the 30/30/30 rule can help.

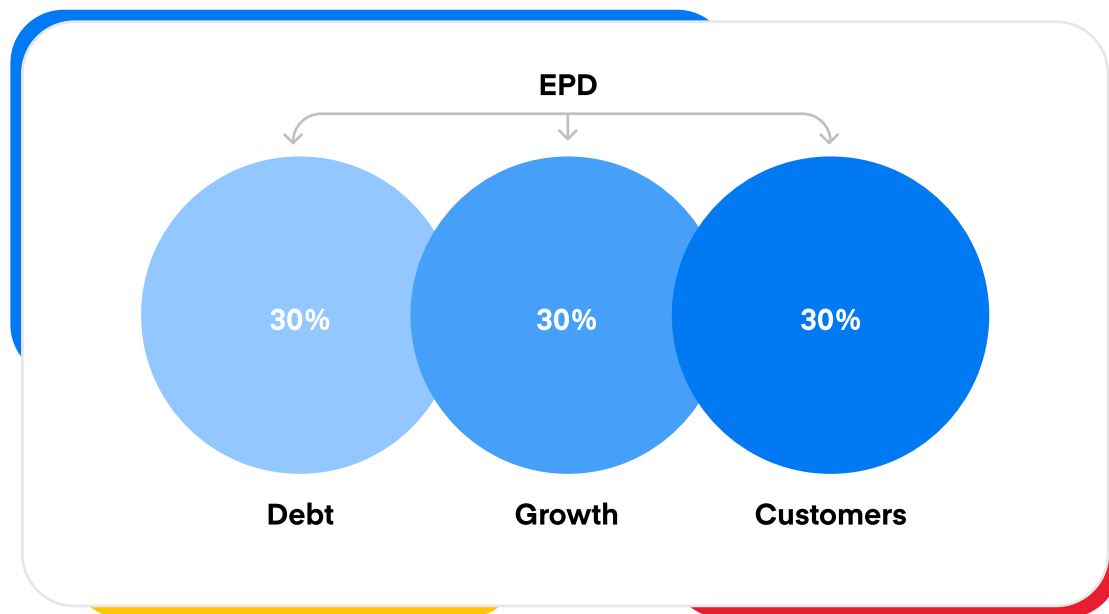
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# The 30/30/30 rule of product management



*The 30/30/30 rule states that you should invest 30% of your EPD (engineering, product management, and design) resources on existing customers, 30% on growth, and 30% on debt.*

As product managers, we certainly want to take requests from our existing customers into consideration. Keeping customers happy and retaining them are often tied in with our business's success and the metrics by which we measure our work.



At the same time, the requests we get from existing customers tend to be focused on making incremental changes to our product.

**Customers may not know everything that's technically possible within our product, and they tend to be focused on their own specific use cases. So we need to be careful that we don't over-index on retention to the point where we neglect growth.**

So we need to be careful that we don't over-index on retention to the point where we neglect growth.

Growth is about looking at the bigger picture and tapping into entirely new areas of business. This involves looking beyond existing customers to adjacent teams or people. Who else could buy your product? If product managers are your main customers, could you make a compelling use case for product marketing managers?

Or you might look at expanding to other countries and languages. If your customers are mostly English-speaking or based in North America, could you localize your product to other languages or geographical regions?

Finally, let's not forget about debt. The more progress you make on any retention or growth project, the more debt you accumulate along the way. And the consequences of neglecting debt are serious. In one infamous example, technical debt cost a company [\\$460 million](#).

This is why the 30/30/30 rule is so helpful with prioritization. Allocating your resources this way helps you focus on both growth and retention while also taking care of any debt you acquire along the way.

There are a few ways to make sure you're following the 30/30/30 rule. In your quarterly reviews and planning meetings, product managers can consider how their projects fit into each category. You might find it helpful to set up [a color-coding system for your roadmaps](#) so you can see at a glance what the distribution is between categories. Or you might ask each team to come up with a certain number of growth-focused projects per year.

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## It's more of a philosophy than a rule

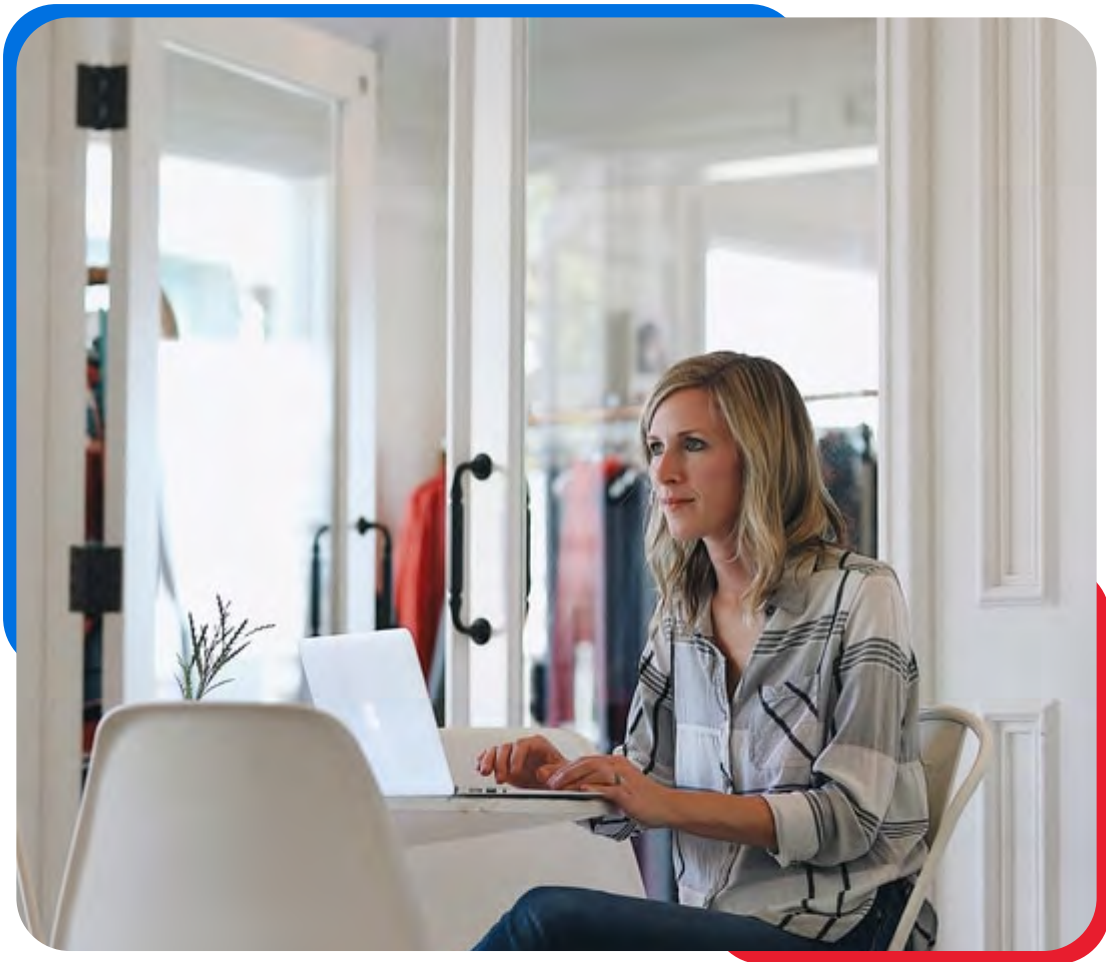
**The important point to keep in mind about the 30/30/30 rule is that you don't have to treat it like it's set in stone.**

If you have a team of 100 product managers, you don't need to assign 30 of them to focus solely on growth-generating projects at all times, for example. But if you see that none of them are working on growth projects, that's a problem.

You can also adjust the percentages based on the maturity of your product and organization. Early-stage companies that haven't yet established product/market fit are more focused on acquiring new customers than addressing debt.

A later-stage company may over-index on growth one quarter, then spend the next quarter focusing on retention. You can see how you might dial up or down in one area according to your circumstances.

One good rule of thumb is looking at your churn rate. If it's high, you'll want to focus on customer-retaining measures. But when your churn is low, this means customers are relatively happy (though this doesn't necessarily mean they'll have fewer asks). This is the time when you can run with your growth ideas and think bigger.



## It's all about checks and balances

We all know that prioritization is one of the hardest parts of being a product manager. The 30/30/30 rule is a way to help you stay aware of how you're investing your resources and create a system of checks and balances. Give it a try and see how it goes!



## Essay 2:

# Product Strategy Building Blocks for Product Leaders



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Being a great product leader means empowering your PMs to be the voice of the customer while also advancing broader business goals. At the same time, you have limited resources and can't do everything at once.

That's where product strategy comes in.

# The building blocks of an excellent product strategy

Though product strategies will vary depending on the size and stage of your business, the maturity of your product, the nature of your market, and the seniority of the person crafting it, good product strategies share common elements:

**A vision statement** summarizes an ideal future state of your product and how it contributes to the overall company mission. It should be short and simple enough for everyone on your team to understand, repeat, and share.

**The time frame of your strategy** is how long you need to accomplish your goals. This window varies depending on your company's industry and maturity.

**Business objectives** tie your strategy to the bigger picture and articulate how your plans will advance business goals.

**A well-defined audience** (perhaps an ideal customer profile or profiles) ensures that everyone knows exactly who you are optimizing your efforts for.



**Your product objectives** are the key problems you've decided to solve — different areas of investment your product team will ultimately focus on. Objectives provide a roadmap for teams to rank and prioritize features and fixes that make sense for what you're trying to achieve. Uniting your team around objectives empowers them to problem solve on their own.

**Measurable outcomes and metrics** help you stay outcome-driven and track the progress you've made toward your objectives.

**Tactics are more granular** initiatives that will help you advance your product and achieve your objectives.

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# Product strategy example and template

We understand that creating a product strategy is a difficult task. We have created an example for you, using the work that we have done at Productboard.

Productboard is mostly competing against spreadsheets and PowerPoints. For people to adopt a new type of solution — a dedicated product management platform — it needs to be 10x better than the alternative. That's how strong the gravity is around the status quo!

As a result, a key part of our strategy is to reduce the friction of adopting a new solution. We believe once users get basic data in Productboard and create their first roadmap, they won't look back.

These include getting started with building a roadmap, finding the right roadmap to share with stakeholders, and sharing roadmaps with stakeholders who don't have a Productboard login. We believe that we'll be able to differentiate ourselves and delight our customers by addressing these gaps.

For this exercise, we're planning over **a 12-month period**.

We start with a high-level [vision statement](#) that summarizes the ideal future state of our product:

**Productboard aims to be the source of truth for where the product is headed and why.**

Keep in mind that a vision statement should be short and simple enough for everyone on your team to understand, repeat, and share.

Then, [a business objective](#) that ties our strategy to the bigger-picture vision:

**Make it incredibly easy to get started with Productboard and create a roadmap that is ready to share in minutes.**

We always recommend defining **a clear audience** in this process. After all, how are we going to build the right products and features if we don't know *who* we're building them for?

And, tying things back to broader business goals, you want to select a segment that will fund your business and keep innovation going:

**Our Ideal Customer Profile here is a 300–400-person company with 15–25 makers, including product managers, designers, and engineers.**

Next, we dive into [product objectives](#) — key problems we've decided to solve and the different areas of investment our product team will ultimately focus on. Objectives empower teams to rank and prioritize features and fixes that advance product strategy.

Here, for example, **we want to enable users to build and share roadmaps right away, find the right format of roadmaps for their needs, and easily share their roadmaps with stakeholders.**

These objectives then inform **measurable outcomes** that help us keep track of progress.

For Productboard, these metrics are:

- time-to-first-roadmap
- adoption of timeline roadmaps
- the number of roadmaps shared with non-Productboard users

Note that these are quantitative metrics. You can also include relevant qualitative metrics.

Finally, we map out our **tactics** — granular initiatives that help us achieve our objectives. Here's what it looks like when we put all this information together in a table.

# 12-month strategy

<b>Vision Statement</b>	Productboard aims to be the source of truth for where the product is headed and why
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<b>Business Objective</b>	Make it incredibly easy to get started with Productboard and create a roadmap that is ready to share in minutes
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<b>Ideal Customer Profile (ICP)</b>	A 300–400-person company with 15–25 makers, including product managers, designers, and engineers
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Product Objectives	Measurable Outcomes (Metrics)	Use Cases/Tactics
Enable users to build and share roadmaps right away	Time-to-first-roadmap — how long it takes users to create their first roadmap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Easier import of external data</li><li>• Showcase the value of each roadmap</li></ul> Productboard currently offers and empower users to quickly select one that meets their needs
Guide users to the right roadmaps for themselves and their stakeholders	Adoption of timeline roadmaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Launch objective roadmaps</li><li>• Unify the roadmap creation process and make it intuitive to set up all formats of roadmaps in Productboard</li></ul>
Make it easy to share roadmaps with stakeholders	An increase in roadmaps shared outside Productboard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enable sharing of roadmaps with stakeholders without a Productboard login</li><li>• Embed roadmaps where people work (Wiki, Notion, etc.)</li></ul>



## A few pieces of advice

The process of creating a product strategy is both top-down and bottom-up. You need to work closely with executives to understand broader business goals and incorporate customer feedback related to their problems and needs. Be crisp and brutal in prioritizing. Pave the path forward, tell people why, and get buy-in from others. Remember that it's impossible to please everyone. If you get stuck, reach out to others on your team to see how they think about things like your business or product objectives and the tactics that will help you achieve them.

## Essay 3:

# Defining Objectives and Key Results for Your Product Team



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Product Marketing Manager  
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A lot has been said about avoiding the feature factory approach to product management. No one wants to work on a product as though they're "sitting in a factory, cranking out features, and sending them down the line," without knowing if they're actually having any impact. It's the definition of aimless busywork. It's jumping straight from one project to the next, with no evaluation of whether past efforts made a difference. It's a fixation over shipping features regardless of the actual outcomes they drive for your users and your business. Yet without a doubt, the feature factory approach is the status quo. It's the unfortunate equilibrium that awaits all teams who waver in setting and pursuing clear objectives.

And the loathsome hum of its malevolent machinery can emerge gradually, even among top-performing teams! We've all been there.

**When pressure is high and time frames tight, anyone can revert to just cranking out features.**

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## Introducing objectives and key results

Indeed, only a well-maintained system can fend off the feature factory. For many organizations, that's come in the form of **objectives and key results (OKRs)**. It's credited for the rise and dominance of companies like Intel and Google, where it has helped them move mountains while maintaining alignment and agility at scale. And it's been employed by thousands of smaller organizations that are plenty [agile](#) yet looking to focus their scattershot efforts on one clear strategy.

If you've heard of OKRs but wrote them off as a passing fad or a daunting management methodology (as I once did!), you'll be pleasantly surprised. The logic behind them is intuitive, time-tested, and universal to defining good objectives in general. The system itself can be explained in less than five minutes.



Sound promising so far? Let's dive into the basics and review some examples. Then we'll conclude with the next steps you can take to try OKRs with your product team. Whether you're new to OKRs or just brushing up, you'll leave feeling more confident about driving your product team toward clear, measurable outcomes in the coming quarters.

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# Why you need OKRs

Have you ever felt spread too thin to be effective in your work?

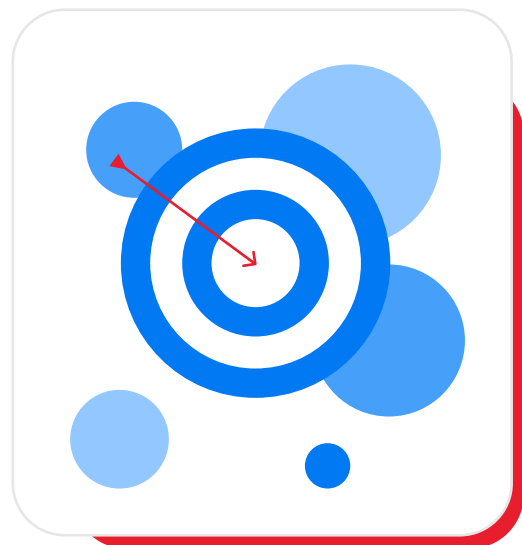
Has your team struggled to commit to one strategy and de-prioritize another?

Has your organization lacked alignment as divisions or teams with conflicting goals row in different directions?

**For the individual, team, and organization: If everything is important, nothing is important.**

OKRs provide a flexible hierarchy of objectives that cascade down through every team and individual. Everyone knows what to focus on. Everyone's objectives are aligned.

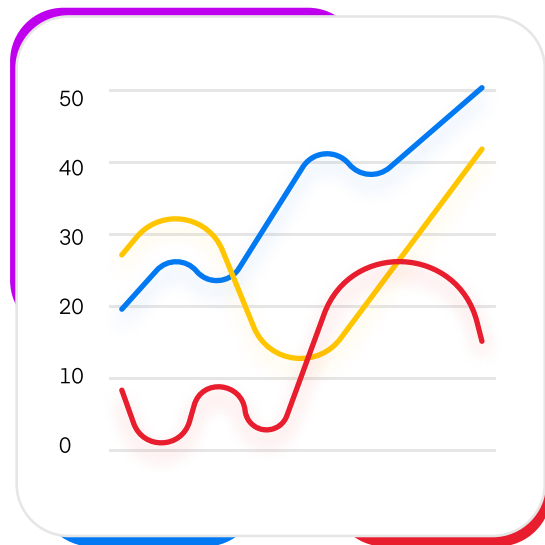
**Objectives** are inspirational (qualitative) goals that communicate the business outcomes you're looking to reach. They're timebound, most often to a quarter or sometimes to a year.



**Key results** are the three to five indicators (often quantitative goals/KPIs) associated with each objective that help you track your progress and ultimately determine whether the objective has been met.

Here's the most important bit: The key results at the organizational level can become objectives for the next level down — whether that's division, department, or team (depending on the size of your organization). The further down you go, the more specific and tactical the objectives become.

Let's illustrate how that works through some examples of company OKRs, product OKRs, and individual OKRs.



# Examples of OKRs

## Company OKRs

A company's highest objective is stated in its mission statement, but when discussing top-level objectives, we typically mean the goals the company aims to reach in the next quarter, half-year, or year.

***Company objective:***

***Expand our impact by selling to the enterprise  
(by end of quarter)***

- ***KR: Win 20 new enterprise deals***
- ***KR: Grow sales-touched revenue by 20%***
- ***KR: Grow Average Revenue Per Account (ARPA) by 15%***
- ***KR: Launch major product initiative Y***

If the last key result seems a bit different from the rest, you're right. It's not a quantitative key result (KR), but it is specific enough to verify completion at the end of the period. Even the OKR guru himself, John Doerr, confirms that this is the form some KRs take, and that's just fine.

What will it take to launch this major product initiative? Let's jump one level down to the product team.

## **Product team OKRs**

The product team is lucky. Their objectives are often especially closely aligned with the organizations at large.

Even at larger organizations like Google, where objectives exist at the parent company, company, division, subdivision, function, team, and individual level, a company-wide objective (e.g., Increase market share within segment Z) may skip multiple levels to be assigned to an individual team!

What a thrill to have the entire company rallied behind your success, but quite some pressure too. But back to our previous example...

***Product objective:***

***Launch major product initiative Y (by end of quarter)***

- ***KR: All features in scope to GA***
- ***KR: 50% of customers import data to interface Y***
- ***KR: Interface Y plays a direct role in helping close 20 enterprise deals***
- ***KR: 30% of monthly active users use interface Y each week***
- ***KR: Customer Z is fully satisfied with feature Y***

As you can see, key results for product objectives are often just proxies for user value. Are users actually benefiting from this thing we worked so hard on? (The answer may not be what you'd hoped, but that knowledge is key for avoiding future waste!) While every product generates value in different ways, our analytical methods for measuring value are limited. It means we often fall back on common metrics for measuring feature adoption and engagement. **Adoption metrics** might measure the number of users/projects who configured a feature or began using it at all. **Engagement metrics** measure how often users returned to get more value (e.g., daily active users, weekly active users). Together they provide a basic picture of whether a feature is getting used.

Still, that's a pretty low bar, huh?

**If quantitative key results ever threaten to suck the air out of the room, get creative with some qualitative ones.**

They can still be measurable, if in a more abstract way, but can also be a fun motivator.

- ***KR: Customer Z is fully satisfied with feature Y***

At Productboard, we've had some fun including key results associated with the reception of features by especially demanding customers. (Don't get me wrong, we love these folks who really care about the problems we're solving and push us the hardest.) Provided the customer falls into the [target segment](#), and their needs align with our vision, rallying the team to deliver a feature that thrills them is an exciting result to aim for.

In addition to launching new features, additional objectives might include maintenance of existing functionality, investing in new team processes, as well as administrative goals:

*Objective: Eliminate core areas of in-product friction*

*Objective: Create a design system*

*Objective: Scale the team*

## Individual OKRs

If you're a product manager, your objectives will likely address a handful of [user needs](#) or business goals. Key results may include the successful launch of major features and the indicators you use to measure desired outcomes.

***Objective: Help customers better categorize their data for rapid retrieval***

- ***KR: Ship tag management***
- ***KR: Ship advanced search***
- ***KR: 80% decrease in support tickets related to tags***

If you work at the director or VP level, or if you're a product manager at a startup, you will likely own the objectives of your team of product managers, department, or division. That's in addition to objectives related to your strategic leadership and managerial duties, such as completing strategic deliverables, hiring, training, and mentoring.

# Setting objectives: top-down meets bottom-up

When planning your objectives for your team or yourself, you'll find that much of the exercise involves analyzing higher-level key results and asking yourself: "How can I bring my/our unique strengths to bring about this result?"

It requires brainstorming, and you may come up with multiple ideas. For example, to increase new user adoption, you could create an in-app walkthrough, a dynamic project setup checklist, or carousels containing explanatory gifs. In this case, you'll really be placing a bet, given your limited time and resources, on the course of action most likely to drive the intended result.

Objectives tend to cascade down, but they can also bubble up. For example, executives at our company might not understand some of the struggles customers are having with a certain area of the product that could be driving churn.

By choosing your own objectives and key results, you use the context you have from the frontlines to decide the best way you can generate value for your customers and your organization. And in the mid-term, inputs that employees on the frontlines feed back to leadership can influence the top-level objectives set for future cycles.

Last, don't forget to include an objective for personal growth! What measurable steps will you take to grow in your role, develop your skills, and advance your career?

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## Succeeding with OKRs

Here are a few final things to keep in mind to get the most out of OKRs with your product team.

### Set ambitious OKRs

The primary purpose of OKRs is not just to document but galvanize. If OKRs are to be made sufficiently ambitious, they need to be kept separate from performance evaluations.

Otherwise, goals tend to be set too conservatively to do much good. This is especially true of moonshot OKRs.



*“Take a look at your OKRs. If you are getting a funny little feeling in the pit of your stomach saying, ‘We are really going to have to all bring our A game to hit these...’ then you’re probably setting them correctly.”*



**Christina Wodtke**

Christina Wodtke, Radical Focus

If you find **moonshot** OKRs are being met with close to 100% success rate, then you’re probably not setting ambitious enough targets.

Note: You may also set **committed** OKRs related to your core job responsibilities and expect them to be achieved 100%. Just clearly designate these and set expectations accordingly.

## Counterbalance your key results

When setting key results, consider what negative outcomes they might incidentally incentivize. Aim to counterbalance these.

For example, if one goal is to ship more features (quantity), consider setting another key result targeting quality.

If another goal is about growth, set another to address performance. And keep an eye out for blind spots! If you’re setting key results to validate whether users are getting value from a new feature, then it’s likely not enough to verify that they configure it (adoption). You’ll also want to ensure that they’re coming back on a regular basis (engagement).

## Keep your OKRs front and center

If you're setting OKRs for the first time, it's easy to promptly forget about them.

Things come up. We get distracted in our day-to-day. New responsibilities land on our plates mid-cycle. And the further individual OKRs drift from memory, the easier it is to convince yourself that since the work you're doing seems important, it must be supporting one of your objectives. It's not until you check your OKRs with three weeks to go that you realize an impossible amount of work remains.

To get full value from OKRs, post them where you'll see them every day, or adopt [a dedicated OKR management solution](#) and refer to it on a regular basis. Capture product OKRs in a product management solution like [Productboard](#), where you [can use objectives](#) to prioritize and plan supporting feature ideas. Score your key results to indicate confidence that you'll meet them and update them regularly. Share OKRs with your manager and colleagues — if not your entire organization — for transparency, alignment, and accountability. Bake OKRs into weekly team meetings, where you can discuss progress and blockers.





# Life beyond the feature factory

OKRs bring the promise of greater focus, alignment, and measurable progress toward exciting outcomes. They require an upfront investment and ongoing attention, but hopefully with the tips we've reviewed here, you'll be well on your way.

As with all things, sometimes your best bet is to [start small and just get started](#). You can take OKRs for a trial run and adjust as you go. But if you're looking for more guidance and resources, check out John Doerr's [Measure What Matters](#), Christina Wodtke's [Radical Focus](#), and the Google re: Work [Guide: Set goals with OKRs](#).

## Essay 4:

# Storytelling Techniques for Product Leaders



**Author:**  
**Petra Wille**

Product Leadership Coach  
and author of  
*Strong Product People*

One hot summer morning, my young daughter insisted on wearing her heavy winter boots to school. Given the warm weather, I told her not to wear those boots. This led to the typical childish pleading familiar to all parents.

But then, my daughter stopped complaining and started a story.

She told me about a game based on the Disney movie *Frozen* she and her friend had been playing the previous day. The pair thought that having winter boots like the main characters would make the game even better. Both agreed to wear them to school the next day.

Then I understood the context behind my daughter's unusual request. I heard a story that made it much easier for me to say yes. She wore those boots to school that day.

From a very young age, we understand the power of storytelling. But as we grow older, we often forget to use this power or dismiss stories as trivial compared to the logic of data or a well-reasoned argument.

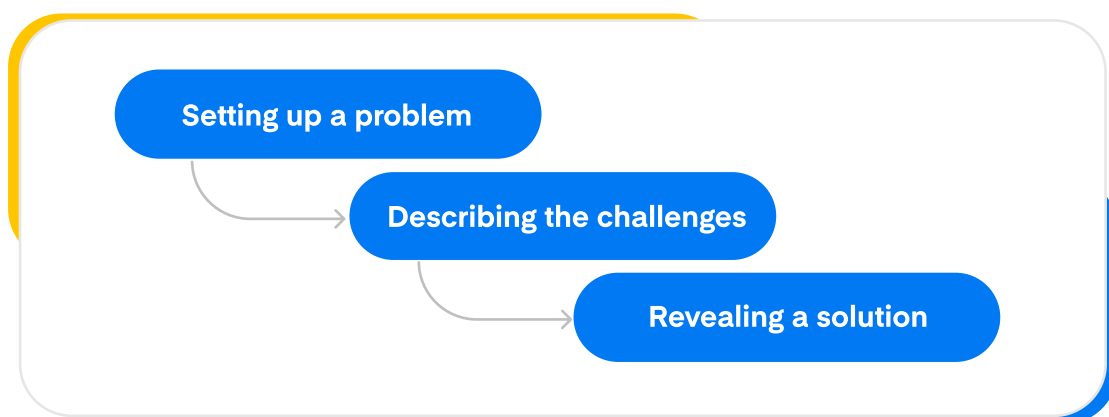
I still believe in stories and their ability to inspire action.

**I think storytelling is a critical skill for product leaders when they need to motivate their teams or bring the wider business on board with their product vision and strategy.**

But too often, leaders lack the confidence to tell good stories. Instead, they fall back on facts that can bring someone over to your side but rarely get them fully behind you.

We all need to overcome our inner critic and re-embrace the power of stories. Here's how to be a better storyteller who can turn doubters into believers.

Whenever Steve Jobs spoke at an Apple product launch, he used a classic three-part story structure to **set up the problematic status quo, describe the challenges involved in changing it,** and then finally **reveal Apple's solution.**



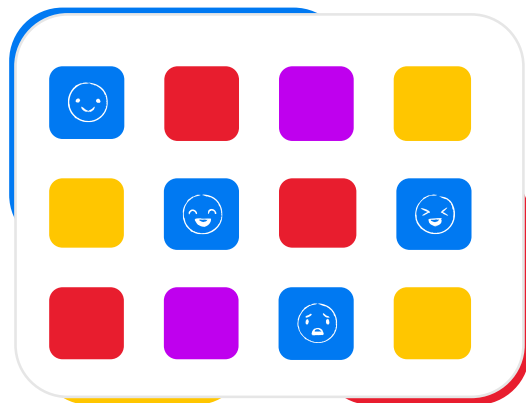
Barack Obama often recounted tales from his childhood or about his parents to demonstrate his unique presidential perspective on the issues facing the United States and the world.

**It's not just individuals who succeed by telling stories. Companies with iconic brands have also mastered the art and can inspire customers to imagine a better future with just a few words.**

Whether it's Nike's "Just Do It," L'Oreal's "Because You're Worth It," or Airbnb's "Belong Anywhere," these slogans are the compelling opening lines of each organization's broader brand story.

Successful people and businesses understand that stories impact people on a biological level. Hearing a great story makes our brains light up by triggering the release of powerful hormones:

- **Oxytocin**, which causes us to build trust, generosity, and a personal connection
- **Endorphins**, which can make someone laugh or help them deal with fear, pain, or uncertainty
- **Dopamine**, which leads to a desire to know what happens next when you tell a story with peaks and troughs that lead to cliff-hangers



It's likely that these chemical reactions have evolved because they've helped our species work together to solve problems more effectively. Thousands of years ago, the unique gift of language allowed Homo sapiens to take a collective approach to hunting and gathering food.

Today, stories remain a critical tool in how we overcome challenges, build trust, and deal with uncertainty. Their value is felt in all aspects of our lives, from a child choosing footwear to our collective response to the global pandemic. There is no reason we shouldn't use storytelling to enhance product management.



*"We think in stories, remember in stories, and turn just about everything we experience into a story."*



**Carl Alviani**

When I worked as a product manager for a job board service, my team was strong on output. We got stuff done. But none of it seemed to translate into good outcomes. Traction metrics were poor, users rarely provided feedback, and new features didn't make much difference.

I conducted product discovery initiatives to figure out what we were doing wrong, but I struggled to build a consensus among stakeholders about how to fix our problems. When I mentioned my frustration to my then-mentor, [Marty Cagan](#), he hit me with a hard truth: I wasn't a good storyteller.

Marty felt that I was failing to communicate my [product discovery](#) learnings in a way that motivated my team and other stakeholders. As I wasn't connecting these individual findings to the big picture of our product, my team was left uninspired, while stakeholders had no reason to get behind our efforts.

Having identified my lack of storytelling skills as an issue, Marty encouraged me to work on them and recommended Guy Kawasaki's book, [Selling the Dream](#). The marketer behind the success of the original Apple Macintosh notes that telling great stories about a product creates evangelists: people who believe in your idea or product and promote its value to others.

Understanding the critical importance of stories and developing my storytelling skills changed the rest of my career as a product manager. My stories now united my development team, convinced stakeholders to back our ideas, enhanced our marketing and sales, and, most importantly, helped me to figure out what really mattered to our users.

Stories are a perfect design tool because:

- Everyone has the ability to create one
- It's easy to iterate on a story
- They provide more clarity about what you're trying to achieve

If you're struggling to convince your team and stakeholders that your strategy will work or that you're building the right features, storytelling might be the way to make your ideas resonate.

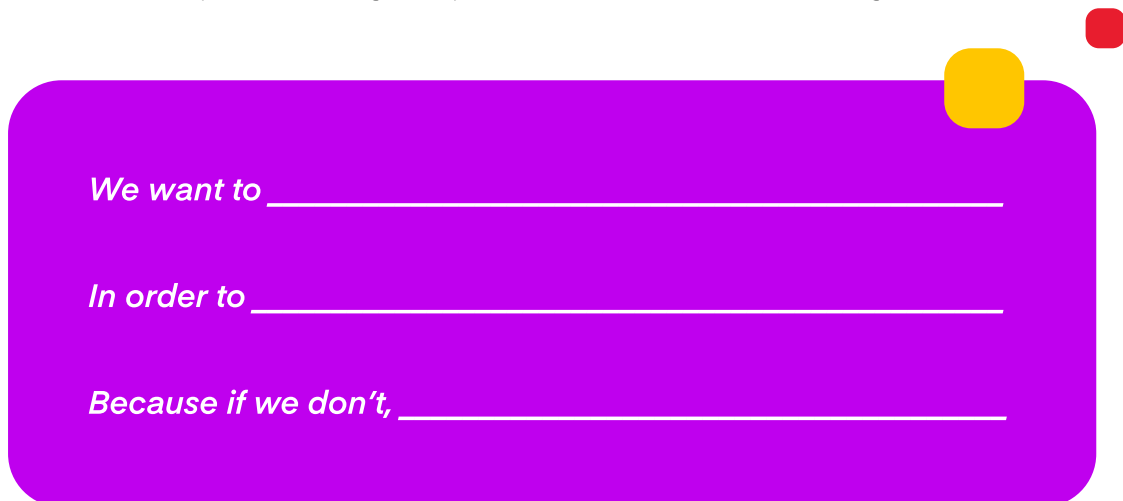
But how do you get started?

**The first and perhaps most critical step is to dedicate time to writing your story.** Trust me, the hours you spend now crafting a great story will save you from wasting many more later in endless, frustrating meetings. The upfront investment is worthwhile, so find a slot in your calendar.

Next, decide whether you'll put your team or the user at the center of your story. Then choose a structure. A clear beginning, middle, and end make it easier for people to understand the point of your story.

The "[hero's journey](#)" is a classic structure that underlies many of the best-known stories, from *The Odyssey* to *Star Wars*. Outlined by professor of literature Joseph Campbell, it describes a main character's journey from their ordinary world through a call to adventure and a transformative conclusion. The journey can take the form of a simple three-act structure or expand into more stages if your story demands complexity.

**The quickest way to start writing a story is to fill in the blanks in the following template:**



*We want to* \_\_\_\_\_

*In order to* \_\_\_\_\_

*Because if we don't,* \_\_\_\_\_

Once you have the bare bones of your story in place, it's easier to flesh out the details. To get your audience excited about your idea, include certain key elements in your story. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I painted a picture of a desirable future?
- Is it clear why the listener should be part of this future?
- Does the story acknowledge the current situation while describing the potential difficulties that may arise and why it's worth overcoming them?
- Does it suggest a common goal while providing enough clarity on the next steps?

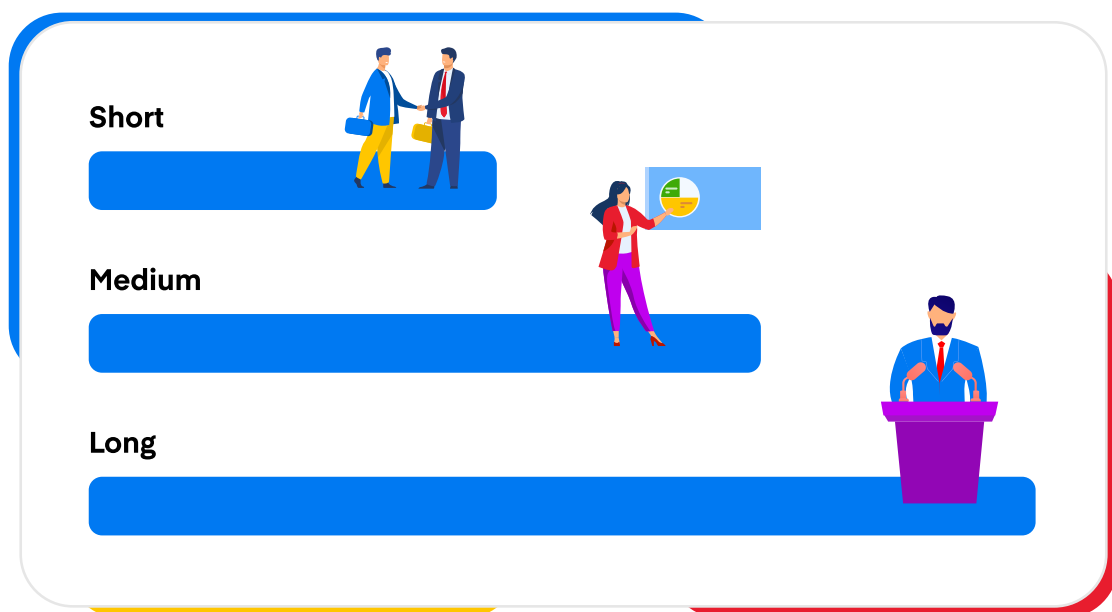
Next, you need different versions of the story. While you'll occasionally have the floor for a full presentation, other times, you may only be assigned a short segment in an agenda-packed meeting or have the ear of a critical decision-maker for the length of your elevator ride together.

That's why you should create the following three variations so you can always deliver your message, whatever the occasion:

**Short:** Your elevator pitch should be no more than approximately 150 words and take about 75 seconds to deliver. You need to deliver your setup, challenge, and resolution quickly while retaining the overall impact of your story.

**Medium:** This version can be about 900 words and take six minutes to deliver, but don't assume you'll have everyone's full attention throughout. Start with what you are going to tell them, then finish by reminding them of what you just told them. That helps ensure your message gets through to wandering minds.

**Long:** You may have the room booked for an hour, but resist the temptation to make your story longer than 18 minutes. TED talks are restricted to that length for a reason. As TED curator Chris Anderson says, "By forcing speakers... to bring it down to 18, you get them to really think about what they want to say."



Use visuals to help tell your story, especially in the medium and long versions. Drawings, illustrations, pictures, graphs, and memes can keep your audience engaged and help make your story stick.

**Now you're ready to start testing your story.** Share it with a small number of people and observe how they react. Are they drawing the right conclusions? Did you provoke their emotions and inspire them to be part of the future you envision? Did they laugh?

Rework your story based on this feedback. You may need to add more emotive language or even a joke or two to ensure that you're really lighting up the brain of your listener. Cut down on buzzwords, tool names, and abbreviations, as these can cause people to tune out.

When you tell your story, speak to the hearts and minds of your audience. Show them your curiosity, passion, and vulnerability. This helps listeners connect to the story, making them more likely to remember and retell it.

This is the ultimate power of storytelling. When a listener takes your tale and makes it their own, your ideas go further. They live beyond you, the original storyteller, making it more likely that you'll inspire action and achieve your vision.

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## About Productboard

Productboard is a customer-centric product management platform that helps organizations get the right products to market, faster. Over 5,000 companies, including Microsoft, Zoom, 1-800-Contacts, and UiPath, use Productboard to understand what users need, prioritize what to build next, and rally everyone around their roadmap. With offices in San Francisco, Prague, and Vancouver, Productboard is backed by leading investors like Tiger Global Management, Index Ventures, Kleiner Perkins, Sequoia Capital, and Bessemer Venture Partners.

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