Naked Product Management

Posted on Oct 11, 2012, Posted by Val Workman Category Product Management

Naked News is one thing, Naked Product Management is another. It's not about nudity, but it's about

the protective clothing we ware. I've shared this story with a few people, so if you've heard it, please

forgive an old guy remembering too much too often. When I was going to school, I spent 100% of my

time between the Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Schools. The only exception to this was when

I was fulfilling my General Education requirements. I used to look out of the windows onto the patio

belonging to the School of Music; see all those fun, attractive girls, and wish I needed more music

classes.

Well my last semester came, and I had time for an extra course, so I signed up for choir. I'd spent all

Spring watching the girls in the choir with their tiny white shorts, sunning on the steps of the music

building, I figured that would be the place to be. Turns out I had to have the signature of the instructor

to be placed in the class. I figured, "No problem, I had great grades, and I was God's gift to the science

world, how hard could a music class be?"

So I stood in line with all those girls waiting for a faculty signature. I thought I'd died and went to

paradise. My decision to take a music class was paying off already. As I came closer to the head of the

line, I could hear people behind the door auditioning to get into the class. I quickly got out of line and

went to the back. After doing this a few times I ended up at the door, the last in line.

The instructor came to the door [he recognized me from a Music Appreciation class I'd had with him a

few semesters back] and said, "Hi I didn't know you could sing, come on in." I had given this instructor

hell, when I took his class. He didn't have the physics of harmonics down right, nor could he

properly
explain the musical sequences of Mozart in number theory. I'll never forget the grace he extended to me
that day. It could have been his revenge, but it wasn't.

He led me into an empty auditorium, where a large grand piano was in the center of the room. He sat on
the piano bench and gave me a sheet of music. He told me to sing those notes. I must have looked lost.
He said, "You don't know how to read music do you?" I told him no. He then went through a series of
notes on the piano and asked me to sing each note as he played it. At the end, he said, "I'll let you in the
choir, but you must always stand next to someone who knows how to sing." He signed the paper, I took
the class, never got to spend even two minutes with any girls, worked hard not to embarrass myself too
much, and had a very rewarding experience.

The lesson comes what happened after that first audition. I went back to the math building, sat as white
as a ghost uncontrollably shaking for an hour. Oh, I'd spoken in public lots of times, made hundreds of
presentations, to lots of important people, substituted in the high school, all with no problem. Because
I was wearing the cloths of my discipline. It didn't matter what discipline, I had the technology to hide
behind. I never had to expose myself, I just talked about the science. But with music, I was naked. I had
to become vulnerable, and let people know what I physically could or could not do. This was about me,
not the science or whatever the topic was.

The audition had left me in I shock, real physical shock. It scared me that much.

I find that many Product Managers feel this way when placed responsible for a product in an industry
they aren't real familiar with. They believe they need a background in a particular industry to function
as a product manager. If they don't have that background, they feel naked, and exposed to failure. They
ware their past experience as a set of protective clothing.

In truth, most Product Managers hide behind their experience and use it as an excuse for taking

shortcuts in product management activities. They figure the way they succeeded in the past is by taking
shortcuts. Naked Product Managers wouldn't dare. Product Managers with experience in product
management processes and best-practices, but not in the current industry, are far more likely to go
through the correct process than those with industry experience. Traditionally Product Managers use
their experience in the industry as protective clothing to hide behind.

What makes the difference in product management is the level of standardized, product management
practices that are repeatable, defendable, and maintainable. Let the industry represent it's self, that's
the point of market-driven product management.

Tags: