

# TALKING TO HUMANS

Success starts with understanding  
your customers

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**GIFF CONSTABLE**

with Frank Rimalovski  
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and foreword by Steve Blank

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collaboration and support in the creation of Talking to Humans*

# Acclaim for *Talking to Humans*

“If you are teaching entrepreneurship or running a startup accelerator, you need to make it required reading for your students and teams. I have.”

**Steve Blank, entrepreneur, educator and author of  
*Four Steps to the Epiphany* and *The Startup Owner's Manual***

“If entrepreneurship 101 is talking to customers, this is the syllabus. *Talking to Humans* is a thoughtful guide to the customer informed product development that lies at the foundation of successful start-ups.”

**Phin Barnes, Partner, First Round Capital**

“Getting started on your Customer Discovery journey is the most important step to becoming a successful entrepreneur and reading *Talking To Humans* is the smartest first step to finding and solving real problems for paying customers.”

**Andre Marquis, Executive Director, Lester Center for Entrepreneurship  
University of California Berkeley**

“A lot of entrepreneurs pay lip service to talking to customers but you have to know how. *Talking to Humans* offers concrete examples on how to how to recruit candidates, how to conduct interviews, and how to prioritize learning from customers more through listening versus talking.”

**Ash Maurya, Founder Spark59 and Author of *Running Lean***

“This is a great how-to guide for entrepreneurs that provides practical guidance and examples on one of the most important and often under practiced requirements of building a great startup—getting out of the office, talking directly with customers and partners, and beginning the critical process of building a community.”

**David Aronoff, General Partner, Flybridge Capital**

“Giff has been one of the thought leaders in the lean startup movement from the very beginning. Entrepreneurs in all industries will find *Talking to Humans* practical, insightful, and incredibly useful.”

**Patrick Vlaskovits, New York Times bestselling author of *The Lean Entrepreneur***

“Current and future customers are the best source of feedback and insight for your new product ideas. Talking to them is intimidating and seemingly time-consuming. In this focused, practical, down-to-earth book Giff Constable demystifies the art (not science) of customer discovery helping entrepreneurs and product veterans alike learn how to build a continuous conversation with their market and ensure the best chances of success for their ideas. Want to know what your audience is thinking? Read this book!”

**Jeff Gothelf, author of *LeanUX***

“When getting ‘out of the building,’ too many people crash and burn right out of the gate and wonder what happened. *Talking to Humans* is a quick and effective guide for how Lean Startup interviews should be done: who to talk to, how to talk your way in the door, and how to gain the most insight and learning. Don’t crash and burn – read *Talking to Humans*!”

**Dean Chang, Associate Vice President for Innovation & Entrepreneurship  
University of Maryland**

“A must read for anyone who is considering creating a startup, developing a new product or starting a new division. Read this book first – a great guide to the evolving art of customer discovery. Don’t waste your time building products that your customer may or may not want. Before you write the first line of code, pitch your idea to investors or build the first prototype, do your self a favor, read this book and follow the advice! I guarantee you will make better decisions, build a better product and have a more successful company.”

**John Burke, Partner, True Ventures**

“Primary market research has been around for a long time because it has stood the test of time and proved that it is fundamental to building a successful venture; it underlies all that we do at MIT in entrepreneurship. The question is how we more broadly deployed appropriate skills to

entrepreneurs so they can be guided to do this in an efficient and effective manner while maintaining rigor. With all the sloganeering out there on the topic, this book stands out in that it delivers real value to the practitioner in this regard.”

**Bill Aulet, Managing Director, Martin Trust Center for MIT Entrepreneurship**

“Talking to strangers can be scary, but it’s vital to launching any new product. Through storytelling, Giff Constable makes customer development concepts accessible. This book will show you how to articulate assumptions, get useful information and turn it into meaningful insights. Then it delivers practical advice you can use immediately to test your ideas. Fear holds people back. This book will give you the confidence to jump.”

**Andres Glusman, Chief Strategy Officer, Meetup.com**

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# Foreword

“Get out of the building!” That’s been the key lesson in building startups since I first started teaching customer development and the Lean Launchpad curriculum in 2002. Since then, a lot has happened.

The concepts I first outlined in my book *The Four Steps to the Epiphany* have grown into an international movement: The Lean Startup. The class I developed - The Lean Launchpad - is now taught at Stanford, UC Berkeley, Columbia University, UCSF, and most recently New York University (NYU). More than 200 college and university faculty have taken my Lean Launchpad Educators Seminar, and have gone on to teach the curriculum at hundreds of universities around the globe. The National Science Foundation, and now the National Institute of Health, use it to commercialize scientific research as part of their Innovation Corps (I-Corps) program. My *How to Build a Startup* class on Udacity has been viewed by over 225,000 students worldwide. During the past few years, we’ve seen dozens of large companies including General Electric, Qualcomm and Intuit begin to adopt the lean startup methodology.

The Lean Startup turns the decades-old formula of writing a business plan, pitching it to investors, assembling a team, and launching and selling a product on its head. While terms like “pivot” and “minimum viable product” have become widely used, they are not understood by many. The same can be said of “getting out of the building”. Many entrepreneurs “get out” and get in front of customers, but take a simplistic view and ask their customers what they want, or if they would buy their startup’s (half-baked) product. The “getting out” part is easy. It is the application of the customer



development methodology and the testing of their hypotheses with users, customers and partners that is both critical and often difficult for entrepreneurs to grasp in the search for a scalable and repeatable business model.

Since the Four Steps, many other books have been written on customer development including *The Startup Owner's Manual*, *Business Model Generation*, *The Lean Startup*, and others. Each of these texts has advanced our understanding of the customer development methodology in one way or another, teaching aspiring students and entrepreneurs the what, when and why we should get out of the building, but have only skimmed the surface on “how” to get out of the building.

For both my own classes as well as I-Corps, I always made Giff Constable's blog post “12 Tips for Early Customer Development Interviews” required reading. It answered the “how” question as well. Now Giff has turned those 12 tips into an entire book of great advice.

In a comprehensive, yet concise and accessible manner, *Talking to Humans* teaches you how to get out of the building. It guides students and entrepreneurs through the critical elements: how to find interview candidates, structure and conduct effective interviews and synthesize your learning. Giff provides ample anecdotes as well as useful strategies, tactics and best practices to help you hit the ground running in your customer discovery interviews.

If you are a student, aspiring entrepreneur or product manager trying to bring the value of getting out of the building to an existing company, *Talking to Humans* is a must read. It is chock full of lessons learned and actionable advice that will enable you to make the most of your time out of the building.

*Talking to Humans* is the perfect complement to the existing

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body of work on customer development. If you are teaching entrepreneurship or running a startup accelerator, you need to make it required reading for your students and teams. I have.

Steve Blank

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