

## **Step 1: Empathize with the End User**

*What is empathy?* To feel what someone else feels. To walk in another's shoes.

The intention of design thinking is to improve products by developing deeper level understanding of the people who use the product by getting out in the field and learning directly from users, potential users, or even competitors. In order to innovate, you need to be solving a problem or meeting a need. In order to do that, you have to understand the problems and needs of the person you're creating the product for. The goal is to empathize with the actual human beings who your product impacts, which involves understanding their emotions, needs, motivations, and what drives their behavior. It also involves understanding their experience interacting with the product and the problems and obstacles they might face.

The power of empathy is that it allows you to set aside assumptions, biases, and preconceived notions that may limit you and your team's ability to truly fulfill a need or accurately solve a problem. It is impossible to completely let go of our assumptions, so it's important to regularly remind ourselves to assume a beginner's mindset—going into it pretending we know nothing about the user experience. There are 3 ways to gather data about your users in order to develop an empathetic understanding of their experience:

- Immerse and experience what your user experiences
- Observe their behavior and the context and infer what they think and feel
- Engage through interviews

### **IMMERSION**

Nothing helps clarify a problem and therefore bring a solution into focus like understanding the user through first-hand experience. A great example of immersion for the sake of empathizing with the end user is a hospital in Saint Louis who wanted to design a better experience for their emergency room patients. Instead of relying only on brainstorming and ideas generated by people outside of the actual situation of being in the hospital's ER, they had one of their team members become a patient in the emergency room so they could experience the patient experience first hand. The pretend patient recorded the experience through a video tucked discreetly beneath his hospital gown and reported back about the experience. They learned more about the patient experience of their ER than they ever could have relying only on the assumptions of nurses, surgeons, ambulance drivers, or observers.

Design a field study trip for your team members. Step outside of the office, literally getting outside-of-the-box, and design an experience that puts you and your team in your customers' shoes – literally. If you don't have an obvious experience, such as a physical location where your customers experience your product, you may need to manufacture an experience.

Ideas for possible field study trips:

Ideas for possible manufactured experiences:

## **OBSERVATION**

Observing the end user interacting with the product is one way to gain empathy and understanding. The logistics of how you observe your customers will depend on your product, industry, and customers. You can observe them directly or indirectly. When taking notes, always write down only what you actually see, rather than anything you assume. Also remember that the key to successful direct observation is to do it without disturbing the user, which could interfere with their natural behavior.

**Direct observation:** When you have the ability to observe your customers in person, you will need to take notes on what you see. There are 3 key questions to ask yourself, taking notes on each question.

- First is “What?” Record details on how they interact with the product, including any problems they seem to have. Record the facts, both the obvious and surprising.
- Second is “How?” How is the person doing what they’re doing? How are they acting? Are they demonstrating any facial expression or body language? Are they struggling or at ease?
- Last is “Why?” In this case, you have to make an educated guess as to the person’s emotions and motivations for their actions and behaviors.

Ideas for methods of direct observation:

**Indirect observation:** Photos, and ideally videos, can be used to capture experiences and behaviors when in-person observations cannot be made. You can record sessions you observed in person, or even interviews, which we’ll get into next. But, recording users in their natural setting is another way to gather data. The goal is to record them while they’re experiencing the problem you’re trying to solve.

Ideas for methods of indirect observation:

Which method(s) of gathering information about your users and their experiences will work the best for your organization and project?

## **INTERVIEWING**

The following is an interview outline you can follow that's designed to help you develop questions for your interview. Numbers 2, 3 and 4 are the core of the interview and you'll find tips for developing questions for each section.

1. Introduce yourself and the project
2. Build rapport by getting to know your user
3. Evoke stories of their experiences
4. Explore emotions and dig deeper
5. Follow-up and question statements
6. Thank and wrap-up

### **Tips for Building Rapport**

- After introducing yourself and your project, shift the focus to your user.
- Ask how they're doing, and actually listen.
- Share something about yourself.
- Ask probing questions, "Tell me a little bit about (your experience today... how you use... what you think about...)"

### **Tips for Seeking Stories**

You want to encourage them to tell stories about not only what they do when interacting with your product, but also how they think and feel about it.

- "Can you tell me about the first time you...?"
- "What was your best or worst experience with...?"
- "What do you think would surprise me about your experience...?"

### **Tips for Discussing Emotions**

- "Walk me through what you were thinking when you...?"
- "Why do you say that? Tell me more..."
- "How did you feel when \_\_\_\_ happened?"
- "Why is \_\_\_\_ important to you?"

*Attached you will find an interview template, which you can customize.*

## **PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW**

List potential questions to ask, considering all aspects of the topic and what you want to know about the user's experience and needs. This can be brainstormed with your team in advance so your questions will elicit answers that meet your determined goals.

Ideas for interview questions based on what you want to learn?

Select the most important questions and organize them based on the interview outline above. Rewrite the questions as open-ended, conversational questions, that encourage your customer to share.

Building Rapport:

Evoking Stories:

Exploring Emotions:

**INTERVIEW TIPS:**

- Don't suggest answers to your questions.
- Don't be afraid of silence.
- Look for inconsistencies and probe for clarification.
- Be aware of nonverbal cues such as body language, facial expression, tone of voice.
- Probe deeper once the interviewee responds to the initial question, such as "Why do you say that?" or "What were you feeling at that point?" or "What is the reason for that?"

**ENGAGING WITH EXTREME USERS**

By focusing your observation or interviews on users who represent extremes helps non-obvious problems and other situations become easier to identify. The goal isn't to develop solutions for the extreme users, as they may not represent the majority of users, the goal is to help identify problems that mainstream users may have difficulty expressing. For example, if your goal with your product was to help people get in shape through jogging, it may be useful to interview or observe people who love jogging on one extreme and hate it on the other.

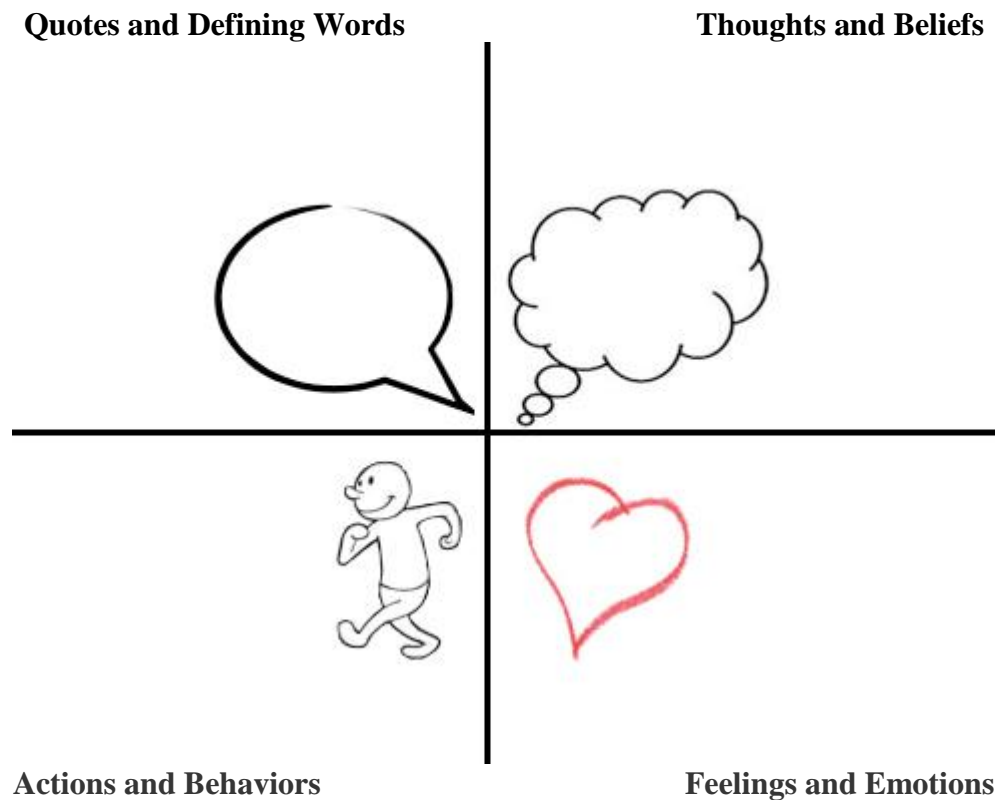
What are potential extreme types of users you could observe or interview?

What might what you learn from these extremes show you about mainstream users?

## ANALYZING COLLECTED DATA

After immersion, observation, or interviews, each person in your team needs to report back to the team and each user that's been empathized with needs to be discussed. By putting together all information that has been gathered, patterns will begin to emerge.

A great method for analyzing the data collected is to use **story mapping**.



How to use this process with your team:

- Use a large vertical area, such as a wall, and label 4 quadrants with the above labels.
- Give post-it notes (which will be posted in the quadrants) and sharpies to all team members.
- Have each team member share their notes from their interactions with users, specifically sharing stories and emotional observations. Everyone in the group should be standing, giving them easy access to post notes.
- As everyone listens to the stories, anyone can write down a key words, thoughts, beliefs, actions, or emotions that stand out and post them in the appropriate quadrant.
- While one team member is sharing, the rest of the group should pay special attention to anything said that evokes an “aha” moment or a “whoa, what?” moment. Questions should be asked of the person sharing the story to dig deeper, similarly to how interviewers probe with the users.

Examples of a simple story mapping session:

