

An [article by John Doerr](#) had a great quote from technology luminary Alan Kay that every entrepreneur needs to remember “**The best way to predict the future is to invent it.**”

I'm working with a company that at one point had a product that was not only best in class, but also technically far ahead of its competition. It created a better way of offering its service and customers loved it and paid for it. Then it made a fatal mistake. It asked its customers what features they wanted to see in the product and they delivered on those features. Unfortunately for this company, its competitors didn't ask customers what they wanted. Instead, they had a vision of ways that business could be done differently and as a result better. Customers didn't really see the value or need, until they saw the product. When they tried it, they loved it.

So what did my company do when they saw what their competitor had done ? They repeated their mistake and once again asked their customers what they wanted in the product. Of course the customer responded with features that they now loved from the other product.

They didn't improve their competitive positioning. They put themselves in a never ending revolving door of trying to respond to customer requests. To make matters worse, resources and brainpower that could be applied to “inventing the future” were instead being used to catch up with features that locked them into the past.

Entrepreneurs always need to be reminded that its not the job of their customers to know what they don't know. In other words, your customers have a tough enough time doing their jobs. They don't spend time trying to reinvent their industries or how their jobs are performed. Sure, every now and then you come across an exception. But you can't bet the company on your finding that person at one of your customers.

Instead, part of every entrepreneurs job is to invent the future. I also call it “kicking your own ass”. Someone is out there looking to put you out of business. Someone is always out there who thinks they have a better idea than you have. A better solution than you have. A better or more efficient product than you have. If there is someone out there who can “kick your ass” by doing it better, its part of your job as the owner of the company to stay ahead of them and “kick your own ass” before someone else does.

Your customers can tell you the things that are broken and how they want to be made happen. Listen to them. Make them happy. But they won't create the future roadmap for your product or service. That's your job.

The best way to predict the future is to invent it. Words that should always be part of your product or service planning.