

Product Manager Guide to

Make Your

"It's in the Backlog"

**Sound Like a True
Promise**

A Startup Product Manager's
Guide to Prioritization,
Roadmaps, and Gaining Trust



As a product manager, you've probably been in this situation: a stakeholder asks for a new feature or bug fix, and you respond with, "We'll put it in the backlog."

But oftentimes, saying "It's in the backlog" can feel like code for "This might never happen." The backlog doesn't have to be a black hole. With the right framework, transparency, and communication, you can turn it into a tool for trust, not frustration.

This guide will help you prioritize effectively, build a credible roadmap, and size user stories. So you can deliver on your promises and earn stakeholder confidence.

1. Prioritize Your Backlog Like a Pro

Why Backlogs Become Black Holes in the First Place?

In startups and fast-paced environments, backlogs often turn into chaotic dumping grounds. Teams are juggling urgent fixes, planned features, and ad-hoc requests, all while trying to survive. Without a clear prioritization process, important tickets get buried, and stakeholders lose faith in your ability to deliver.

The Solution: A Simple Prioritization Framework

To avoid the black hole effect, you need a prioritization process. Start with a basic framework like MoSCoW:

- **Must Have:** Critical features or fixes without which the product cannot function.
- **Should Have:** Important but not urgent items that add significant value.
- **Could Have:** Nice-to-have features that can wait if needed.

This framework helps you categorize requests and communicate why certain items take precedence. Other frameworks to explore include: RICE (Reach, Impact, Confidence, Effort) and ICE (Impact, Confidence, Ease)

PRO TIP: Make your backlog visible to everyone in the company. Transparency builds trust. Consider creating a public-facing product roadmap (without dates) to show stakeholders that their requests are being considered.

2. Build a Product Roadmap That Inspires Confidence

Why Roadmaps Matter?

A product roadmap is your North Star. It shows stakeholders what's coming next, even if you can't give exact timelines. In startups, where chaos is the norm, a roadmap demonstrates that you have a plan. Even if it's a rough one.

How to Create a Roadmap in Chaos

1. Group Features into Epics

- Epics are large themes that group related user stories (e.g., "Improve Onboarding Experience").
- Initiatives are collections of epics tied to business OKRs or KPIs (e.g., "Increase User Retention").

2. Start Small

- Take your top 20 features or bugs and group them into epics.
- Map them out roughly over the next few months using simple tools like Google Sheets or Slides.

3. Iterate and Refine

- Your roadmap doesn't need to be perfect. It just needs to exist.
- Refine it as you gather more data and align it with business goals.

PRO TIP: A basic roadmap shows stakeholders that you're organized and proactive. It's not about perfection. It's about progress.

3. Size User Stories for Realistic Roadmaps

Why Sizing Matters

Sizing user stories helps you estimate how long tasks will take, making your roadmap more believable. Without sizing, your roadmap is just a wishlist.

How to Size User Stories

1. Use Story Points (If You're Using Scrum):

- Story points help estimate effort based on complexity, not time.
- Work with your team to assign points to each user story.

2. Get Rough Estimates from Your Lead Developer:

- If you're not using Scrum, ask your lead developer for rough time estimates.
- Be prepared. This process can take longer than you expect.

3. Sequence Your Roadmap

- Group user stories by epic and map them out over the next few months.
- Align them with initiatives and KPIs as you refine your roadmap.

PRO TIP:

Transparency is key. Share your roadmap with your team and stakeholders (minus specific dates if needed). This builds trust and keeps everyone aligned.

4. Conclusion

The phrase “It’s in the backlog” doesn’t have to be a kiss of death. With a clear prioritization process, a visible roadmap, and realistic sizing, you can turn it into a promise that inspires confidence.

Remember, your goal isn’t to create a perfect plan. [It’s to show stakeholders that you’re in control, even when things change more often than you’d like.](#) Start small, iterate often, and communicate openly. By doing so, you’ll build trust, deliver value, and prove that your backlog is a place of action, not oblivion.

Ready to transform your backlog and roadmap? Let’s work together to create a product management strategy that builds trust and drives results.

Contact me at paola@psproductperson.com or visit my website

<https://www.psproductperson.com/> to learn more