

## Customer interviews

They are easy to screw up.

We want to find the truth of how to make our business succeed. We need to dig for it – and dig deep – but every question we ask carries the very real possibility of biasing the person we’re talking to and rendering the whole exercise pointless.

*“The truth is our goal, and questions are our tools. But we must learn to wield them. It’s delicate work. It turns out almost all of us are doing it wrong.” – Rob Fitzpatrick (The Mom Test)*

These conversations take time and are easy to screw up. When you screw up, they give you a false negative – or even worse – a false positive that causes you to over-invest your cash, time, or team.

### What are we doing wrong?

Before we can start doing this correctly, we need to understand how we’re doing them wrong. I want to help you see where you might be messing up in unnoticed ways. Give you the tools to talk to customers, navigate the noise, and learn what they really want.

### The three basic rules

1. Avoid exposing your ego & feel
2. Any form of hypothetical is worthless. Replies will be too optimistic.
3. Ask people to do you a favor. It makes them feel good about themselves.

Examples:

	<b>Right</b>	<b>Wrong</b>
Rule 1	Talk about them & listen more)	Talk about your idea & talk more
Rule 2	Specifics in the past	Generics or opinions about the future
Rule 3	Ask for an introduction	(Ask them to correct your mistakes)

## The Good, the bad, and the ugly questions



Question	How to rate it	Why the rating	Comments
1	"Do you think it's a good idea?"	Ugly	It violates rule 2: no hypotheticals.  There's a high risk of a false positive unless maybe you're talking to a deep industry expert.  What to ask instead: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you currently do it?</li> <li>• Which parts do you love and hate?</li> <li>• Which other tools and processes have you tried before this one?</li> <li>• Are you actively searching for a replacement?</li> <li>• If so, what's the sticking point?</li> <li>• If not, why not?</li> <li>• Where are you losing money with this now?</li> <li>• Is there a budget for better ones?</li> </ul>
2	"Would you buy a product that did X?"	Bad or Ugly	It violates rule 2: no hypotheticals.  You're asking for opinions and hypotheticals from overly optimistic people who want to make you happy.  See the list for question 1.

3	<i>"How much would you pay for X?"</i>	Bad	It violates rule 2: no hypotheticals..	<p>Again, you're asking for opinions, but here, the replies are more likely to trick you because the number makes it feel more truthful</p> <p>What to ask instead:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do you currently solve X?</li> <li>• How much does it cost?</li> <li>• How much time does it take?</li> <li>• Talk me through the last time X came up.</li> <li>• How big is the budget you've allocated to solving this?</li> </ul>
4	<i>"What would your dream product do?"</i>	Bad or Good	It's only a good question if you ask the right follow-up questions.	<p>Things to look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <del>Feature requests</del></li> <li>• Why they want these features</li> </ul>
5	<i>"Why do you bother?"</i>	Good	This question is great for getting from the perceived problem to the real one.	<p>Things to look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The actual pain they're trying to solve</li> </ul>
6	<i>"What are the implications of that?"</i>	Good	Some problems have big, costly implications. Others exist but don't actually matter. This question will help you find out which is which.	<p>Sometimes people will use emotionally loaded terms like "disaster". But when asked what the actual implications were, it can turn out to be not that bad.</p>
7	<i>"Talk me through the last time that happened."</i>	Good	You learn a lot more through their actions instead of their opinions.	<p>Things to look for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do they spend their days?</li> <li>• What tools do they use?</li> <li>• What constraints do they encounter?</li> <li>• How does your product fit into that day?</li> <li>• Does your product need to integrate with any of these tools?</li> </ul> <p>Watching someone do the task is even better. You can see where the problems and inefficiencies are instead of relying on where the person in front of you thinks they are.</p>

8	<i>"What else have you tried."</i>	Good	If they haven't looked for ways to solve it already, they're probably not going to look for (or buy) yours.	Things to look for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When's the last time it came up (recent = great sign)?</li> <li>• Talk me through how...</li> </ul>
9	<i>"Would you pay X for a product which did Y?"</i>	Bad	It violates rule 2: no hypotheticals.	See the list in question 3.  People stop lying when you ask them for money. If you really want to put them to the test, you need to ask them for a deposit or a pre-order.
10	<i>"How are you dealing with it now?"</i>	Good	You learn a lot more through their actions instead of their opinions.	Things to look for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workflow information</li> <li>• Price anchor</li> </ul>
11	<i>"Where does the money come from?"</i>	Good	In a B2B context, this is a must-ask.	Things to look for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who's budget will the purchase come from</li> <li>• Who else is involved and holds the power to torpedo a deal</li> </ul>
12	<i>"Who else should I talk to?"</i>	Good	Great question. You're asking them for a favor. People want to help you. Give them an excuse to do so! I suggest ending every conversation like this.	If someone doesn't want to make intros, you screwed up the meeting (probably by being too formal, pitchy, and clingy), or they don't actually care about the problem you're solving.
13	<i>"Is there anything else I should have asked?"</i>	Good or Bad	People want to help you. Give them an excuse to do so! I suggest ending every conversation like this.	You want to give them the chance to politely fix your line of questioning. Not to offend you.  If someone says no, you have to wonder if the answer is correct or if they're actually trying to protect your feelings.