

If you were the owner of a fast food restaurant that sold milkshakes, and your milkshakes weren't selling well, how would you go about improving your milkshakes?

- Would you buy higher quality ingredients?
- Would you survey customers to see what flavors they would like to see on the menu?
- Would you focus on one popular flavor, say chocolate, and make the chocolate shake richer and decadent?

Any one of these innovations might increase sales, but you can't be sure. The success of each innovation relies heavily on luck. It's like throwing out a bunch of seeds and hoping for one of them to take root and grow into something people will buy.

Companies take this hopeful approach to innovation far too often. They waste millions of dollars and often go out of business because they don't know how to innovate. When global executives were recently surveyed by McKinsey, a shocking 94 percent said they were unsatisfied with their innovation performance.

Author Clayton Christensen has studied innovation for over two decades, and he says those who fail to innovate are simply asking the wrong question. Instead of asking, "How can I get more people to buy my product?," they need to ask, "What job are my customers hiring this product to do?"

"As W. Edwards Deming, the father of the quality movement that transformed manufacturing, once said: 'If you do not know how to ask the right question, you discover nothing.'" - Clayton Christensen

"When we buy a product, we essentially "hire" something to get a job done. Some jobs are little ("pass the time while waiting in line"), some are big ("find a more fulfilling career"). Some surface unpredictably ("dress for an out-of-town business meeting after the airline lost my suitcase"), some regularly ("pack a healthy, tasty lunch for my daughter to take to school")" - Clayton Christensen

The "Jobs to be Done" theory essentially states that all products are services that promise a better experience for the person hiring them.

If you have the desire to create an innovative product or improve an existing product in an innovative way, and you want to rely more on creativity and skill, and less on luck, here are three steps to get your product hired:



Find a job that needs to be done. Aim to understand why you, a set of existing customers, or a set of target customers would want to pull your product into their lives.

Don't just focus on the rational reasons like "satisfying hunger." Dig deeper. Focus on the emotional and social reasons people have for wanting to make progress in their lives.

"In many innovations, the focus is often entirely on the functional or practical need. But in reality, consumers' social and emotional needs can far outweigh any functional desires. Think of how you would hire childcare. Yes, the functional dimensions of that job are important—will the solution safely take care of your children in a location and manner that works well in your life—but the social and emotional dimensions probably weigh more heavily on your choice. 'Who will I trust with my children?'" - Clayton Christensen

When looking for a job to be done, think of yourself less as an entrepreneur and more of a psychologist. You want to find out what people care about and determine where they specifically want to make progress in their life.



Document the journey from the moment a customer or potential customer hires the product for a job to the moment the job is complete (or the customer gives up).

You want to be like a documentary filmmaker. Your goal is to find out where, when, and what they are doing at the moment they have the desire to hire your product, and then create a timeline of the experience that follows.

"What progress is that person trying to achieve? What are the circumstances of the struggle? What obstacles are getting in the way of the person making that progress? Are consumers making do with imperfect solutions through some kind of compensating behavior? How would they define what "quality" means for a better solution, and what tradeoffs are they willing to make?" - Clayton Christensen



Remove the obstacles, remedy the frustrations, and create a better experience. The new experience you create must at least be twice as good as their current experience. Why? Because most of us get anxious when hiring something new.

New is often scary. Behavioral economists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky have done several studies to show that "Loss aversion—people's tendency to want to avoid loss (and maintain the status quo)—is twice as powerful psychologically as the allure of gains."

Executing these three steps won't be easy, but it's far easier than the alternative: spending a bunch of time and money on a series of innovations and hoping one of them leads to more sales.

"New products succeed not because of the features and functionality they offer but because of the experiences they enable." - Clayton Christensen