

UNDERSTANDING THE CUSTOMER

The complete framework for knowing who you're selling to, how they buy, and what to do about it this week.

You don't have a sales problem. You don't have a marketing problem. You have a **customer understanding problem.**

FROM HUSTLE TO ENGINE

A Substack Series by Matt Lauro · Fractional CRO

STEP 01

Diagnose the Real Problem

Before changing anything, get honest about where the breakdown actually is. Most founders jump straight to a sales fix or a marketing fix — but the root is almost always upstream.

Ask yourself: If your top salesperson left tomorrow and a smart new hire joined, could they figure out who to sell to, what to say, and why customers choose you — without you in the room? If the answer is no, you have a customer understanding problem.

WARNING SIGNS YOU HAVE THIS PROBLEM

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sales slows and you can't explain why	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Marketing isn't converting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Messaging feels a little off
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deals take longer to close	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Every close still runs through you	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You're guessing what buyers care about

STEP 02

Define the Two Layers

Most companies stop at surface-level: industry, company size, job title. That's your ICP. It's necessary — but not enough. The second layer is the human being inside that company.

LAYER 1 — THE COMPANY

Ideal Customer Profile

- Industry / vertical
- Company size (employees, revenue)
- Geography
- Growth stage
- Tech stack or infrastructure signals

LAYER 2 — THE HUMAN

The Actual Buyer

- What are they responsible for?
- What are they trying to achieve this year?
- What pressure are they under internally?
- What are they afraid of getting wrong?
- What would make them look bad to their boss?

Key insight: People don't buy your product. They buy based on their situation. Your messaging needs to speak to the fear, the pressure, and the outcome — not just the features.

STEP 03

Run the Customer Conversations

Don't guess. Don't survey. Don't look at dashboards. Talk to actual customers — and listen for what you didn't expect to hear.

New Customers

Still close to the buying decision. They remember what almost stopped them and why they said yes.

Long-Term Customers

They can tell you what actually keeps them here — often different from what won the deal.

Customers You Lost

The most honest feedback you'll get. Don't skip this group — it's where the real gaps live.

THE 5 QUESTIONS TO ASK EVERY CUSTOMER

Q
1 How did you find us?

Q
2 Why did you choose us over alternatives?

Q
3 What almost stopped you from moving forward?

Q
4 What keeps you here? (for existing customers)

Q
5 What would you change or improve?

REAL EXAMPLE — STAFFING COMPANY

BEFORE THE CONVERSATIONS

"We deliver fast, high-quality candidates."

What the company assumed buyers cared about



AFTER LISTENING TO CUSTOMERS

"We help you reduce hiring risk and make the right decision the first time."

What customers were actually afraid of: a bad hire, looking bad internally, creating problems for their team

STEP 04

Map the Buying Journey

Your sales process is not your buyer's journey. They might see something on LinkedIn, talk to a peer, visit your site, disappear for three months, and come back when the timing is right. Map their path — not yours.

THE CUSTOMER BUYING JOURNEY



AWARENESS	CONSIDERATION	DECISION	RETENTION
How do they first discover you? Where are you showing up — and where are you invisible?	They're researching. Talking to peers. Comparing options. What do they find when they look?	They're close. What fears are holding them back? What does your conversation need to address?	They chose you. What keeps them? What would make them leave — or refer someone new?
Audit: LinkedIn, referrals, search, content	Audit: Website, reviews, case studies, social proof	Audit: Objections, risk language, decision-maker access	Audit: Onboarding, check-ins, expansion signals

Action: This week's exercise: Map all four stages. For each one, honestly answer: Where are we unclear? Where are we invisible? Where are we actually helping? That alone will unlock a lot.

WHEN YOU FIX THIS

Everything Starts to Click

✓ **MESSAGING IMPROVES**

Because it's grounded in what buyers actually care about — not what you assumed.

✓ **SALES GETS EASIER**

Your team can articulate value clearly and handle objections before they arise.

✓ **MARKETING STARTS TO CONVERT**

You're speaking the buyer's language, at the right moment, in the right channel.

✓ **REVENUE BECOMES PREDICTABLE**

You stop relying on who's in the room and start building a repeatable engine.

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