

You Don't Need a Product Manager.

You Need a Process.

The Lean Product Alignment Framework

A five-step system for solo AI builders who want to ship the right thing the first time.

What This Is

A structured process for turning a raw idea into a buildable V1, without hiring a product manager or becoming one. Five steps. Each one produces a concrete output. Complete them in order.

The core problem this solves:

- **You start building before you know what you are building.**
- **You add features on instinct rather than user need.**
- **You hit V1 and it does not match the original vision.**
- **You cannot explain the product clearly to anyone else.**

How to Use This Document

This document has two parts. Part 1 is the blank template, fill it in order, one step at a time. Part 2 is a completed example using a real AI product called Blink.

One rule: each step must produce a real output before you move to the next.

The 5-Step Workflow

Step	What you produce	Why it matters
Capture	Brain-dump your idea, structured	Gets everything out of your head into a format you can work with
Echo + Sprinkle	Confirm your understanding + add value	Forces you to summarise in one paragraph, a critical clarity test
Persona Snapshot	Define who this is actually for	Stops you building for yourself instead of your user
Freeze	Lock V1 scope, nothing else exists	The single most effective way to avoid over-building
Build + Show	Build fast, review often	Keeps you honest and prevents silent drift from the vision

PART 1

Blank Template

Fill in each step before moving to the next. Do not skip ahead.

STEP 1 | Capture

Get everything out of your head and into a structure.

Write down everything about the product. Do not edit yourself. The only thing you must nail before moving on is a single, concrete success metric.

Tip: Speak it out loud and record yourself if writing feels slow. Completeness beats polish here.

Product name / working title *e.g. A tool that automatically categorises customer support tickets*

Success metric : one sentence *e.g. Reduce manual triage time by 60% within 4 weeks of going live*

Core vision: 2 to 3 sentences *What is this, who is it for, and what does it replace or make easier?*

Who are your users? *Describe them specifically. What do they do today without this tool?*

Must-haves : V1 only *Features without which the product fails its core purpose*

Nice-to-haves: for later *Worth noting, but not needed at launch*

Tone, style, or content constraints *Any brand, compliance, language, or quality requirements*

How does it fit into an existing workflow? *What happens before and after someone uses this?*

Known risks and open questions *What might break, slow you down, or is still unresolved?*

Future ideas: post-V1 *Capture anything worth remembering but out of current scope*

STEP 2 | Echo + Sprinkle

Prove you understand your own product. Then make it better.

Write a single paragraph that summarises the product in plain language. Then add 2–3 optional ideas that improve on it without changing the core scope.

Test: if you cannot write the Echo without hedging, the Capture step is not done yet. Go back.

Echo: plain-language summary *So, [product name] is a tool that [does X] for [users], by [mechanism]. The goal is [outcome]. That's it, right?*

Optional idea 1 *Name: What it adds and why it might matter*

Optional idea 2 *Name: What it adds and why it might matter*

Optional idea 3 *Name: What it adds and why it might matter*

STEP 3 | Persona Snapshot

Stop building for yourself. Define who you are actually building for.

Write 1–2 lightweight personas using the When / I want / So I can format. Every feature decision later should trace back to at least one of these.

One honest persona beats five vague ones. If you do not know your users yet, state your assumptions explicitly.

Persona 1

Name, age, role *e.g. Mia, 31: Operations Lead at a 40-person logistics firm*

Their context *What is their daily situation? What do they care about most?*

Their pain point *What frustration or inefficiency does this product address?*

Their behaviour *How and when would they interact with this type of product?*

Job story *When I [situation], I want [action], so I can [outcome].*

Persona 2 (only if it meaningfully changes what you build)

Name, age, role

Their context

Their pain point

Their behaviour

Job story

STEP 4 | Freeze

Lock V1. Everything else does not exist yet.

List only the features that make it into V1. Everything else goes to the backlog. Sign off on this list. Any new idea that comes up after this goes to the backlog, not the build.

V1 is not the product. V1 is the proof. Freeze accordingly.

V1 goal: one sentence *What does a successful V1 prove or deliver?*

Core features: what the user sees and does *List only what is essential for the V1 goal to be met*

Internal / admin features (if any) *Anything you need to operate or manage the product behind the scenes*

How you will know V1 worked *What specific behaviour or result tells you the V1 was worth shipping?*

Backlog : V2 and beyond *Everything that did not make V1. Captured, not forgotten.*

Sign-off *Your name + the date you locked this list*

STEP 5 | Build + Show

Build against the frozen list. Stay honest about progress.

Phase A: design each screen against the Freeze list, not your instincts. Phase B: build and do regular self-reviews to catch drift early.

If you are the only person working on this, treat Phase B reviews as a stand-up with yourself.

Phase A: design cadence *e.g. One mockup pass per feature, reviewed against the Freeze list before moving on*

Phase A: how you will review *e.g. Loom walkthrough, share with a trusted contact, or written walkthrough*

Phase B: build cadence *e.g. Weekly self-review every Friday: what shipped, what changed, what is blocked*

Phase B: how you will track progress *e.g. Short Loom update to yourself or a changelog doc*

Definition of done for V1 *What does the product need to do for you to call V1 complete and ship it?*

PART 2

Worked Example: Blink

The person building Blink was not a product manager. They had a strong instinct and a broad idea, but no structured way to turn it into a buildable V1. This is the output they produced by running through each step.

Read this before filling in your own template. Your output will look different. That is expected.

Step 1: Capture

Product name: Blink

Success metric: 50 AI-generated article summaries published per day, 90% accuracy, human review under 10 minutes per batch.

Core vision: Blink fetches articles from curated sources and summarises each into a four-sentence answer to the headline question. Publishes automatically throughout the day. Users stay informed in seconds without reading full articles.

Target users: Busy professionals, students, content curators, and executives who need reliable information quickly and face constant information overload.

Must-haves: Four-sentence AI summaries / Curated vetted sources / Automated scheduling / Web interface / Links to originals

Nice-to-haves: Mobile app / Topic personalisation / Multilingual support / Analytics / AI quality scoring

Content constraints: Summaries must directly answer the headline question. Tone: neutral, professional, no editorialising.

Workflow: Editor curates sources and selects articles or adds via URL. AI generates summaries. Human reviews. Approved summaries are scheduled and published.

Known risks: Consistent AI output quality / Copyright / Volume management / Finding the right publication cadence

Future ideas: Multilingual support / Advanced personalisation / Automated trending selection / Mobile app / Analytics

Step 2: Echo + Sprinkle

"Blink is a tool that fetches articles from curated sources, summarises them into four-sentence answers to headline questions, and publishes those summaries throughout the day. The goal is to let anyone stay genuinely informed, without reading full articles. That's it, right?"

Optional: Smart Topic Clustering: Group articles by theme so users can follow ongoing stories across days.

Optional: Daily Digest Export: One daily email with all summaries for offline reading or team sharing.

Optional: Multi-Source Comparison: Summarise multiple articles on the same story side by side to surface reporting differences.

Step 3: Persona Snapshot

Persona 1: Mark, 34, Consultant

Context: Needs quick, reliable insights. Most information consumption happens in 10-minute windows between meetings or during commutes.

Pain point: Constant information overload. Dislikes clickbait. Wants headlines answered with real context, not filler.

Behaviour: Consumes content on mobile. Skims. Clicks through only when a summary genuinely hooks him.

Job story: When I have 10 minutes between meetings, I want headline-driven summaries that explain why something matters, so I can stay informed without losing time to irrelevant noise.

Persona 2: Ana, 22, University Student

Context: Follows global events and tech. Sceptical of bias and overwhelmed by long-form content.

Pain point: Cannot filter what is worth reading. Does not trust single-source framing. Wants balance without the reading load.

Behaviour: Reads on mobile during commutes or study breaks. Values multiple angles on a story.

Job story: When I am commuting to university, I want balanced summaries that give context from more than one source, so I can form an opinion without spending an hour reading.

Step 4: Freeze

V1 goal: Validate that AI-generated summaries answering headline questions are accurate, readable, and useful. Collect real user feedback on quality and relevance before building anything else.

User-facing features: Topic selection / Browse published summaries with links to originals / Leave feedback on relevance, clarity, and trust

Admin features: Add and manage trusted sources / Select articles or add by URL / Trigger AI summarisation / Schedule daily publication

V1 success criteria: 50 articles/day with admin work under 10 minutes / Feedback collected on clarity and trustworthiness / Four-sentence format validated as useful

Backlog: AI-assisted selection / Mobile app / Topic clustering / Daily email digest / Tone customisation

Sign-off: Name verbal approval confirmed before build began

Step 5: Build + Show

Phase A cadence: Wireframes produced per feature and reviewed against the Freeze list before moving forward. No feature gets built that does not appear on the locked list.

Phase A review: Loom walkthrough shared with one trusted contact. Async feedback. Revise and confirm.

Phase B cadence: Weekly Friday review: what shipped, what changed, what is next, and any open questions.

Phase B tracking: Short Loom update plus a changelog note. Any deviation from the Freeze list flagged immediately.

Definition of done: Admin processes 50 articles in under 10 minutes. Users browse summaries, click through to originals, and leave feedback. First real users have been through the flow and responded.

The framework is the floor, not the ceiling.
Each step must produce a real output before the next one starts.