

The Unusual Field Guide

# Customer discovery

## TL;DR

- Customer discovery is about replacing assumptions with evidence.
- In this phase, you're not selling — you're learning. The goal is to validate desperation, not demand.

Once you've articulated your value hypothesis, you're ready for customer discovery: the process of testing your assumptions with real people.

Steve Blank called this "getting out of the building."

We strongly recommend reading Rob Fitzpatrick's book on this topic, "The Mom Test."

It is a full contact exercise that requires humility and an open mind. It requires listening more than you talk and observing more than you pitch.

Your mission is to uncover the truth.

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## 01.

### The phases of validation

1. **Concept test** – Validate the pain exists. Ask open-ended questions about recent frustrations or workarounds. If people aren't already working and spending money to solve this problem, they aren't desperate.
  2. **Implementation test** – Validate your approach. Use mockups, demos, or short videos to gauge reactions. Dropbox's original 4 minute video is a perfect example.
  3. **User testing** – Deliver on a delightful experience and confirm willingness to pay. Once users express real delight, are referenceable and provide evidence of the value exchange — you've proven your value hypothesis.
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## 02.

### The "Three Whys" framework

Every discovery conversation should answer these questions:

1. Why buy anything?
2. Why buy now?
3. Why buy from you?

If you can't get clear answers to all three, you haven't found a truly desperate Who yet. Founders are often desperate for customer prospects to be desperate for the solution they are building; be careful not to fall victim to happy ears at this stage. Use the Three Why's in every conversation, document the information, and spend the time debriefing with your team to assess what you heard and learned.

| *"We see what we look for, not what we look at."* — Edward Dolnick

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## 03.

### Built to learn

The best discovery calls are 60% listening, 40% probing, and 0% pitching. Ask about what's broken, what customers have tried, and what they wish existed.

Customers are polite. They want to be encouraging. That's why we push founders to keep asking "why?" — until the real truth emerges. The founders who win aren't the ones who start with all the answers — they're the ones who learn the fastest.

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## 04.

### Pivot or restart?

In the Unusual Way, pivots are healthy; restarts are dangerous.

A **pivot** means changing Who you focus on — while preserving your underlying insight.

A **restart** means abandoning your insight entirely, changing the What, and starting over.

Authenticity matters. If your insight is rooted in a real technical edge, you can iterate your way to PMF if there is a desperate customer. But if you abandon that insight altogether, you lose your edge.

Most great founders pivot multiple times on their Who before finding PMF. Very few ever restart and succeed.

**Founder takeaway:** Your discovery process determines your destiny. Be relentless about learning, not selling. Desperation beats validation every time.