

Module: Conducting Customer Interviews

Deliverable	Time	Activity Type
(4) Customer Discovery Interviews	90 minutes	Pairs

Do and Don't

Actually Talking with Customers

The first step of conducting customer discovery interviews is about *gaining empathy and surfacing insight*. There is simply no better way to gain an understand of potential customers above and beyond “*getting out of the building*” and actually talking to your customers. In the beginning this can be an incredibly uncomfortable experience but will ultimately prove to be the most effective if done right.

This is an exercise in self-control, because most people ask a question when they already have the answer in mind that they want to hear -- particularly if they are consumed by the genius of their own idea. They are not really asking questions to *learn and gain empathy*, they just want help validating what they themselves have already assumed as true and great -- most always their own envisioned product or solution to a problem they think they understand, but really don't.

Existing Markets

When operating in an existing market and the problem is well understood, you can use a Problem Presentation resegmentation

What's a Problem Presentation?

A problem presentation is designed to elicit information from customers. **It works incredibly well in existing markets when the problem is well understood.** Innovative solutions can help save time, reduce costs or deliver a better experience.

The presentation summarizes your assumptions about customer “pains” and “gains” and about how they're solving the problem *today*. It can also offer some potential solutions, to test whether your assumptions are correct.

The first step is to describe your assumed list of problems, pause and ask the customers what they think the problems are, whether you're missing any problems, how they would rank the problems, and which are must-solve rather than nice-to-solve. You've hit the jackpot when the customer tells you she will do anything to solve the problem.

Unknown Markets

Alternatively, if you are operating in a new market or working with a disruptive technology, Customer Discovery is not about conducting a focus group. Simply asking customers “*Tell me, what is your biggest pain point?*” Or, “*What do you think of this solution?*” is not Customer Discovery. This is a big idea and important to understand, because people *don’t always understand their own problems*. You are looking for specific stories about their *day to day experiences* that can surface insight about their *true needs and motivations and how their life will be different once they begin using your product or service*.

Then, you have to really *listen* and become tuned-in for ‘customer doorways’ to probe further into. ‘Customer doorways’ can be a bold statement the person makes, an inconsistency between what they say or do, silence, or sudden, animated gestures. When you notice one of these actions, go through that ‘customer doorway’ and probe further by asking *how* and *why*. Essentially playing completely naive can surface some great insight about whether or not you think this person will turn into a real customer.

- **Listen** - This may seem obvious but it is surprising how much we do not listen to the people we are trying to solve problems for. Forget about yourself and be completely optimistic and open to listening to the needs of your customers.
- **Seek Stories** - High level conversations won’t inspire you to be able to ideate towards a remarkable solution. Seek in depth stories about a users experiences that touch their emotions.
- **Ask “Why” AND “How”** - As you are listening to stories and hear them express a point, always dig deeper and ask why. You may have heard of the “5 Why’s” technique which is ultimately if someone expresses something asking why 5 times will usually get them to express a deeper need which they may not have understood initially.

Demonstrate that you are genuinely interested in delivering a solution that will eliminate “pains” or create “gains” for the customer. Being as authentic as possible when engaging with someone will allow them to reveal their true needs and motivations. We all know the feeling of what it is like to be interviewed and how different we are than a genuine conversation with a friend.

Additional ways to gain empathy

- **Immersion** - There is simply no better way to gain empathy for a problem a customer experiences than actually living through their experience.
- **Observation** - One straightforward observation technique is to actually ask the customer to physically demonstrate to you how they are currently solving a particular problem. Additionally, you can have them draw the process flow of how they are currently conducting a specific job.

In closing, conducting customer discovery is truly an art -- which implies you must practice if you want to be any good. You can study its theory forever, but until you put it into practice, you will never

understand its intricacies. Customer Discovery is an intuitive process and relies on an individual's ability to recognize common themes expressed amongst the people they speak with and to possess the self control, objectivity, and realism to be honest about whether or not you can fulfill one of these learned needs or motivations. The mastering of this art is what makes or breaks a great entrepreneur.