The Pragmatic Product Professional

Laura Van Doore
Head of Product Design, Fathom

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The Pragmatic Programmer

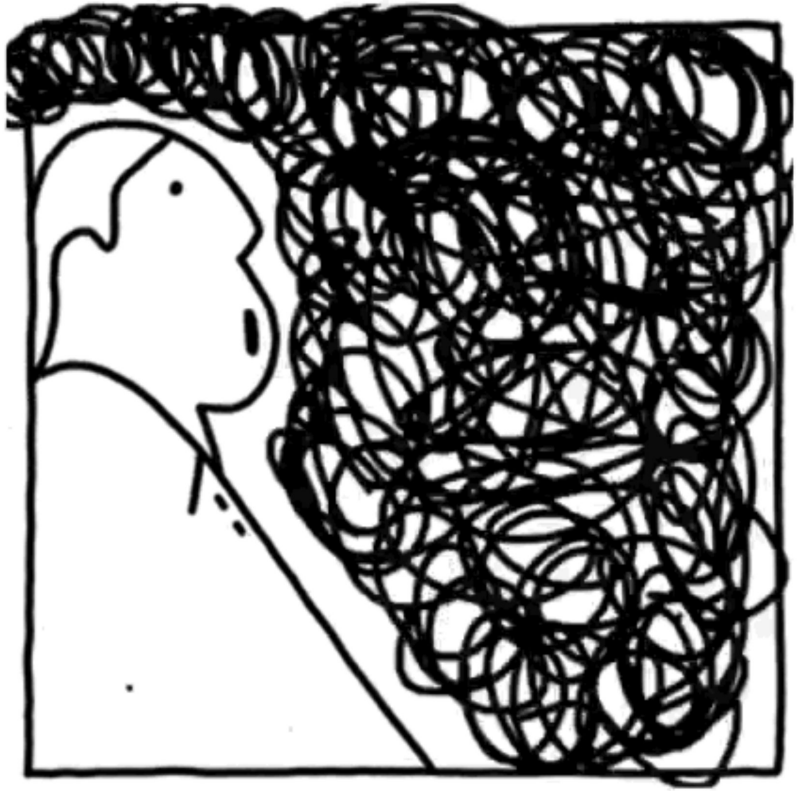
from journeyman
to master

Andrew Hunt
David Thomas

Foreword by Ward Cunningham

How could a book about programming written 2 decades ago be applicable to modern product development?

Building Products in 2019



Pragmatic

Adjective

Solving problems in a sensible way that suits the conditions that really exist now, rather than obeying fixed ideas, theories or rules.

Otherwise we end up with products like this:

4GIFs.com

What makes a
pragmatic product person?

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Trait #1

BIG PICTURE THINKER

They think beyond the immediate problem and place it in a larger context

Trait #2

DEEPLY REALISTIC

They work with the chess pieces that are on the board, rather than the resources they wish they had

Trait #3

INQUISITIVE

They constantly re-evaluate and question current methods, approach & practices

Trait #4

SKILLED CRAFTSPERSON

They deeply care about their craft, and actively invest in new skill development

Trait #5

SCIENTIFIC MINDSET

They make informed decisions and intelligent compromises

Pragmatic Product Mindset Traits

Big picture thinker

Realistic

Inquisitive

Skilled Craftsperson

Test & Learn Mindset

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Cultivating a Pragmatic Product Mindset

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1
Speak more than one language

In 1999

Learn as many programming languages as possible

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The limits of languages influence how you think about a problem

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In 2019

Building product is a team sport

With many roles and players

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Learning the languages of your teammates is a super power

SPEAK MORE THAN ONE LANGUAGE

- Customers
- Engineering
- **Product Management**
- Design & UX
- Business

Shared language and skill overlap breaks down barriers

2
Be a catalyst
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Catalyst

Noun

A chemical substance that can be added to a reaction to increase the reaction rate without getting consumed in the process

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Be a catalyst

Imagine this scenario:

- You have a really clear picture on how to make positive change
- You've got a great grasp on the resources you'll need, and how to bring it all together.
- It's a slam dunk

Be a catalyst

- But when asking for permission to get started, you're met with delays and blank stares
- People form committees
- Budgets need approvals
- Everyone starts to guards their resources

STORY TIME

Stone Soup

Illustrations by Marcia Brown

Illustrations by Marcia Brown

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BE A CATALYST

People find it easier to join an ongoing success

BE A CATALYST

Showing a glimpse of the future helps folks to rally

BE A CATALYST

Sometimes people aren't aware of the value they can contribute

(They don't know what they can bring to the pot)

Be a catalyst by helping the people around you see an exciting possible future, with a clear path for how they can contribute

3

Invest in your knowledge portfolio

> Your knowledge & experience are your most important professional assets. Unfortunately, they're expiring assets.

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INVEST IN YOUR KNOWLEDGE PORTFOLIO

Diversify

The more areas you have knowledge in, the more valuable & adaptable you are.

INVEST IN YOUR KNOWLEDGE PORTFOLIO

Manage risk

Tech skills exist along a spectrum from risky, potentially high-reward to low-risk, low-reward skills.

INVEST IN YOUR KNOWLEDGE PORTFOLIO

Buy low, sell high

Learning emerging technologies or methods might be risky, but it pays off for early adopters who can end up dominating that area.

Manage your knowledge investments in a similar way to how you would manage a financial portfolio

4

Push for progress over perfection

PUSH FOR PROGRESS OVER PERFECTION

You can’t design perfect software

There’s no single correct answer when building new features & products. ‘Perfect’ is dependant on the eye of the beholder.

PUSH FOR PROGRESS OVER PERFECTION

Plan to adapt and iterate. Permanently.

Customers needs are always evolving, usually needing more and more sophisticated functionality. Product is never done.

1. Speak more than one language
2. Be a catalyst
3. Invest in your knowledge portfolio
4. Push for progress over perfection

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Pragmatic Product Mantras

4 bite-sized knowledge nuggets

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Don’t live with broken windows

Fix bad designs, wrong decisions, and poor code when you see them.

Horses, not zebras

Look for expected cause first, rather than searching out something more exotic

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No one from Brazil has purchased our product, people must not be interested.

Later, user research showed their checkout form validation didn’t allow Brazilian postcodes to pass

Focus on where the big picture meets the detailed implementation.

When in doubt ask the duck

Rubber duck debugging is popular with devs, but is handy for other teams too

Thanks

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