How Defensiveness Kills Collaboration

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[slide left blank for dramatic effect]
THIS IS THE WORST DAY OF MY LIFE.
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defensive-ness
/deˈfensivnəs/

1. the quality of being anxious to challenge or avoid criticism.
   “their supporters have reacted with defensiveness and hostility to the disclosure”

2. behavior intended to defend or protect.
   “defensiveness of the prize was related to the size of the colony"
Product management can leave us all feeling anxious and defensive.
Defensiveness makes everything worse.
QUICK REFLECTION:

When was the last time you felt or acted *defensive* in your work as a product manager?
My attempts to “defend”:

- my contributions
- my decisions
- my team

made my contributions, my decisions, and my team worse.
My attempts to “defend” my contributions

... meant that I was distracting my team and my organization from our actual goals and objectives.
My attempts to “defend” my decisions

... meant that I was shutting out important new information that could improve the quality of my team’s work.
My attempts to “defend” my team

... meant that I was insulating my team from changes in company-level goals and objectives (which NEVER ENDS WELL)
approach. Always make sure that the decision is in their hands, that they have ownership. That way it’s not an us-versus-them situation—it’s just us.

“**Our Boss Is an Idiot,”** or, **Congratulations—You’ve Ruined Your Team**

When product managers fail to push upward for clarity, they tend to retreat into building cohesion within their own team at the expense of their team’s connection with the organization as a whole. Early on in my career as a product manager, when a request came in from senior leadership that felt unreasonable, my first thought was always, “Oh no, my team is going to blame me for this.” In an attempt to emerge blameless, I would end the conversation with senior leaders as quickly as possible, go back to my team, and say something to the effect of, “Can you believe how those idiots are jerking us around? WELP, I guess this is what I’ve got to work on now. *Cough* NOT MY PROBLEM.”
Defensiveness makes everything worse.

.... And product management can often make us defensive.
I'M GOING TO FIND OUT WHAT THAT ONE WEIRD TRICK IS!
Tips to avoid defensiveness:

1. Always present multiple options (avoid “yes”/“no” conversations and decisions!)
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3. Give yourself a 24-hour buffer for any actions that feel defensive or reactive
QUICK REFLECTION:

When was the last time you acted out of defensiveness or reactiveness... and then regretted it the next day?
Give yourself a 24-hour buffer for any actions that feel defensive or reactive
If you stay off the defensive, you can make your own “worst days” a lot better.

DON’T WANT ANYBODY TO HAVE
Oh, and one more thing....
Revised and Expanded edition on the way!!!

Suggestions?

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