

# First 90 Days



Lance Willett — CPO, Tumblr

Lance Willett  
sensible.blog

# First 90 Days



Listen, Learn and Act

Lance Willett  
sensible.blog

Poll: Is anyone starting a new job, role, team/company this month?  
What about in the last 6 months or year?

# Change?

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Poll: do you 1) Love change or 2) Love stability?  
Share your thoughts in the comments section

# Change

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[sensible.blog](http://sensible.blog)

Change is inevitable!

Product leaders often deal with change and uncertainty in our jobs and across our careers

In a constant feedback loop of learning and action

# Change & Continuity

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[sensible.blog](http://sensible.blog)

Best of the best build on basics when taking on a new role or stepping up to lead a key project

Use the first 90 days to establish trust and credibility, identify and fill gaps in knowledge, and gain confidence

Confidence compounds long after the start

Balance. This will come up as a theme in this talk.

# Feedback Loop

Lance Willett  
[sensible.blog](http://sensible.blog)

Get started *better*: activate teams, organize your work, communicate clearly, and build success from day one

Feedback loops help us capture the learning as we go, turn into action

# Product Skills

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sensible.blog

You can apply your product skills directly to this challenge...

You are a product leader! Same tools apply as any project

- Discovery, framing, priorities, and planning
- 90-day roadmap

You live and breathe this every day

Simply apply your skills to your first 90 days as a product leader...

# First 90 Days

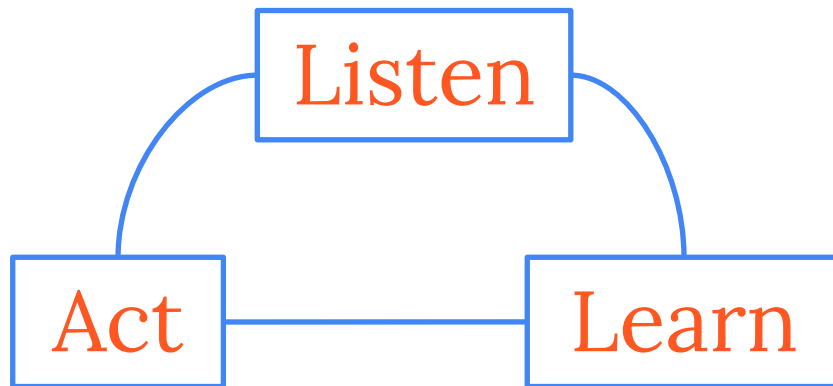


Feedback Loop — Listen, Learn and Act

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What does success look like? Do you know where to start?

How do you organize your thoughts and tasks?



Lance Willett  
sensible.blog

Keeping in mind this feedback loop

I'd like you to imagine yourself starting something new

Even if you didn't answer "YES" earlier when I asked who is starting something  
TODAY

Take 20 seconds to think of what might be the toughest "new start" you've had in your  
career

Today I'll tell you one of mine — how I navigated the change using this structured and  
intentional approach

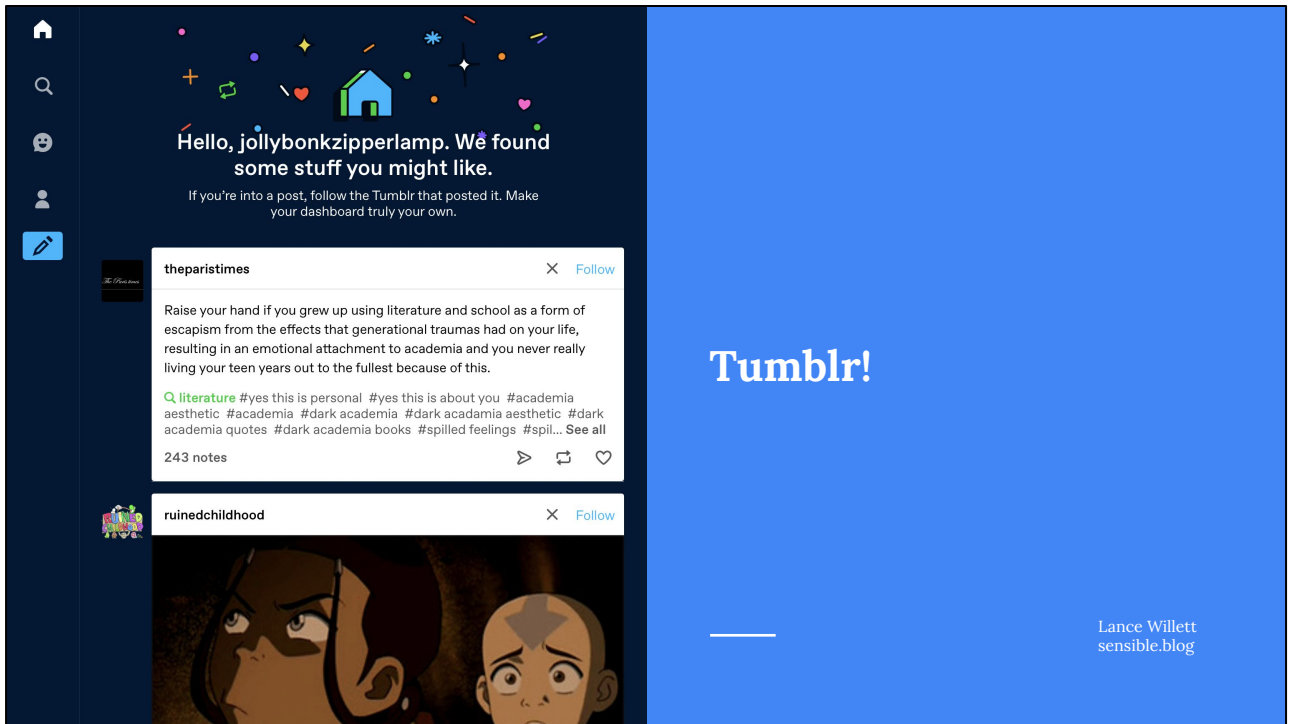
Just like framing a product issue, roadmap or delivery plan



Let's rewind the clock to May 2020

- COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, daughter home from school — everyone on ZOOM!
- Wildfires, death in family, moving house, new home office setup...

My boss comes to me and says...



Come join Tumblr!

Surprise! Boom. Now I had 150 new teammates, a new product to learn, and a well-known brand with an active community



Jumped right in...

What's first?!

# Now–Next–Later

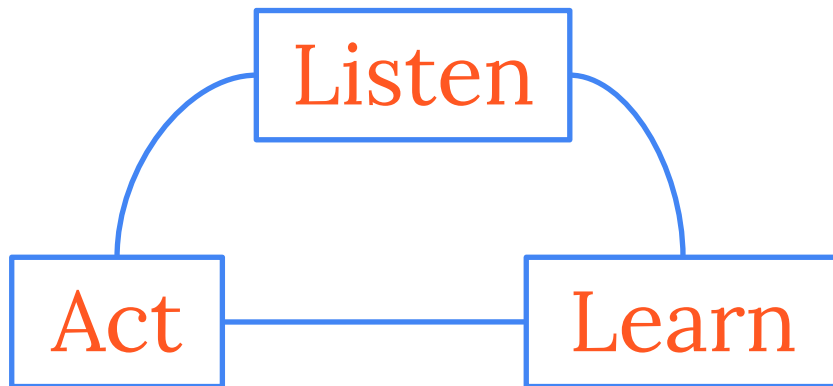
30, 60, and 90–Day Plans

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Just like a product roadmap, your first 90 days take shape as you get going

What's first — where do I start?

Now, Next, Later = 30, 60, 90



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Let's dive in...

# Listen

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1

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2

---

3

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## Listen

- Map out team and key partners
- Dive into the products
- Ask questions; be a sponge!
- Keep a glossary of terms and acronyms (knowledgebase)
- Join rituals to absorb the style and culture of the team

## Folks / People to meet,

#tumblr/people

Keywords: check-ins, intros

## My List

## Lance, Week 3 Onboarding

#tumblr/onboarding

By function

- Marketing
- Data
- Engineering, read more
- Product management
- Design

## What is? Tumblr Glossary

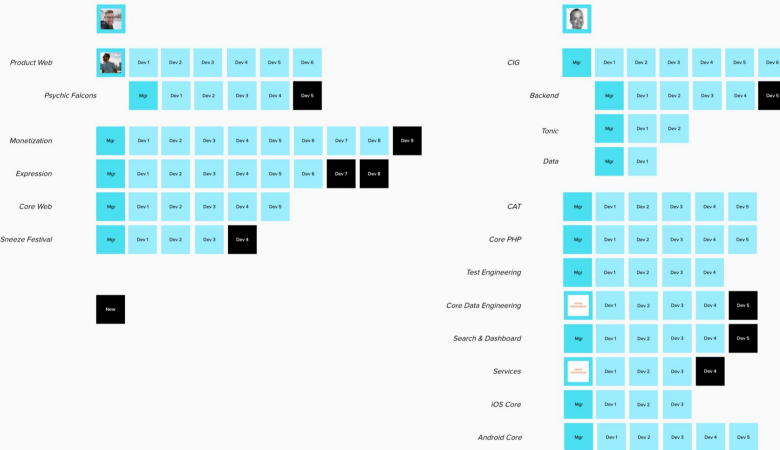
#tumblr/lore

#tumblr/onboarding

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2020 Lance Team Org Map					
File Edit View Insert Format Data Tools Add-ons Help Last edit was 5 days ago					
100% \$ % .0 .00 123 Arial 10 B I S A					
Function	A	B	C	D	E
1	Function	Standard Label	Head / Owner	Direct report	Team / HR
2	<b>Product &amp; engineering</b>		<b>Lance Willett</b>		
3	Product management	Product	Lance Willett	—	Product Management
4	Data analytics	Data		Yes	Data Science & Analytics
5	Engineering oversight	Engineering		Yes	Core Engineering
6	Engineering oversight	Engineering		Yes	Product Engineering
7	Internationalization	i18n / Global		Yes	International Development
8	Hiring / performance	Hiring		—	Office of CTO
9	<b>Leadership</b>				
10	Business operations	Biz Ops		Yes	Business Operations
11	CRO	Sales/Biz Dev		Yes	HQ
12	CFO	Finance (FP&A)		No	Finance
13	New business strategy	Marketing / Strategy		Yes	Marketing
14	Marketing	Marketing		No	DCH
15	Comms	PR		No	DCH
16	Advertising business	Ads		Yes	Ads
17	Design quality / end-to-end experience	Design		Yes	Product Design
18	<b>A&amp;C / Not on Tumblr</b>				
19	Human resources	HR		—	HR
20	Legal	Legal		—	Legal
21	Customer support / insights	Customer Support		—	Community Support
22	Trust & safety	Content Safety		—	Trust & Safety
23	Payments / billing	Payments		—	Payments
24					
25					

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# Learn



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## Learn

- Stay open, beware overwhelm: notes, tags, screenshots
- Daily habit to review next steps
- Key metrics and stats as daily bookmarks
- Track progress, find the gaps & patterns

Powerful habits, yet also risks (overwhelm, noise, distractions)

Ads | ProdEx | Data  
International | Platform

Product, Engineering, Data  
PM | TPM

-----  
Design, Marketing  
Community Support  
Trust & Safety

-----  
Sales, Rev Ops  
Business Dev

-----  
Systems  
Content Safety, SRE, CDE

-----  
Finance, Legal, HR

▼ t tumblr

 business

 cool

 integration

 lore

 marketing


 onboarding

 ops

 people

 principles

 product

 safety

 tech

#### PURPOSE

How we orient  
and steer

#### AUTHORITY

How we share power  
and make decisions

#### STRATEGY

How we plan  
and prioritize

#### RESOURCES

How we invest  
our time and money

#### WORKFLOW

How we divide  
and do the work

#### MEETINGS

How we convene  
and coordinate

#### MEMBERSHIP

How we define  
and cultivate  
relationships

#### MASTERY

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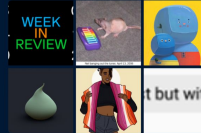
# tumblr staff

POSTS FEATURES EXPLORE **LANGUAGES** #ACTION ARCHIVE

## Languages

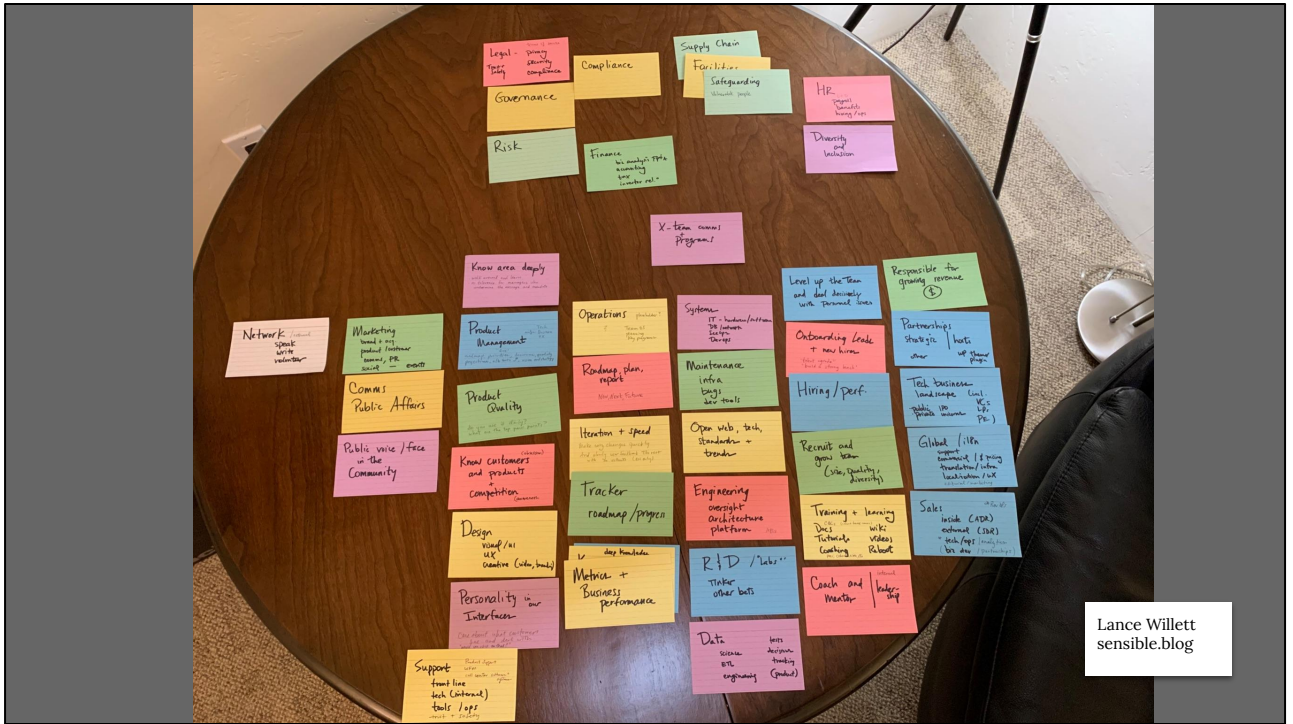
- English
- Deutsch
- Español
- Français
- Italiano
- 日本語
- 한국어
- Nederlands
- Pycckий
- Polski
- Português (BR)
- Português (PT)
- Türkçe
- 简体中文
- 繁體中文 (台灣)
- 繁體中文 (香港)
- Bahasa Indonesia
- 中文

## TOP PHOTOS



Staff Design Engineering International Support

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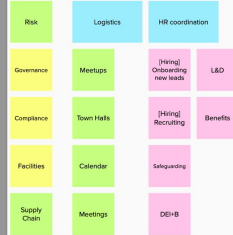


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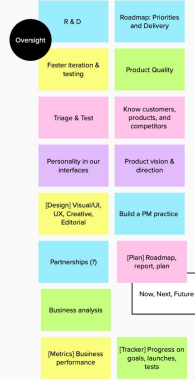
## General Manager



## COO / Operations



## Product Management



## Direct Partners



## Indirect Partners



## Engineering



## Programs



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[illegible]

Coming in, big themes:

1. Ad tech is new to me
2. Product development, "I know what to do"
3. User & content safety focus is new

**tumblr**

Conversion Name	Events Seen	Events per Visitor
Conversion 1 (Easy Goal)	1000	25
Conversion 2	1075	45
Unlabeled Conversion 1 (Goal Name)	1000	40
Goal 2	1000	25

Goal 2 (Charlottesville)

The screenshot shows a Windows 8 desktop environment. On the left, a Windows Store app titled 'The Great Outdoors' is displayed, featuring a large image of a person in a tent. In the center, a web browser window shows a Facebook page for 'The Great Outdoors', which includes a profile picture, cover photo, and a list of posts. On the right, a Windows Store app titled 'The Great Outdoors' is also visible, showing a list of items for sale. The desktop background is a solid blue color.

Exciting time ahead!

## Priorities

in Priorities

**People:**  
Lance's top priorities:

- **"People"** – keep listening and learning, help boost morale, share a clear vision. Continuity for PMs and engineering managers.
- **"Products"** – provide continuity with current roadmap, clear decisions on priorities.
- **"Process"** – plan monthly, execute weekly, ship daily, lightweight and nimble. Condense various meetings into one, for effectiveness.

**"Jeff, it is top priority"** – all projects should focus that first. Data, quality second. Real needs last.



The image is a screenshot of a Tumblr blog post. At the top, the Tumblr logo is visible. Below it, the author's name 'Lauren Hester' is displayed next to a small circular profile picture. The main title of the post is 'June 2020 Tumblr Product Delivery Plan'. The post content includes a paragraph about the June 2020 roadmap, a bulleted list of features, and a closing statement. The background of the post is a light blue color.

**tumblr**

Lauren Hester

## June 2020 Tumblr Product Delivery Plan

The June 2020 roadmap includes some things you've asked for since Tumblr launched more in June 2019. To be sure, we have many other things planned for you in 2020, including updates to analytics, DMs, and quality.

- Starting here as a friendly reminder for visibility and accountability:

- ⌘ New 2020 goals and roadmap: See [a General Product Roadmap](#), [Tumblr Product Roadmap](#), and [Tumblr 2020 Goals](#)

Core Revenue

Process

□ Product release cycle map

1 → 2 → 3 ✓

priority happens in binary

waiting with

banking → { TM, PM, Ed } →

Energy

not about

not about

ok

Program : **SEO**

Building, spreading, planning

ERP = **Engage** + **Build**

**Engage** → **Link** (links) → **PR** < **Product** (more than)

like a mobile phone

but plan by Product, then → **PR**

bring friends

San+mark —TPM

TPM+city club —Cap+TEST

Land sense

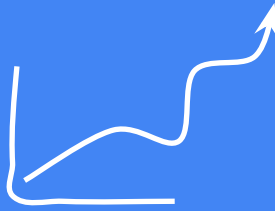
PMs in June 2020

lett  
log

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Operational excellence is key. Communication, accountability, and clear processes.

# Act



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## **Act**

Draw your map; and save snapshots

- What are the necessary changes? Who will you tap for advice and support?

Frame decisions and priorities in everything you write and share: People, Product, Process, Plan, Profit

- A consistent frame builds credibility, creates accountability, and improves your chance at effective communication

Share out highlights

- Written reports, pulse updates, presentations, “Top 3” lists

People / organization

Product / business

Process / execution

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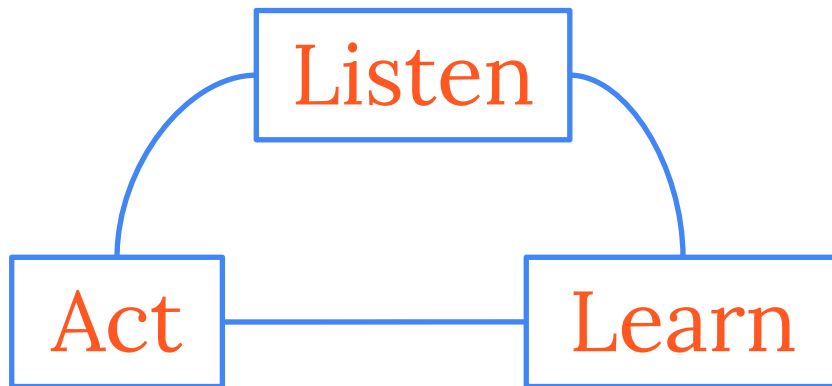
**Ship it!**



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Make a list, fastest way to develop self-awareness

Share what you learn with others (with your team, in public)



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Looking back at the full loop, I'd like to mention risks and possible downsides

To go along with the powerful habits and techniques you'll develop

# Listen

Aware and alert – connected

Avoid noise and distractions

Ask questions, be a sponge!

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## Listen

Too much noise?

- Stay aware and alert
- Ask better questions second time around
- Avoid distractions with simple lists and trackers (time management)

# Learn

Stay open

Avoid overwhelm

Find gaps and patterns

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## Learn

### Overwhelmed?

- Stay open and alert
- Find the gaps, patterns — synthesize and organize
- Make a list, fastest way to develop self-awareness
- Avoid using your brain to memorize — know where to look

# Act

Sense of urgency

Quick wins

Watch for impatience

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Act

Impatient?

- A true sense of urgency means patient daily progress
- Quick wins to build momentum, gain confidence, and prove yourself
- Long term: compounding benefits

**It's not the load that breaks  
you down, it's the way you  
carry it.**

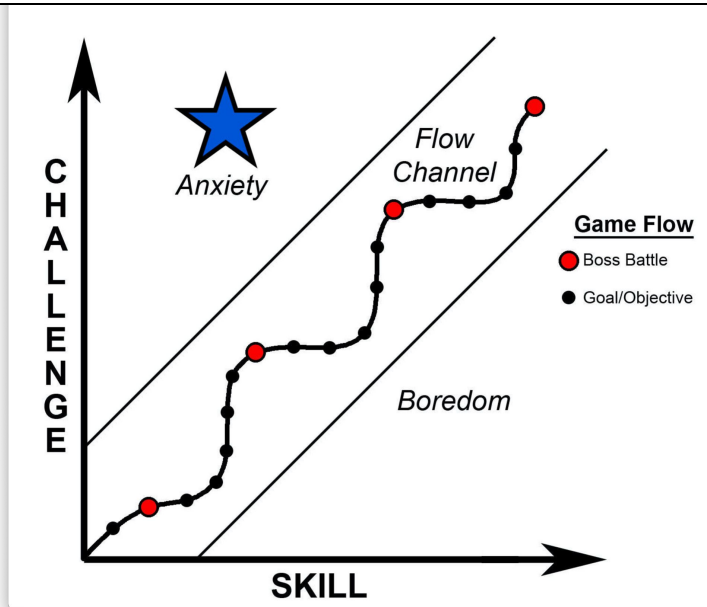
— Lena Horne

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Your success in first 90 days, and beyond — is not just techniques

Also a mindset; how you approach the balance of change vs continuity

One way I framed this for my time on Tumblr...



Credit: Akshay Kapur

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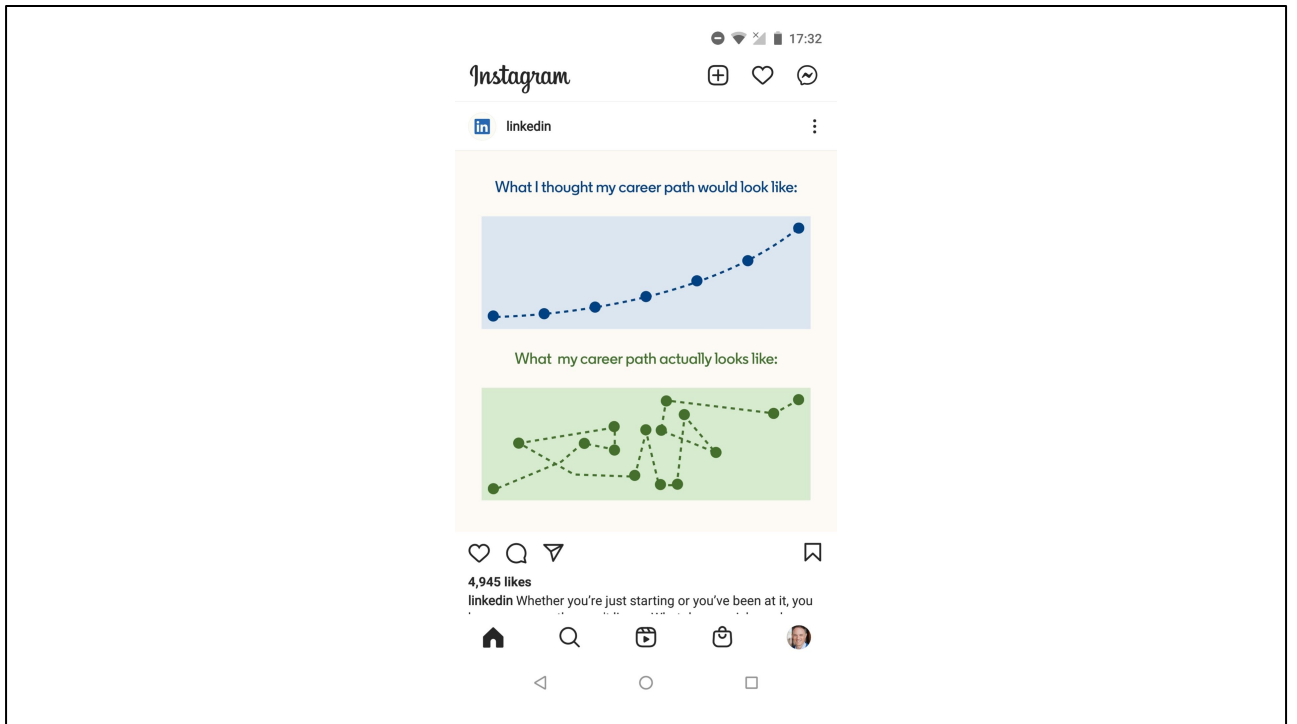
## Flow

“Can I do this? What was I thinking? Will it get any easier?”

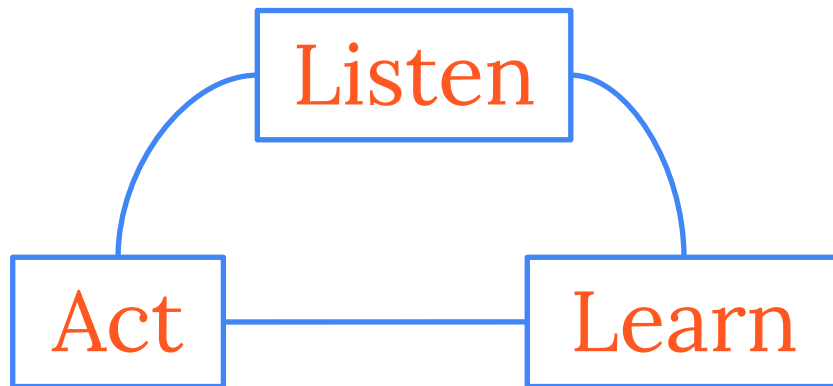
Messy middle: in the “zone” you’ll notice ups and downs

- Keep your clear vision to keep going
- When you know you’re out of the neutral zone: discomfort, feeling it
- The growth can be painful
- Yet a strong signal that you are active and alert and not asleep, complacent, or static

*Image credit: executive coach Akshay Kapur*



Love this illustration by LinkedIn (on Instagram)



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sensible.blog

**Takeaway.** If you remember one thing about this talk, I want it to be this:

1. Listen & learn — via feedback loops
2. Take action — aim for visible results
3. Stay positive — engage and believe in the change

Simple list of 3 basics to give you a much better chance at success as you get started

# Make It Stick

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Make it stick:

- Squeeze as much learning as possible
- Keep your intentions clear
- Drive the change that you believe in

Product managers bring all of it together into something productive; something you're proud to show the world, your family and friends

Confidence matters

# Whether you think you can do it or not, you are right.

— Henry Ford

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Confidence matters! Believe in the change, and that you are contributing to the best possible outcome

Keep your reasons well-polished

# First 90 Days



Feedback loop — listen, learn and act

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[sensible.blog](http://sensible.blog)

The best product leaders start well! Find the gaps and fill them

Make your first 90 days matter by staying alert and ready to listen, learn, and act

You'll find success from day one

# Thank you!



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[sensible.blog](https://sensible.blog)

Thank you! Find me on [sensible.blog](https://sensible.blog)

Lance Willett is the Chief Product & Technology Officer, Tumblr  
Part of the Automattic family of brands  
Learn more: [automattic.com](https://automattic.com)

# More Resources



## Books

*The First 90 Days* by Michael Watkins

- Learn quickly
- Share progress visibly and often
- To achieve quick wins and gain confidence, expedite everything while keeping your balance

*A Sense of Urgency* by John Kotter

- A true sense of urgency is about starting today
- Grab opportunities and avoid hazards, and shed low-priority activities to move faster and smarter, now