

The 24-Week PM Onboarding Checklist

For managers onboarding a new product manager

Adapted from *All Over It: How to Nail Your New PM Job* by Daniel Thomason

Standard onboarding checklists are written by HR for every role at once, so they cover laptops, benefits and the all-hands calendar. None of that is what limits a new PM.

What limits them is access they don't have, people they haven't met, and decisions being made in rooms they don't know exist. All three are fixable in advance, and all three are invisible until month four.

This is the PM-specific layer. Give it to your new hire, or work through it together in your 1:1s.

SET THE FOUNDATIONS

WEEKS 1–2

Almost none of this feels like work. All of it determines the next six months.

Access — start day one; requests take weeks, questions arrive in hours

- ☐ Analytics tooling, plus the specific logs, tables and dashboards for their product. Usually the slowest to grant. Start it first.
- ☐ Admin rights on the project management tool for their own projects — not view access. Dependence on someone else to make changes will bite.
- ☐ Figma and current design files.
- ☐ A test environment where they can break things safely.
- ☐ The most recent planning document, then whatever it references.

Habits

- ☐ Recurring calendar blocks for work that's important but never urgent — reading, product data, weekly planning.
- ☐ Working hours set and visible; a lunch block; ideally one meeting-light day.
- ☐ A task-capture system they trust. Any tool. The system matters, the tool doesn't.
- ☐ A note structure: meeting notes, doc summaries, a who's-who map, a running list of unanswered questions.

Relationships

- ☐ Recurring 1:1 with their tech lead and their designer. Fortnightly minimum. The highest-return meeting on their calendar.
- ☐ Tell them explicitly who their skip-level is, and that a meeting is expected.

Manager action. Give them a ranked list of the six to ten people they should meet and *why each one matters*. “Get to know the team” is not a plan. This list is the most useful thing you can hand over in week one, and only you can write it.

LEARN THE TERRAIN

WEEKS 3–6

Manager action. Say out loud that you don't expect delivery yet. New PMs jump into projects early because they assume they're being judged on visible output, and it costs them the only learning window they'll get. Removing that pressure explicitly is worth more than any onboarding document.

- ☐ Use their fresh eyes: test your product and two competitors' properly, write up what's confusing. Present it around week 6. This perspective is gone forever by month three — capture it while it exists.
- ☐ Get in front of a real customer. Week 5 is not too early. Internal sources will give them endless information and a subtly wrong picture.

- ❑ Meet the peripheral functions — legal, support, sales, data science, platform teams. Before a favour is needed, not during.
- ❑ Work out how things actually get decided here, as distinct from how the process document says they do.
- ❑ Start contributing around week 5. Small and useful. Quick wins that are visible to the team.
- ❑ Agree what they should be known for — the territory they own and can describe in a sentence.

BUILD CREDIBILITY

WEEKS 7–13

- ❑ Learn the launch process on something low-stakes, before it matters.
- ❑ Document something that only one person understands. Half a day to write, half a day later to correct. Highest-leverage document they'll produce this year, and only a newcomer can write it.
- ❑ Ship something with a name. People talk about things that have names, and they don't talk about things that don't.
- ❑ Seek structured feedback — early enough that it's still cheap to act on.

Manager action. Hand over a presentation. Let them talk about the team's work to a wider audience. And let their engineering lead or designer present sometimes too — it defaults to the PM and it doesn't have to.

DIRECTION

WEEKS 14–24

- ❑ Form a vision, from week 18. Not earlier — before then they neither know enough nor have the standing to sell it.
- ❑ Write a strategy, from week 20, after the vision.
- ❑ Build a roadmap, and sell it to stakeholders properly rather than publishing it.
- ❑ Keep an explicit “no” list — specific tempting things they've decided against, with reasons, agreed with the team.
- ❑ Present to the wider org around week 20: why this problem area matters and what the team has done about it.

The four failure modes

Most struggling new PMs are failing in one of these ways, and each has an obvious fix once it's named.

Delivering too early. They took on real work in week 2 to prove themselves, and never built the foundation. Symptom: month five, still can't answer basic questions about their own product's data.

Never leaving the building. All their information comes from internal stakeholders. Endless ideas, subtly wrong priorities.

Calendar capture. Their time went to whoever asked loudest. Nothing they personally decided was important ever happened.

No territory. Nobody's sure what they own, so they're consulted on nothing and blamed for everything adjacent.

One question for your 1:1s

“What's the most important thing you don't understand yet?”

New PMs will not volunteer this. Asking it directly, repeatedly, surfaces the gap while it's still cheap to close — and it tells you more about their ramp than any status update.

The full version — forty chapters, each with timing, rationale, curated resources and action items — is **All Over It: How to Nail Your New PM Job**, available on Amazon, Apple Books and Kobo.

Questions, or want to talk about onboarding a PM team: dthomason.com