

A short guide to problem interviews

Prepare

Define ahead your customer and problem hypothesis - don't worry about what they are, chances are they are both wrong.

Select the location where you are most likely to find those customers.

Go with a partner: one person will take note while the other leads the conversation. you can alternate.

Get ready to learn about the customer problem and not to sell your idea.

It's interviewing people like this often, but practice makes perfect.

Introduce yourself

Rule number #1: Do not talk about your business idea.

Talk to one person at the time.

I introduce myself as doing a research on the topic. Make the conversation about them and their experience of the problem or need.

A typical I use something like:

Hello, I am doing a research about xxx and I wanted to get know your opinion on the question. You don't mind me asking you a few questions? It won't be long.

Smile.

So, I am trying to understand people experience with xxx issue.

How you ever been in a situation where xxx happened to you ?

Why ? What happened ?

Learn from your potential customer

Here are the 3 things that I want to learn in problem interview

1. Evaluate the importance and frequency of the problem for that person
2. Learn about alternative solution, how much the problem cost them, how the customer look for solutions, the root causes of the problem.
3. Discover related problems that you didn't know about.

Ask questions about the past events such as:

What's hard about this situation ?
Please tell the last time you experienced the problem/need.
What did you do then ? Why ? Did that solve it ?
What else did you try ?
What was hard about this situation ?
Does it happen to you often ?
Why is that a problem for you ? Why ?

Be nosy. Drill down. Keep asking why ?

Get excited about learning things you don't want to hear. Ask open ended questions.

Smile
How do you...
What motivates you to...
Why ? Tell me more about that experience...

Listen, don't talk. Try to keep your questions short and unbiased.

Leave blank in the conversation and let them do the talking.

Repeat what you understand to get a confirmation or a correction.

Take notes (you can use the problem interview sheet)

Saying thank you

Once the interview is done, thank them for their time. Answer their questions.

Ask for introductions and referrals to people who you can talk with the similar problem.

Quickly debrief with partner and write up other comments you had on the interview sheet.