

Teaching Exercises

Mock Interviews

If you are using this book to try to teach customer discovery/development, there is nothing like real-world practice to make learning stick.

Before you send your class out into the world to conduct their own interviews, however, you might try a compact exercise like the following:

Preface: Choose a Topic

Everyone in the class will interview each other based on the same topic, which means it needs to be something most people can relate to. There are two angles you might take:

1. Something that helps the interviewer dig up past behavior.

For example, “Tell me about the last thing you purchased over \$100.” Have the interview subject explain what they bought, what the purchase process was like from desire to actual ownership, how they made their purchase decision, etc.

2. Something that helps the interviewer unlock deeper motivations and desires. For example, “Tell me about your dream car.” Prompt your students not just to get people to describe the car, but to dig into the reasons behind the choice; they can also prompt for whether the interview subject has ever experienced driving the car.

Exercise

Step 1: Intro, 5 minutes

Explain the exercise, the topic that the students will use, and give a few specific suggestions for

questions they might ask. Example questions for the dream car: *when did you fall in love with the car and why? of the reasons you shared, why are these the most important to you? how have you imagined using the car? etc*

Step 2: Interview Plan, 2 minutes

Make sure everyone has paper and pen/pencil. Give your class the topic and let them spend 5 minutes on their own. They should write down no more than 6 questions to ask.

Step 3: Pair Interviews, 5 - 7 minutes each

Pair up your students. One will begin as the interviewer, and their opposite will be interviewed. Give them 7 minutes, and then switch the roles, keeping the pairs unchanged. The new interviewer gets 7 minutes.

The person doing the interviewing should also take notes, which will give them some exposure to doing an interview solo as opposed to bringing a note-taker to help (which is what most people prefer to do when possible).

Step 4: Observations and Questions, 5-10 minutes

Ask the room to share observations, challenges, lessons or questions on what it was like to do a live interview.

Assumptions Exercise

Mock Approaches

Dean Chang, the Associate VP of Entrepreneurship at the University of Maryland, recommends a class exercise where one or more teams of students takes on the role of cold calling an “expert.” The team has to do it over and over until they get it right.

For this exercise, select one team and have them come to the front of the classroom. Their job is to “cold call” a selected member of the teaching team. The teacher will pretend to be an expert in the team’s target field. The team needs to get the expert to take the call, and smoothly transition into asking questions.

The job of the person playing the “expert” is to block the team’s misguided attempts to engage. When the team does something wrong, the expert declines the interview request, or ends the conversation, or gives them a gong. Then the team has to start over again.

Classic mistakes that should trigger the team starting over include long or unclear introductions, pitching the product/technology too soon, implying that the expert has problems and desperately needs help, and/or generally making the expert feel uncomfortable with the line of questioning.

As Dean describes it, “We let the other teams offer critiques and suggest plans of attack for winning over the expert and then the chosen team tries it again. Eventually after being gonged several times in a row, they stop making the same mistakes and start to converge on a good elevator pitch that praises and disarms the expert and paves the way

to entering into an interview. Then we stop the exercise.”

The exercise will probably be humorous and painful at the same time, but there is nothing like stumbling, or watching a team stumble, to realize why best practices are best practices.