Customer discovery best practices

GRANT M WARNER, PH.D.

Grant Warner, Ph.D.

Affiliations

CBE — Center for Black Entrepreneurship

Spelman College — A Choice to Change the World

Morehouse College

American Association of Community Colleges — Lead. Advocate. Advance.

I-Corps (DC)

KIC

GW

Howard University

NSF I-Corps

Virginia SBDC

I-Corps at NIH

GIST — Global Innovation through Science and Technology

VentureWell — idea to impact

GEM — The National GEM Consortium

Founding Member

ConnectYard — Communicate Better

Black Tech Ventures

MediaLabs

The Marathon Fund

Iconically — Where every Icon is an Ally.

Innovate Egypt - Cairo

GIST Senegal - Dakar

KIC Start Korea - Seoul

HOUSEKEEPING

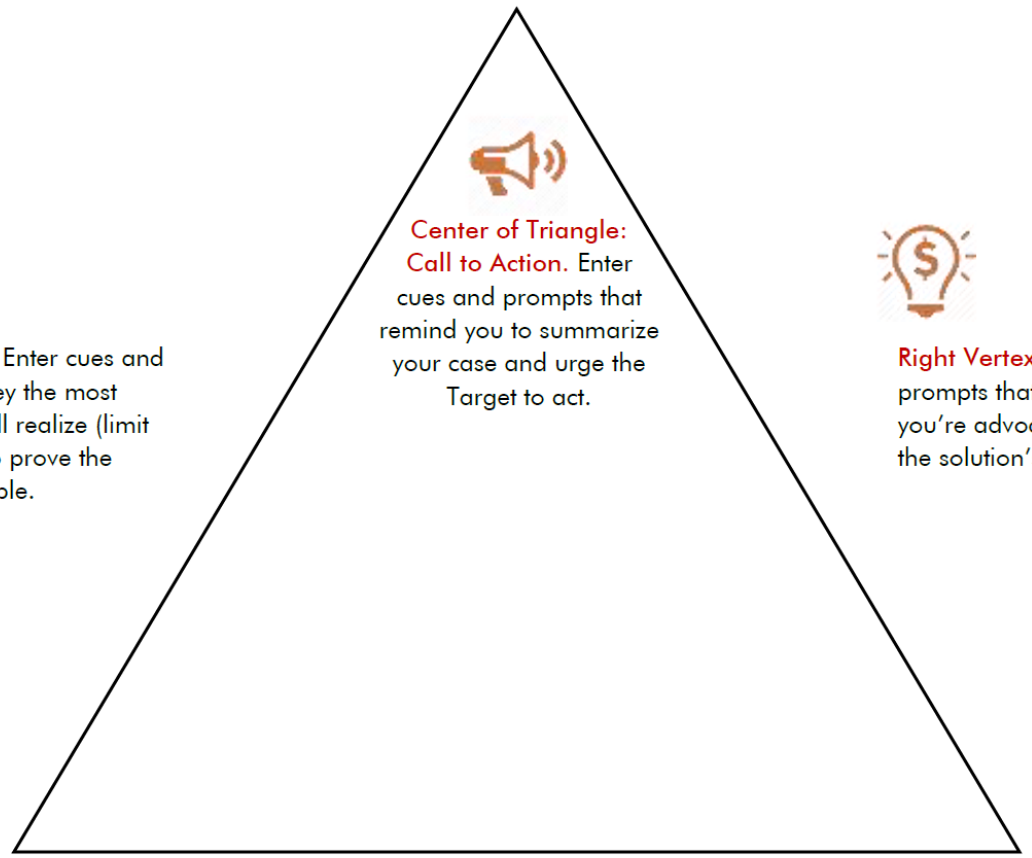
PLEASE USE THE CHAT BOX TO ENTER YOUR QUESTIONS.

PITCH SHOWS HOW YOUR PRODUCT SOLVES THEIR PROBLEM

Message Triangle

TARGET: Identify the Target

Top Vertex: Pain/Gain and Proof. Enter cues and prompts that remind you to articulate and validate this Target's problem, need, or opportunity.



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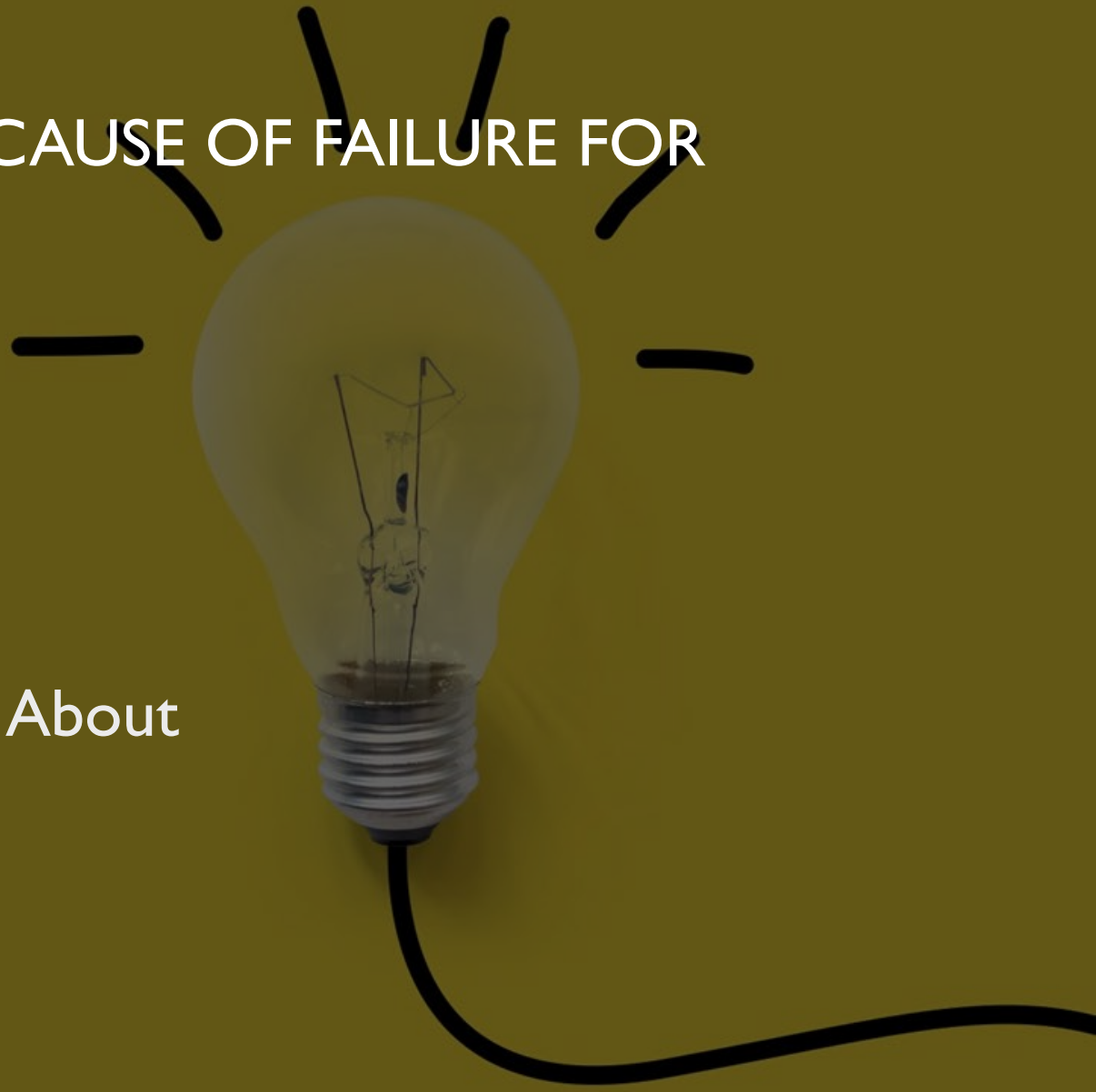
Right Vertex: Solution and Proof. Enter cues and prompts that remind you to relate the solution you're advocating. Add triggers to substantiate the solution's viability.

POLL: WHAT IS MOST COMMON CAUSE OF FAILURE FOR STARTUPS?

1. Spending Money Too Fast
2. Building a Product Nobody Cares About
3. Not Having the Right Team




#1
Building something nobody wants
Score: 300
36% of Tot.
#2
Hiring Poorly
Score: 153
18% of Tot.
#3
Lack of Focus
Score: 112
13% of Tot.
#4
Fail to execute Sales & Marketing
Score: 98
12% of Tot.
#5
#6
#7
#8
#10
100 First Hits
www.100FirstHits.com
8. Spending Too Much Money 18 (2,1%)
9. Failing To Ask For Help 12 (1,4%)
10. Ignoring Social Media 6 (0,7%)
5. Not Having The Right Co-Founders 66 (7,9%)
6. Chasing Investors, Not Customers 45 (5,4%)
7. Not Making Sure You Have Enough Money 28 (3,3%)

DO COMPANIES BUILD THINGS THAT NOBODY WANTS?

DO COMPANIES BUILD THINGS THAT NOBODY WANTS?

The Segway

The Segway

> Steve Jobs said that the invention would be “as significant as the personal computer.” Jeff Bezos said it was “revolutionary.”

Source: History of Dean Kamen's Segway: The mysterious invention was going to change the world, and I helped kill it. (slate.com)

Segway raised over **$100MM USD in 2001**.

Used funds to focus on *execution*.

Thought everyone would want a Segway

Projections: **6,000 Segways per week**.

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After **2 years they sold 6,000 TOTAL Segways.**

Tyson's *Law*


Tyson's Law

“Killer” Application: City Tours

Why Customer Discovery?

The company had expected that any softness in consumer sales would be made up for by corporate and institutional partnerships, with organizations like Disney and the U.S. Postal Service. But that never panned out. Even the police department in Segway's hometown, Manchester, ordered only four, and didn't use them much. They were fine for parking enforcement, the department told a reporter, but mountain bikes were cheaper and lighter, and they never ran out of juice.

Why Customer Discovery?

When I returned the Segway, I told the guy at the rental place how I'd learned about all the incredible inspiration and innovation and work and skill that had gone into the Segway, all to make something that cost 10 times as much as a scooter and required a lesson from an expert to ride. He said something I cannot stop thinking about. "Yeah," he said, "a bunch of really smart people got together, but you needed one dumb person in the room to keep things on the level."

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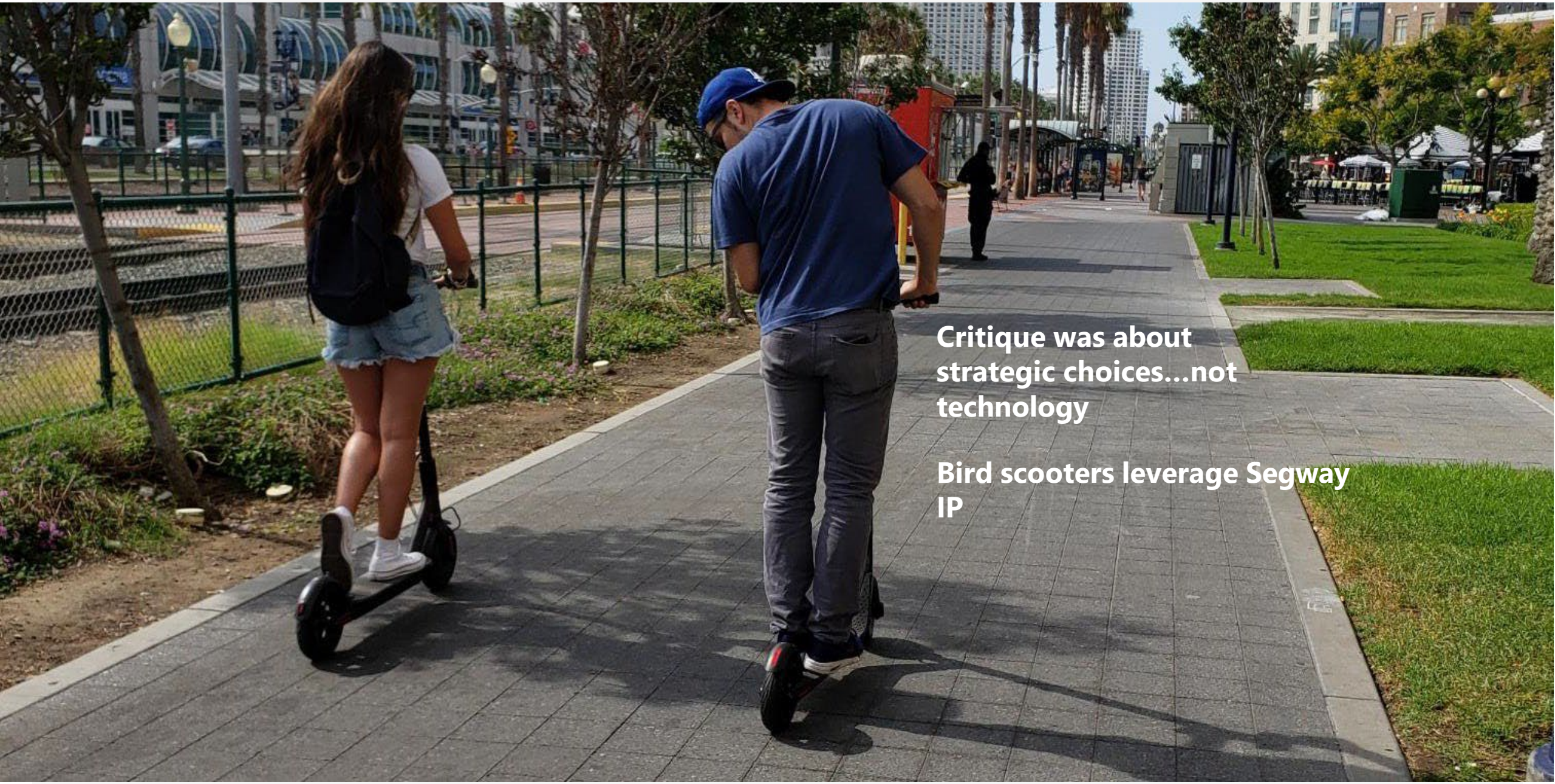
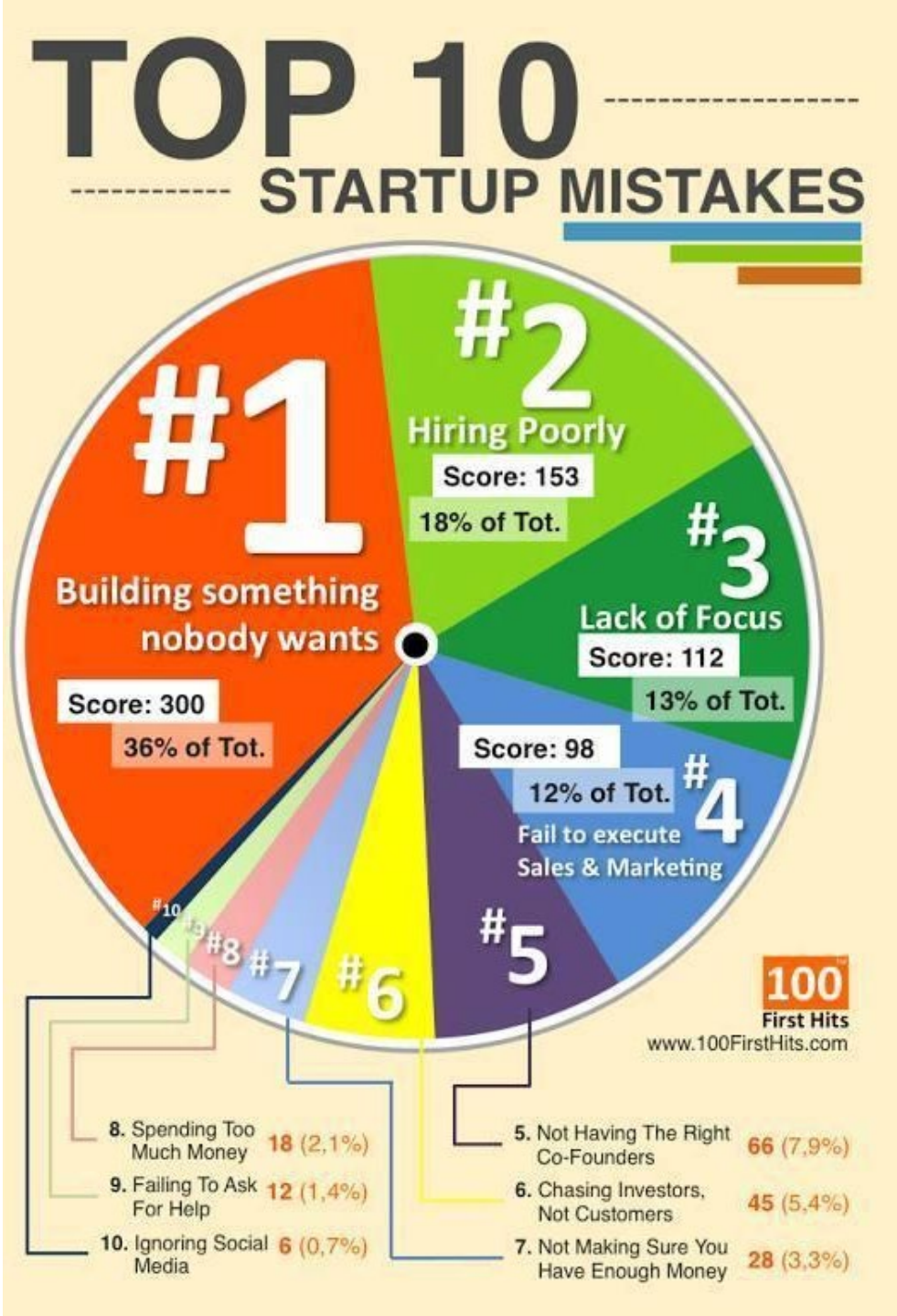
Innovation Coach


Critique was about strategic choices…not technology
Bird scooters leverage Segway IP

SEGWAY WAS A GOOD *INVENTION*, MORE THAN A GREAT *INNOVATION*.

- They did not understand the needs of the customer.

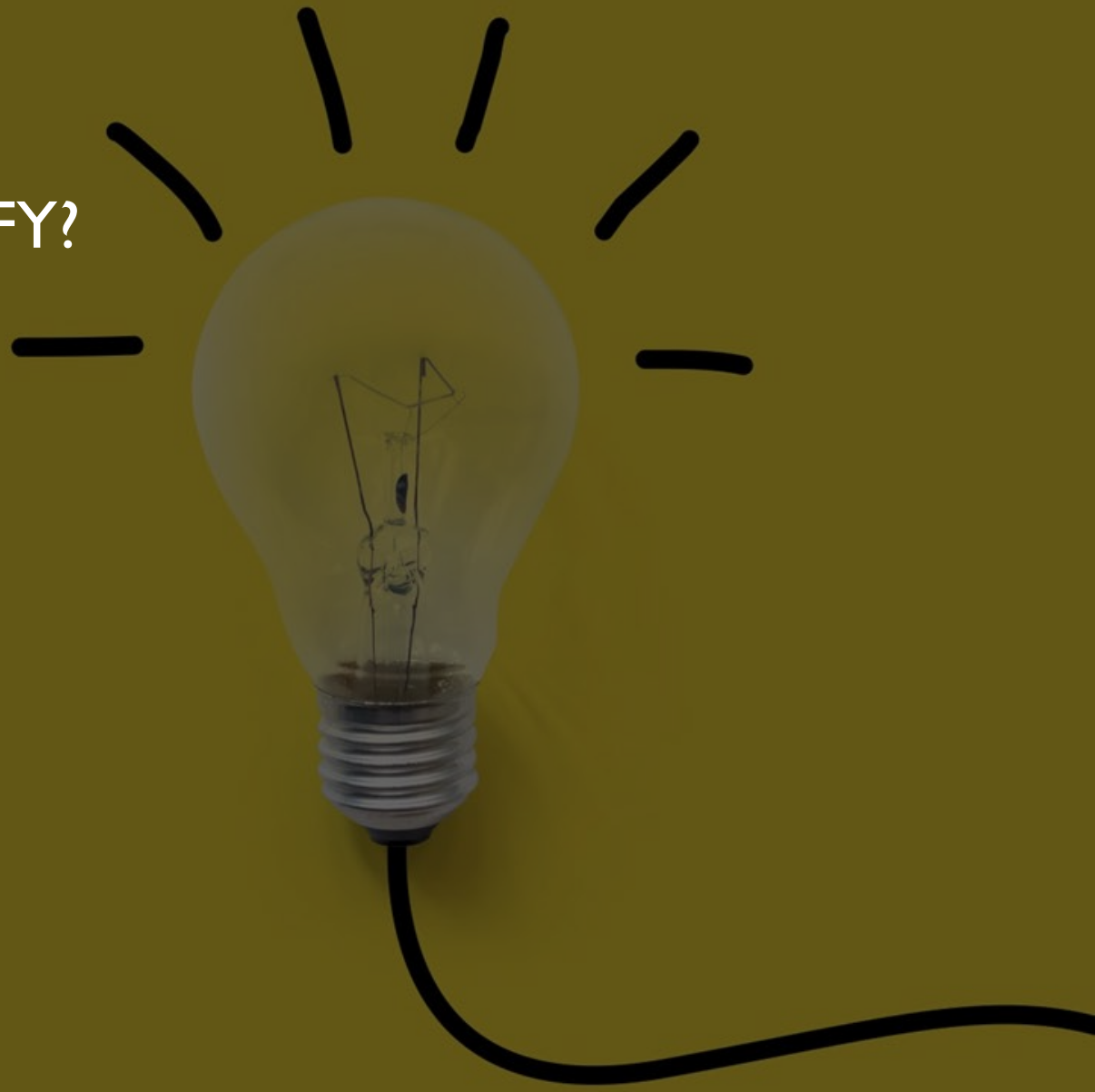


INVENTORS: TRY TO UNDERSTAND THE TECHNOLOGY

INNOVATORS: TRY TO UNDERSTAND THE PEOPLE

POLL: HOW WOULD YOU IDENTIFY?

1. Inventor
2. Innovator
3. Other



2026 COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

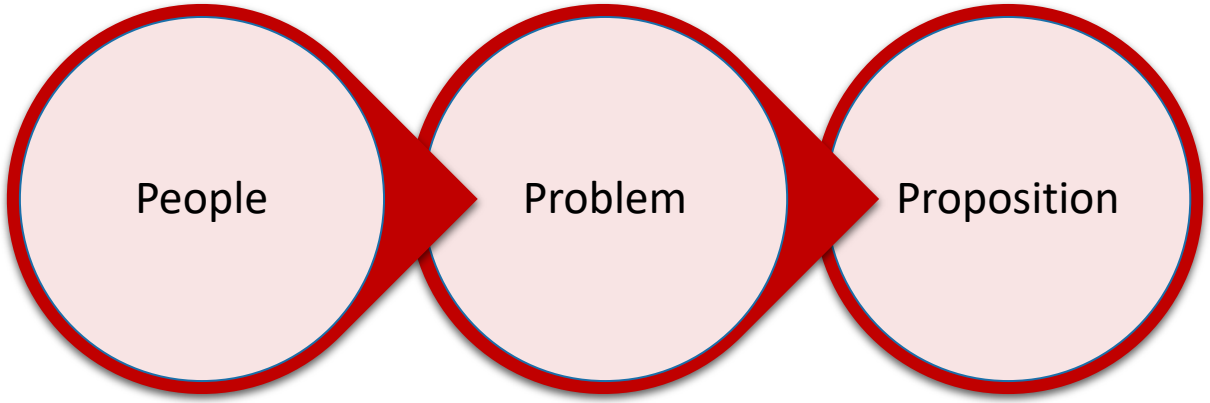
We are all innovators

BIG IDEAS FOR INNOVATION

- Startups are not small companies
- Get out of the Building – Customer Discovery
- Minimum Viable Product (MVP)

Customer Discovery

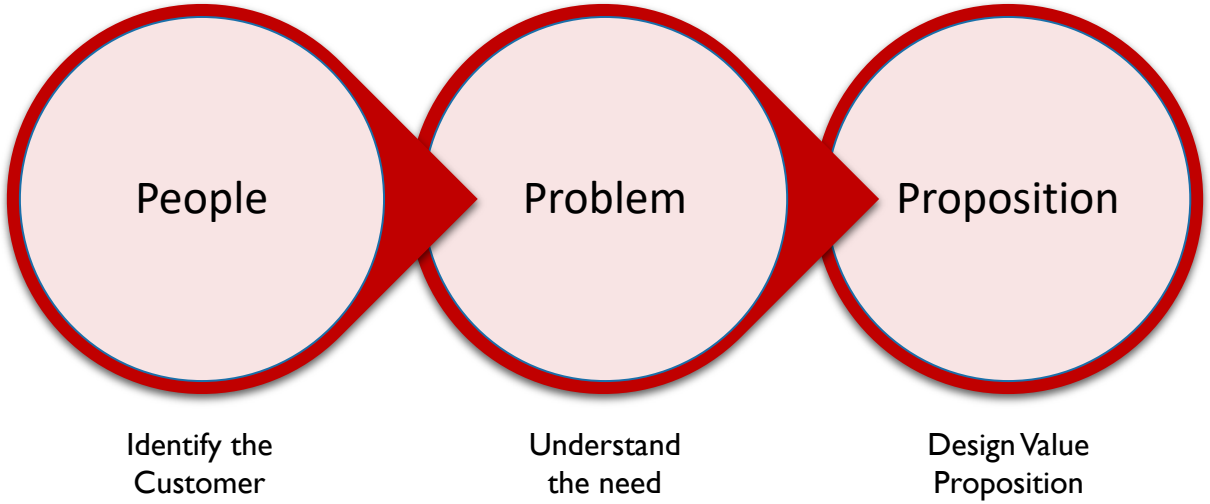
Process Steps



EVIDENCE-BASED INNOVATION

Customer Discovery

Process Steps



DRIVEN BY MANY ASSUMPTIONS:

- Who we are intending to help [identify customer]
- What this person is trying achieve [the need]
- The problem they are having accomplishing this job [pains/gains]
- How this problem might be addressed [competition/status quo]
- The value that might be accrued [value propositions]

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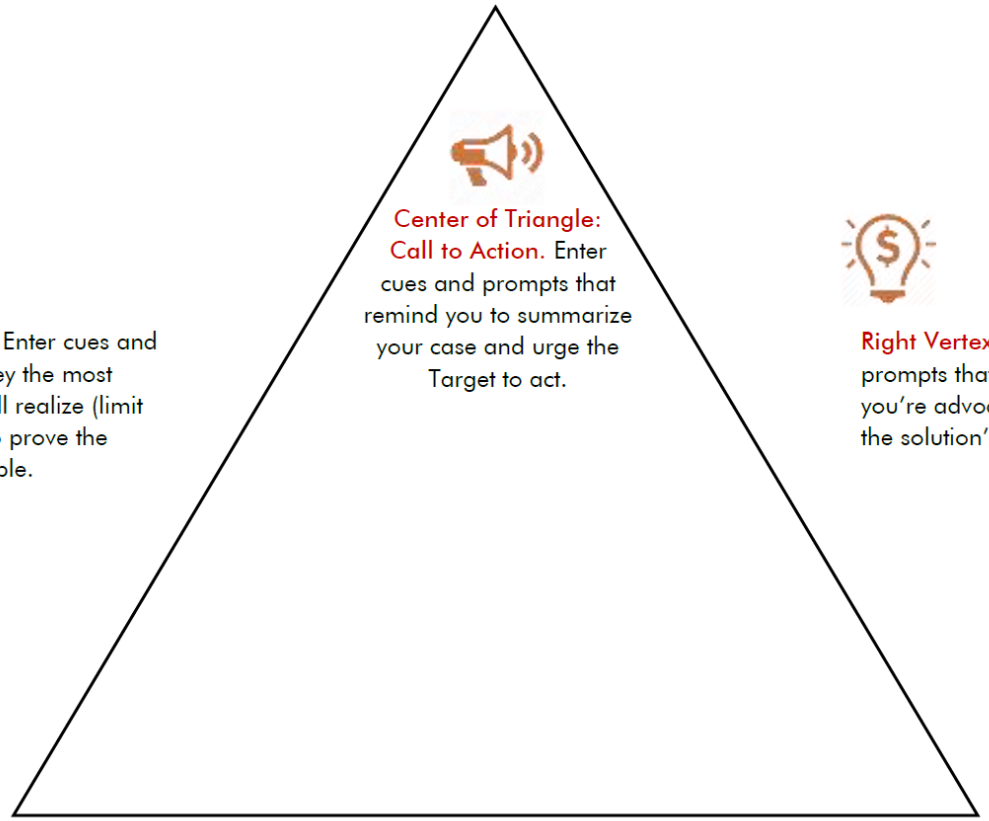

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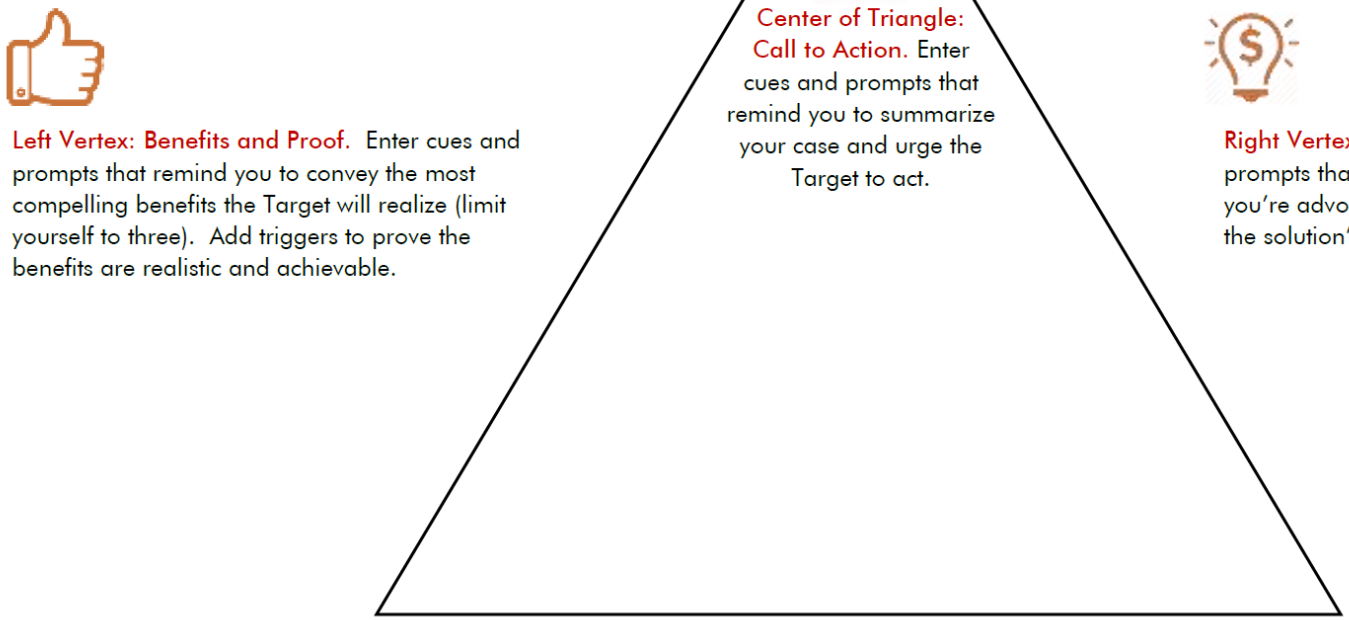

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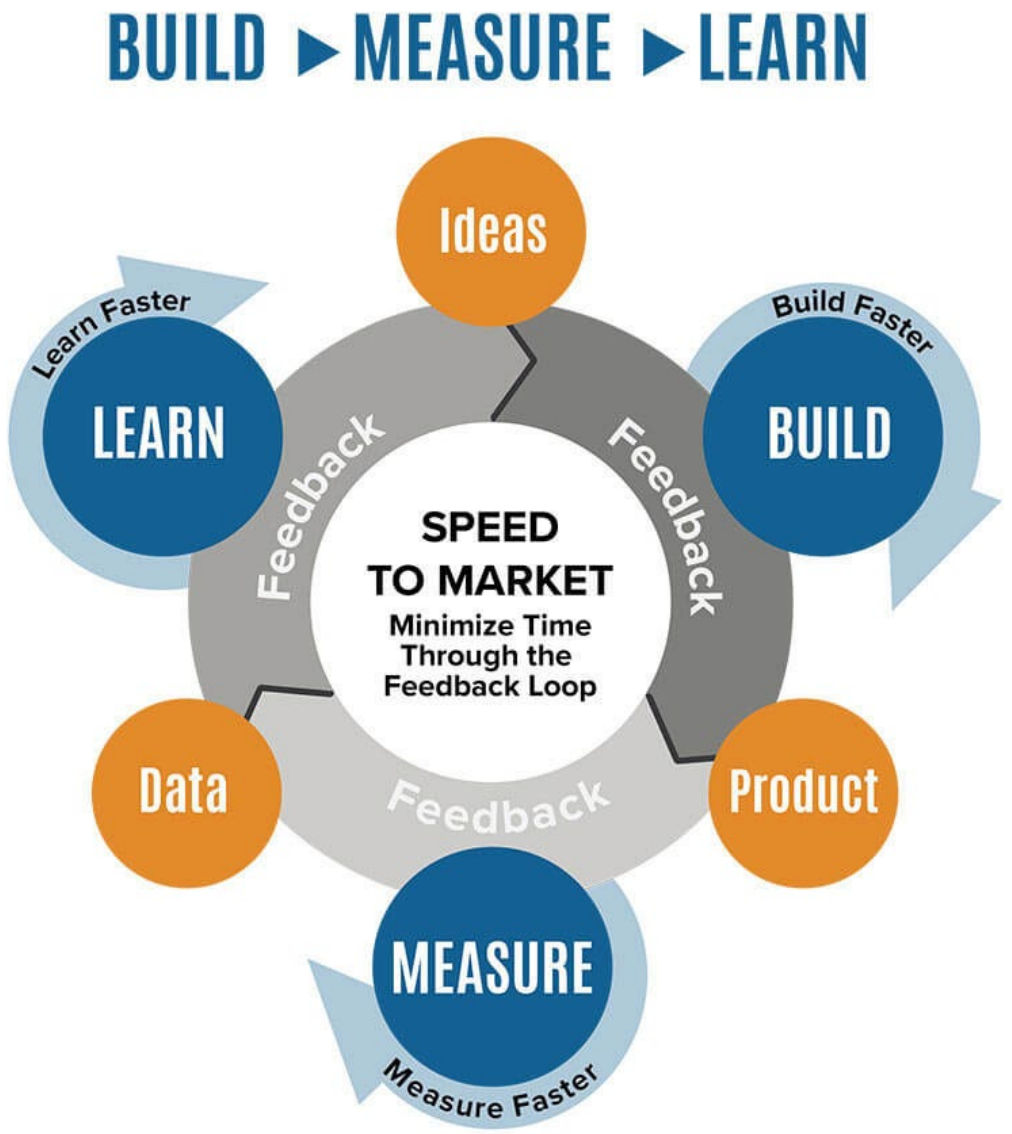
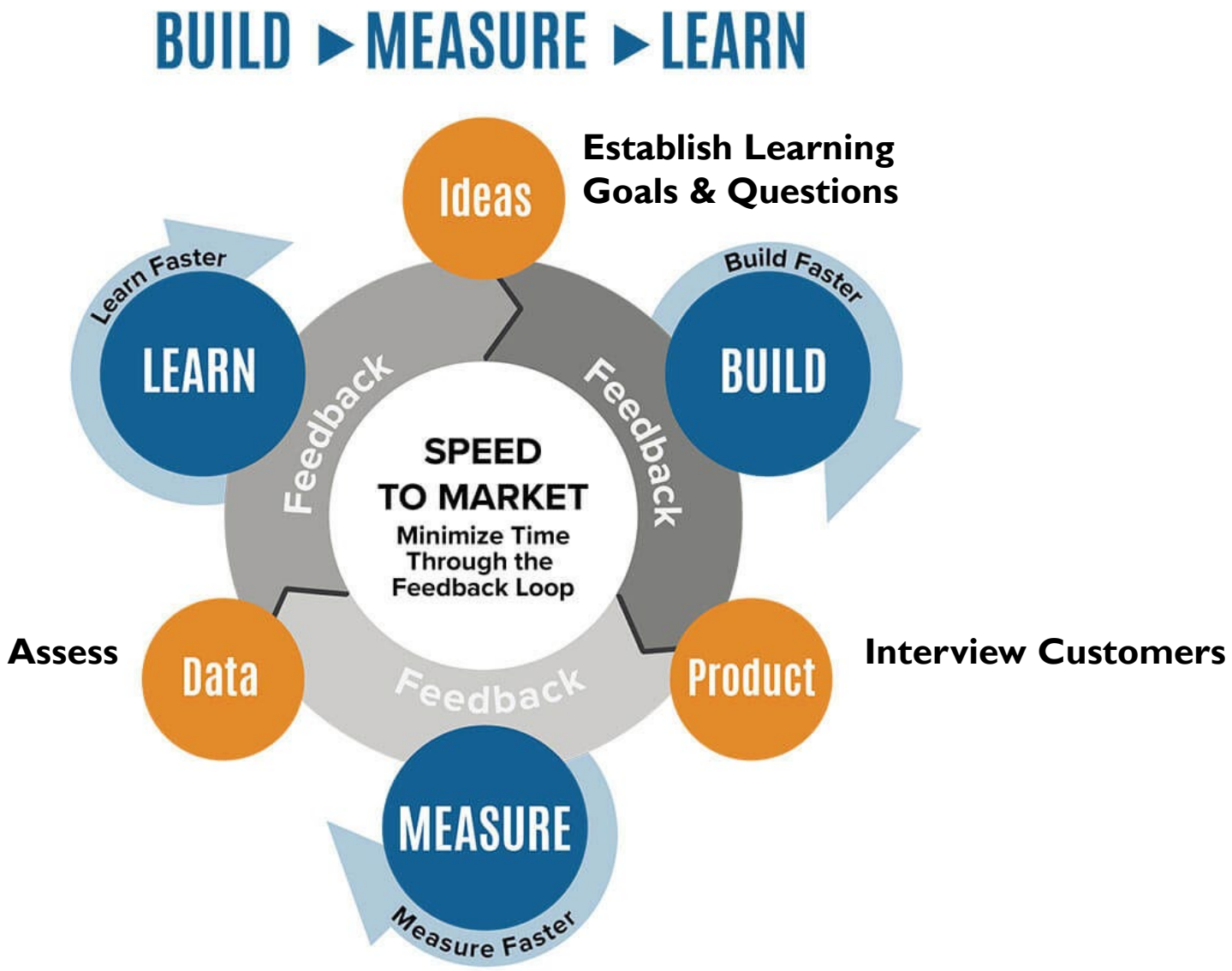
HOW A PRODUCT OF YOURS WILL SOLVE A PROBLEM OF THEIRS

Your Goal:
Turn guesses into facts



Your Goal:
Talk to people and ask them questions




It's NOT
Rocket
Science
2 x Z-400 Rechargebale Battery
Mass = 20 kg
Capacity = 400 e
2 x OX-STAT Photovoltaic Panel
Mass = 5 kg
Electricity = 0.75 e/s
6 x 60° Liquid Fuel Booster
2-2-2 Asparagus Staging
6 x NCS Adapter incl. Standard NC
Mass = 400 kg
18 x FL-T400 Liquid Fuel Tank
Mass = 250 kg
Liquid Fuel = 180 L
Oxidizer = 220 L
6 x LV-T45 Liquid Fuel Engine
Mass = 1 500 kg
Thrust = 200 000 N
Isp (atm) = 320 s
6 x Hydraulic Detachment Manifold
Mass = 400 kg
Ejection Force = 180 N
Rockomax „Mainsail" Liquid Engine
Mass = 6 000 kg
Thrust = 1 500 000 N
Isp (atm) = 280 s
Isp (vac) = 330 s
6 x 60° AV-R8 Winglet
Mass = 20 kg
Mk16-XL Parachute
Mass = 300 kg
Drag
- Stowed = 0.22
- Semi-Deployed = 1
- Deployed = 500
Mk1-2 Command Pod
Mass = 4 000 kg
Required Crew = 3
„Poodle" Liquid Engine
Isp (vac) = 390 s
15200
4657
(5371)
11500
1657
KERBAL X
The Kerbal X is one of the most successful rockets that can be ordered from a catalog. Despite the original design having been meant for a plastic model, it's proved itself quite dependable as a full-sized craft.
The X is capable of achieving orbit around Kerbin, and even features a very optimistic set of landing legs on its upper stage.
Total Δv (atm) = 5 404 m/s
Total Δv (vac) = 6 826 m/s
Total Mass = 131 390 kg
Part Count = 78

GET OUT OF THE BUILDING

(PHYSICALLY OR VIRTUALLY)

POLL: HOW WOULD MANY INTERVIEWS SHOULD YOU COMPLETE BEFORE THE BOOTCAMP?

- 1
- 3
- 5

YOUR HW

- Complete 5 interviews prior to the Bootcamp
- Log your interviews

GOOTB: CUSTOMER INTERVIEW STEPS

- Pre-plan the interview
- Conduct the interview
- Process the interview

IDENTIFY THE CUSTOMER
& LEARNING GOALS

PRE-PLANNING THE INTERVIEW

PRE-PLANNING: IDENTIFYING CONTACTS

WHO IS YOUR KEY CUSTOMER?

CUSTOMER TYPES

- **End User:** Day to day users of the product/service
- **Decision Maker:** Makes the final decision to purchase
- **Economic Buyer:** Issues the PO or signs the check
- **Influencer:** Can sway the decision
- **Recommender:** Tasked to recommend solutions

- **Saboteur:** Loses out if the solution is adopted

OTHER TYPES

- **Subject Matter Experts:** Persons with knowledge of the vertical who can be used for referrals and/or hypothesis development but NOT validation
- **Beneficiaries:** Person who benefits from your innovation but does not have influence on the adoption process
- **Champion:** Person with high influence within an organization

HOW DO WE FIND THEM?

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Job Title of your target

Instructional Technologist

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Washington D.C. Metro Area

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Michelle Metzler • 2nd
Instructional Technologist at Stratford University
Washington D.C. Metro Area

Current: Instructional Technologist at Stratford University

Tien Wong is a shared connection

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Kristian Dabney • 2nd
Instructional Technologist at The George Washington University
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Kristian Dabney • 2nd
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Past: Instructional Technology Specialist at Howard University
Joshua K. Brown and **Adrienne Lacy** are shared connections
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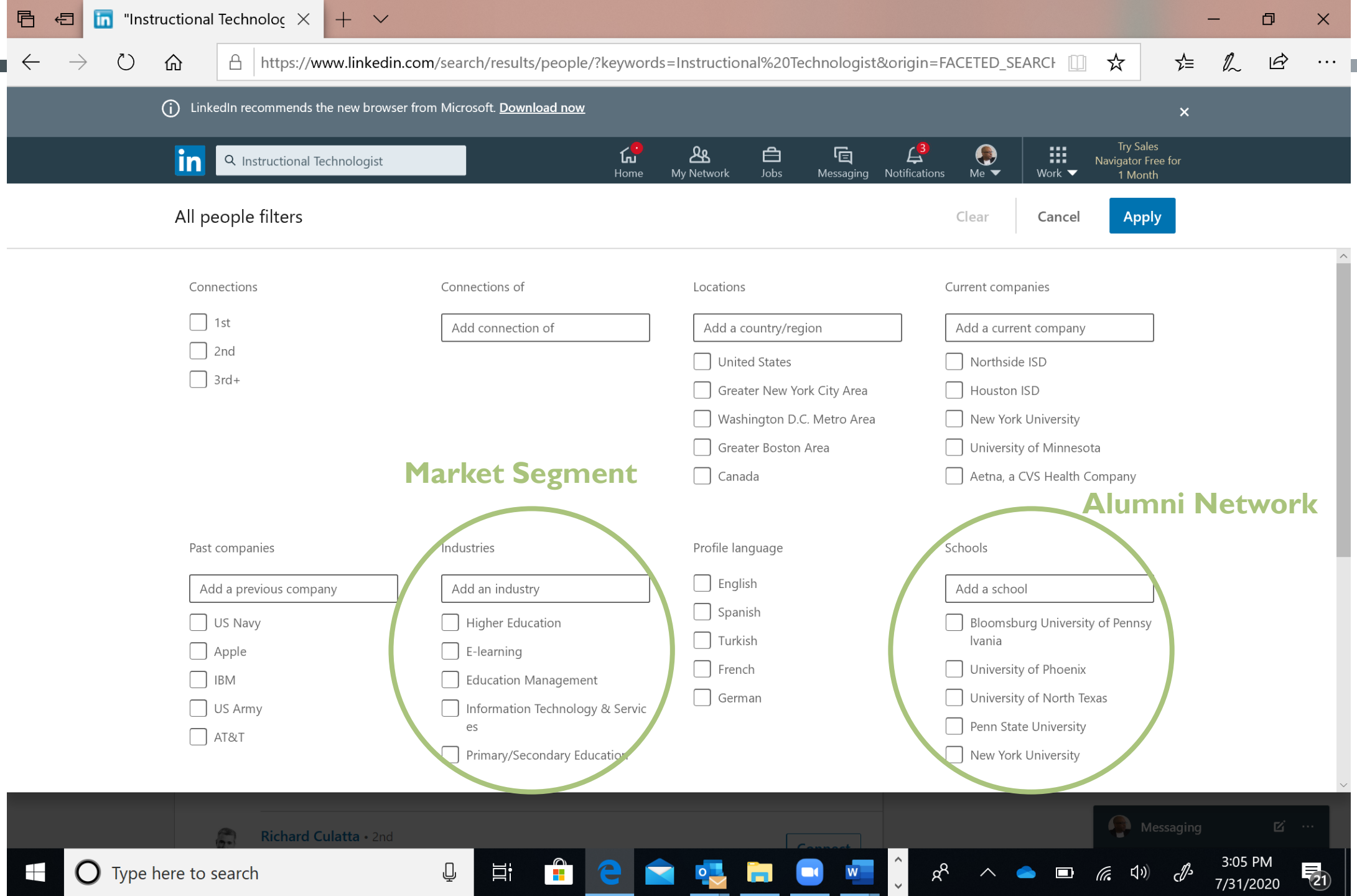
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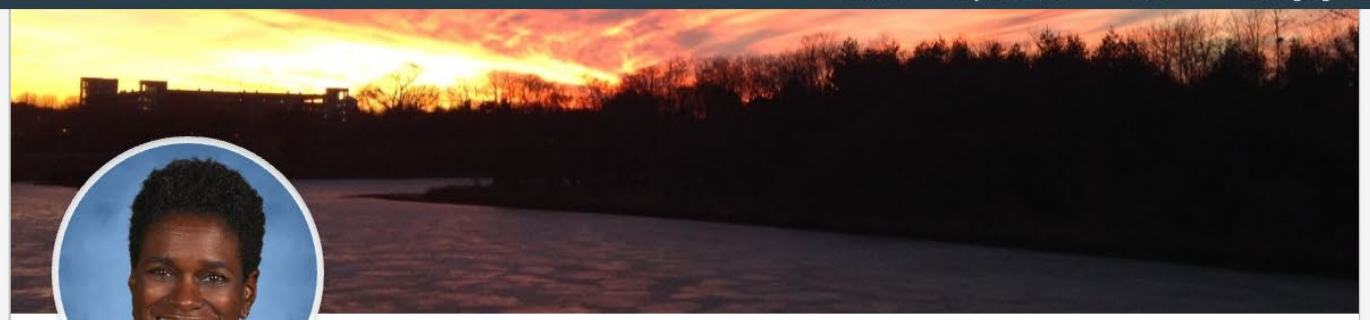

Message | More...

Erika Eason · 3rd

Director of Academic Technology at Maret School

Washington, District Of Columbia · 129 connections · Contact info

MARET Maret School

UMGC University of Maryland Global Campus

Highlights

You both studied at Cornell University

You both studied at Cornell University from 1991 to 1993

Say hello

About

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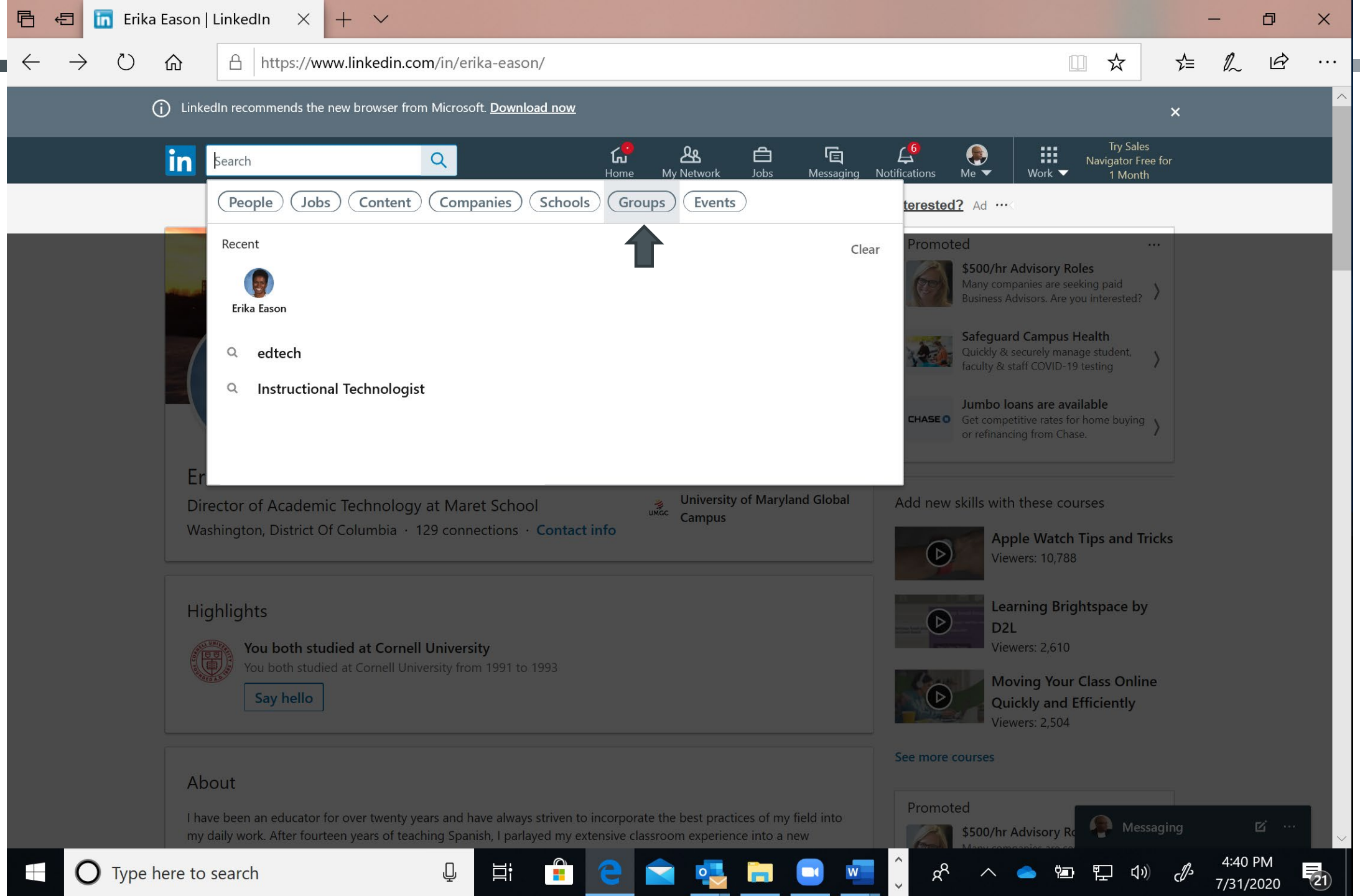
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Instructional Technologist
Director of Academic Technology at Maret School
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University of Maryland Global Campus
Highlights
You both studied at Cornell University
You both studied at Cornell University from 1991 to 1993
Say hello
About
I have been an educator for over twenty years and have always striven to incorporate the best practices of my field into my daily work. After fourteen years of teaching Spanish, I parlayed my extensive classroom experience into a new
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Jumbo loans are available
Get competitive rates for home buying or refinancing from Chase.
Add new skills with these courses
Apple Watch Tips and Tricks
Viewers: 10,788
Learning Brightspace by D2L
Viewers: 2,610
Moving Your Class Online Quickly and Efficiently
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EdTech (Education Technology)
Group • 2,518 members
Join the Group to together Spread Awareness on Education Technology. EdTech (Education Technology) is a Group of EdTech enthusiasts across the globe who can collaboratively reform technology adoption and ...

EdTech Leaders Online
Group • 3,106 members
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EdTech Forum
Group • 11,716 members
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Group • 4,587 members
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Group • 403 members

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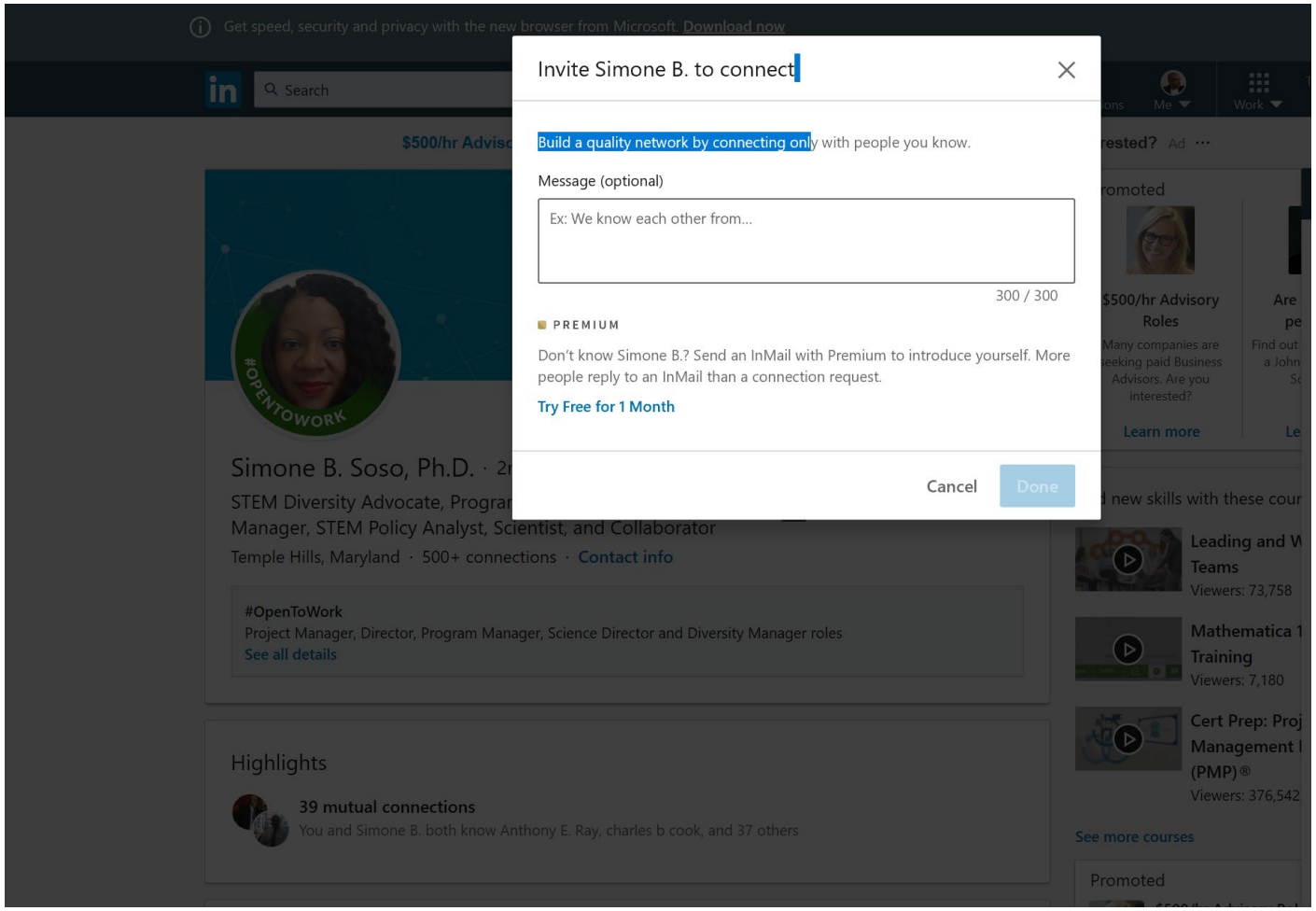
Once you have found them you need a “cold-call” script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Invite Simone B. to connect
Build a quality network by connecting only with people you know.
Message (optional)
Ex: We know each other from...
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Simone B. Soso, Ph.D.
STEM Diversity Advocate, Program Manager, STEM Policy Analyst, Scientist, and Collaborator
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#OpenToWork
Project Manager, Director, Program Manager, Science Director and Diversity Manager roles
See all details
Highlights
39 mutual connections
You and Simone B. both know Anthony E. Ray, charles b cook, and 37 others
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PRE-PLANNING: COLD-CALL SCRIPT

- **Who** you are?
- **What** are you looking for?
- **Why** are you contacting the person?
- **How** much time do you need?

PRE-PLANNING: COLD-CALL SCRIPT

- **Who** you are?
- **What** are you looking for?
- **Why** are you contacting the person?
- **How** much time do you need?

SAMPLE: COLD CALL SCRIPT

- Hello. My name is [Your Name], I am a student working on an NSF project exploring [the problem area you are interested in]. I am hoping to gain insight into decisions about [specific process your investigating]. As an expert in this area, I hope that you could speak with me for10 minutes.

KEY POINTERS – DEVELOP YOUR INTRODUCTORY SCRIPT

- Who/ What/ Why/ How
- Be clear that you are not selling
- Flatter your target
- Ask for minimal amount of time

Once they agree to speak to you, you need interview goals

KEY EARLY STAGE LEARNING GOALS

DO YOUR CUSTOMERS HAVE THE PROBLEM YOU THINK THEY HAVE?

WHERE DOES THAT PROBLEM FIT IN THEIR PRIORITIES?

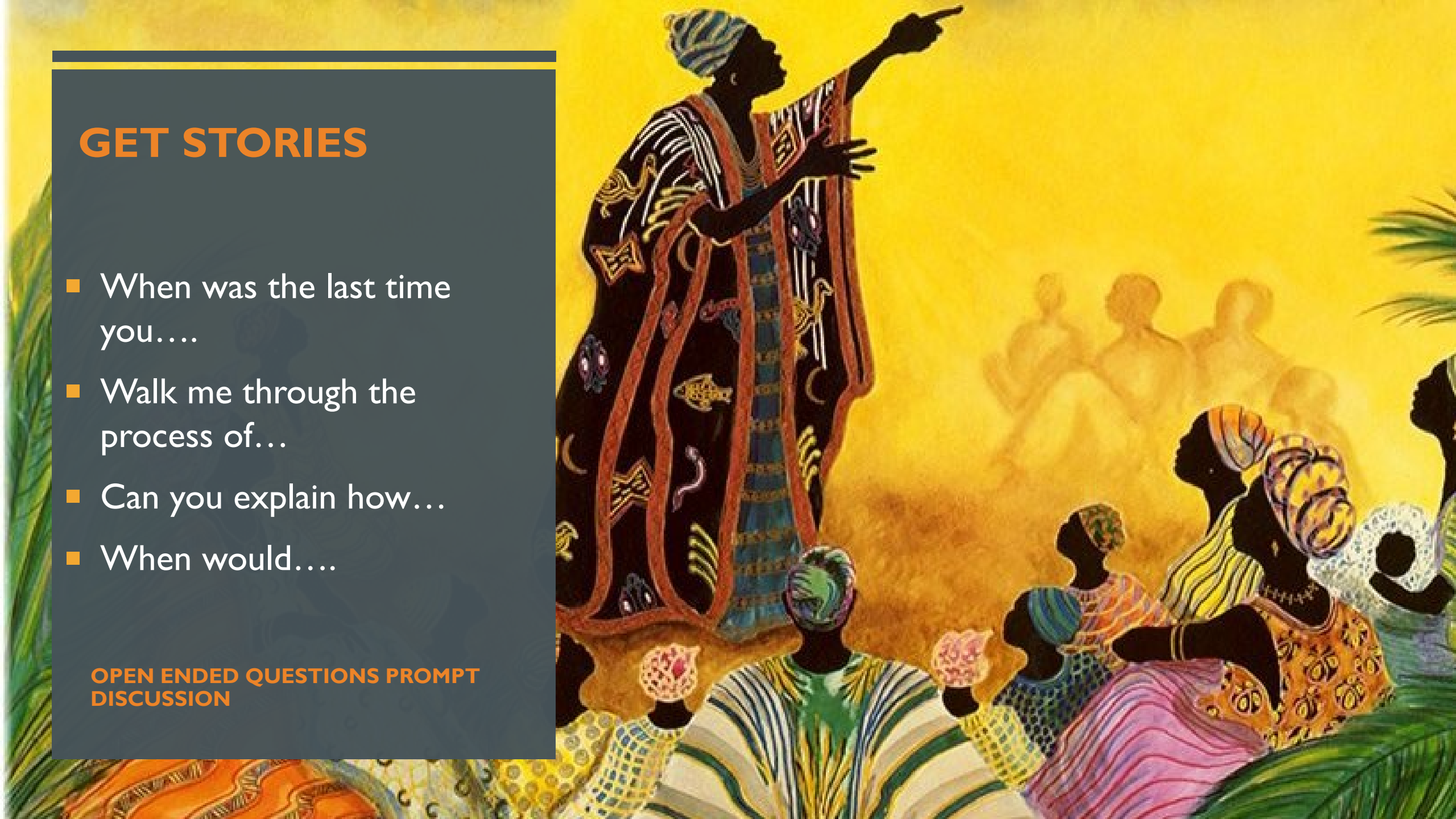
ARE YOU TALKING TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE?

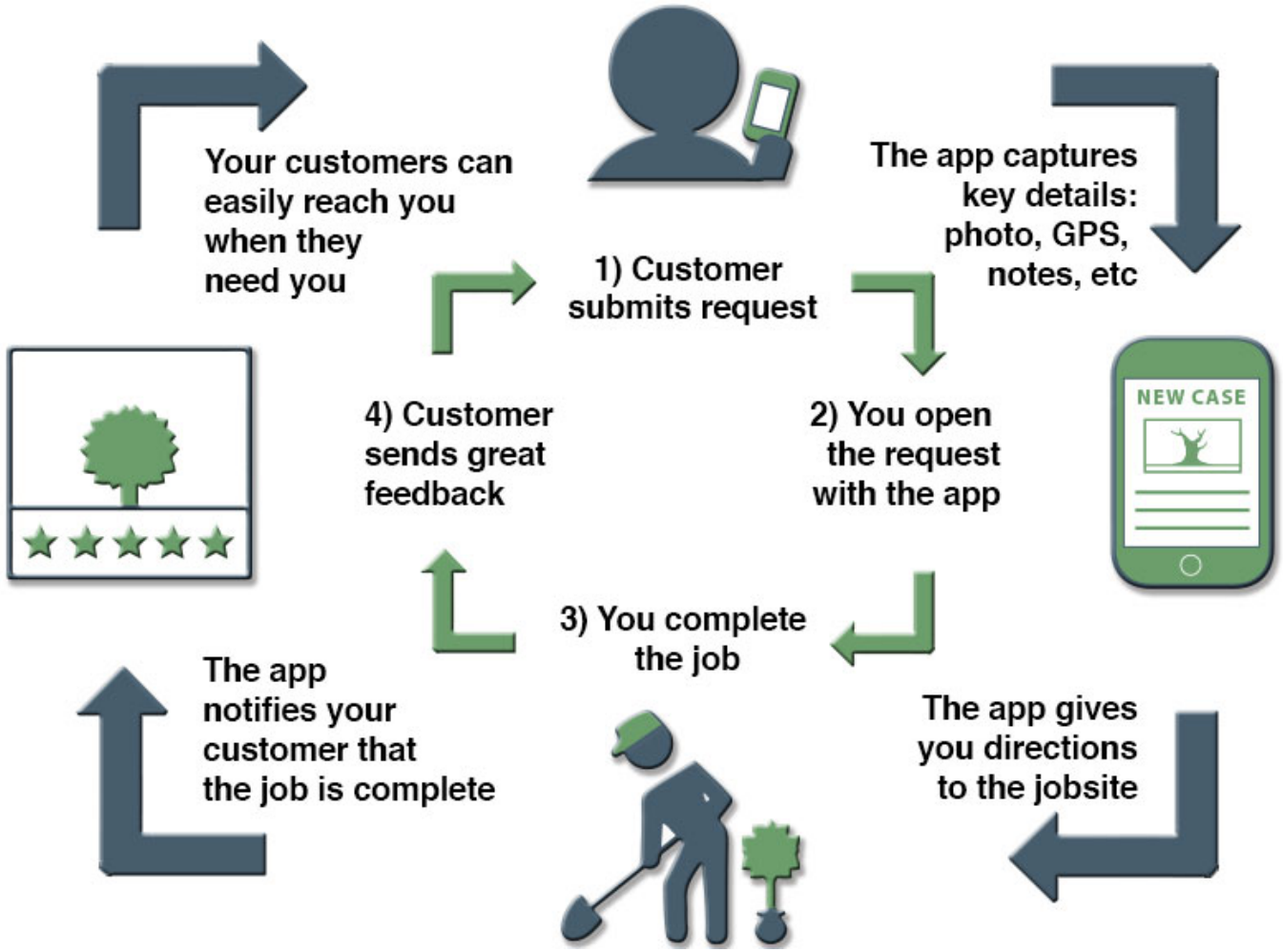
Then create a conversation to help you validate/invalidate the hypotheses/goals

GET STORIES

- When was the last time you….
- Walk me through the process of…
- Can you explain how…
- When would….

OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS PROMPT DISCUSSION





UNDERSTAND THE CUSTOMER JOB

HOW DO THEY SOLVE THE PROBLEM YOU ARE SOLVING TODAY?

WHAT IS THE PAIN WITH THAT SOLUTION?

ARE THEY ACTIVELY LOOKING FOR NEW SOLUTIONS?

ASK WHY - REPEATEDLY

- WHY?
- WHY?
- WHY?
- WHY?
- WHY?


GOOD
QUESTION


BAD QUESTION

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST ISSUE YOU FACE WHEN DEALING WITH PROCESS/ACTIVITY ‘Y’?

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST ISSUE YOU FACE WHEN DEALING WITH PROCESS/ACTIVITY ‘Y’?

Would you buy a product that did ‘X’?

Would you buy a product that did ‘X’?

What are the implications of not solving the problem?

What are the implications of not solving the problem?

How are you dealing with this today?

How are you dealing with this today?

What solutions have you tried?

What solutions have you tried?

What would your dream product do?

What would your dream product do?

(customer jobs)

What would your dream product do?

(customer feature request)

Would you pay “X” for a solution that did “Y”?

Would you pay “X” for a solution that did “Y”?

Where does the money come from to deal with the issue?

Where does the money come from to deal with the issue?

What do you think about this solution?

What do you think about this solution?

What do you think about this solution?

What do you think about this solution?

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

- Ask them to tell a **story** about their **jobs/responsibilities**
- Ask **open-ended** questions
- Drill Down on their **pain points** – **ask why**, repeatedly
- Listen more | Talk Less
- **DO NOT Talk** about your product
- Take notes

CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

(CLOSING THE INTERVIEW)

What else should I have asked about?

Who else should I talk to?

Can I follow up with you later?

Thank them again

LOG YOUR NOTES/INSIGHTS

PROCESSING DATA

PROCESS THE INTERVIEW

REMEMBER: YOUR ARE SIFTING FOR GOLD

THINK ABOUT HOW RESPONSES ARE IMPACTING YOUR LEARNING GOALS

IT IS NOT ABOUT THE QUESTIONS; IT IS ABOUT THE ANSWERS

ANALYZE YOUR DATA

- What did you hear that you never heard before?
- What learning goals/assumptions did they disprove?
- What new people did they tell you about that you were unaware of?

- What will you revise change?
  - New Learning Goals/Assumptions?

CUSTOMER DISCOVERY DO'S

DO

Know your objective before you go

Listen more, Talk less

Ask Open-ended Questions

Ask for referrals

Log your results honestly

Listen more, Talk less

CUSTOMER DISCOVERY DON'TS

DON'T

Sell, pitch, sell, pitch

-you got it?-

Talk About Your **Technology**

Ask them what they ***Want***

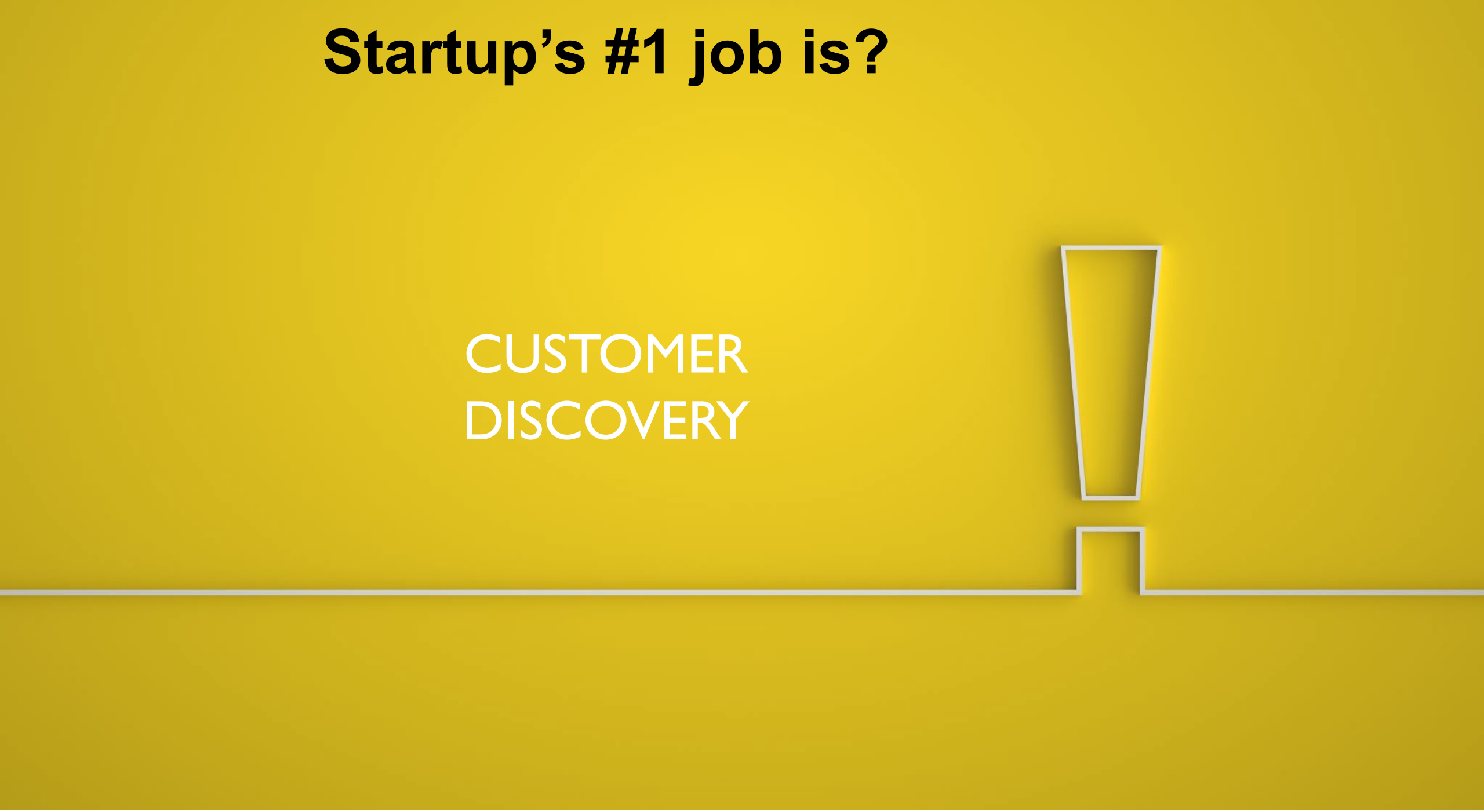
*take **feature** requests*


It's NOT
Rocket
Science
2 x Z-400 Rechargebale Battery
Mass = 20 kg
Capacity = 400 e
2 x OX-STAT Photovoltaic Panel
Mass = 5 kg
Electricity = 0.75 e/s
6 x 60° Liquid Fuel Booster
2-2-2 Asparagus Staging
6 x NCS Adapter incl. Standard NC
Mass = 400 kg
18 x FL-T400 Liquid Fuel Tank
Mass = 250 kg
Liquid Fuel = 180 L
Oxidizer = 220 L
6 x LV-T45 Liquid Fuel Engine
Mass = 1 500 kg
Thrust = 200 000 N
Isp (atm) = 320 s
6 x Hydraulic Detachment Manifold
Mass = 400 kg
Ejection Force = 180 N
Rockomax „Mainsail" Liquid Engine
Mass = 6 000 kg
Thrust = 1 500 000 N
Isp (atm) = 280 s
Isp (vac) = 330 s
6 x 60° AV-R8 Winglet
Mass = 20 kg
Mk16-XL Parachute
Mass = 300 kg
Drag
- Stowed = 0.22
- Semi-Deployed = 1
- Deployed = 500
Mk1-2 Command Pod
Mass = 4 000 kg
Required Crew = 3
„Poodle" Liquid Engine
Isp (vac) = 390 s
15200
4657
(5371)
11500
1657
KERBAL X
The Kerbal X is one of the most successful rockets that can be ordered from a catalog. Despite the original design having been meant for a plastic model, it's proved itself quite dependable as a full-sized craft.
The X is capable of achieving orbit around Kerbin, and even features a very optimistic set of landing legs on its upper stage.
Total Δv (atm) = 5 404 m/s
Total Δv (vac) = 6 826 m/s
Total Mass = 131 390 kg
Part Count = 78

Startup’s #1 job is?

Startup's #1 job is?

CUSTOMER
DISCOVERY



Why Must Startups do Customer Discovery?

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TO BUILD SOMETHING PEOPLE CARE ABOUT

QUESTIONS?