WHAT 25 PRODUCT LEADERS WOULD TELL THEIR YOUNGER SELVES

Our eldest is 17, studying A-levels and drawn to design and technology. They'll enter a very different world in 2030 from the one I entered. Trying to offer useful advice, I asked 25 close product leaders and educators - with more than 500 years of combined experience - a simple question:

"What would you focus on if you were entering the product development workplace in 2030?"

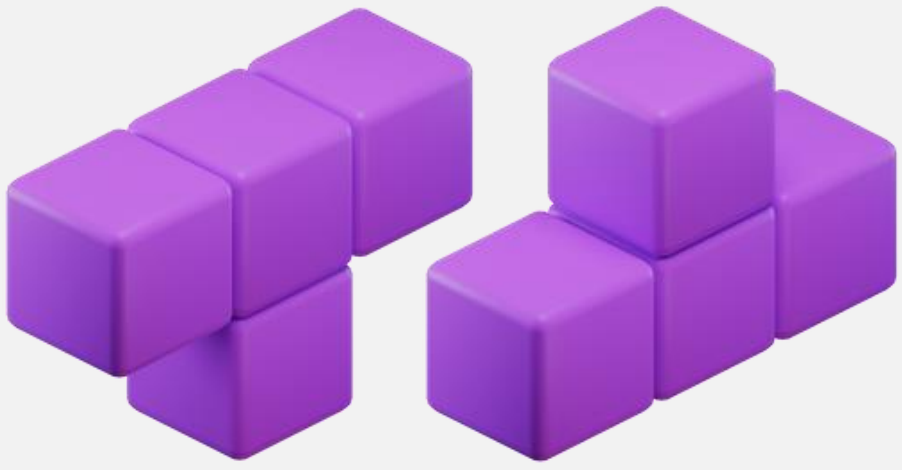
The responses revealed a remarkably consistent picture of where the industry is heading.

Six themes stood out.

1. MULTIDISCIPLINARY THINKERS WILL WIN

Many who built careers through specialism now believe the future belongs to "T-shaped" professionals: deep in one discipline, broad across many. Engineering, systems thinking and commercial awareness together, not separately. An area were neurodivergence is a gift.

"Full stack skillset - the generalist wins in a complex world. Learn to design, build, code, test, sell. All of it."



2. LEARNING VELOCITY MATTERS MORE THAN PRESTIGE

When discussing early careers, the dominant advice was simple: optimise for how fast you can learn. Network access, responsibility, and real-world exposure consistently outranked salary or status.

"Learning to learn is even more important than ever. Rate of change is only accelerating."



3. BUILD REAL THINGS

The clearest practical advice? Work on tangible products. Design, engineering, hands-on experimentation, and shipping ideas into the real world were repeatedly seen as the best foundations for long-term success.

"Hustle and make something real. Hustle is not an Instagram post or AI conversation – hustle is to build a real thing. Don't wait for permission."



4. AI WILL RESHAPE ROLES BUT NOT REPLACE HUMAN JUDGMENT

Most respondents expect AI to fundamentally transform product development workflows. However, they believe human creativity, communication, storytelling, customer understanding, and systems thinking will become more valuable, not less.

"AI is information, not wisdom. Designers translate humanity into products — through empathy and judgement. Refined skills may be automated. Refined taste won't be."



5. CURIOSITY MAYBE THE ULTIMATE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Across almost every answer, one theme kept emerging: curiosity. Not credentials. Not titles. Not brands. The people most likely to thrive are those who continuously learn, adapt, experiment, and stay close to real human problems.

"Education matters less than portfolio — curiosity, courage, learning mindset, and building intuition about what will work is increasingly important."



6. POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION: VALUABLE – BUT TIMING MATTERS

Half the group hold a master's degree, yet few advocated more education for its own sake.

MBA's and specialised technical master's programmes are valued (e.g. advanced manufacturing, systems engineering, interdisciplinary innovation, etc), but the consensus was clear: postgraduate study matters most when paired with experience.



SUMMARY

The future product developer is a technically fluent, highly adaptive builder with strong human skills.

A colleague reviewing early results commented:

"This is all as relevant to us weather-hardened product folk in the field. Adapt and stay humble!"

Hopefully, this short exercise helps others pass on a few pointers to their young charges.

(Thanks to everyone who took the time to answer the survey questions from a Group with university degrees across Brunel, Cambridge, Glasgow, GSA, Durham, London Business School, Imperial, Massey, Newcastle, Oregon, Santa Barbara, Stanford, UCL, and Virginia).