MASTERING THE PROBLEM SPACE

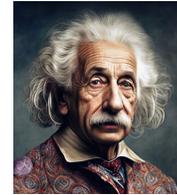## THE PROBLEM SPACE

Solution First = Failure
The Real Work: Understanding the Problem
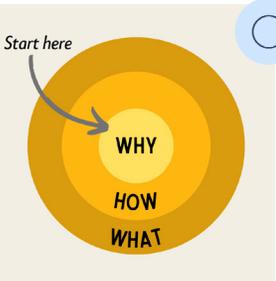
"Spend 55 minutes defining the problem, 5 minutes solving it."

Focus on dissecting and understanding the problem.

START WITH WHY

Start here

WHY
HOW
WHAT

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	**Reflect**	**Write**
What frustration or experience led you to this problem?	Why does this problem irritate you enough to do something about it?	Write a few sentences (just for yourself - this is personal)

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	

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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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: ....

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.

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

YOUR IDEAL CUSTOMER PROFILE (ICP)
Demographics, psychographics, behaviors

DEMOGRAPHICS	PSYCHOGRAPHICS	BEHAVIORS
Size, revenue, industry, vertical, location, role	**Values, decision style, risk tolerance**	**Current tools, workarounds, pain triggers**
Example: "VP Marketing at $10-50M SaaS companies, US-based"	*Example: "Early adopters, data-driven, willing to test new tools"*	*Example: "Using 3+ disconnected tools, manually copying data daily"*

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

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"

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?"

MASTERING THE PROBLEM SPACE

BRINGING IT TOGETHER | NOTES