00:00:00:17 - 00:00:04:04
Stefan Stenroos, Technical Trainer and Host, Centercode
Coming up on this episode of the Delta Huddle Podcast.

00:00:04:06 - 00:00:36:01
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Really where we have had a really spend a lot of time is, okay, what's next? How are you going to maintain momentum? What's going to help you transform? And that's making sure people going into this change are aware. You know, do they have that desire? So that they're bought into it so that when you do bring that concept to them, like beta testing, they're open minded because you can have the greatest process, you can have the greatest idea improvement.

00:00:36:03 - 00:00:52:18
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
But if that person or team you're speaking to isn't bought in, doesn't matter. You can't have the latest thing ever. But if they don't know why it's important or they're not on to it, bought into it going into the conversation. Forget it.

00:00:52:20 - 00:01:22:20
Stefan Stenroos, Technical Trainer and Host, Centercode
Welcome to the Delta Huddle podcast by Centercode. I'm Stefan Stenroos. Today's guests are Joe Ghali and Ryan Cantwell, principal trainers and consultants from the 280 Group. Joe and Ryan have a combined 30 years experience in product management, helping teams from Fortune 100 and 500 companies become more transparent, collaborative and vulnerable. Now, today's episode is all about the intersection of product management and beta testing.

00:01:22:22 - 00:01:53:02
Stefan Stenroos, Technical Trainer and Host, Centercode
And while it may seem obvious at first that beta testing naturally fits into product management, there are a lot of project managers who try to avoid beta testing or just see it as another box to check during the development process. And really that can't be further from the truth. Joe and Ryan shared some excellent insight during this episode talking about how important it is to listen to your customers and your end users, why it's incredibly valuable to be vulnerable and what it truly means to be launch ready.

00:01:53:03 - 00:02:02:16
Stefan Stenroos, Technical Trainer and Host, Centercode
Also joining Chris Rader, Joe and Ryan during this podcast was John S. Little, senior VP of Product Marketing here at Centercode.

00:02:02:18 - 00:02:03:09
Stefan Stenroos, Technical Trainer and Host, Centercode
He also had

00:02:03:09 - 00:02:20:18
Stefan Stenroos, Technical Trainer and Host, Centercode
Some wonderful insights to share about our journey to developing our own PLG product and what it meant to develop a platform for free beta testing forever. We hope you enjoyed this episode. And without further ado, here is Joe Ghali and Ryan Cantwell.

00:02:20:20 - 00:02:25:07
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Joe, how did you meet? To a degree? How did you get into 280 Group specifically?

00:02:25:08 - 00:02:47:22
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Yeah, actually. So I worked for Kimberly-Clark. So they're based in Wisconsin, so I'm based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. And so the short story is I was interviewing for a product manager role at Kimberly-Clark, and the recruiter was like, you know, you're kind of overqualified. And I was like, That's all right. And she's like, Well, what do you want to do when you grow up?

00:02:47:22 - 00:03:06:20
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
And I at that point, I've been coaching U-12, driving, coaching. My daughter's in softball since there were three results. And I said, you know, if I could find like that ideal job, it would be a product coach. You know, I've done this for a long time. You know, is there such a role? And she goes, Actually, we have this team act.

00:03:06:20 - 00:03:28:12
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Kimberly-Clark called the Product Transformation Office and we have a product coach role. Is that something you're interested in? And I just was like, that was like a sign. It was like a light bulb. It's like, shined on me, like at that moment, right? And so the company that actually trained or got Kimberly-Clark, their framework was the 280 Group.

00:03:28:18 - 00:03:54:11
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
And so and this is when COVID was happening, so 280 was actually launching their DPM class, which is digital product management. And they actually asked me to be at actually coincidentally, a beta customer. Ah see that! See how I tied it all in. And so this is no joke. And so I really enjoyed the class. I love the instructors, the exercises and engagement.

00:03:54:13 - 00:04:16:06
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
And so they started inviting me back to product roundtables and other webinars and podcasts and write and blogs. And so there was an opportunity a couple of years ago for our product, our principal consultant trainer, and I just said, this is this is my jam, this is where I want to be. And like Ryan said, I just I haven't looked back and it's been the fastest two years of my career.

00:04:16:06 - 00:04:17:17
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
I can say that for a fact.

00:04:17:19 - 00:04:23:04
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Yeah. Yeah. Ryan, What was your introduction to 280?

00:04:23:06 - 00:04:49:09
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Yes. So as I, I kind of accidentally fell into product management. I always say it's kind of just kind of that happened. I didn't went to I didn't go find it. It found me. And I really became a student of the discipline. I wanted to learn everything I could about it and 280 Group hit my radar. In those early days of product management, I had a colleague who took 280 Group courses.

00:04:49:12 - 00:05:15:17
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
I was in tune and I started using some of the resources as a product manager when I was in acting product manager and I kind of graduated, climbed the corporate ladder, if you will, and through through business. And I just got I was very fortunate to find an opportunity, the 280 Group was looking for a consultant and trainer.

00:05:15:19 - 00:05:31:21
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
And one thing led to another where I applied, I interviewed and here I am, I'm in the seat and I could not be more thrilled. I tell everybody, go, listen, guys, that this it's too much fun to be work Like, I enjoy it so much.

00:05:32:00 - 00:05:53:13
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
It's it's so funny. John and I worked at Western Digital before we came to Centercode, so we were on the beta testing team, the beta program. There was about 20 people and we were doing beta testing and we looked at resources from Centercode. Centercode was like the de facto resource for beta testing. So we pull up infographics, we'd go to the blogs, right?

00:05:53:13 - 00:06:14:10
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Okay, We love the stuff. We eventually talk to Centercode. They come a pitch to read and short, long story short, John and I end up joining Centercode. And it was that same, very same thing of it was kind of the the way to use the knowledge they were they were creating it Centercode and then apply it.

00:06:14:12 - 00:06:36:11
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
And it just brought us in. We I loved it. My my favorite pitch for joining Centercode was I'm never going to see so many beta programs ever. Right. Same thing with product, right? You're never going to see so many products because you're consulting or coaching across all these industries and it's just so diverse. And I, I was addicted to it.

00:06:36:12 - 00:07:01:13
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
On the beta testing side, you get to see these things come to fruition a little bit further along, less so in the design or scoping or analysis phase. But so many products, so many people, personality issues, that's what kind of hooked me into into Centercode. It's so funny that there's this, that connection of product managers looking for this, and you use the resources and bridge the gap and you join in.

00:07:01:15 - 00:07:20:12
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
That's great. So I'm assuming you guys are doing a decent amount of coaching. What what are the the big things? What are the trends that you're trying to keep up with right now in product management that you're you're actively coaching on that, that you could kind of help people out there with product managers?

00:07:20:12 - 00:08:06:12
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Oh well, there might be this thing you guys have heard of before. It's called Chat G, T, P or G, only heard it once or twice... So that that is certainly a hot topic among our the circles right. That that were running in that in addition to it's surprising in our position where we get to interact with a lot of organizations just how much foundation building happens to to really strengthen the skill of product manager because so many stories you heard mine and Joe's story that were like very small fish in a very big pond like everybody has got us very similar story, it seems like, where they kind of found their way to product management.

00:08:06:12 - 00:08:25:07
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
They didn't go to school to learn the discipline specifically and building that foundation, particularly getting closer to the customer and understanding them better and then feeding that back to the organization is something we work on a lot with our clients.

00:08:25:09 - 00:08:53:00
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Joe, You actually I mean, you mentioned you mentioned it earlier that why, right. Like you were so interested in the why, I think that's a such a product management thing, right? Like why are they doing it? And then you get to like investigate. And so I just just popped in my head soon as

you said that, Ryan, if like you want to be closer to that customer that why from Joe's original statement of what and treat him to get into product is it's very telling.

00:08:53:02 - 00:08:55:09
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
So Joe, what trends are you seeing?

00:08:55:10 - 00:09:18:18
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Yeah you know I think it's in this marketplace you know this economy you know a lot of product managers, a lot of product teams are being asked to do more with less, right, and less. You know, they're being asked to do more. Their time and their resources that they have at their disposal, they have less. Right. Or they're being shared across multiple teams.

00:09:18:20 - 00:09:38:02
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
And so it really goes back to what Ryan said about the foundation. It's, you know, when Ryan and I sit down with a lot of these organizations and teams, they're tripping over themselves, right? They don't have clarity on roles and responsibilities. That is 95% of the clients, you know, either I've coached or that I've worked with or worked at.

00:09:38:04 - 00:09:59:16
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
You got to fundamentally get like the teams working together, right? Get that accountability squared away. And then in especially now, where resources are so finite is how do you spend your resource dollar in the most effective way? And so a lot of organizations can get away with a lot of hobbies. I'm going to try this out and try this product out.

00:09:59:19 - 00:10:19:19
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Somebody has a really good idea. Let's build it. And then they're left scratching their heads asking, Well, I don't know why anyone didn't want to buy it. I thought it was a really good idea. And so really, like, this is an opportunity for a lot of companies to get back to the needs of the customer. Like, have we just forgotten about why they're buying our product, what brought them here?

00:10:20:00 - 00:10:40:14
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
There's got to be other ways. There are other jobs to be done, pain points that we can address. And so, you know, that's something that we're on a lot of a lot of teams and organizations like, hey, do you have a fundamental basic way of getting to the voice of the customer? Start with that and everything else. What kind of flow?

00:10:40:18 - 00:11:06:07

Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Much easier, because then you're building a story, you're building empathy. And I think even on top of that, that stakeholder engagement pick where a lot of organizations are falling apart is they're bringing the stakeholders, their leadership in later in the process when, golly, they got to be bringing them in early. So that way, when it comes time to do a beta test or doing a launch, everyone's kind of in lockstep together.

00:11:06:07 - 00:11:12:12
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
They're like, Yeah, let's do this. Let's go out and take care of our customers.

00:11:12:14 - 00:11:17:08
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
You hit on so much that, Oh man, I wish I could unpack it all just instantly.

00:11:17:09 - 00:11:22:02
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
You only got an hour? I can talk your ear off it in.

00:11:22:04 - 00:11:22:17
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
I'll go.

00:11:22:17 - 00:11:24:09
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Back to the first one because.

00:11:24:09 - 00:11:47:08
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
It's a, it's a really big topic and we just wrote a nice content piece about it. The do more with less concept. Yeah, it's tough. There's layoffs, there's hiring freezes, there's budget freezes, and the people that are left are just required to keep everything going. And we need to do better. We need to do it.

00:11:47:13 - 00:12:03:21
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
You need to get this product out. You need to launch it. It needs to bring in revenue. But you don't have as many people to help you do it anymore. So you need to manage this really well. And we have that same saying in beta testing. Not everyone has a full fledged team.

00:12:04:03 - 00:12:22:13
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Like you don't have the beta program manager with a coordinator to help them go through the feedback or a support person. We're seeing data that supports product managers having to pick

up and do beta testing themselves, right? They might have to be able to kick some stuff over to a highway or an engineer or or somebody, but they're having to go find these people and talk to them.

00:12:22:13 - 00:12:40:04
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
And it's good. I think it's really good because establishing the connection with your customer is huge, but it's a tall order. And how am I supposed to do this with fewer resources? What's the advice that you're giving for people that need to do more with less?

00:12:40:05 - 00:13:13:22
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Woo boy, Chris, you're nailing it as such. You know, speaking of trends, and to that question, we I see so often product managers are under more and more pressure to make more accurate decisions more quickly, like they have to do it faster. So increasing the probabilities for success. And that's what every business leader wants and the recommendations we make to get you there are you need you don't rely on instinct and opinion.

00:13:14:01 - 00:14:01:11
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
You need facts and evidence to support those decisions, to be accurate and to act quickly to kind of both of those areas and those sources of information come from so many different places. But what's happened so easily is people focus on what they can control. Instead of looking outward, they look inward and that immediately closes them off a little bit from very important bits of information, whether it's qualitative information that they collect from user conversations, observations or qualitative information from formal UT or a beta testing program or something.

00:14:01:11 - 00:14:21:17
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
It's it's we need to be very open to this and then it's up to the product manager. It's more of the art than it is the science to derive insight and meaning from it and turn it into something useful. So a lot of what we do at the 280 Group is help guide people to those ways to collect it, but not only collect it, how do you use it and make it work for you?

00:14:21:19 - 00:15:02:13
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Yeah, and even to that point, it's, you know, people ask what we deliver, we deliver confidence, right? That you're making the right decisions. We're delivering the ability to assess risk, we're delivering the ability to be strategic, to build your strategic credibility within the organization. And, you know, a lot of times that beta test or the beta program is an invaluable part of that strategy because you're trying to mitigate risk and you're validating, you know,

00:15:02:15 - 00:15:29:09

Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
It's that question we have in our courses that we call the product markets to try it as a valuable, as a viable, as a feasible. And so what we're trying to do is validate that is it valuable, right? Are we delivering on our promise? And so, you know, I harp on this in our course and in our workshops of hey, you got a plan, you know, And with that plan, do you have goals?

00:15:29:11 - 00:15:53:12
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Who's going to manage that? Who's going to take the feedback? And then what are your metrics? How do you know that you were successful? And it's that fundamental like practice discipline, you can basically apply it in every stage of the product management lifecycle. And beta testing is really no different. You just got to plan, tell me why, tell me who, how will you know?

00:15:53:12 - 00:16:00:03
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Is this, you know, did we get value from this particular exercise? Should demonstrate that to me.

00:16:00:05 - 00:16:24:02
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Curiosity. That's one of my favorite things. I think it's like there's theories to like I'd say personalities, like passion and curiosity, I think are the biggest components to probably anybody in business, right? If you were asking those questions and you go investigate them, it's going to help you do whatever you need to. And we were just talking to Paul Chen, actually, John and I worked with Paul Chen.

00:16:24:02 - 00:16:43:22
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
He was a product manager at Western Digital. He now is at Mattel and he leads the engineering team. And we talked about how often we fall into that trap of thinking or assuming that we're the user, right? And it was like, John and I did this. John, We built products for beta tests. We were beta test managers.

00:16:43:22 - 00:17:05:06
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
We did that stuff and we just got into this. It's a dark place when you start saying, Oh, I know, I know I'm the user, right? And that false, false confidence or even that confidence can be a little fragile. Right? Like if you get to a point where you're being kept up at night, I am, is this really right?

00:17:05:07 - 00:17:34:04
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Is this really the right product? Will I have product market fit? And then you're not sleeping so easily anymore. You know, having some connection to check is big. We actually just launched

our PG version are product led growth version of our platform and it was a big change for us. John, tell us about some of your sleepless nights and how we got beta to give you a little more a little more ease going out the door with it.

00:17:34:06 - 00:17:52:03
John S. Little, VP of Product Marketing, Centercode
Yeah, when we first were doing it, obviously we thought we had a good idea and we, like Chris said, we were talking to the people internally, but until we started actually talking to people externally who are doing this themselves, other product managers, we got our beta version out, started getting feedback from them. I tell you what, that's whenever they gave us two things.

00:17:52:03 - 00:18:06:18
John S. Little, VP of Product Marketing, Centercode
Really want to give us confidence. Like you said, Ryan, we knew that our decisions were getting more accurate from the feedback coming in, but also gave the whole team energy because we were actually talking to people who are doing this every single day. They were excited about what they were seeing or they were frustrated by what they were seeing.

00:18:06:20 - 00:18:25:17
John S. Little, VP of Product Marketing, Centercode
It was no more like the day to day drudge of getting the product out. It was close to the end, but that feedback really was what drove the teams across the finish line. It gave them more energy than they needed. I mean, we ended up with a dev team wanting to make more changes that we wanted to make because they were excited to get the product to a better state as they were seeing the feedback from the product managers out there.

00:18:25:19 - 00:18:28:01
John S. Little, VP of Product Marketing, Centercode
And so that was really cool.

00:18:28:03 - 00:18:54:12
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
And John, what you're talking about is a primary philosophy of the 280 group. By learning instead of the drudge, I think you called it, you just immediately shifted from outputs to outcomes like hands down, like you are now outcome focused. And it's exciting. Like I've seen teams that have the same thing happen and that energy like that is why I am enthusiastic about product management, like that energy.

00:18:54:12 - 00:19:09:00
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
It's so cool to see teams click and be fed by learning, and that learning translates to better teams, better products, better and happier customers. In the end.

00:19:09:02 - 00:19:33:18

Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Yeah, you understate the morale. You can't underestimate the impact in morale on the product team by doing that. You know, it made me think of we had a big beta program, uh, a couple of jobs ago and, you know, we were talking about product readiness and, you know, we identified we needed to do a demo site, we needed to do a certain type of reporting.

00:19:33:18 - 00:20:00:08
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
We, the data, allowed us to identify all these extras we just didn't know we needed to do. And so we got it in the hands of an actual user. And the beauty was we got in front of our most skeptical group and they were trying to pepper us and take care of that. Got that? Got that. Oh, like it got to a point where I could go into a conversation with that client and I knew every single question they were going to ask me, and I had an answer for it.

00:20:00:10 - 00:20:19:08
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Like, there is nothing that just drives more passion and more excitement knowing that I can go into a conversation like that, knowing that you know what's going to be asked of you and you have an answer for it because you did that, that deliberate beta testing from her from her products perspective.

00:20:19:10 - 00:20:31:16
John S. Little, VP of Product Marketing, Centercode
You know Joe and Ryan Are both hitting on this here. One thing that product managers at least I've seen really have to have is that confidence. They have to have the rapport within the company. A couple bad decisions can really set you back.

00:20:31:17 - 00:20:32:18
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Yeah.

00:20:32:20 - 00:20:34:20
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Go ahead, Ryan.

00:20:34:22 - 00:21:10:09
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
We always say, and as you guys know, any product manager is responsible for everything but have authority over no one, right? And any authority they have is earned. It's like you got to be careful about how you go about earning that trust and manage your stakeholders effectively. So you, whether you have people reporting to you or not, you're a business leader, Product Managers! Like and recognizing that is, I think, a great first step in saying, Oh, I'm in fact a leader, I need to have some influence and earn my trust.

00:21:10:11 - 00:21:33:20
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Yeah, I actually saw that. And I don't know if you guys subscribe to the product management subreddit, but there they were talking about this. Someone said they got this harsh feedback, this negative. They thought it was negative feedback. It was a really cool conversation and the person that their manager was telling them that they needed to communicate more, they needed to build better connections with their teams and the person's like, Oh, this is so negative, this is so rough.

00:21:33:21 - 00:21:52:12
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
And everyone's like, This is a perfect yeah, do those things be great, build those connections. Without those connections, you don't do much of anything as a product person. You're there to help make the decisions you might have to pick up, you know, get dirty a little bit, but you have a team that's building your product.

00:21:52:12 - 00:22:08:13
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
You have a team that's mostly internally testing your product. If you're doing beta testing, you have customers testing your product or users testing your product. You're very reliant. So those connections are big. And that's it's important.

00:22:08:14 - 00:22:39:11
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Well, you gotta build that vulnerability. That was probably a lesson I learned early on as a product leader is you don't know everything. I think a lot of companies think the product manager has to be like the perfect product manager has all this experience in their industry. Maybe, right, But I'd rather hire on attitude, communication skills, vulnerability, like trust those softer skills.

00:22:39:13 - 00:23:03:00
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
I can teach you the rest. That's easy to teach. I can't teach you to be a good communicator, to, you know, be someone that you can be trusted within your organization. And I think you've got I mean, for me, being vulnerable was really hard. Once I started doing that, I was like, Wait a minute, I have a team that can help me, right?

00:23:03:00 - 00:23:23:12
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
There are areas where I might have to come in and roll up my sleeves, but the beta program, maybe I can delegate that to a project manager or maybe my business analysts or PO can manage that. I don't have to worry about it just having that open dialog and that trust and that connection with people, they have just as much stake in being successful as you do in many cases.

00:23:23:14 - 00:23:43:14
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Yeah, I love that that term, the vulnerability being being vulnerable to something and it's, I'll look at it in a different light. We have this joke amongst our customers and internally that we say always be testing right should always be testing. You always want to have that lifeline to customers. And I think it really applies to that, always being learning component to it.

00:23:43:14 - 00:24:07:16
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
So if you talked about launch readiness and I love that topic, that's kind of what I wanted to kind of focus or hone in on on this in this podcast. But the idea of you might have learned something in market research or very early on, or you might have scoped a requirement really early, or you could have run into something technical and three, six, nine months from now things could have changed.

00:24:07:16 - 00:24:32:13
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Technology could have opened up users, customers could, could change. And having the mindset to always keep learning and I need to be curious. I need to be vulnerable, even if I'm a two year, ten year veteran of product management. There's no way you're going to be a veteran that year on that user in this environment because it's new to everybody.

00:24:32:13 - 00:24:43:04
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
It's oh, it's always new so what say you about launch readiness in that stage of learning for a product manager.

00:24:43:06 - 00:24:50:00
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
And to clarify Chris, that stage of learning being towards the later end of a project or really.

00:24:50:02 - 00:25:12:21
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Yeah All right I'll call actually give me some advice here. When we talk about launch readiness, we think it's maybe a couple months before you're going out the door. You're getting your product buttoned up, you're talking to your support team, your marketing team. You're getting all this stuff ready to go out the door. What would you consider the launch readiness phase of a development?

00:25:12:22 - 00:25:36:09
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Yeah, it's a great question. So the launch readiness phase should be exciting. And what it feels like is it should feel exciting. It shouldn't feel so stressful because you've got a checklist of

things. I gotta get through these before we're ready to go because a good product manager has taken care of a lot of those things very early in the process.

00:25:36:09 - 00:26:10:19
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
They're ready and you're doing things to ensure that adoption numbers are going to be hit. Once you hit the market, you make sure there's not going to be teething pains that you see on once it does hit the market, meaning operational readiness, or that the support features around the product know what to do with it and once it is in the world, you're you're mitigating because they're got to happen arguments on is it a bug or is it a feature those sort of things you don't want those.

00:26:10:21 - 00:26:29:17
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
But also we mean we don't want to take our eye off the ball yet we're not fully coasting like it's we don't want teams to move on too quickly to the next thing. Now it's our job to kind of rallying like, okay, everybody, we're are we ready? Are we ready? Let's make sure we're good to go.

00:26:29:19 - 00:26:57:16
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
And the product is meeting the expectations that we want it to meet. And Chris, like you said, if we've learned something very early and now, once we are preparing for launch and we do something like a beta, it's our dress rehearsal. We need to know our value proposition being delivered so that that's our opportunity then to do it, not after it's out in the world.

00:26:57:18 - 00:27:05:21
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Joe, what's a ready launch look like to you? Like if you're if someone's asking, how do I know I'm ready?

00:27:06:00 - 00:27:09:01
John S. Little, VP of Product Marketing, Centercode
Easy questions, right? Easy questions, easy questions.

00:27:09:03 - 00:27:38:21
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
How much time do we got again? When you get you know, I look at different teams across the organization, right? I ask, you know,for a B2C product is my sales team ready? Right. Do they feel like they're armed to start selling these products? Are they confident? Is my support team ready? You know, are we at a stage where if a customer calls in, we're like, oh, yeah, yeah, you know what?

00:27:38:21 - 00:28:02:18
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group

Oh yeah, this is how we're going to solve it for you. Here are some techniques to help you along the way. Is my dev team ready? Right. So making sure that. All right, do we have agreement on Sev 1, Sev 2, Sev 3 You know what? What are we going to work on next? Are my stakeholders ready? Are they ready to take calls from some in the organization who maybe hasn't been paying attention?

00:28:02:19 - 00:28:28:05
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Like when I think about that internal operational readiness, that's what comes to the front of my mind in terms of are we ready to rock and roll? And sometimes I get a little greedy and, you know, I'm looking for testimonials, I'm looking for quotes, I'm looking for those success stories because there's going to be naysayers. And what I'd like to have happen is, it isn't Joe Ghali.

00:28:28:05 - 00:28:50:05
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Ryan Cantwell, you know, running around the company saying, this is great. It's more like, hey, I have these other customers or other folks that have bought in that are kind of speaking on my behalf, where I know they're more likely to listen to them than they are to listen to us. Like those are the you know, it's like the ladies spit in the plates, you know.

00:28:50:07 - 00:28:50:17
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
You.

00:28:50:19 - 00:29:01:03
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Can use that in many different scenarios. But that's really what comes to mind. We talk about that like product readiness or that beta readiness from a product perspective.

00:29:01:05 - 00:29:15:15
John S. Little, VP of Product Marketing, Centercode
That's a whole different type of challenge when we start working with other teams. I found that sometimes that last little bit of change management because people find change difficult, you're giving them something new, they have to change and trying to get through that can really be something else.

00:29:15:17 - 00:29:40:22
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
You're speaking my language, John. You speak in my language. So one of my passions is change management. And so, you know, one of the we talked about some of the trends that we're starting to see. One of the biggest trends that's not talked a lot about, but we see it is the with them, you know, the what's in it for me, you know, a lot of organizations are going to introduce beta testing.

00:29:40:22 - 00:30:09:03
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
They're going to introduce a new product management framework. And there's just a lot of fatigue. You know, there's different frameworks that have been introduced. Right. And, you know, people have probably gone through three versions of Agile training by this point in their careers, right? If they've been in, they've been working for 20 years. And so really what we're finding is it isn't so much convincing the product manager, it's how do we help them bring their leadership along in the journey?

00:30:09:04 - 00:30:31:04
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
How do we help them bring the support team, the cross-functional teams, the shared services like accounting and finance, who aren't living in Agile or who aren't living in product management, have buy-in. And so really where we have had a really spend a lot of time is, okay, what's next? How are you going to maintain momentum? What's going to help you transform?

00:30:31:04 - 00:31:00:07
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
And that's making sure people going into this change are aware. You know, do they have that desire? So they're bought into it so that when you do bring that concept to them, like beta testing, they're open minded because you can have the greatest process, you can have the greatest idea improvement. But if that person or team you're speaking to isn't bought in, doesn't matter.

00:31:00:09 - 00:31:09:02
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
You can't have latest thing ever. But if they don't know why it's important or they're not on to it, bought into it going into the conversation forget it.

00:31:09:03 - 00:31:14:16
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Yeah I know. I'm not sure if you guys are familiar with the specific term, but have you heard of dogfooding before?

00:31:14:18 - 00:31:15:20
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Absolutely.

00:31:15:20 - 00:31:44:09
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Internal beta testing of all that jazz. Yeah. This is one of our favorites. We were on the beta team, but we were like the product manager's best friend at Western Digital in there and we employed our beta test program in a dog fitting capacity to get all those teams ready to get that

buy-in. So we went to our marketing folks, we went and talked to regional sales managers rather than the individual salespeople.

00:31:44:09 - 00:32:04:18
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
We didn't want them selling the new product yet, but the regional people could come up with their stuff. But we went and grabbed those different teams. We got support teams. We had anybody that's going to be part of this product and we brought them into a test and we got their feedback and they learned the product and they, they, we got that buy-in for that product because they got to use it firsthand.

00:32:05:00 - 00:32:30:08
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
They had their voices heard, which everyone loves to have their feedback listened to, and they got their concerns out the way they got to collaborate with each other and saying, Oh, you know, I've seen this on other products that we've launched and this is what we could do for that. And I love it. I love that buy-in that you can get from those different teams just by using something as simple as dogfighting has been around for decades at this point.

00:32:30:10 - 00:32:48:22
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Yeah, that's one of my big topics. I love talking about dogfighting. It's a great thing. So in terms of launch readiness, getting this by and why is this important tool tool product manager, why would this be important? Why do we need to focus on it? Why do we need to care about it?

00:32:48:22 - 00:32:52:19
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Why do we need to push for it?

00:32:52:21 - 00:33:20:10
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Yeah. Gosh, because if we don't, I really like to say something by saying what it isn't. So if we don't like it if we don't do that, we have underperformance like we've just made this big investment. It's not getting the traction we wanted. It's not hitting the metrics that we were hoping it would hit. And that's frustrating and then everybody starts to point fingers and instead of being ready.

00:33:20:10 - 00:33:49:03
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
So we do our readiness steps hopefully early, instead of too late to make sure that we have something successful on our hands that's going to meet customer expectations. I know, gosh, I think every product manager encounters a situation like this. I know I certainly have where we're so excited about our new product, like everybody in the company and it goes, we let it fly.

00:33:49:05 - 00:34:11:15
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
And then all of a sudden, like you're expecting to see, like the needle starts to quickly tick up and it's like it's not moving. What's happening everybody? Then the bullets, the sweat bullets start to form and they start dripping. Oh, no. Why? Why? And then the investigation starts and everything else. But readiness is helping make sure, one, your expectations are appropriately set.

00:34:11:15 - 00:34:36:05
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
You have a firm understanding of what's going to come and you know how to react when certain things happen. Like you're ready as readiness implies, you're able to respond much more quickly to make sure you do have a successful product. And we talked about learning early in the process. You're always learning. You need to keep learning.

00:34:36:05 - 00:34:51:15
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
And as part of the readiness phase, what little things can we pick up on now? What can we learn to help make that flywheel spin faster? Like it is really what we want. And that's why readiness is so important.

00:34:51:17 - 00:35:14:06
John S. Little, VP of Product Marketing, Centercode
Yeah, if you don't have it, you end up, like you said earlier, Ryan, with the product manager being stressed out instead of calm at the end when it should be going out that way. And. Joe Well, you said earlier this is what it was like in the very beginning, it's what at least sound bites me is that recently there's a lot more like back to basics inside of product management getting back in touch with the customers, getting rid of those pet projects that somebody was just forcing people to run down.

00:35:14:11 - 00:35:20:17
John S. Little, VP of Product Marketing, Centercode
As our resources are getting more constrained, we're going back to what we know to be the successful formula.

00:35:20:18 - 00:35:36:07
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
You know, and it's that some of those basics include the fundamentals of let's just use data. You know, many times we go with our gut and, you know, a lot of great companies started that way. A lot of great companies start that. Somebody had a really good idea that was based on data. And then along the way, they lost.

00:35:36:09 - 00:36:16:17
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group

They lost their way and, you know, to Ryan's point, beta testing represents a big dataset. It helps to justify the why. Why did we think we were ready to launch? Well, because we identified these segments or these types of customers. You know, we have these goals. We were able to measure it. You know, we were tracking it. We knew coming out of it, you know, if we got out of these beta programs, these are the results we were looking for, then we knew we were ready to start making it available to a broader audience, like we were effectively turning into really credible and strategic storytellers in your organization.

00:36:16:17 - 00:36:46:02
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
And again, it's painful the first couple of times, but the more times you do it, the less people are kind of there on top of you because they know, hey, when we launch our next product, Ryan's got it because he, he does his due diligence, right? And, you know, one of the things that sometimes we miss is, you know, beta testing is also a great way to build stronger customer relationships.

00:36:46:04 - 00:37:05:00
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Oh, yeah. They love being I mean, if you got it from it, right? But they love being part of the beta because then they feel like they have input into the product. They feel like there's a little sense of pride and that, you know, you talk about in this market, you got to take care of your current customers, right?

00:37:05:00 - 00:37:24:19
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
And so one of the great ways to do that is you engage them in a beta saying, Hey, I need your help, let's partner up together, I want your feedback. And so not only are you mitigating your risk, but you're also building stronger relationships with some of your key customers that will help you get through trying times like the ones we're going through right now in our economy.

00:37:24:19 - 00:37:37:07
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
If you do it right, there is a payback of 100. If you know, you take care of those relationships not only with your customers, but their customers as well.

00:37:37:09 - 00:37:49:08
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Yeah, I call that the inner circle and whether it's a career or whether it's a customer may not be special, make them feel special like everybody else.

00:37:49:10 - 00:37:59:20
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Well, and then you have to give them money off or give something for free. No, honestly, it's like that intrinsic help makes me feel like I'm an important customer.

00:37:59:22 - 00:38:26:19
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
That we've done studies with our audience and Betabound is our testing community. So there's over 250,000 people there. So we've done the research into that, right? Like, why, why are you testing number one to get their feedback? So to, to influence the product, right. It's not to get paid to, to make money because you're not going to make a lot of money if you're, if you're just relying on beta testing.

00:38:26:21 - 00:38:44:09
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
But I actually just had this content. Please come out and I called it. It was called the hidden value of testers to kind of help people understand that you may think you are a beta tester, a dogfooding or is just providing you with issues, right? They're just going to help me find bugs. They're just going to kind of knock those things out and get them out the way.

00:38:44:09 - 00:39:13:10
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
They actually visualized it as an iceberg. That's the tip of the iceberg is just this the feedback that you get from them and how you use it in product. But the bottom of the iceberg is all the value they're providing as a great customer as what we'd call an evangelist and advocate our product. Because when, for example, times are tough and you know, you're asking to do more with less, you don't have as much budget for advertising, raising and getting your product out there.

00:39:13:13 - 00:39:31:09
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
You know who's going to advertise for free? Your customer. You're like when you say 1000 times more, that one customer that was like, You know what? I had a great time on the beta test. This product manager was super responsive to me and gave me feedback. I'm going to go tell my friends and family about it and then they're going to tell their friends and family.

00:39:31:09 - 00:39:49:18
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
And then you get this network of people that are talking about your product because you did a great job of including their feedback and letting their voice being heard. Without it, you're not only your beta tests, but your product is going to struggle a little bit more because you got your fire in upstream. What happens if you don't respond to them?

00:39:49:20 - 00:40:08:19
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Right? If you have a customer that has a bad time, what do you think they're going to do? Right. To complain. But they're not going to not going to be the advocate. They're going to say, you know, the team sucked at doing beta. They didn't want didn't want me. They didn't want to hear

my feedback. They don't why would I want to know why they care about recommending this product to somebody else.

00:40:08:21 - 00:40:10:21
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
So, yeah, I love that.

00:40:10:22 - 00:40:37:09
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Well, and the other part of it is, you know, a lot of sales teams are struggling right now. Right. And the duration, right. The closed deals are longer. A lot of customers are ghosting the folks in sales. Right. Because that purse strings are tighter and so the secret sauce is, you know, engage with your customers, build that strong relationship.

00:40:37:09 - 00:40:58:10
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
And what I like to focus on is getting those testimonials in quotes and then arming yourself. Like I just got off a call with our sales team literally right before the call, and they're like, We're really struggling for testimonials, right? If I can just get more tangible examples of success, then I can arm my sales team with, like this time.

00:40:58:10 - 00:41:21:00
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Right now I need proof. I need proof they're going to get an ROI. And so not only are you helping your existing customers, but also enabling, you know, getting some of those storytelling points, those data points that then you can help your sales team evangelize and arm them to help them, you know, be more effective at closing deals with new customers.

00:41:21:02 - 00:41:37:07
John S. Little, VP of Product Marketing, Centercode
Yeah, I think you're at a really good point, Joe, as far as helping other teams out, because product managers, even though they have very little authority, they sometimes get perceived as having a lot of it. And so sometimes a finger pointing game can turn up really fast because it was like you make all the decisions, why are you giving me all this bad stuff?

00:41:37:08 - 00:41:47:16
John S. Little, VP of Product Marketing, Centercode
And when things get a little bit rough, it's easier to have that happen when you're actually helping them. When you give them the stuff they need and listen to them as well. That keeps that from happening.

00:41:47:18 - 00:41:49:05
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
No? Yeah, absolutely.

00:41:49:09 - 00:42:22:06
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Proof in the pudding, right? We actually have one of our best practices for beta testing is to collect what we call the three inherent types of feedback. So issues, ideas and praise. Praise. That's all. That's all your testimonials, that's all the quotes. It's all the stuff that you need. And depending on the size of your test, like, that's a lot of feedback, that's all the testimonials you need and having run a few tests, it's my favorite thing because it's qualitative, right?

00:42:22:11 - 00:42:41:05
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
And then you have some quantitative measurements on the back like what their star rating was or their net promoter score and beta. You have a sentiment kind of that you can look at. But one of my examples that I use, those running a test on a grill. It was a smart grill, so I won't give the specifics.

00:42:41:07 - 00:42:57:20
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
And it's the first time that we've kind of got into that field of smart grills. And I'm looking at this feedback and it's praise and they're talking about This is great, right? I love the ability to be able to control it remotely. And I popped in the feedback and said, hey, why what? Why was it important? Why is that important?

00:42:57:20 - 00:43:26:09
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
He's like, Well, I get to go spend time with my family, right? So I don't have to sit outside for 4 hours on this grill, making sure everything's cool and controlling the temperature from my phone I can access and I can spend time with my family when they're here. And I'm like, Wow Wow. And I present that to the product team and the marketing teams on that, just like everyone's throwing stuff like they were just it's a little dramatic, but they were so excited like, can we get that and use it as a testimonial?

00:43:26:09 - 00:43:48:11
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
We just walk out the door with the testimonial and sure enough, you can get consent right there from your people. You can have a forum coming in that says, like, I consent to giving praise. And it was so deep and qualitative and rich and they ate it up. So those three feedback types are going to do you a lot of justice because if you try to narrow it to one, they're all going to flood into one and it's hard to decipher.

00:43:48:11 - 00:44:07:15
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
But also the importance of responding to feedback because testers might be a little shallow in terms of the quantity of feedback. But just by poking a little bit at one simple like why is that

important to you? Why does it matter? Can get you a big story that is super useful. That context is huge.

00:44:07:17 - 00:44:41:09
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Yeah, I'm glad that makes me so happy, Chris, to hear that because the conversation as product managers, I always encourage them to challenge their organization when they hear about a new feature. For example, the first two words out of your mouth when you hear about that feature should be, So what? Like, so what, what are the benefits? And you can use this you're testing like you said that data is such a goldmine for like you can point to specific areas and get that and like you said, your marketing team is thrown things.

00:44:41:09 - 00:44:46:03
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
I love being dramatic like I imagine a room full of confetti and champagne, but there's a.

00:44:46:03 - 00:44:47:14
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Party.

00:44:47:16 - 00:45:10:11
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Know about a party. So but like I just see. Then how much more effective are those messages that you're sending? So the customers are much more locked in to what it is you can do for them. And again, I mentioned the flywheel before it. That is like it's you're going to it's the snowball rolling down the hill.

00:45:10:11 - 00:45:19:01
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
If I'm not using the firewall, it's just you're collecting more good information to keep things going. And it's so exciting. There's that energy.

00:45:19:03 - 00:45:40:18
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Yeah, that engagement. I say it's one of our feedback types. It is a big structure configuration of your test responding to feedback and I, I talked about this in the very first episode of the podcast responding to feedback is the number one advice I have for anybody. I don't care what tool you're using, I don't care how crappy your beta test is planned.

00:45:41:00 - 00:46:03:06
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Just respond to feedback. If you don't respond to feedback, why would anybody submit anything else? So you're going to see numbers just dip. You're not going to see engagement from people. They don't feel invested. They're not going to want to give you anything else. And

they're again going to get a bad taste in the mouth and not want to, you know, promote your product as much because you weren't there for them to serve.

00:46:03:06 - 00:46:38:11
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Why did they even join the beta test? To have their voice heard. All right. So I think we're coming up close to time here. Is there anything that you guys can give? Let's talk to a new product manager right now based on the trends, based on what we talk about, what's your one statement to them as advice? We'll start with Joe.

00:46:38:11 - 00:46:55:15
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
I might go basic because this is what I talk a lot about, there's so many components of product management and, you know, when we our training, we talk about at the end, we talk about what are the three key things you're going to take away? What are the first three things you're going to do? Because we introduce a lot, right?

00:46:55:15 - 00:47:20:09
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
We arm them with so many tools and techniques and processes. My advice is look for progress, not perfection, right? Build up those success stories, evangelize those success stories, you know, build, you know, learn, build upon what you've done and just continue that momentum. That's and I do that a lot with a lot of newer product teams that I work with.

00:47:20:09 - 00:47:43:06
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
As I'm not asking you to be amazing in one month or three months or six months, like focus on your customers, understand the why, but look for those tiny acts of discovery. Look, if you look for those tiny success stories and evangelize them, Right?

00:47:43:08 - 00:48:06:14
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Yeah. So my short bit of advice for a new product manager is to really nail down and understand the difference between outcomes and outputs. Like understand it. Because if you can focus on the outcomes, you're going to hit home runs, it's going to keep you across. I think it was you that said it early. It's going to keep you curious.

00:48:06:15 - 00:48:29:02
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
It's going to get you closer to the customer. It's going to naturally lead you down so many fruitful paths instead of kind of like keeping your head down and maybe focusing on some of the more internal things or more tactical things, you'll be more strategic as a result. It'll make a difference. So outcomes, not outputs is my advice.

00:48:29:03 - 00:48:34:17
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
And John, you've got a new product manager starting soon. What's your advice to the herd?

00:48:34:18 - 00:48:48:13
John S. Little, VP of Product Marketing, Centercode
It's going to be and this is just a broader coming from what Joe and Ryan said, but always keep the customer in mind. And remember, you have more than one customer, you have your internal customers and your external customers. You have to keep them all in mind as you release the product.

00:48:48:14 - 00:49:02:20
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
You Well, and John, you said you have a new product manager starting to send him my way. I'm doing a class in August in Milwaukee. I don't get I'll get I'm the individual I'll get that person ready to go for you, buddy. Just let me know, okay?

00:49:02:21 - 00:49:05:04
John S. Little, VP of Product Marketing, Centercode
If you will.

00:49:05:06 - 00:49:22:01
Chris Rader, VP of Marketing, Centercode
Alright. Thank you guys so much for joining. I really appreciate it. I feel like that was a really good conversation and I'm really hoping for all you new or seasoned product managers out there that you got something you can walk away with. There's a lot of nuggets here. And thank you guys so much.

00:49:22:02 - 00:49:23:05
Joe Ghali, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Thank you. This is awesome.

00:49:23:05 - 00:49:24:02
Ryan Cantwell, Principal Trainer and Consultant, 280 Group
Thank you, fellas.

00:49:25:15 - 00:49:41:02
Stefan Stenroos, Technical Trainer and Host, Centercode
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