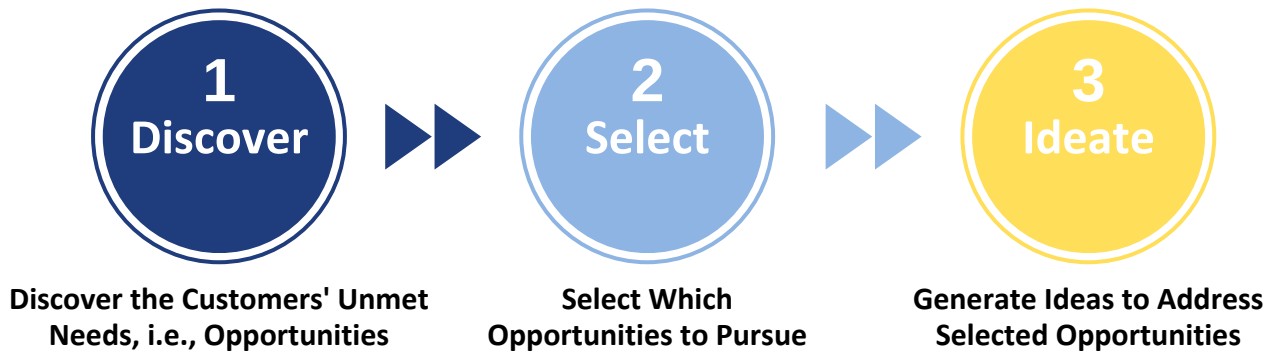


3 STEPS TO CONSISTENTLY FILL YOUR NEW PRODUCT PIPELINE WITH ONLY GOOD IDEAS



It's unusual for any organization to consistently fill their new product pipeline with good ideas, let alone ONLY good ideas. On the contrary, the front end of the pipeline is usually bogged down with a lot of bad ideas. More than a few innovation teams have been terminated because they got overwhelmed trying to evaluate a lot of bad ideas. So, what should you do to consistently fill your pipelines with only good ideas? Is that even possible? Yes, it is possible, but not with conventional thinking.

The #1 cause for new product failure is misunderstanding the target customers' needs. The chief reason why brainstorming doesn't generate more good ideas is because innovation teams do not sufficiently define their target customers' needs or adequately determine which are unmet.

"Unmet" needs are those needs that customers consider to be highly important and poorly satisfied. The more important and less satisfied a need is, the greater the opportunity for innovation and growth it presents. In general, only ideas that address important unsatisfied needs are likely to be successful because only they can create unique value. But because most companies do not define their target customers' needs sufficiently or measure how unmet they are, most of their ideas miss the mark.

"I find out what the world needs. Then I go ahead and try to invent it."

- Thomas A. Edison

This isn't anyone's fault. People have been doing the best they can with the knowledge and tools available. It has been very difficult to identify and record customers' unmet needs in a reliable and actionable format until the advent of the **Jobs-to-Be-Done** (JTBD) innovation approach. But now firms can identify the biggest opportunities in virtually any market, with precision, so teams know where to focus and what to do to consistently create unique value. The key to success is to shift your focus away from generating ideas to helping your target customers get their jobs done better.

3 STEPS TO CONSISTENTLY FILL YOUR NEW PRODUCT PIPELINE WITH ONLY GOOD IDEAS

So, the first step to fill your pipeline with only good ideas is to discover your target customers' unmet needs. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to make readers effective practitioners of the JTBD approach, you can still gain potentially game-changing insights when talking with target customers if you understand three truths:

1. People “hire” products and services to get their jobs done.
2. People can tell us what they want to accomplish and how they measure success.
3. Customer needs are separate and distinct from product or service solutions.

**“People don’t want to buy a ¼” drill;
they want a ¼” hole!”**

- Harvard Business School Professor, Theodore Levitt

All three of these truths are illustrated in Theodore Levitt’s famous quote: “People don’t want to buy a ¼” drill; they want a ¼” hole!” Similarly, people don’t want to buy vitamins; they want to improve their health. And your customers don’t want to buy your product or service either; they want to get their jobs done. They may not know what type of product or service solution will help them get their job done best, but they can tell you what they are trying to accomplish and how they measure success. Then it’s your job to figure out the best product or service solution and features for them.

And notice that, while a “drill” is often the preferred product solution to make a hole, the product solution could be a pick, a punch, a laser, or some still-to-be-invented tool. Regardless, product and service solutions are always separate and distinct from the customers’ true high-level need: to get a job(s) done.

In his highly acclaimed book, **The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People**, Stephen R. Covey taught us that the second habit of highly effective people is to “Begin with the end in mind.” That is, highly effective people determine:

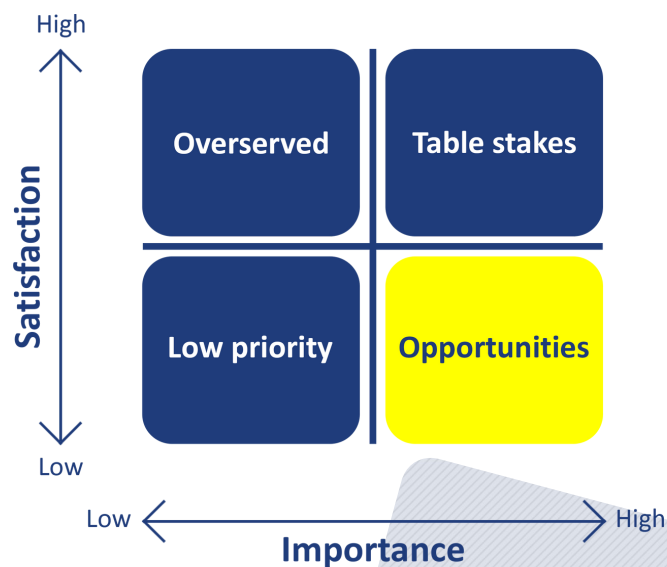
1. The job they want to get done
2. How they will measure success
3. A plan for getting the job done

The same is true for highly effective innovators except, in this case, innovators need to “begin with the *target customers’* end in mind.” And, in order to create unique value for your target customers, you must also determine where they struggle at each step in the process of getting the job done given their current product or service solution. That’s where their unmet needs and your opportunities for innovation and growth lie.

3 STEPS TO CONSISTENTLY FILL YOUR NEW PRODUCT PIPELINE WITH ONLY GOOD IDEAS

The customer need statements you capture should clearly state what your target customers are trying to accomplish and how they measure success at each step along the way. Be sure not to include any reference to current products or services, if possible.

IMPORTANT UNSATISFIED NEEDS ARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW VALUE CREATION



The second step is to select which opportunities to pursue for new value creation. This entails evaluating each opportunity with about 5 common criteria such as strategic fit, relative advantage, time to commercialize, etc., plus maybe one or two more company-specific criteria. Essentially, you want to select those opportunities that you believe your firm can address better than other competitive options and win. Great new products and growth strategies are formulated by addressing unmet market needs with the firm's relative strengths. That's exactly what we're doing here in a systematic fashion.

Now the team is ready for Step 3: generate ideas to address the selected opportunities. Because the team has already discovered the opportunities in the market and determined which to pursue, now they will know where to focus and what to do to create unique value.

If you ever participated in a brainstorming session, then you are undoubtedly familiar with the adage, "there's no such thing as a bad idea." This is not true, of course, but facilitators say it anyway because they know how important it is for everyone to feel safe enough to share their "crazy" ideas. The motivation is good, but this fiction confuses people about what actually constitutes a good idea. It also encourages people to execute innovation "ideas-first" instead of "needs-first" which ensures high failure rates.

3 STEPS TO CONSISTENTLY FILL YOUR NEW PRODUCT PIPELINE WITH ONLY GOOD IDEAS

Contrary to what people say, a "bad" idea – at least in these brainstorming sessions – is any idea that does not address a validated market opportunity that the team has selected to pursue. Conversely, a "good" idea is any idea that addresses a validated market opportunity that the team has selected to pursue. When I facilitate brainstorming sessions now, I still say, "There's no such thing as a bad idea," but now it's true as long as the team is addressing market opportunities that have been validated and thoughtfully selected for pursuit.

Another benefit of doing the first two steps before brainstorming is that the firm is no longer dependent on the random nature of "inspiration" for good ideas. By executing the first two steps before brainstorming, firms are essentially preparing the soil so that good ideas can germinate naturally and predictably. Once the right conditions have been established, generating good ideas is inevitable. A well-defined customer need is the best creativity trigger.

Additionally, because the need statements won't include any solution language (if you're doing this according to JTBD practices), you won't be constrained by any current product and service solutions. That increases the likelihood of generating breakthrough ideas. Some of those ideas may even be for mergers or acquisitions, joint ventures, or simply creating better messaging and positioning.

**"The best way to resolve a problem is
not to solve to it but to eliminate it."**

- Wharton Professor Russell L. Ackoff

It's been said that the best way to resolve a problem is not to solve it but to eliminate it. JTBD eliminates the problem of wasting your precious time on inherently bad ideas – i.e., ideas that address unimportant, already well-satisfied, or phantom needs (needs that customers don't really have).

The JTBD approach enables companies to consistently fill their pipeline with only good ideas, ideas that address big market opportunities that are also a great match for the talents, capabilities, and goals of the firm. Using just a few JTBD best practices, you can do it, too!

3 STEPS TO CONSISTENTLY FILL YOUR NEW PRODUCT PIPELINE WITH ONLY GOOD IDEAS

About Reveal Growth Consultants, Inc.

We work with business-to-business companies to create new and improved offerings that win and avoid making things that nobody wants to buy.

Most people think innovation is inherently risky and messy. That's not surprising when you consider that 60-90% of new products fail.

And yet, study after study has shown that the #1 reason for new product failure is misunderstanding the target customers' needs.

So, in fact, innovation does not need to be risky and messy if you know how to reveal the target customers' unmet needs in a reliable, precise, and actionable format. That's what we do using the **Jobs-to-Be-Done** approach with much more rigor, precision, and reliability than is possible to communicate here.

Consequently, our clients can turn innovation and revenue growth into a repeatable business process that delivers dramatically better results. When you get a clear fix on your target customers' unmet needs, all the customer value creation activities downstream can be executed more effectively, e.g., generating ideas, messaging and positioning, market segmentation, competitive analysis, etc.

You can do it, too! We can guide you through the process as well.

Reveal needs. Create value. Drive growth.



By **Urko Wood**, Founder and Innovation Guide, Reveal Growth Consultants, Inc.
LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/in/urkwood](https://www.linkedin.com/in/urkwood)
Email: uw@revealgrowth.com

To learn more, visit our **website** or schedule a **free 30-minute discovery call** with Urko to talk about your business and explore whether we can help you achieve your goals.