

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

# **ASPIRE TO YOUR CAPABILITIES**

**By Steve Johnson  
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# ASPIRE TO YOUR CAPABILITIES

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## So you've got an idea for a company or a product.

Most often, the first step is to estimate the costs and revenues to see if you can deliver it profitably. But before you start running the financials, ask yourself, “Is this product a good fit for my organization?”

Whether you're just starting out or have an established brand, every team has capabilities to be leveraged with new products. Yet it's often hard to pinpoint your core capabilities, particularly when applied to a new product idea.

## Should we or shouldn't we?

It seems like a good idea but a fundamental concern is not whether **someone** could offer this solution, but whether **your organization** should offer it.

ASPIRE is a quick way to assess the product opportunity against your organizational strengths.

# A-S-P-I-R-E

This handy mnemonic—ASPIRE—can help identify your organization's core set of competencies to ensure you're focused on the most valuable priorities.

**Authority.** Clients look to us to solve these problems.

**Systems.** We have proven methods in place.

**Passion.** We're fanatical about the product category, the persona, and their problems.

**Innovation.** We have solved a problem in a unique way.

**Research.** We have evidence to support our claims.

**Expertise.** We have proven skills in this area.

These business factors help you determine how much you can leverage corporate assets to develop and deliver a new product idea.

**The likelihood of product success dramatically increases when you leverage existing competencies.**

# A.

## AUTHORITY

*Do your customers expect you to solve this type of problem or offer this type of solution?*

Sure, you can develop almost any product or service but will your customers embrace it? Do you have the authority? If your company has a reputation in a domain or market, you're likely to have the authority or privilege to offer additional products to your existing customers.

Who is your favorite vendor? Why do they have credibility with you?

They have earned the authority to offer you products in a specific category. Your favorite software vendor can easily offer new types of software but you'll probably be skeptical if they try to offer hardware or cars or sports equipment.

I love my Nest thermostat. My good experience with their thermostat granted Nest authority to sell me additional household products. When Nest started offering smoke detectors, I was willing to pay a premium for their new product. (And now I'm hoping for them to develop a controller for my lawn sprinkler system.)

Likewise, Apple has been delivering high-quality, elegantly designed products for years. As a result of their authority, I bought an iPad before I'd actually seen one; I did the same with Apple Watch. But I don't trust many other companies enough to buy a new product so blindly.

Sales people have known this for years: it's easier to sell more products to an existing customer than it is to find new customers for existing products.

What's your authority and with whom?

# S. SYSTEMS

*Do you have the necessary systems in place to offer this product or solution?*

Do you understand the systems and methods necessary to deliver your product? You'll need to leverage existing systems or somehow acquire them (via partnerships or "acqui-hiring").

For example, a company offering curriculum for teachers wants to offer their curriculum directly to the public in the form of video presentations. They'll need to acquire the systems to produce and deliver video

content. They'll have to figure out how to take money over the web. And they'll have to evaluate whether their existing content is effective when delivered via video instead of via the classroom setting they already know.

Many startups encounter this as they try to scale their business. They've put all of their focus on product but not on the supporting business systems.

Are you ready to support your new product initiatives with proven systems and methods?

What systems do you have in place?

# P. PASSION

*Are you excited about the problem and domain?*

One of the things you read about successful companies is their passion, their zeal. In particular, passion for customers and passion for solving customer problems.

In an article for HBR, Lindsay McGregor and Neel Doshi refer to this as Play, Purpose, and Potential.

**Play** is when you are motivated by the work itself. You work because you enjoy it. A teacher at play enjoys the core activities of teaching — creating lesson plans, grading tests, or problem solving how to break through to each student. Play is our learning instinct, and it's tied to curiosity, experimentation, and exploring challenging problems.

**Purpose** is when the direct outcome of the work fits your identity. You work because you value the work's impact. For example, a teacher driven by purpose values or identifies with the goal of educating and empowering children.

**Potential** is when the outcome of the work benefits your identity. In other words, the work enhances your potential. For example, a teacher with potential may be doing his job because he eventually wants to become a principal.

For more, see [How Company Culture Shapes Employee Motivation](#).

Passion for customers and their problems is what makes employees go the extra mile — and keeps you going when times get rough.

What's your passion?





# INNOVATION

*How you create value with unique approaches and original ideas.*

Have you invented something new? Do you have an innovation or invention?

An innovation may be a new type of technology but it can also be a new delivery model, a new way of pricing and packaging, or a new service. In short, innovation is a new way of solving a problem.

In fact, most innovations solve a problem that is already solved; it just isn't solved as well as it could be.

Take Uber or Lyft. They certainly didn't invent taxi services; those have been around since before cars existed. In fact, today's taxicab companies created the opportunity for ride-sharing services in the United States because cabs are often unreliable, they are frequently dirty, and they rarely take credit cards. What they did was connect drivers directly with passengers. They automated the dispatching, the transfer of payment, and the driving directions. They can tell you pretty accurately when your car is going to arrive and they can estimate your fare. And each service gets instant updates if you're unhappy with the driver or the car so they can take corrective action. (Can you do any of that in a taxi?)

What's your innovation or invention?

# R. RESEARCH

*Do you have data to support your approach?*

What data do you have to support your recommendations? Other than yourself, who agrees with your approach? Perhaps domain experts and scientists have published studies. Or you may have customer success profiles that support your fundamental conjecture.

Research is how you prove it.

One company is building an application to help guide and coach romantic couples. The app gives advice on activities that will please your partner. Here's the big question: what do you know about counseling couples? The product team can point to specific research that shows which actions are most effective at building and maintaining committed relationships.

Research ensures your product is grounded in proven methods and you can make claims with confidence.

What research do you have?

# E. EXPERTISE

*How you use our know-how to deliver results.*

How widespread is the experience of your team on this type of product in this type of market? Is the expertise found in only one or two employees or does everyone on the team (or everyone in the organization) have expertise?

I worked as an advisor to a company and many of their struggles were related to the absence of expertise. The sales team couldn't recognize a good client from a bad one. The developers were building features they wanted, not features clients would use. Both turned to the product manager who didn't really understand the problems in the market or the common methods in the domain. The result was a hodgepodge of partially implemented methods driven by a wide diversity of potential customers. The company failed because of an absence of expertise.

What's your expertise?

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# ASPIRE WORKSHEET

*Use this worksheet to describe your capabilities in each area. Then rate these aspects to guide your evaluation of any new product idea.*

<b>Authority</b>	Why customers look to us to solve this type of problem.
<b>Systems</b>	The methods, tools, and processes that support our solutions.
<b>Passion</b>	Why we are excited about the problem and domain.
<b>Innovation</b>	How we create value with unique approaches and original ideas.
<b>Research</b>	We have data to support our approach
<b>Expertise</b>	We use our know-how to deliver results.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steve Johnson is an author, speaker, and product coach focused on implementing modern methods that move products quickly from idea to market. His approach is based on the belief that minimal process and simple templates result in a nimble product team.

Steve's work experience includes technical, sales, and marketing management positions at companies specializing in technology-based products. His market and technical savvy allowed him to rise rapidly through the ranks from product manager to the executive suite. In his career, he has launched dozens of products.

Steve was a long-time instructor at Pragmatic Institute and co-creator of the popular QuartzOpen framework.

Nowadays, Steve works as coach and advisor, helping teams implement best practices in product management and marketing.

Steve's book, ***Turn Ideas Into Products***, describes a nimble planning process from idea to market. Learn more at <http://www.under10consulting.com/books>

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