Introduction

Teaching is a passion of mine, and I'm thrilled to share my knowledge about product management interviews with this book. Over the last five years, I've helped job seekers get their dream jobs. During that period, I've taught my clients the fundamentals of product management, design, business, technology, and face-to-face communication.

Over the years, my clients have asked me for sample answers for case interview questions for the likes of Google, Amazon, Facebook, LinkedIn and Microsoft. To my clients, you've inspired me to write that book. I hope you enjoy it.

This book focuses on sample answers. On the Internet, there is no shortage of tips and frameworks on how to answer these questions. But actual answer responses — that's rare. That's what you'll get here.

This book also provides context without which you may not understand why a particular question would be asked or if your planned response is good or bad. I have provided some brief advice before each question type on how to approach a particular category of questions.

The product management case interview is tough. It combines interview questions that would otherwise for appear for positions in disparate disciplines, including project management, product design, software engineering, management consulting and marketing.

The best way to prepare is to practice. This book will help you develop responses with the help of sample answers. You won't be caught off guard with unexpected interview questions. You will be able to analyze differences between responses and determine what's best for you.

When the big interview day comes, with your newfound awareness and knowledge, your responses will be convincing and penetrating.

The aim of the book is not to give you a script to read from during an interview, but to prepare you for whatever questions may come your way. By working with this book, your response will sound practiced, but not in the regurgitated way that interviewers can easily detect. In fact, the book will prepare you to answer unique employer-specific questions that aren't in this book.

This book will prepare you for an interview both by helping you with your content and your delivery. For the sake of simplicity, I refer to hypothetical candidates as "he" and hypothetical interviewers as "she."

There is no substitute for true, in-depth knowledge. That is the product manager's burden. You have to be an expert in so many different fields. Over time, if you haven't already, you should develop intellectual curiosity for all the product management disciplines – from design to business to technical. You'll find that interview responses will come more naturally.

In addition to the content of your answers, delivery is equally important. Good product management candidates give answers that are impactful, influential, engaging and precise. Many ineffective candidates ramble at the same cadence as dull corporate jargon. It's important to be crisp in your responses and avoid boring answers.

Good luck with your interviews. By challenging yourself and practicing, you won't need it!

Chapter 1 Critiquing design

Any good design critique includes a scorecard. It's an objective way to determine if a product passes or fails based on predetermined criteria.

Dieter Rams is a famous industrial designer who has deeply influenced Apple's design chief, Jony Ive. Rams has 10 design principles that governs his work. It serves as a good starting point to evaluate product or feature design.

Dieter Rams Ten Principles of Good Design

Good design is:

1. **Innovative**
2. **Makes a product useful**
3. Aesthetic
4. **Understandable**
5. Unobtrusive
6. **Honest**
7. Long-lasting
8. Thorough down to the last detail
9. Environmentally friendly
10. As little design as possible

Of his 10 design principles, I've bolded the best ones to cite: innovation, utility, ease of use and sense of honesty.

Approach any product design critique by:

- Revealing your design criteria. Cap it to three principles.
- Explaining how the product may or may not meet your criteria.

- Being specific, offering evidence, and contrasting with similar products.

Practice Questions

1. How do you like LinkedIn's endorse feature?
2. Tell me about a product you like and use frequently. Why do you like it?
3. Tell me about a product that was designed poorly.

Answers

How do you like LinkedIn's endorse feature?

CANDIDATE: When I evaluate whether or not I like a feature, I think about three design principles:

- Is it innovative?
- Is it useful?
- Is it honest?

I'll use those principles to evaluate LinkedIn's endorse feature.

Since I don't recall the feature details, I will start by reviewing how the feature works. The endorse feature appears on different parts of the site.

On your profile page

There's a pop-up at the top of the page asking you to endorse skills of four people you know.

LinkedIn offers suggestions for endorsements. You can endorse each person individually, or you can easily endorse everyone by clicking a single button.
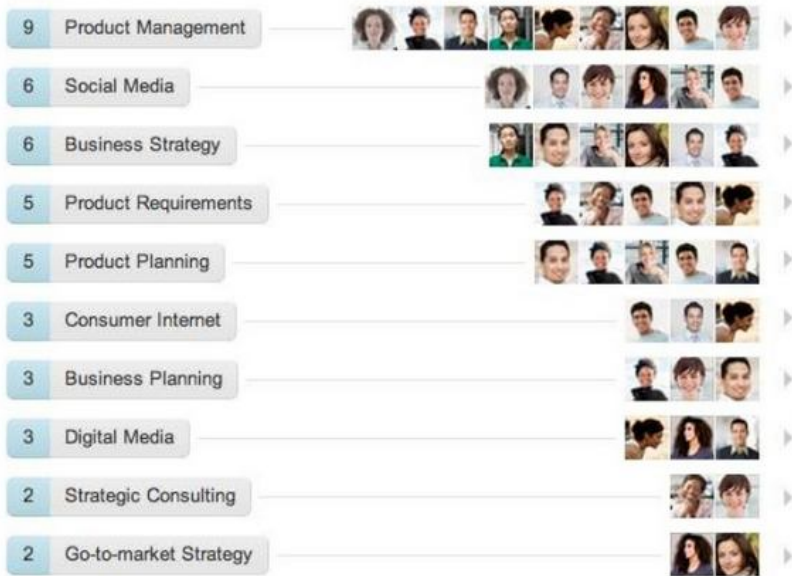
On someone else's profile page

Here we are at Matt's profile page. It focuses on suggestions for Matt alone, not four different people. There are a few suggestions — with the ability to add or subtract endorsement. Suggested endorsements could be added to Matt's profile with a single click of the yellow "Endorse" button, provided that Matt accepts them.

Skills & Expertise / Endorsements

9	Product Management
6	Social Media
6	Business Strategy
5	Product Requirements
5	Product Planning
3	Consumer Internet
3	Business Planning
3	Digital Media
2	Strategic Consulting
2	Go-to-market Strategy

All endorsements appear at the bottom of a user's profile page. On the left, you'll see how many have endorsed a particular skill. On the right, you'll find photos for those who gave the endorsement.

	Pros	**Cons**
Innovative	Is a clever way to get more profile data	May not produce quality data
Useful	Adds more information about the individual Identifies probable expertise areas	Has categories that don't include details or examples
Honest	Provides wisdom of the crowds	Lacks way to verify what is actually true

The feature is innovative though it has issues. I find it a clever way to get more profile data. It's an easy one-click process. And the endorsee

will be compelled to return the favor to the endorser, creating a growing cycle of more endorsement data.

But the data quality is suspect. On the one hand, LinkedIn doesn't allow strangers to endorse one another. But still, who knows if the endorser is qualified to evaluate a person's expertise?

The feature meets my usefulness criteria. LinkedIn wants people to find the site valuable and worth spending time on. Users are more likely to spend time on it if there's more quality data to peruse. The data also has two additional benefits to LinkedIn. First, LinkedIn can create new products based on rich data. Second, for a competitor to lure the LinkedIn user, it would take a lot of time to recreate all the value that already exists on LinkedIn. The downside is that these endorsements don't include examples or details of a person's expertise. For example, if someone is endorsed as an expert in web design, I'd like to see a link to his or her design portfolio.

The third and final criteria for me, is this feature honest? I have mixed feelings about that. On the one hand, it leverages the wisdom of the crowds. On the other hand, there's a heavy sampling bias. Friends are more likely to endorse each other than people with other types, or no, relationships. Also, endorsed users feel compelled to return the favor, possibly voting up connections that shouldn't have been voted up in the first place.

Comments: The candidate does a good job stating his evaluation criteria and then thoughtfully evaluated the feature based on those criteria.

Walking through, either in writing or vocally, the way the feature works may seem unnecessary. However, most candidates

overestimate their knowledge of a particular product. They assume they know how it works, only to be challenged by the interviewer later when the feature doesn't work that way. By methodically walking through the product before critiquing it, the candidate takes the opportunity of being on the same page as the interviewer before moving forward.

Tell me about a product you like and use frequently. Why do you like it?

CANDIDATE: My favorite product is my iPhone. When I think about why it's my favorite, it comes down to three key design questions:

- How useful is it?
- How innovative is it?
- Is the product easy to use and understood?

In terms of utility, there's no other device that I use as much as my iPhone. It's a personal communication device that allows me to browse the web and listen to music. Excluding eating and breathing, it meets or helps meet most of my life needs including getting stuff done and connecting with friends and family.

It's a very innovative product. Before the iPhone, the BlackBerry dominated. BlackBerries were effective for emailing, but they were limited when browsing the web. And there were few apps. Remember checking sports scores on a WAP-enabled (wireless application protocol) ESPN site? It seems archaic compared with what we have now. We've come a long way, and the iPhone gets most of the credit for starting the revolution.

Finally, the product is easy to use and understand. There are few buttons — just the ones that are critical and obvious: on/off, ringer