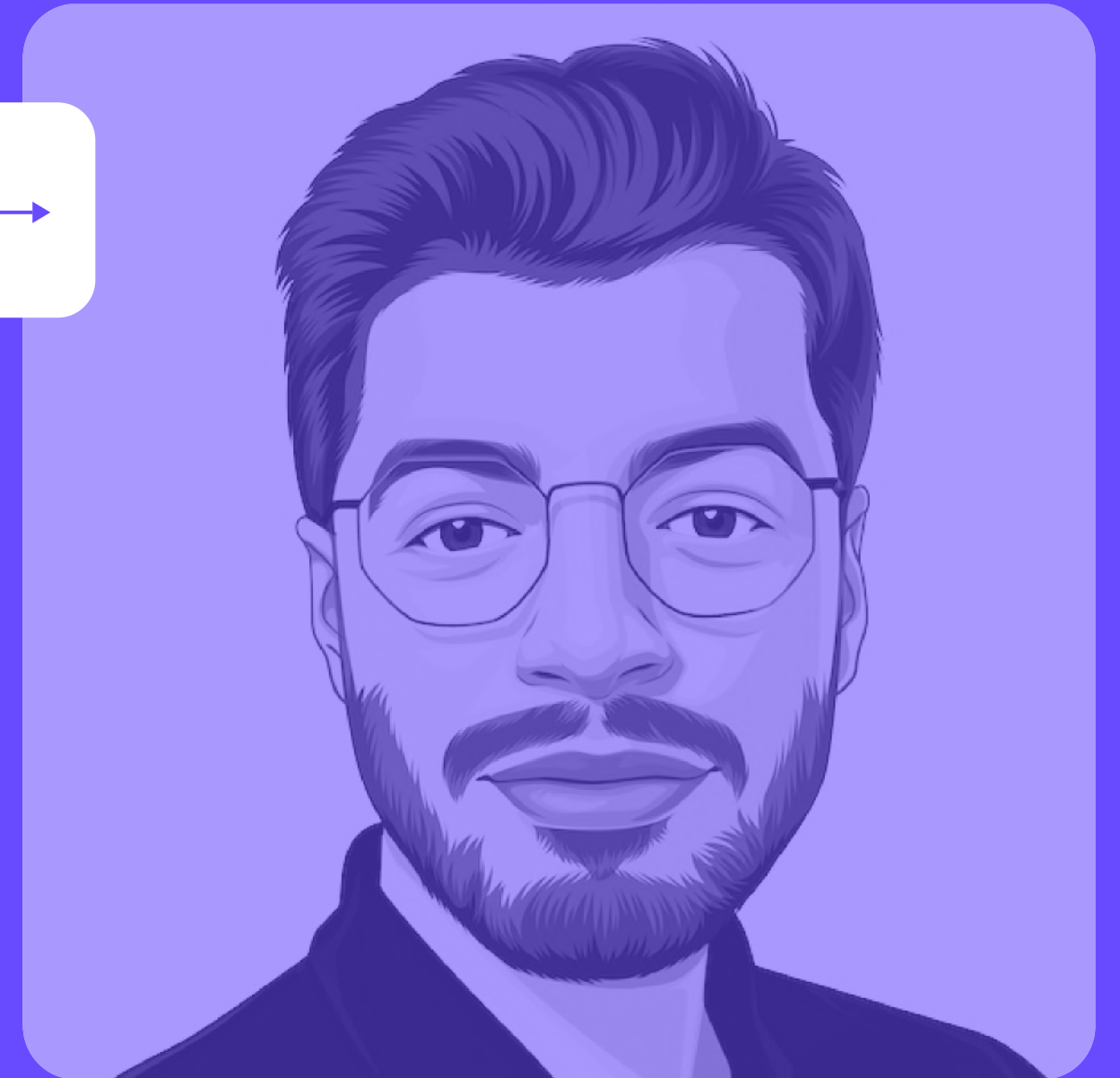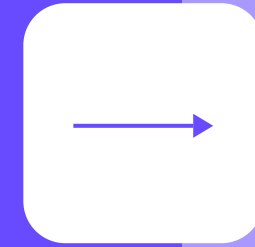**Mirza Beširović**
**ProductCamp Europe Conference 2023**
mirza.tech

# You Are The Product

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**Director of Product Management @ Dixa** (B2B SaaS customer service platform)
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**Author @ You Are The Product** (monthly newsletter for product managers who want to become product leaders)

Learn more about me at mirza.tech

# What is product leadership?

# Conventional wisdom about people managers in product

## 01

### Bye bye IC

Individual contributors grow into people managers.

## 02

### No more shipping

Managers stop being involved in product development and only focus on process.

## 03

### Coaching

They are expected to coach their direct reports and help them develop.

# Today it's not as simple

| Individual Contributor | People Manager |
|---|---|
| Associate Product Manager | |
| Product Manager | |
| Senior Product Manager | |
| Principal Product Manager | Group Product Manager / Product Lead |
| | Director Product |
| | VP Product |
| | CPO |

Roughly equivalent

A product management career ladder has become a lot more crystallized, even though we still have some confusion around titles (e.g., Product Owner *vs* Product Manager).

We have developed a people management track, similarly to engineering.
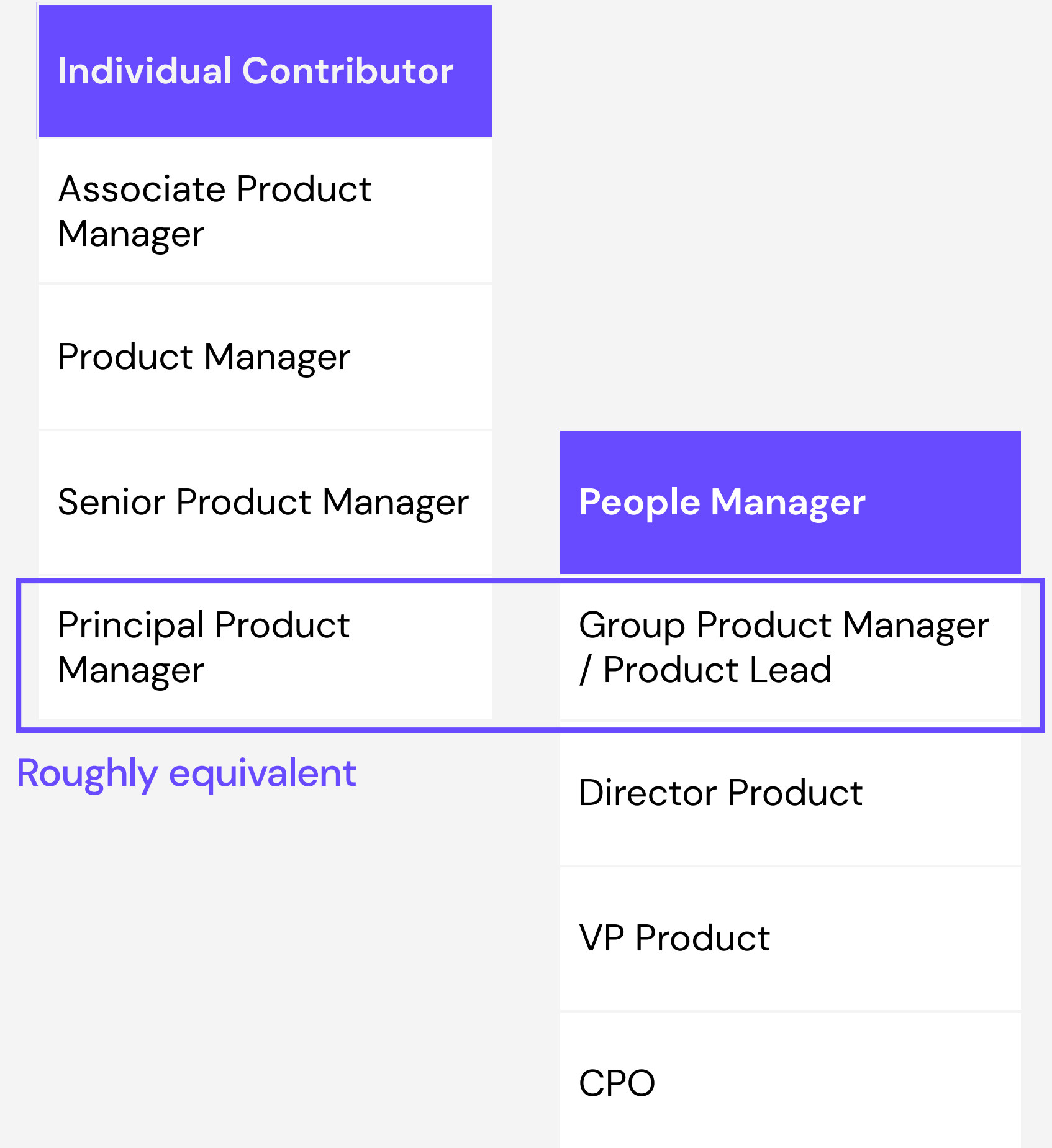
# Becoming a product leader meant following a set script

There were fewer jobs
Product management was a developing discipline
Fewer resources
Different way of thinking about the role jobs played
Common to stay in one company

## This made sense before

1. Work hard and keep your head down
2. Spend many years in one company
3. Be the top performer and put in the most hours
4. Show upwards loyalty
5. "Dress for the job you want"

# Things have changed in the meantime

**Today**

1. Work hard and stand out from the crowd
2. Job hopping has proven benefits
3. Deliver outcomes by working smart, not hard
4. Survive & thrive
5. Build the brand you want to become

# There's other ways too

☑ Structure a growth plan with a manager
☑ Start your own side hustle
☑ Join an early-stage startup as the first PM

But first…

Ask yourself

# Do I want to be a leader? Why? Do I want to manage people? Why?

# What kind of leader do I want to be?

# How do you achieve the perception you are leadership material?

## 01

### Show evidence of your success

Communicate regularly in different formats to demonstrate you have achieved outcomes. Don't ignore outputs. Don't forget to tell the rest of the company you have shipped something.

## 02

### Take the spotlight

Talented product managers who don't give themselves the credit they deserve are hard to spot in a crowd and might not be seen as leaders. You need to learn to enjoy the limelight. No show, just business.

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People management is not the same as leadership

The stress, demands, and pressure of the job as IC will double, triple, or more as a people manager. Except it's no longer your stress or success — but that of your reports.

# You only succeed if your reports succeed.

Some people managers think their job is to *whip their reports into shape*. Many managers are top performers promoted into managerial roles, and they expect their personal standards from their reports.

# Managing people requires a completely different set of skills



**Employee name**

Position



**Employee name**

Position



**Employee name**

Position



**Employee name**

Position



**Employee name**

Position



**Employee name**

Position

# Nothing soft about soft skills

Communication                                01

Problem–solving                              02
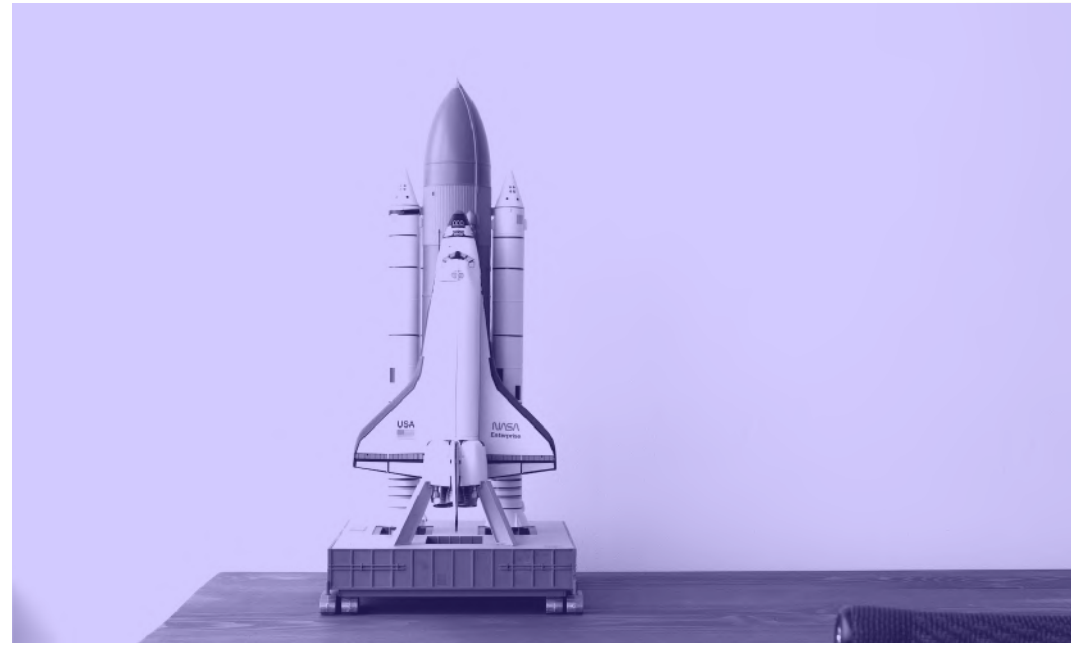
Leadership                                   03

Empathy                                      04

Teamwork                                     05

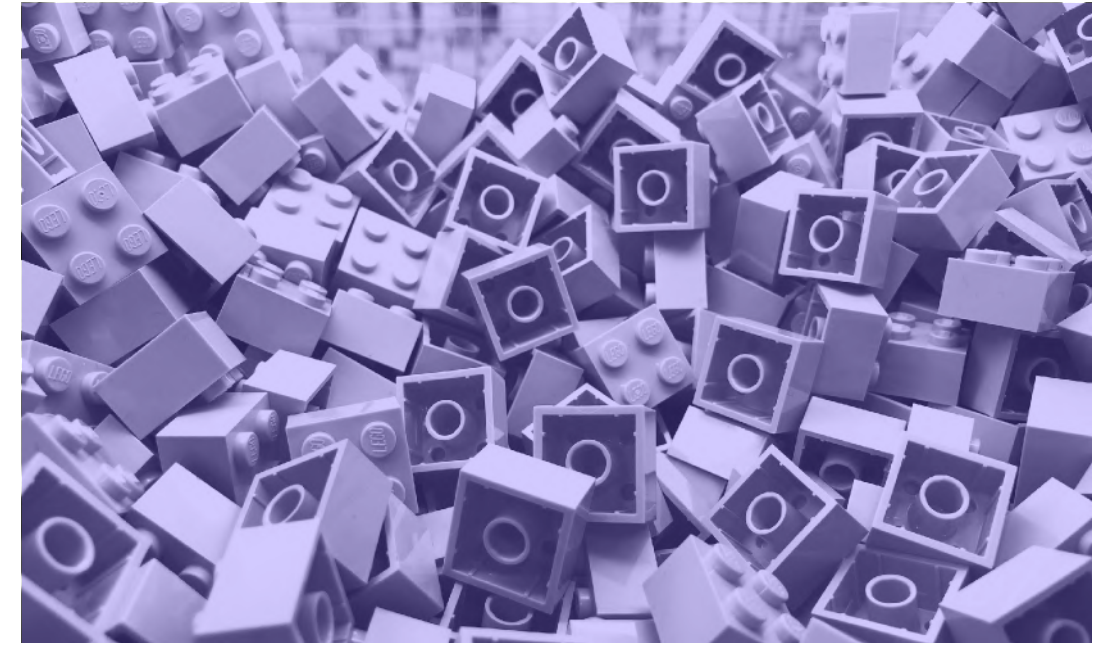Creativity                                   06

# Behaviors of great product leaders



## Create opportunity for others

Commit to creating opportunity for workers from underacknowledged, underserved, and underrepresented groups



## Propel others in their roles

Enable diverse voices to express opinions, participate in decision making, and help shape product philosophy and ethics
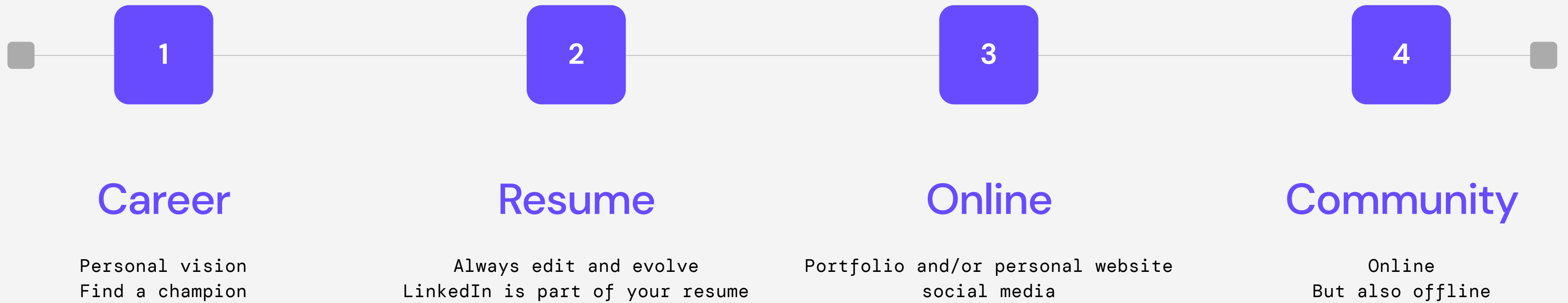


## Help others build great careers

Work with your reports beyond the boundaries of the job in which you met and help them grow beyond you and your needs

**03**

# Your Brand is a Product Portfolio

# Your Brand

**1** Career

Personal vision
Find a champion

**2** Resume

Always edit and evolve
LinkedIn is part of your resume

**3** Online

Portfolio and/or personal website
social media

**4** Community

Online
But also offline

**Write a personal narrative**

## Describe who you are, what your journey has been so far, what knowledge and skills you've gained, and what you are currently doing in a few paragraphs.

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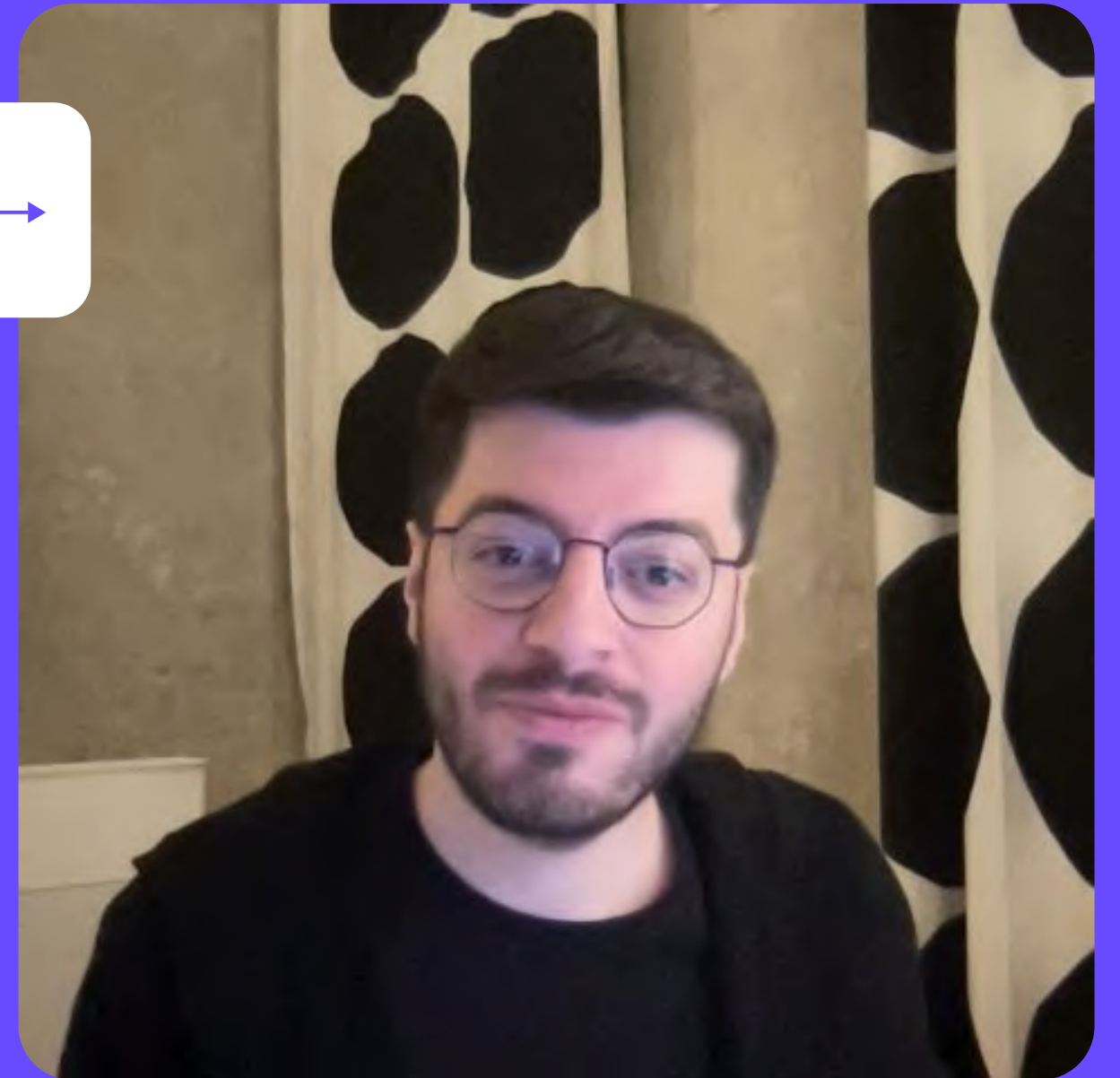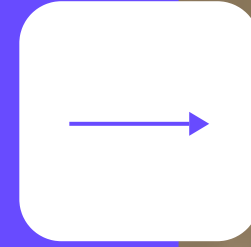
Make your online presentation consistent

Make sure your LinkedIn, social media profiles, resume, personal website tell the same story, using the same language. Limit the amount of information you present. You don't need to show everything you've ever done.
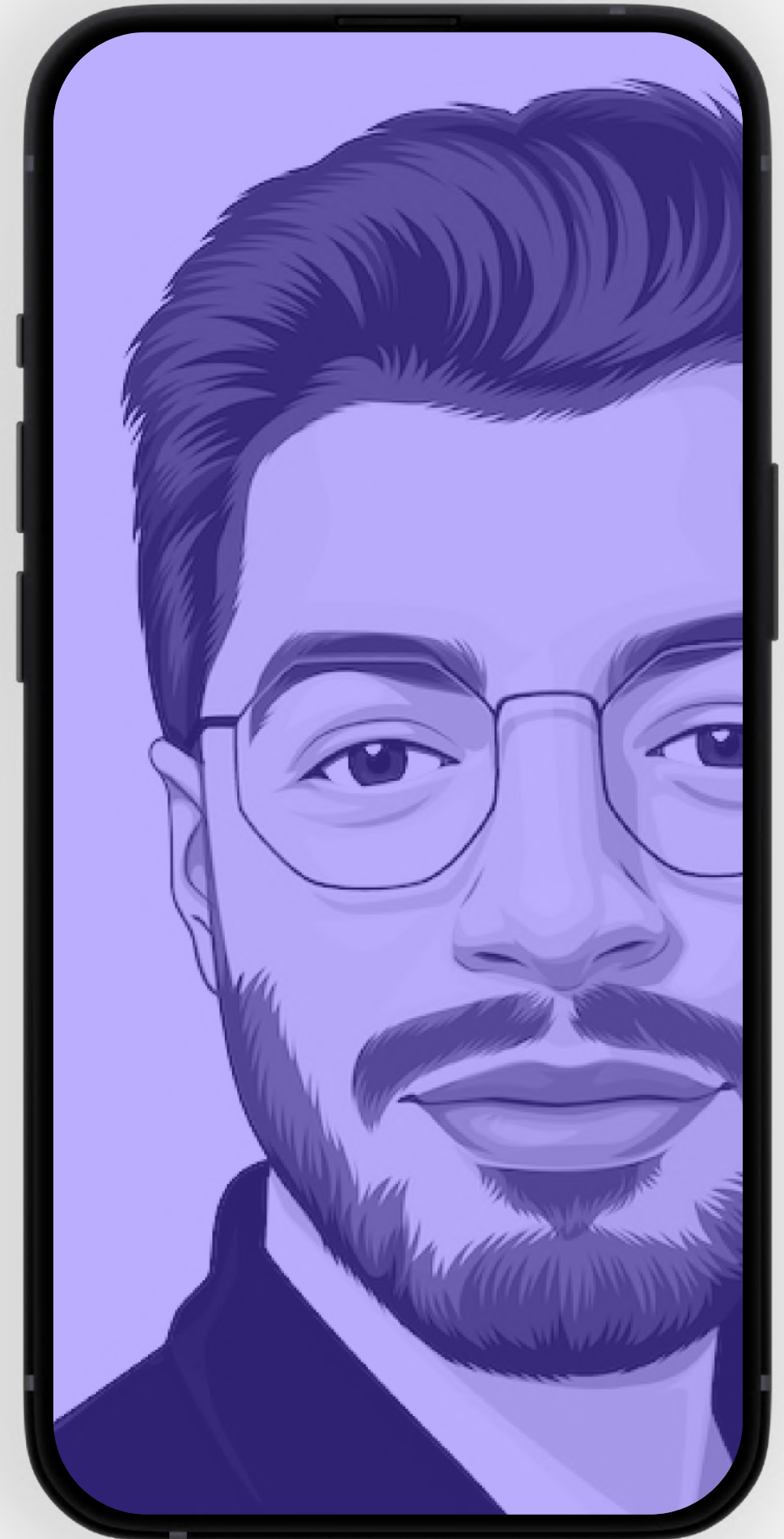
# Be ready to fail.

A forever work-in-progress. But if you adopt the right mindset, moving up to product leadership can be the most fun you'll have in your career.

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# Thank you