

“KEEP YOUR SANITY” CHECKLIST FOR PRODUCT OWNERS / PRODUCT MANAGERS

Product Owners / Product Managers have some of the most stressful and difficult positions in a company. Because of this, it is critical that they prioritize some downtime to rejuvenate, take a breath, share why things matter, and not be quick to change the plan. They need to influence through collaboration and inclusion, and continually invest in the relationships with those around them, whether face to face or in remote situations.

In this post we summarized some of our tried-and-tested thoughts on how to keep your sanity in this demanding role during these demanding times:

1. Product Owners, beat the chase!

- Make sure you prepare enough stories to last you for a couple sprints, so you can beat the chase!
- Always have a few, valuable yet small, stories ready in the backlog to roll out when team is lacking other work or when product discovery is lagging product delivery
- Don't be afraid to pull in others to help you. Creating a backlog is the job of the whole team.

2. Convert email to standup questions (or Slack)

- Long emails are a pain! Encourage your teams to write shorter emails.
 - Ask the question first
 - Make the question yes/no or a choice of options that you propose
 - Try to limit it to one question per email. It's ok to send multiple short emails.
- Encourage your teams to bring their questions to standup - makes the whole process more efficient and the whole team can hear if relevant.
- If you don't have a standup or the question can't wait, encourage your teams to shoot you a Slack (this has the added benefit of forcing people into more concise messages).

3. Influence by “walking” around (face to face or remote!)

- Talk to people around you. Find a way to talk to everyone (sales, marketing, finance, etc.)
- Build relationships and learn about other's perspectives.
- Set a specific time to reach out to people while always being respectful of their time.

4. Product Owners, think strategically while acting tactically

- Don't be afraid to engage in the strategic discussions in the Product Manager meeting.
- Ask the Product Manager how you can help, while constantly thinking of specific things you can do ahead of time.
- Engage the Product Manager and the team in product discovery sessions that take an idea and bring it all the way down to stories. Make discovery a blend of strategy and tactics.



5. Product Managers: Influencing is easiest when others are part of the decision

- Include your development teams and other teams early in the discovery phase to build unity of purpose and collective ownership
- A collaborative product discovery and delivery process will result in a higher quality product and achieve better product market fit.

6. Don't be so quick to change the plan - make sure trade-offs are known

- Avoid being too reactive and eager to pivot.
- Make sure you can talk to the requester directly to hear what they need.
- Take the opportunity to influence and share the strategy.

7. Prioritize downtime for yourself

- Stay motivated, enthusiastic, and dedicated by prioritizing time for yourself. It is imperative to dedication that we step away.
- Prioritize time during the week to tear away and get your favorite treat, grab a bike ride, or a walk through the park.
- Balance your choices carefully so that you won't find yourself bitter of those choices when things at work aren't going your way.

8. Prioritize downtime for the benefit of your employer

- Give priority to what matters most.
- Give your brain the time needed to subconsciously solve the complexities you face every day and come up with great solutions!
- Disconnect!

9. Make regular sincere deposits in the social bank

- Manage through influence; inspire others to follow you into battle.
- Make regular deposits into the social bank by making sure to care about those around you and know about what motivates them.
- Be sincere. Insincerity will be discovered over time and will actually be detrimental.