

TE 250: Week 6 Customer Interviews

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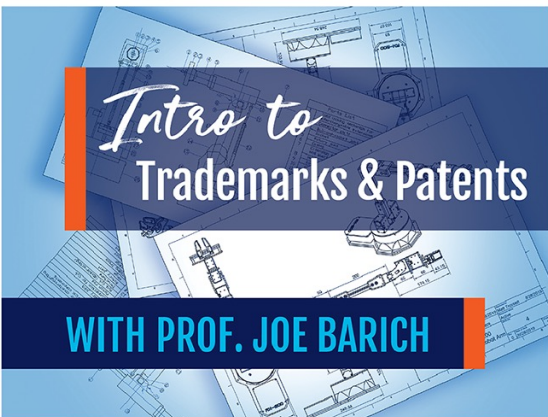


Technology Entrepreneur Center



Mon | Oct 3 | 11:59pm

The deadline to apply for the week-long educational entrepreneurship workshop is Monday, October 3. The trip takes place January 8-14, 2023. APPLY: go.illinois.edu/sview



Thurs | Oct 6 | 7-8:30pm

314 ALTGELD HALL

Get the basics on trademarks and patents for your startup idea from Prof. Joe Barich. Register at go.illinois.edu/ipclinic.



Fri | Oct 14 | 2-3pm

ENTREPRENEURSHIP HUB
1050 SIEBEL CENTER FOR DESIGN

Matthew Meltzer, Immigration Attorney, will help students understand policies and requirements for starting a business in the U.S. RSVP: go.illinois.edu/isew



Tues | Oct 18 | 5-6pm

4100 SIDNEY LU MECHANICAL
ENGINEERING BLDG.

Hear from advisers & current ILEE students, ask questions, and learn how to apply. Snacks provided! RSVP: go.illinois.edu/ilee-info-2

Technology Entrepreneur Center



Silicon Valley Entrepreneurship Workshop
Apply by: Mon | Oct 3 | 11:59pm

Travel Dates: January 8-14, 2023

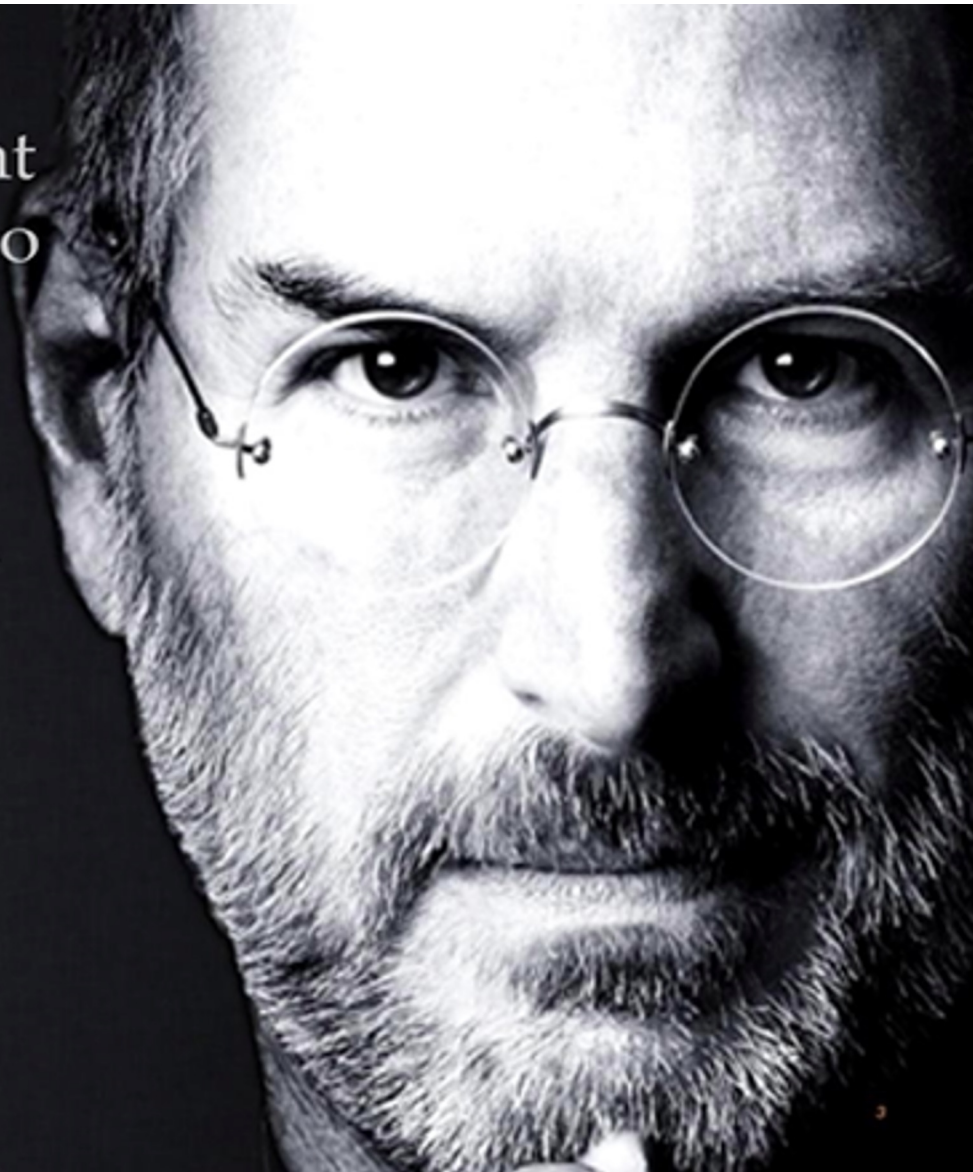
- All students may apply! SVEW is open to undergrad and grad students of any major or field of study.
- Company visits and speakers: Alumni in various stages of the startup lifecycle share lessons learned about entrepreneurship.
- We strongly encourage all interested students to apply for the Silicon Valley Entrepreneurship Workshop regardless of whether cost is an issue. Need-based financial aid is available to cover part or all of the student fee.

go.illinois.edu/sview

Customer Interviews

“You can’t just ask
customers what they want
and then try to give that to
them.”

“New ideas come from
observing something,
listening to people,
experimenting,
asking questions
and getting out of
the building!”



The picture can't be displayed.

Goal of customer interviews

- Understand the problem/opportunity – the REAL one
- Not asking customer to design product
- Be open to being surprised

Why Do Interviews?

- Allows us to **Learn Fast**...current assumptions are **WRONG**
- Allows us to **test value** and whether **a problem is really a problem**
- Builds **deeper empathy** with the customer
- Creates **shared understanding** across the team
- Tells us the **“why”** behind **customer behavior**
- Sparks **big insights** and mental leaps
- **Everyone** on the team should conduct interviews

So, what about *MY* technology?

NOBODY CARES

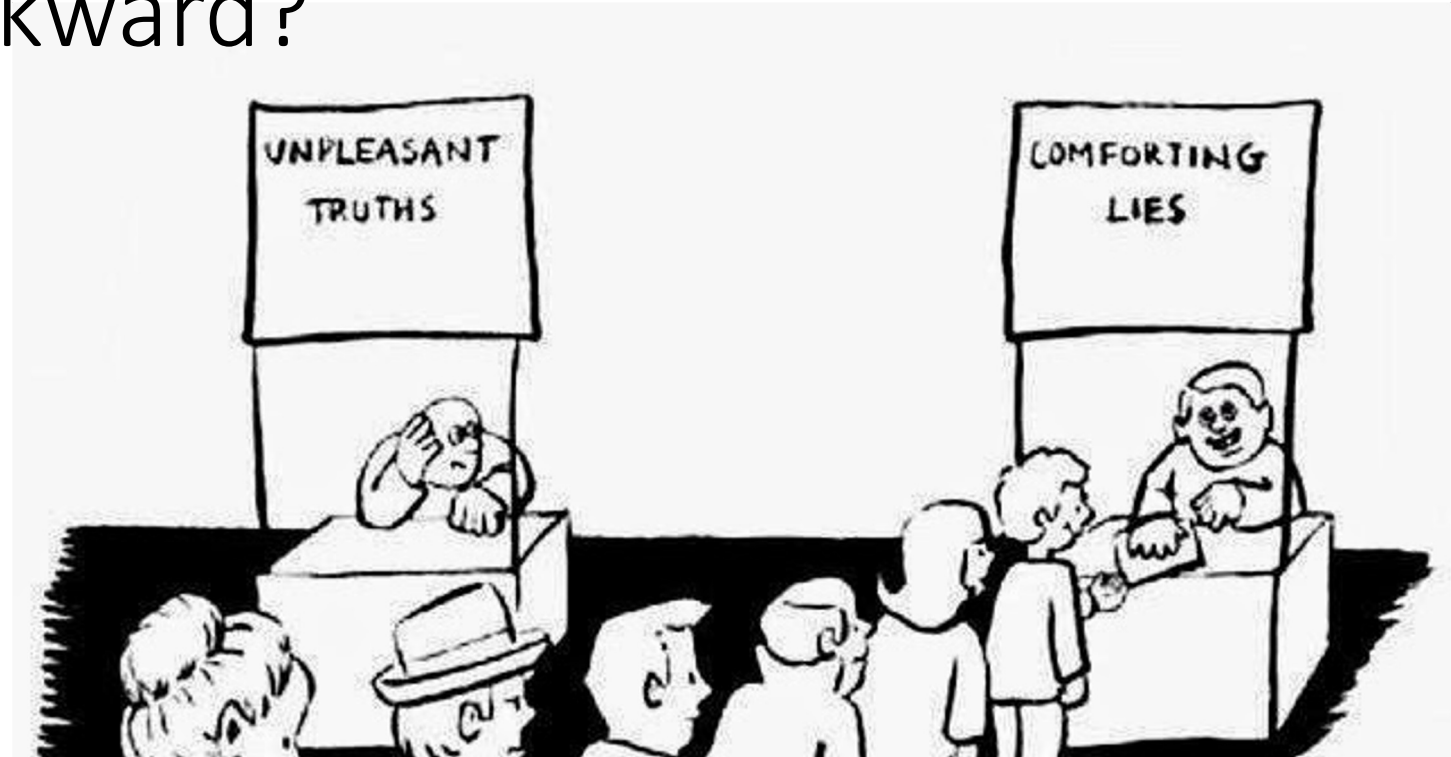


They only care about
what it can do for *THEM*.



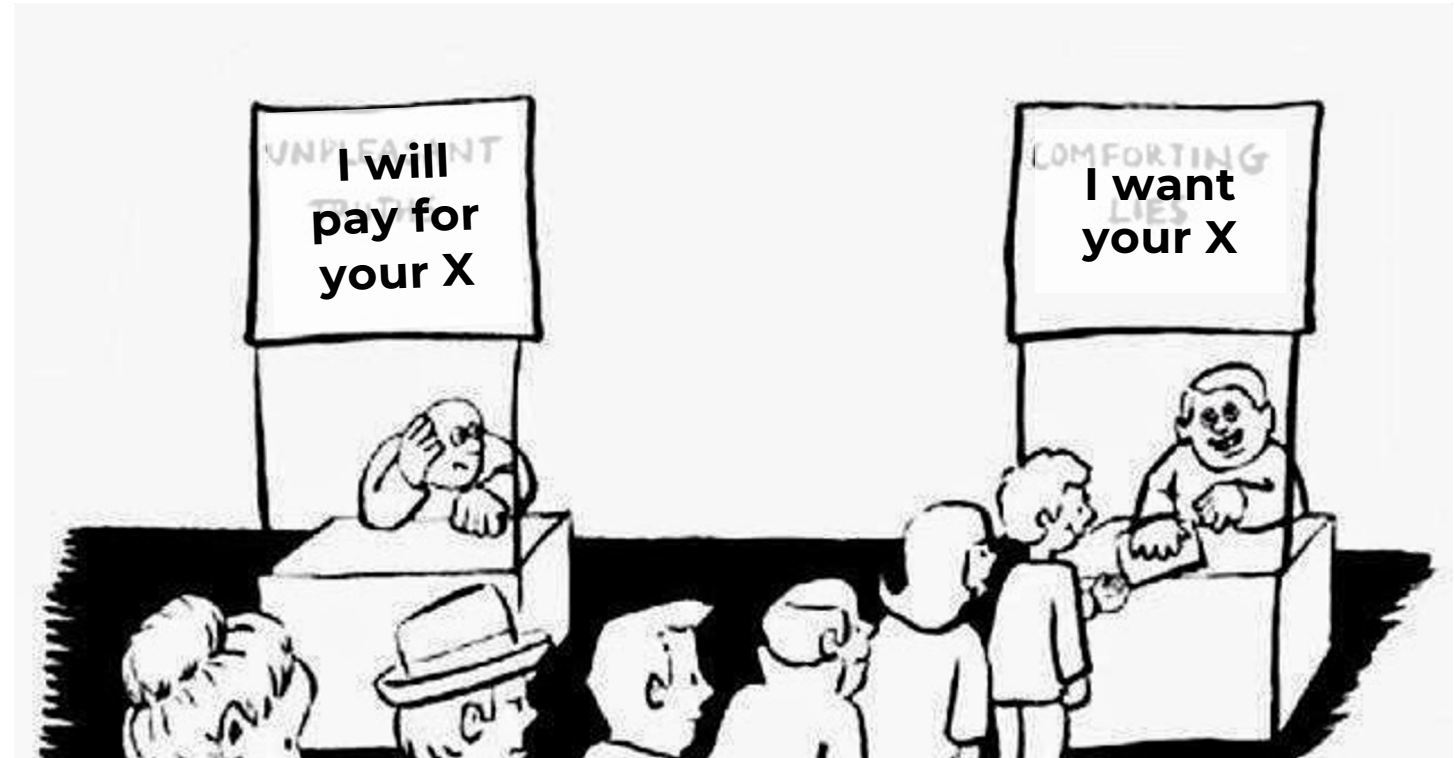
**Your business idea
needs to **solve a problem**
your potential customer
will **PAY** for.**

Why endure the awkward?



Hypotheses -> Facts

GET OUT OF Your
Comfort Zone!!
Talk to People...
you Don't Know



Hypotheses -> Facts

Who is a Customer/Stakeholder?



ANYONE who appears on any of the workflows, decision trees, or value chain maps that could be involved in the business in any way.

You must talk to them all! **I** ILLINOIS

The Process: Scientific Method for Customer Discovery

- Hypothesize

Guess

- Test – Interviews

Ask

- Assess & Analyze

Listen

- Adjust – Pivot

Guess Again

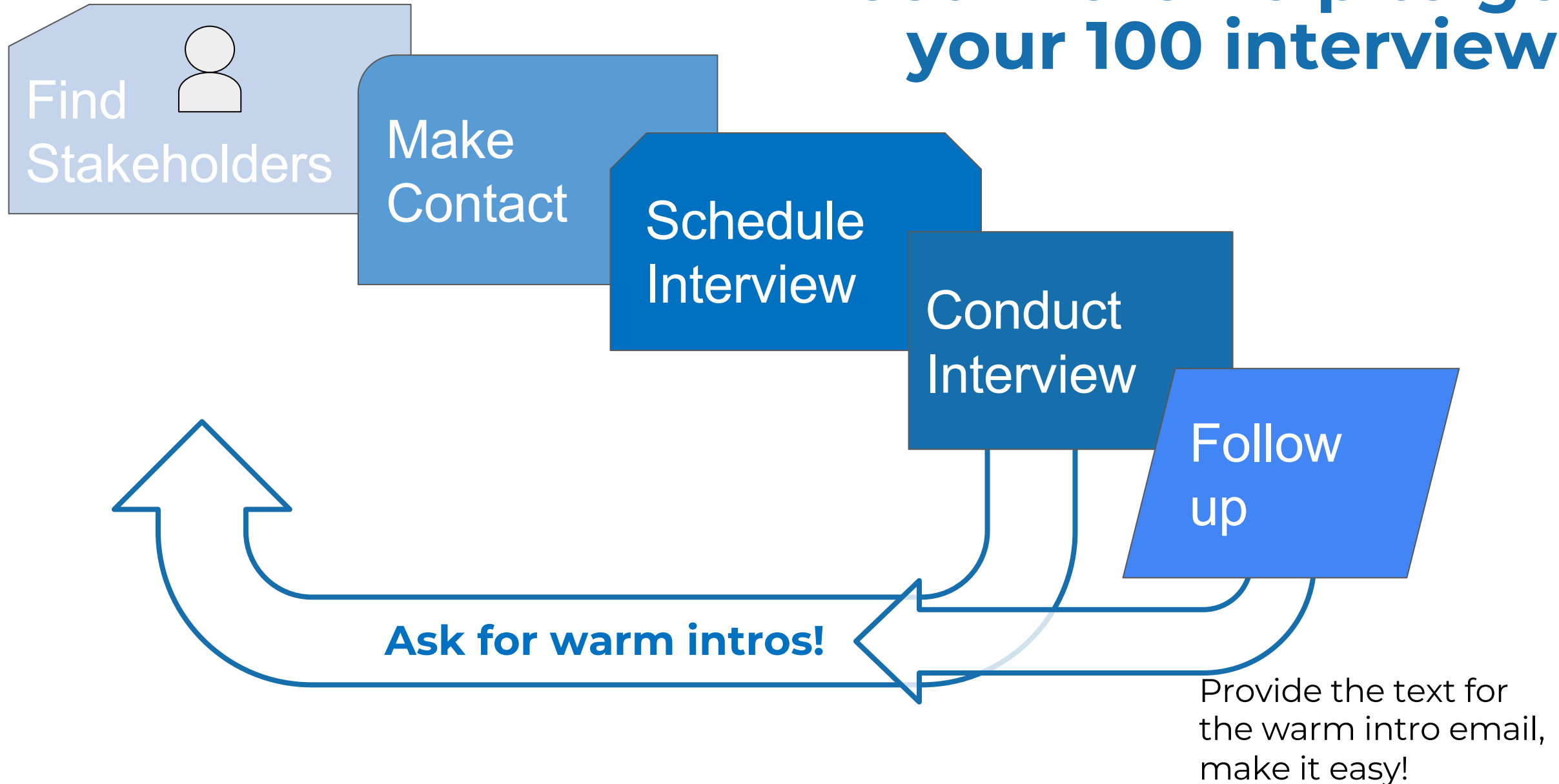


The Interview Life-Cycle Process

Steps

- Find
LinkedIn, conferences, tradeshow, competition, customers, etc.
- Get
Use **your** natural appeal, use **their** natural appeal
- Prep/Execute
Don't waste your time/don't waste their time.
Adhere to social norms...be polite, deferential and appreciative
- Wrap
What else, who else, can I call again
- Analyze
Looking for BIG audacious problems, poorly solved, that you can address
- Record
Notes real time, maybe pixs, no recordings,
INSIGHTS

So you've realized you probably need more help to get your 100 interviews



**How do you find
stakeholders?**

**Most successful...
GO where they GO**

GET OUT of the building



Surveys
Questionnaires?



NO !

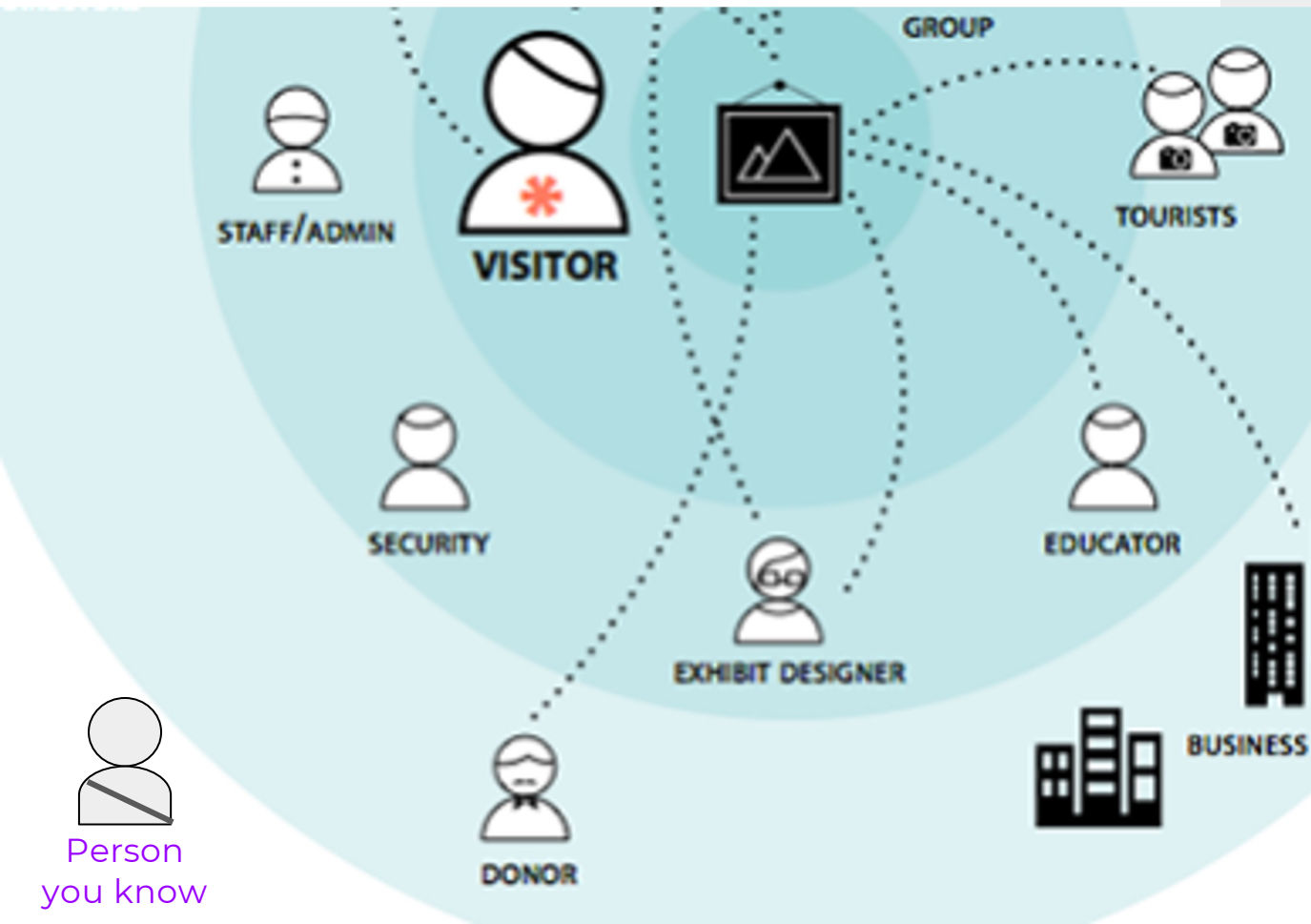
How do you find stakeholders for B2C?

Start with people you know
(even if they're not quite the right fit)

- Use the power of your current networks
- Review profiles and activity indicators on social media
- Don't waste your time, don't waste their time

Then...

- Ask them to give you a **warm intro**-be persistent, but considerate



How do you find stakeholders for B2B?

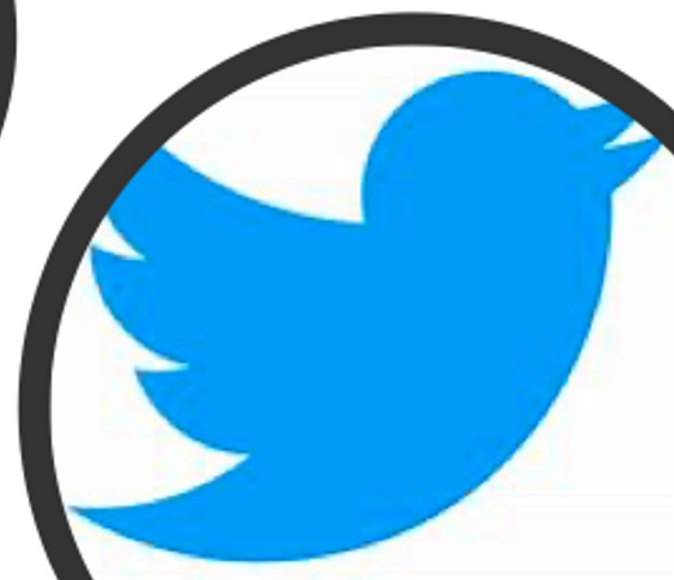
Networking



Search and grow your personal network on LinkedIn

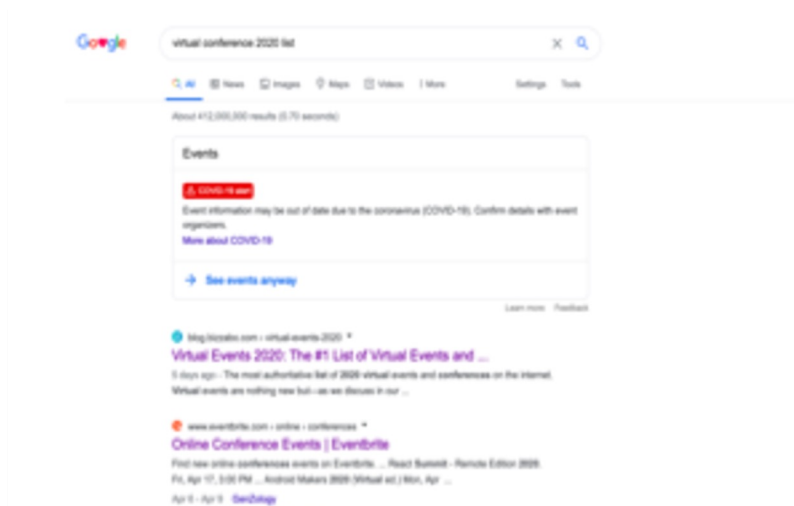
- Develop a profile and establish a personal brand
 - [Build Your Brand on LinkedIn - Bing video](#)
- Find an individual within a specific company
 - What level? Mid-Level?
 - Review current company updates and information
 - Look for groups they belong to and search groups for others
 - Search your alumni networks
- LinkedIn tips from Katy Miller, New England I-Corps Node
<https://youtu.be/UewkdYcnTSg>

Is LinkedIn it?



How do you find B2B stakeholders?

Exploring the Internet

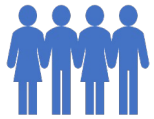


- Keyword + title (consultant, engineer)
- Keyword + conference (power electronics conference)
- Professional and trade associations (IEEE, ACS)
- Standards, regulatory organizations (ASTM, FCC)
- Trade shows/conferences-find speakers, panelists, vendors, attendee lists
- Trade journals, magazine newsletters
- White papers/academic papers
- Industry bloggers/lobbyists
- Equipment suppliers, distributor, service experts
- Check out websites of competitors
 - Highlight satisfied customers?
 - What keywords and phrases they use?
 - What features, benefits do they mention?
 - To what groups/associations do they belong?

How do I make contact for B2B?

- Initially target number 2,3... ranked companies
- Target mid-level management, professionals
- Email, then call
- Cold call (research your target contact)
- Ask for 15-20 min (plan on 30-60 min)
- Play the “student” or “researcher” card
- Remind people you are looking for insights and help
- Network (ask for a warm intro)

Getting the Interview: Warm Introductions B2C and B2B



An introduction from someone you know



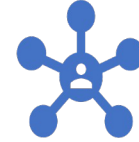
Offer to share what you've learned about technology, market or industry



Know the benefits you will bring and have both a written and verbal list of benefits ready



Rehearse



Use something you learned from your research (LinkedIn, Web, etc.) about the person to establish a connection and build rapport

Getting the Interview:

Email/ LinkedIn message

- Think about
 - Why is this person the right person to talk to
- Subject line: draw a personal and specific connection
 - Example: Fellow IEEE Member-
New research opportunity
 - Example: Saw your posts on this topic
- Message in the body
 - Less is more
 - Get to the point in a few sentences
 - Why is this person
 - Compliment / lean into their expertise
 - What is your connection to them / how do you know them
 - Emphasize your interest in learning / exploring
 - Avoid a sales pitch
 - Offer option A, B, not Yes or No

Outreach Suggested Format

Brief intro to you

How you know them / how you are connected

The topic you are interested in / problem you are looking to solve

What you want from them

Call to action

Outreach Suggested Format

“I am a student at the University of Illinois”

“William recommended that I speak with you”

“I am exploring new methods for predicting cardiac events.”

“I would love to hear your perspective on post surgical monitoring.”

“Would you have 20-30 minutes to spare next week when we could connect over Zoom? Feel free to select a time [here](#).”

Getting the Interview:

Phone

- Always leave a voicemail
 - Example: I missed you and will follow up with an email with some interesting information
- Talk to the B2B gatekeeper – Ask for an email address or a better time to call
- Call first thing in the morning or late in the afternoon
- Never underestimate flattery
- Name dropping can work if done artfully
- Phone in conjunction with email can be very effective

What are some suggestions for getting interviews?

- Consider being
 - direct
 - thoughtful
 - interesting
 - clear with your ask
 - succinct
 - confident
 - kind
 - conscientious
(check for errors in emails)
- Refrain from
 - being too formal
 - asking people to do things on your behalf
 - **being too salesy**
 - being aggressive
 - begging

Play the U of I student card!

Before the Interview



Have at least one hypothesis to test

Know what questions can help get you there



Research your interview subject



Have a process, have a plan

Conducting Interviews

Why are we talking to customers?

- **Listening is not waiting to talk**
- Learn things you don't know
- Discover and understand
 - What is important to them
 - How "it" gets done
- Test your assumptions and hypotheses
 - Helps you stay focused

Formulating Interview *Questions*

- What do you want to learn from the person?
- What are your incoming hypotheses that you will test?
- What is the role of person in the ecosystem?
 - user, decision maker, other?
- What is the stage of discovery and purpose?
 - Start broad, narrow in

Problem Interviews

Example questions

Pains:

- What frustrates them?
- What are their biggest risks?
- What problems keep them up at night?
- What is getting in the way of what they want/need to do?
- What takes up the most time for the least value?
- What part of the process do they wish they could eliminate?

Gains:

- What are their top goals?
- How is success measured?
- What have they tried or adopted previously that paid off?
- What trends are they seeing that they hope to be a part of?
- What is their competitor doing well that they wish they could mimic?

Key Takeaways



Focus on current practices

Do NOT ask them to make predictions



Try to understand current trends



Ask about specific pains/gains they would like to relieve/achieve

This is the key point of the interview!



Try to understand the purchase process

What drives purchase decisions?
Who influences, decides, purchases?
What are lead times?

Tell me a story:

Ask about history

Background

Experiences

Examples

Processes

Some questions *to get you started*

- What are the top three-to-five *jobs* you are trying to do?
- If you could improve just one job, what would it be? Why?
- What are you *currently doing* to meet objectives for that job?
- How *satisfied* are you with your current solution?
- Have you *ever considered* alternative solutions?
- *What keeps you up at night...?*
- *If you could wave a magic wand...?*

Wrapping Up Interviews

Good Interviews

- “Is there anything else I should have asked you about?”
- “Is there anyone else you think I should talk to you?”
- “If I have additional questions may I call you again?”

Bad Interviews

- “Thank you very much, you’ve answered my questions”
- “I want to respect your time.”

Problem Interviews: Example

Assumptions:

1. Price is the most important factor when selecting medical supplies.

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about a time when you were reviewing a request for new supplies. What was the driving factor in your decision making process?
2. What other factors were at play at the time?
3. Who else was involved in the decision making?

Conducting Interviews

- Introduction
 - Introduce yourself and your team
 - Thank them for taking time to meet you
- Frame the Conversation
 - Remind them why you are seeking insights and help
 - Once framed, try to get them to tell a story



Interview Best Practices (Video/Live)

- Try to have 2 of your team present (notetaker/questioner)
- Use 1 web camera
- No recording
- Quiet location
- Headset if audio is compromised
- Dress professionally
- Thank them within a day (email...)

In Summary

General *Best Practices*

- Have a “warm-up”/prelude
 - *Get to know the person*
- Ask open-ended questions
 - *Avoid yes/no or multiple choice.*
 - *Listen for unknown unknowns*
- Ask process, actions & present/past behaviors
 - *Ask who/what/why/how questions.*
 - *Avoid is/are/would/should/do you think – no opinions/speculation*
- Adopt a beginner’s mindset
 - *Listen with a “fresh pair of ears.”*
- Listen more than you talk
 - *You are there to learn.*
 - *Don’t sell.*

General *Best Practices*

- Get facts, not opinions
 - NOT, “Would you...?” BUT, “When is the last time you...?”
 - Focus on what they do...not what they say
- Dive deep(er)
 - Ask “why” x3 to get real motivations.
- Follow-up
 - Ask for permission to contact interviewee’s again later.
- Open doors at the end
 - Ask, “Who else should I talk to?”
 - “What else should I have asked that I didn’t?”

Common *Pitfalls*

- Stick to a process
 - Have a process to follow – don't just "talk to people."
 - Remove variables in conversation to allow comparison
 - Be flexible though, your interviewee knows the market better than you
- Do NOT sell...anything, ever
 - *The goal of discovery interviews is learning, not selling*
 - Don't ever ask, "Would you buy our solution?"
 - Ask, "What are your decision criteria?"
- Don't mention solutions
 - *Avoid the temptation to talk technology!*
 - *Do NOT demo.* It's not about your solution, it's about their problem.

Common *Biases*

- Leading the Witness
 - Walking them down the path to your solution.
 - Allow them to define their needs/wants.
- Avoid the Other 3 Biases
 - **Confirmation bias**- look for the ugly baby
 - **Sample bias**- Sample too narrow or wrong target
 - **Social bias**- go outside of your immediate network, but do leverage them for warm connections

Common Mistakes

- Lack a plan/process
- Execute process with excellence
- Biases

Confirmation, selection, social acceptability, winners, other?

- Perceived vs. Real Value
- Believe what is said
- Go quantitative too soon

Additional Resources

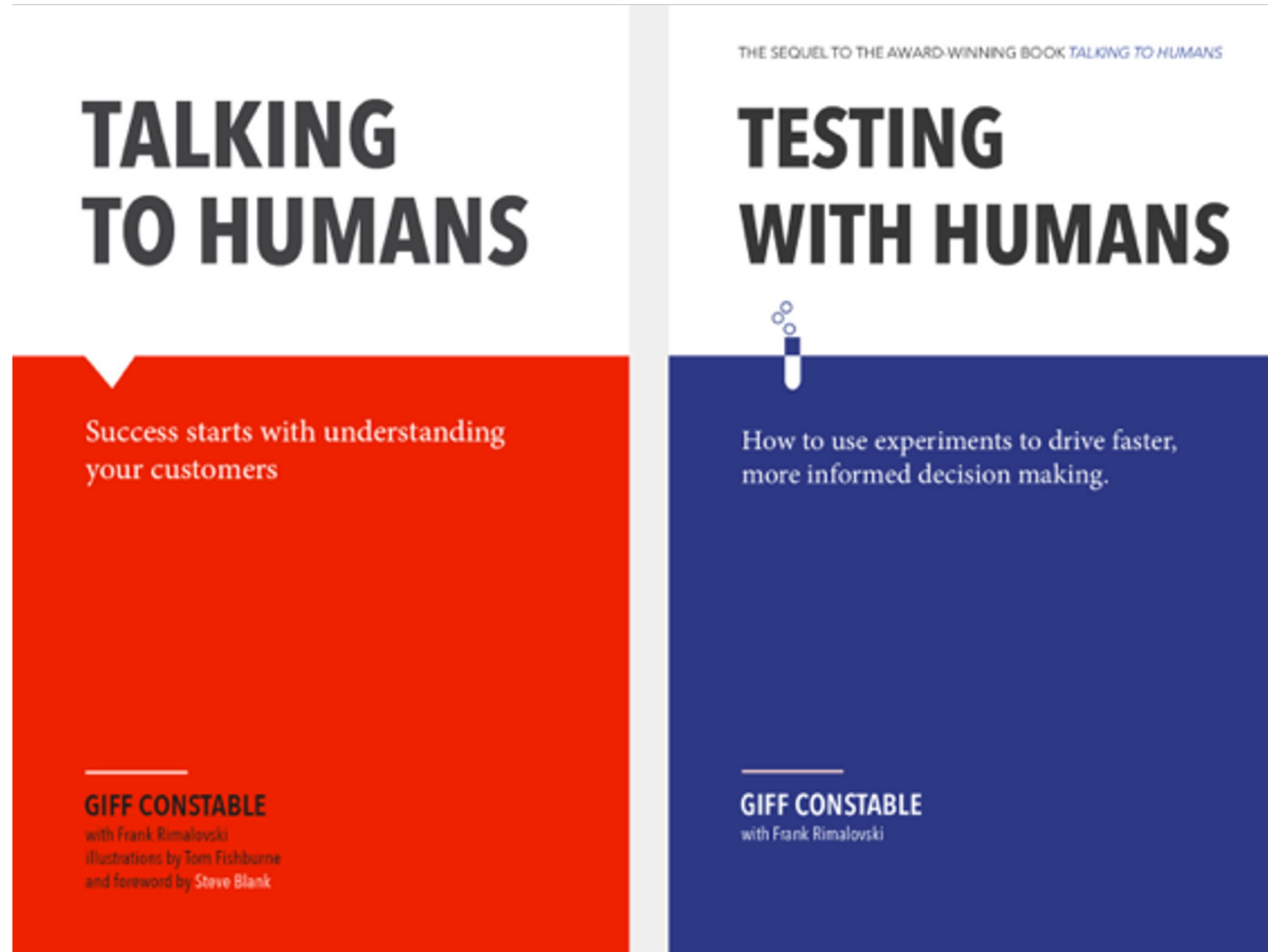
Customer Interview Script Generator:

- <http://customerdevlabs.com/script/>

A handful of short video clips from Steve Blank for Customer Development interviews can be found at:

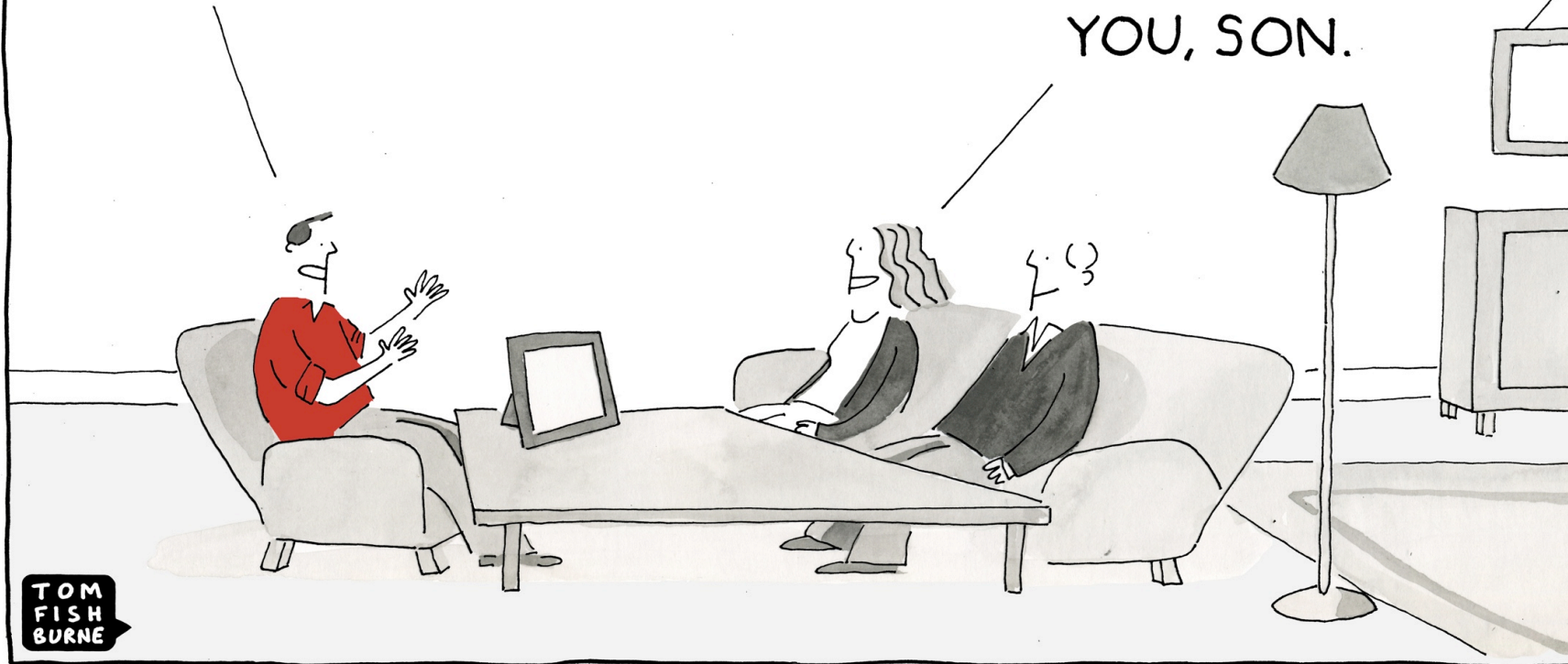
- <http://vimeo.com/groups/204136/videos/page:1/sort:alphabeCcal/format:thumbnail>
- <http://startupweekend.wistia.com/projects/zt618zz0r7>

Resources



I'VE BEEN TOLD I NEED TO GET
CANDID, UNBIASED FEEDBACK
ON MY STARTUP IDEA.

WE LOVE THIS
IDEA AND WE'RE
SO PROUD OF
YOU, SON.



TOM
FISH
BURNE

Relax, it's just a conversation.

Good / Bad Question

Let's judge some interview questions!

Good / Bad Question

What is the biggest issue you face dealing with activity 'x'?

Good / Bad Question

What is the biggest issue you face dealing with activity 'x'?

**Good
Question**

Good / Bad Question

Would you buy a product that
did 'X'?

Good / Bad Question

Would you buy a product that
did 'X'?



**Bad
Question**

Good / Bad Question

What are the implications of not solving problem 'X'?

Good / Bad Question

What are the implications of not solving problem 'X'?



Good
Question

Good / Bad Question

How do you deal with
issue 'X' today?

Good / Bad Question

How do you deal with
issue 'X' today?

Good
Question

Good / Bad Question

What solutions have you tried
in the past?

Good / Bad Question

What solutions have you tried
in the past?

Good
Question

Good / Bad Question

Would you pay \$Z for a solution
that did 'X'?

Good / Bad Question

Would you pay \$Z for a solution
that did 'X'?

**Bad
Question**

Good / Bad Question

Where does the budget come from to deal with Issue 'X'?

Good / Bad Question

Where does the budget come from to deal with Issue 'X'?

Good
Question

Good / Bad Question

What do you think about (insert sales pitch here)?

Good / Bad Question

What do you think about
(insert sales pitch here)?

**Bad
Question**

**Bad
Question**

**Bad
Question**

Relax,
it's just a conversation.

Getting ready for Week 7

- Customer Interview Plan first draft – INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT
- Reading/watching assignment is same as Week 6 – this means you have time to finish the “Talking to Humans” book :-)
- Week 7 will cover documenting customer interviews
 - Team breakout to begin combining individual Customer Interview Plans

Guest Speaker: Craig Vodnik

Founder = Cleverbridge

Craig Vodnik, Cleverbridge

- BS Nuclear Engineering UIUC
- Founder HiFi Clinic
 - HiFi repair, restoration and studio clinic
- Founder Cleverbridge
 - All-in-one ecommerce and subscription billing solution for monetizing software, SaaS & digital goods

