Defining the Problem

Cleveland Justis
UC Davis Child Family Institute
for Innovation and Entrepreneurship

To a child with a hammer, everything looks like a nail.
Make sure your solution isn’t defining your problem

When you start with the solution, you can easily miss the real problem…
A problem well-defined is half-solved.
Before developing your solution further, make sure you’re working on the right problem

What’s the problem?
Whose problem is it (and whose problem is it not)?
Why is it an [important] problem?
Why hasn’t it been solved before?
  – If it’s so important?
  – Don’t guess. You need to know.

Formal Methods for Need Finding

Discovering unmet needs that exist but everyone overlooks

Broad need finding

- Buglists & Customer Feedback – The curious case of Microsoft and Exchange
- User observation – Think Tom Hanks in Big. Just ask people, regularly, what bothers them about their job, their home life, or anything else — all in an effort to understand their lives and their work in the hopes of finding a problem worth working on
- Mind mapping – Technique for visualizing connections between several ideas and central themes

Deep need finding

- Structured interviews and observations – Teneros 4 rounds of structured interviews, 400 by the end
- Process mapping – Lakeland Hospital – 84% you have to be kidding me
- 5-why’s – Take each reason and ask, why is that important? Then ask, why is that answer important? Why? Why?
### Fundamental Behaviors of Need Finding

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Be There</td>
<td>No substitute for being “in the place”.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Be Present</td>
<td>Immerse yourself, roll up your sleeves, dive in.</td>
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<td>Be Surprised</td>
<td>Release expectations.</td>
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<td>Be Thoughtful</td>
<td>Your idea is just a theory. Question everything.</td>
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<td>Be Humble, Be Gentle</td>
<td>Balance arrogance with reality.</td>
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The real problem is rarely the obvious one...
"Customers don’t want ¼-inch drills, they want ¼-inch holes."
— Ted Levitt

"We don’t sell makeup, we sell hope."
— Max Revlon

Create a first draft of the real world problem you are solving

**Identify and State The Problem**
- Based on what objective sources of data?
- Any confirmatory evidence?

**Identify the Customer(s) – who has this problem?**
- How critical is this problem? Must have, want to have, nice to have?
- How is this problem being addressed today?

**Describe the Value Proposition – how would they value the solution**
- What are the costs of the problem? Hard costs, soft costs, other costs [e.g., reputational costs, perceived risk to employment etc.]
- Again, based on what evidence?
Case Study: Greenlight Apparel

EatRx

Case Study: Greenlight Apparel

GREENLIGHT APPAREL

The Men's Workout Tee

Shop Now
Case Study: Revolution Foods

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Let’s try one.

Questions?