

# MASTERING THE PROBLEM SPACE



**STOP** building features nobody wants | **START** solving problems people actually have

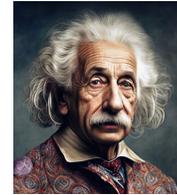


## THE PROBLEM SPACE *Solution First = Failure* *The Real Work: Understanding the Problem*

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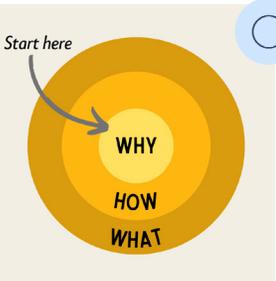
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**"Spend 55 minutes defining the problem, 5 minutes solving it."**

**Focus on dissecting and understanding the problem.**



### START WITH WHY

**People don't buy what you do; they buy why you do it.**  
*Your why shows up in tone, priorities, and conviction—even when unstated.*

**Think**

What frustration or experience led you to this problem?

**Reflect**

Why does this problem irritate you enough to do something about it?

**Write**

Write a few sentences (just for yourself - this is personal)

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**AI ASSIST: After class, refine your thinking...**

**Prompt:** "I'm building a company that does [what you do] for [who you serve]. The problem we solve is [problem]. Help me articulate why solving this problem matters to me personally, rooted in real experiences or beliefs – in clear, human language, not marketing copy."

## DESCRIBE YOUR PROBLEM WITHOUT YOUR SOLUTION

**Step 1** Write the customer problem - NO product/feature mentions

**Step 2** Share with partner - they call out solution talk

**Step 3** Refine until it's pure problem

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**AI ASSIST: After class, test your problem description**

**Prompt:** "Here's how I describe the problem my customers face: [your description]. Does this sound like I'm describing a problem or sneaking in my solution? How can I make it more problem-focused?"

# MASTERING THE PROBLEM SPACE



## JOBS TO BE DONE FRAMEWORK

**Functional job** .....

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**Emotional job** .....

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**Social job** .....

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### 1. Start With the Job (JTBD)

What is the customer trying to accomplish?

- Functional outcome
- Emotional need
- Social expectation

### 2. Find the Friction

Where does the job break down?

- Confusion
- Delays
- Extra effort
- Workarounds

### 3. Turn Friction Into a Problem

Rewrite the friction as a **process failure**, not a feeling.  
"Customers leave without a clear next step."

### 4. Aim Your Whys

Ask *Why* through the lens of the job:

- Why doesn't the process deliver the outcome?
- Why does it create stress or uncertainty?
- Why does it force the customer to compensate?

**Fix the system → the job gets done.**

#### FUNCTIONAL JOB CATEGORIES:

- Get from point A to point B
- Track progress on projects
- Find information quickly
- Organize finances
- Schedule meetings
- Reduce manual work
- Improve efficiency

#### EMOTIONAL JOB CATEGORIES:

- Feel in control
- Reduce anxiety
- Feel productive
- Feel confident
- Avoid embarrassment
- Feel accomplished
- Reduce overwhelm

#### SOCIAL JOB CATEGORIES:

- Look professional to my boss
- Be seen as innovative
- Appear organized to my team
- Seem tech-savvy
- Demonstrate responsibility
- Be viewed as strategic
- Show I'm on top of things

## THE 5 WHYS TECHNIQUE

**The 5 Whys Problem:** .....

.....

**Why did this occur?** .....

**Why?** .....

**Why?** .....

**Why?** .....

**Why?** .....

**Why?** .....

**Root Cause:** .....

**Solution:** .....

### 5 Whys

Helps you uncover why the problem exists



### Jobs to Be Done

Helps you understand why the customer cares

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# MASTERING THE PROBLEM SPACE



## AI ASSIST: Prompt for 5 Whys

**Prompt:** "Act as a business coach. Help me apply the 5 Whys technique to this problem: [problem]. Ask me one 'why' at a time, wait for my answer, then ask the next 'why' – for a total of five – with the goal of uncovering the root cause, not surface symptoms. Keep the questions short and direct."



## AI ASSIST: Prompt for Jobs to Be Done

**Prompt:** "I'm solving [problem] for [customer]. Act as a customer-insight strategist and help me identify the following Jobs to Be Done: 1. Functional job – what they are practically trying to accomplish 2. Emotional job – how they want to feel before, during, or after 3. Social job – how they want to be perceived by others. Present the answers in clear bullet points, using plain language – not marketing copy."



## YOUR IDEAL CUSTOMER PROFILE (ICP)

Demographics, psychographics, behaviors

### DEMOGRAPHICS

**Size, revenue, industry,  
vertical, location, role**

*Example: "VP Marketing at \$10-50M  
SaaS companies, US-based"*

### PSYCHOGRAPHICS

**Values, decision style,  
risk tolerance**

*Example: "Early adopters, data-driven,  
willing to test new tools"*

### BEHAVIORS

**Current tools, workarounds,  
pain triggers**

*Example: "Using 3+ disconnected tools,  
manually copying data daily"*



## AI ASSIST: Refine your ICP

**Prompt:** "I'm targeting [brief description of the customer or role]. Act as a brand strategist and customer-insight analyst. Help me create a practical Ideal Customer Profile that I can actually use for positioning and messaging. Include the following:

- 1. Firmographics / Demographics** - Company size, revenue range, industry or vertical - Location or market type - Decision-maker role and level of authority
- 2. Psychographics** - Core values and motivations - Decision-making style - Risk tolerance and buying hesitations
- 3. Behaviors** - Current solutions or alternatives - Common pain triggers that cause them to seek change - Typical objections or delays
- 4. Jobs to Be Done** - Functional job - Emotional job - Social job.

**Present the ICP in clear sections and bullets, using plain language, not marketing jargon."**

# MASTERING THE PROBLEM SPACE



## COMPETITIVE LANDSCAPE

Direct, indirect, substitutes, swaps + SWOT + UVP

### Competition is More Than Direct Competitors

**Direct** .....

**Indirect** .....

**Substitute solutions** .....

**Swaps** .....

**Status quo** .....

- **Direct competitors:** Same solution, same customer (e.g., Zoom vs. Microsoft Teams)
- **Indirect competitors:** Different solution, same problem (e.g., Zoom vs. in-person meetings)
- **Substitute solutions:** Workarounds customers use (e.g., Zoom vs. email + phone calls)
- **Swaps:** What they'd do with their time/money instead (e.g., not meeting at all)
- **Status quo:** Doing nothing is often your biggest competitor

## SWOT MATRIX

### HOW TO FILL OUT THE SWOT MATRIX:

- **Strengths (S)** – What we do well (internal)
- **Weaknesses (W)** – Where we have gaps (internal)
- **Opportunities (O)** – External chances to grow
- **Threats (T)** – External risks to the business

### STRATEGY BOXES:

- **SO:** Use strengths to seize opportunities
- **WO:** Fix weaknesses to pursue opportunities
- **ST:** Use strengths to reduce threats
- **WT:** Minimize weaknesses to avoid threats

THE ORGANIZATION	STRENGTHS - S	WEAKNESSES - W
OPPORTUNITIES - O	SO STRATEGIES	WO STRATEGIES
THREATS - T	ST STRATEGIES	WT STRATEGIES

# MASTERING THE PROBLEM SPACE



## AI ASSIST: complete your competitive analysis

**Prompt:** "Act as a business strategist. Help me analyze my business: [description] and ICP: [ICP]. First, map my competitive landscape including: - Direct competitors - Indirect competitors - Substitute solutions - Swaps (time/money alternatives) - Status quo (doing nothing). Then guide me through a SWOT analysis by asking focused questions for each quadrant. Finally, based on this full context, help me identify what I could credibly highlight as my Unique Value Proposition, in 1-2 plain-language sentences."



## ONE-LINE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Investor-ready pitch

### One-Line Problem Statement Formula

**[Specific customer] + [wastes/loses/struggles] + [quantifiable pain] + [because current situation]**

Example: "Enterprise IT teams waste 40% of their time managing fragmented data across 15+ systems"

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## AI ASSIST: polish your statement

**Prompt:** "Here's my problem statement: [your statement]. Does it clearly identify: 1) A specific customer segment, 2) A quantifiable problem, 3) Why it's urgent? How can I make it more compelling for investors?"



## EVIDENCE & VALIDATION

Gathering proof, not assumptions

### Market Research

Prompt: "What market research exists about [your industry/problem]? Help me find data on market size, customer pain points, and existing solutions for [specific problem]."

### Customer Insights

Prompt: "I'm researching [problem] for [ICP]. What questions should I ask in customer discovery interviews? Give me 10-15 open-ended questions."

### Competitive Research

Prompt: "Help me find customer reviews and complaints about [competitor products]. What are the top 5-10 pain points customers mention?"

### Validation

Prompt: "What evidence would I need to validate that [your problem statement] is real and urgent? What would prove customers will pay to solve it?"

### Industry Trends

Prompt: "What trends in [your industry] are making [problem] more urgent right now? Why is this the right time to solve this?"

