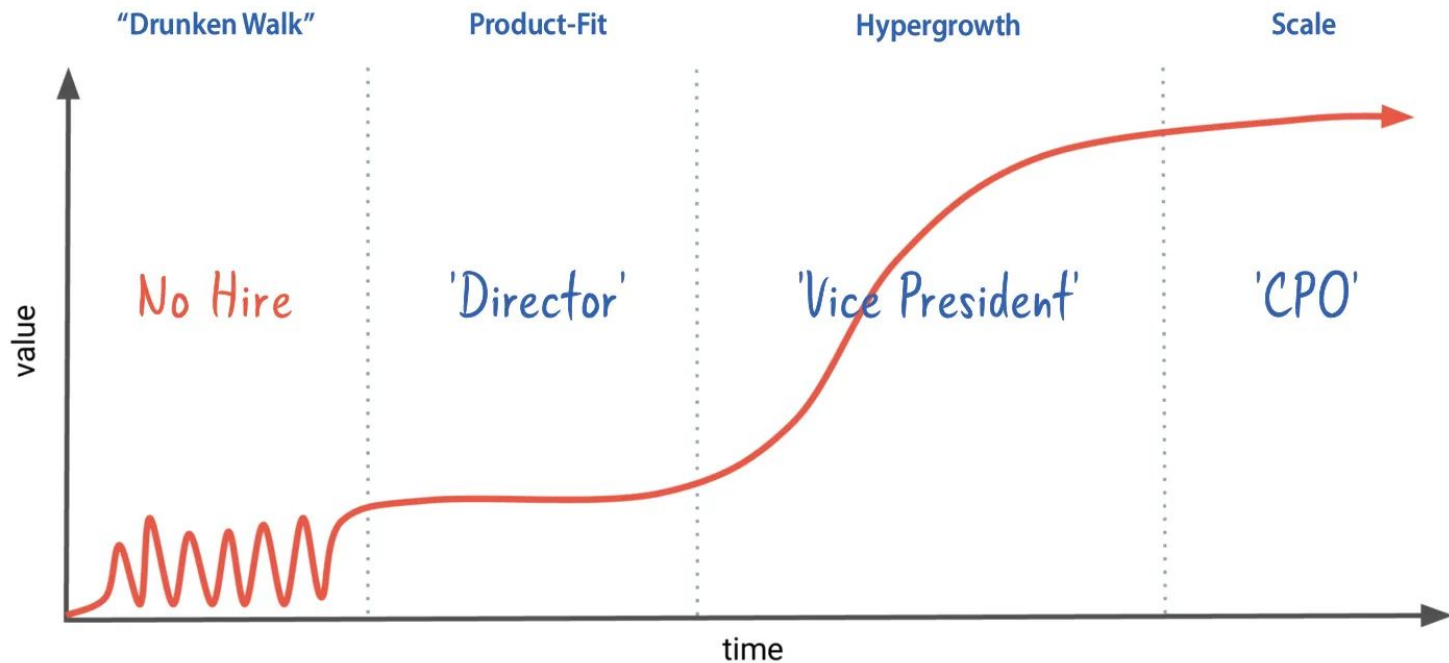

Navigating the twilight zone

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Product leadership changes with each phase



Product leadership changes with each phase

	Director	Vice President	Chief Product Officer
Stage	Recent product-market fit ("Series A", ~20 engineers)	Early hypergrowth ("Series B", 30-50 engineers)	Mid hypergrowth ("Series C", 50+ engineers)
PM Leader's Obsession	Product details and customers	Scaling company and PM org	Innovation, expanding product line Hiring executives
Deliver	Predictable process, roadmap	PM organization running planning	New products adjacent to market leading ones
Team size & leadership	PMs: 3-5 PMs No managers, Director manages ICs	PMs: 6-10 PMs VP manages 2-3 Mgr/Dirs	PMs: 15+ PMs CPO manages 3+ PM Dir/VPs Might manage other functions
Expertise	Introduce PM function to company Product execution Recruiting, managing small team	Hiring and team building Annual planning Contributions to Executive team	Innovation at scale Changing culture that "works" Managing execs, non-PMs



Start-up VP // Director of Product

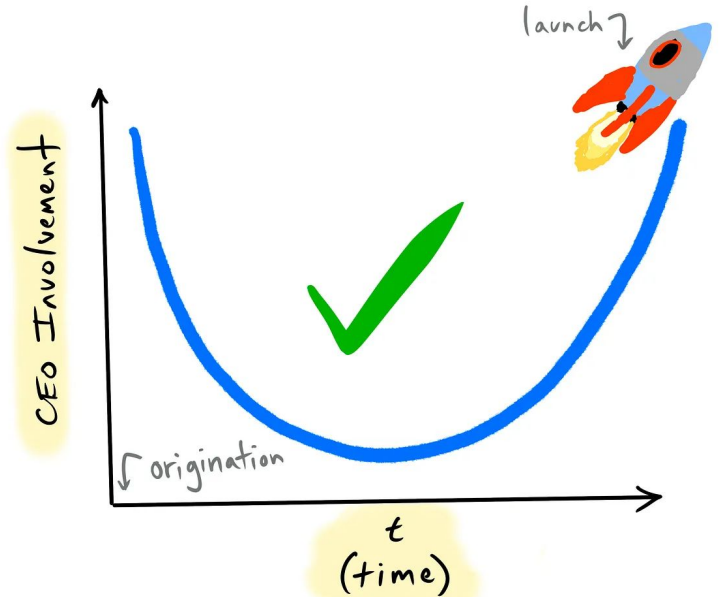
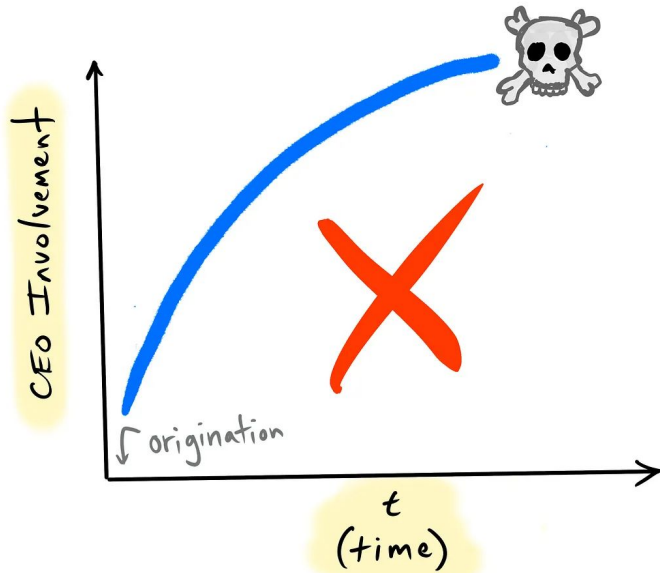
- Good at going from 0 to \$20MM
- Coaching teams, setting up processes
- Still executing
- Huge founder dynamics
- Product Strategy is finding product/market fit, rapid experimentation

Founder-PM fit

A woman with dark hair, wearing a patterned dress and a white cardigan, is speaking on a stage. She is holding a smartphone in her right hand and gesturing with her left. The background features large, stylized letters in blue and white, which are out of focus. The overall lighting is dim, with a blue hue.

**“You’re shopping
for founders.”**

Founder involvement



Delegation poker



Core product management activities

Product vision

Product strategy

Problem discovery and validation

Problem prioritisation

Solution discovery and validation

Delivery execution



Are your values aligned?

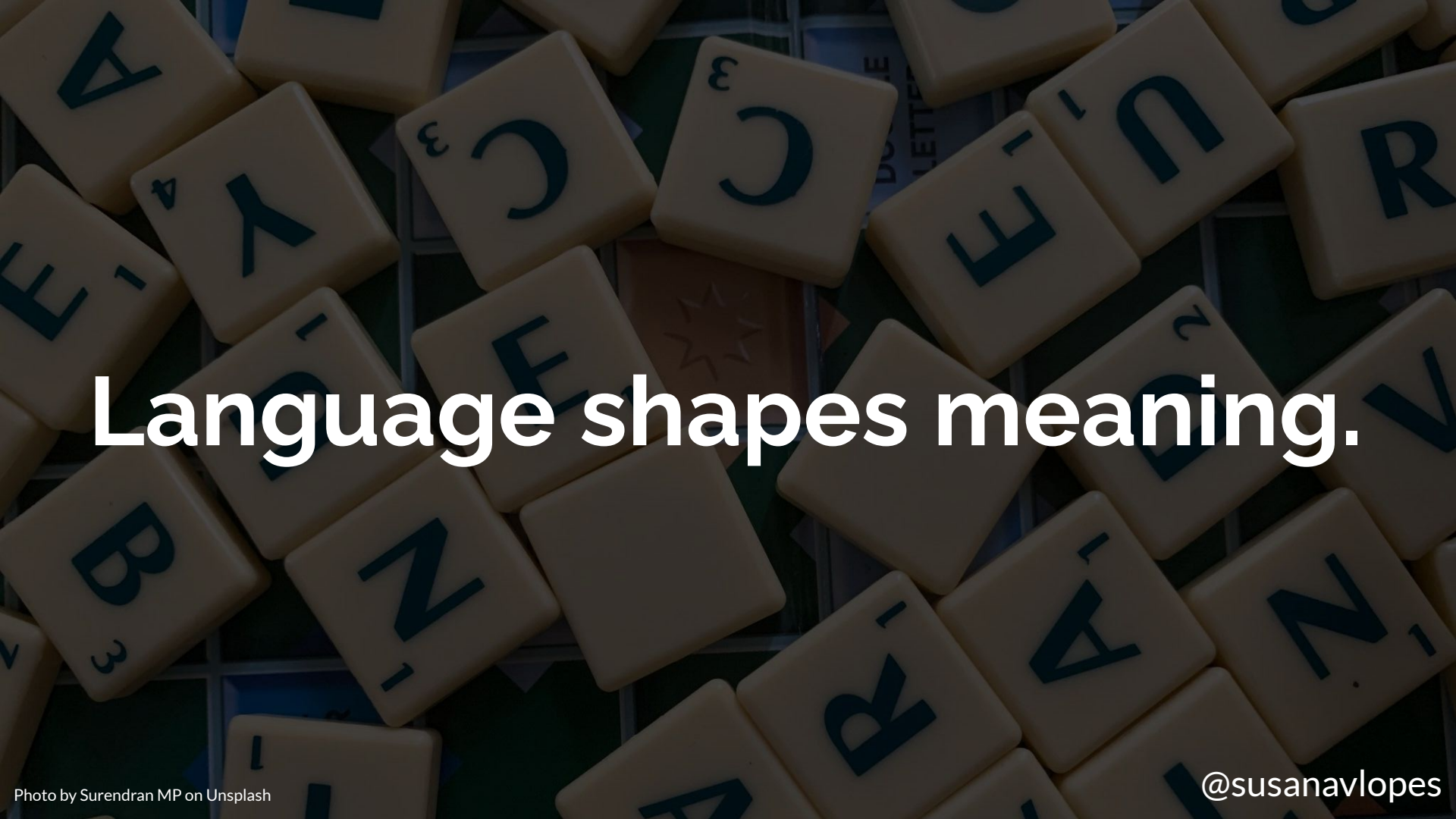
Finding your leadership voice to ensure cultural fit

- What are your values as a leader?
- What am I strong in?
- What am I committed to?
- What do I believe in?
- What won't I compromise on?

Shared vision



My PM doesn't get it.

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of numerous light-colored wooden Scrabble tiles scattered across a dark surface. The tiles feature various letters in a dark blue font, with some tiles also showing point values in the corners. The tiles are arranged in a way that creates a sense of depth and texture. The text "Language shapes meaning." is overlaid in the center in a white, sans-serif font.

Language shapes meaning.



**Extract
the vision**



**From their
head**



**Past decisions have
the vision baked in**

Vision artifacts or “*Visiontyping*”

Press release

Heading: short name for the product that the target customers will understand

Subheading: One sentence saying who the market is and what the benefit is

Summary: 2–4 sentences that gives a summary of the product and the benefits. Should be self-contained so that a person could read only this paragraph and still understand the new product/feature.

Problem: 2–4 sentences describing the problem that a customer faces, which this product solves.

Tests your assumptions about the pain-points that you are addressing.

Solution: 2–4 sentences, describing how the new product/feature addresses this problem. Tests your assumptions about how you are solving the pain-points.

Getting started: 1–3 sentences describing how someone can start using this product/feature (if it's baked into the existing product, say this explicitly). Tests your assumptions about how easy the ramp-up is for your customers to take advantage of the new product/feature.

Written narrative

Press Release FAQ [on Medium](#).



Storyboarding

Airbnb [storyboarding](#) for host experience



Video

Google's [Tilt Brush](#) Vision Video

A vision provides meaning

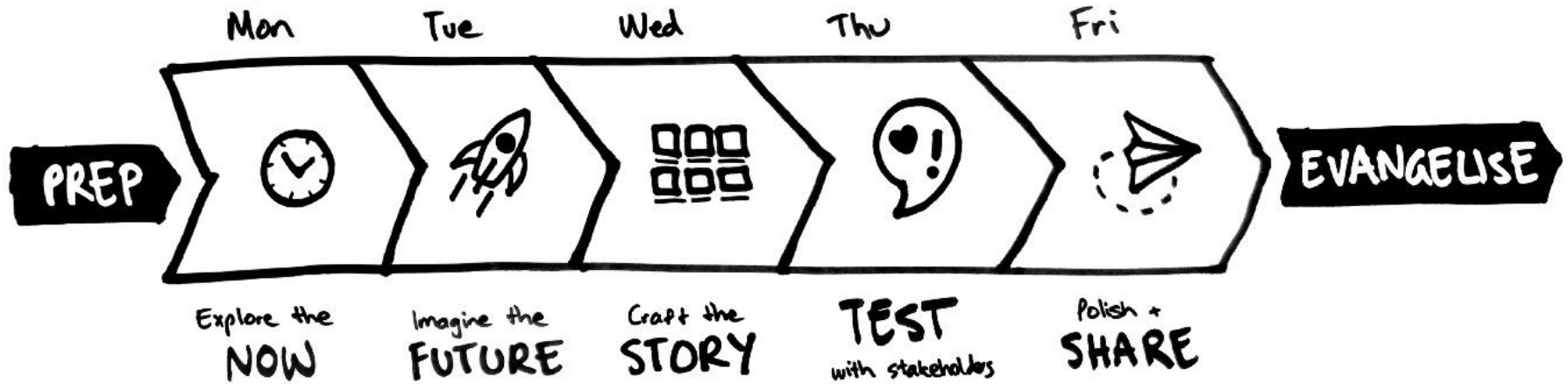
Work through these questions with your founder:

- What change in the world do you hope this product will bring about?
- What makes you proud/will make you proud to work on this product?
- What's the most rewarding part of what you get to do?

A vision changes the world

- What is the product's significant purpose that will motivate team members on a deeper, intrinsic level?
- What impact will our product have on affecting positive change in the world, or reducing negative change?
- How might our product be remembered by our grandkids' generation? What mark will we leave?

Vision Sprint



A Visiontype enables

- Validating value of / demand testing the vision with customers and prospects
- Selling the vision to investors
- Sharing the vision with customers rather than the roadmap
- Informs overall architecture strategy

Though you can't validate feasibility and usability, as it's too zoomed out. The teams will do that work at a smaller scale.

Surviving the ride

**In early stage SaaS,
product strategy
is the business strategy**

An hourglass with blue sand is positioned in the center of the frame. It has a dark wooden frame and is resting on a dark, textured surface that appears to be composed of small, rounded stones or pebbles. The background is dark and out of focus. The text "Time is always running out." is overlaid in a large, white, sans-serif font across the middle of the image.


Time is always running out.

Dealing with the short fuse

- Inherent uncertainty about what is the best strategy.
- Optimise for speed of learning.
- Co-create roadmap with founder.
- Roadmap needs to be *short*!
- Be clear on timeframes for different bets.

A metallic, gold-colored rabbit figure on the left and a puppet with a large, spiky orange afro on the right. The puppet has a large white eye and a red mouth. The background is dark and textured.

**Founders might not agree.
It's not your job to mediate.**



**Expect the founder to
change their mind.**

Understand the change

- What context are you missing? What's changed for the founder?
- Start ups are very vulnerable to signals the market values.
- What *proof points* does the market need?
 - Growth? Margins?
 - Frequency of transactions?
 - Larger total addressable market (TAM)?
 - What bets is the founder raising on?

**Proof points
work**

**Core vision
work**

Navigating the Twilight Zone

- Assess PM-Founder fit: on ways of working and values
- Your number one job is to get the vision out of the founder's head
- Your second job is to get a clarity on the business strategy from the e-team
- Co-create the roadmap, and keep it short term
- Be ready to bin it based on new market signals

Navigating the twilight zone

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