




BUYER-APPROVED DISCOVERY BLUEPRINT

**AVOID WASTED TIME AND ANNOYED BUYERS BY
SPARKING DEEP DISCUSSIONS IN 7 MINUTES OR LESS.**

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Quick Word from Kyle



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One of my priorities at LaunchDarkly is to improve my organization's discovery conversion rate.

To help move this priority forward, I spent several hours working with our enablement, marketing, and operations teams to create a "First Meeting Deck" to drive meaningful, value-based conversations early in the sales process.

This exercise made me consider how discovery can be taught and executed at scale.

This guide will walk you through the outcomes (and example questions) that will help you quickly engage in deep discovery so you don't waste your buyer's time dancing around surface-level conversation.

We'll start with **point-of-view** and **priorities**.

Point-of-view

Point-of-view

When discovery begins, the buyer's immediate bias is,
"The seller doesn't understand me or my business."

Without overcoming that bias, your buyer is unlikely to open up.

My immediate priority is to overcome that bias by sharing what I've learned about them in a quick summary:

COMPANY OBJECTIVES

Company focus areas my research surfaced (public reports, recent news, industry trends, etc.)

TEAM OBJECTIVES

Team-level focus areas that my research surfaced (LinkedIn profiles, job descriptions, tools used, etc.)

It might sound like this:

"I wanted to validate my research with you and then isolate your priorities. If your priorities align with anything we can help with, I'd love to discuss how you are working towards those priorities today.

The goal would be to end the call with a general understanding of if/how we could help you, and you can let me know if it's worth further conversation."

Then, I'd take 2-3 minutes to highlight what I've learned for those categories.

This shouldn't be a lecture. Just enough to show that I've come prepared to have a meaningful conversation and overcome the initial bias of "this seller doesn't know a thing about me."

Priorities

Priorities

Every business has many problems, most of which go ignored. If you tie your deal to an "ignorable" problem, you'll run long sales cycles that often end with you being ignored and the problem neglected in favor of more painful issues.

I want to quickly narrow the conversation to the buyer's most meaningful priorities to avoid this outcome.

I might ask:

"What did I get wrong or miss from my research?"

"How would you stack rank these priorities?"

If these two steps are done right, we are only a few minutes into the discovery, and we've earned (some) credibility while getting a customer-validated priority list ranked in order of importance.

If you can't help solve one of their top priorities, it's a great time to end the conversation so you can spend time with customers prioritizing a problem you solve.

If your solution can help solve one of those top priorities, we have something worth further discovery.

If you'd like a slide template for what this could look like, go here:

[Point-of-View Template](#)

Now that we have validated priorities, we can go deeper into how they solve them and uncover gaps.

We'll do that by understanding the prospect's **current state** and **blockers**.

Current State

Current State

A common mistake is understanding the current state too broadly. Technically, the current state *could* include everything your buyer spends their time on.

But you don't care about how they spend all of their time. You only care about how they spend their time working on a priority that you might support.

You already know their top priorities if you successfully execute part one of discovery. And, you've isolated the priorities that your solution addresses. So we can get right into their relevant current state with a question like this:

"Now that we've established [priority], I'd like to understand better how you are addressing it today. Can you walk me through your current process?"

Make sure to thoroughly understand their current state. Ask clarifying questions and dig deeper using follow-ups like:

"Can you tell me more about..."

"I want to be sure I understand - can you further explain..."

"That sounded like a big part of your process. Can you go deeper into..."

If all goes well, we are only a few minutes into a discovery call, and you understand how they currently solve the problems you solve.

You'll find this much better than asking, *"Can you tell me about your role?"* and having them list irrelevant tasks while you pretend to care.

Blockers

Blockers

After you understand their current state (which will likely require follow-up questions and clarifying questions), it's time to uncover **blockers**.

Sometimes, the prospect will clearly label problems with their current state that you can investigate with clarifying questions. Sometimes, you need to dig a bit to uncover problems.

If you need to dig tactfully, here's a sample question:

"Thanks for helping me understand how you solve for [priority] today! You've got a great handle on things - where do you feel the most friction is in the process?"

If you can be more direct (based on their openness), you could ask:

"Where are you seeing challenges in this process?"

By now, you are likely somewhere between 10 and 20 minutes into the conversation. You know their priorities, how they try to solve them, and where they get stuck.

Now, we need to translate blockers into **negative consequences** worth solving with money.

Negative Consequences

Negative Consequences

Sellers often mistake a negative current state for a negative consequence:

"They have siloed data."

"The app frequently crashes."

"Teams are wasting time on manual work."

These are all descriptions of what's happening (current state). Just because they are negative definitions doesn't make them negative consequences—negative consequences tell us why the current state matters.

"They have siloed data" -> "They can't make decisions fast enough to capture market share when the market shifts"

"The app frequently crashes" -> "They are losing users to their competition"

"Teams are wasting time on manual work" -> "Launch deadlines are missed because engineering capacity is wasted on non-differentiating work"

Put differently, **negative consequences** answer the "so what" of the **current state**.

Note—you can ALWAYS ask more "so what's." Because you can doesn't mean you should. If you get to the point where you are asking, "So if the app keeps crashing, you lose customers to the competition, and the CTO decides to fire you—so what? What's the impact?" you've gone too far.

We'll soon talk more about quantifying and deepening negative consequences to help you find this balance.

While it's possible to go too far with negative consequences, it's much more common to not go far enough.

Here is how I recommend uncovering negative consequences after you've pulled out priorities, current state, and blockers:

"You mentioned [blocker] - have you measured the impact on your [priority]?"

Notice how you can't do this stage of discovery without first successfully executing the earlier phases. You need to know current state, blockers, and priorities so that the negative consequences you uncover will be annoyances your customer is unlikely to address.

Then, a follow-up question to help you better understand the breadth of the negative consequence:

"Who else across the organization is impacted by [negative consequence]?"

If all goes to plan, and you've successfully executed the first steps outlined in this email series, you now know:

- Priorities
- Current State
- Blockers
- Negative Consequences
- Who else should be involved in the deal

Not bad for an initial discovery call.

Now, we need to understand where your prospect wants to go.

After State

After State

After state is part uncovering, part educating. Remember that your buyers aren't experts in your space - their imagination of a great solution is usually basic. And if they imagine a basic solution is the best fit, you'll end up competing on price with your most basic competitors.

I like to transition to this part of discovery by sharing "the art of the possible," ideally through relevant customer stories. Before asking, "What do you want your process to look like?" I want the customer to start thinking bigger.

I also want them to be confident that I have a point of view on how to help them. You don't want your buyer to feel like they have to figure out the solution on their own—the minute they feel like you can't help guide them to an optimal solution, they will stop agreeing to meet with you.

Here's a question I like to ask to start uncovering the buyer's goal after state after sharing a quick customer story:

"I'm happy to share more examples of how others have solved for [negative consequence]. Before I jump into that, I'd love to learn what you think your process would look like if you eliminated [negative consequence]."

As they share, be sure to clarify and take the opportunity to use your knowledge to build on their ideal current state.

Then, you could ask:

"What operational changes would you need to make to reach that goal state?"

Two simple questions made more impactful by the customer story you'll share to open up the conversation.

Done well, you'll leave this part of discovery:

- Influencing their desired after state
- Understanding their desired after state
- Defining the gap between current state and after state

All that's left to finish a great discovery is understanding how we'll measure success.

Positive Business Outcomes

Positive Business Outcomes

Like current state/negative consequences, after state is often confused for positive business outcomes.

I like to imagine a conversation with a CFO:

Champion: "I want to buy software."

CFO: "What will it accomplish?"

Champion: "Automated processes!"

CFO: "So what?"

Positive business outcomes are the "so what" of the goal after state.

Put another way, positive business outcomes are how you know the after-state was successfully achieved.

Here's the question I'd ask to define positive business outcomes after we aligned on after state:

"Our customers measure success differently based on their priorities. How would you determine you successfully reached [after state]?"

Keep in mind that they may not have an exact metric. We aren't necessarily looking for, "I'd like to increase average customer spend by 13% by improving NPS by 15." That level of metric definition often comes later in the sales process.

However, knowing the goal is to increase customer spending as a byproduct of improved NPS is a much stronger positive business outcome than "improve customer experience," which is better suited as an after state.

That's a wrap for this introduction to discovery framework!

Most sellers finish discovery with a superficial understanding of how buyers spend their time.

Successful implementation of this framework will lead to finishing discovery understanding:

Priorities

- How they solve priorities
- Where they are getting stuck
- Why getting stuck is hurting their business
- What an improved situation looks like (and how you get them there)
- How they'll measure the success of your solution (critical to earning investment)

Not bad for the first one or two meetings.

Happy selling, and a shameless plug:

If you liked this, you'll love how I break down the entire sales process in my AE Frameworks available here: hitmyquota.com