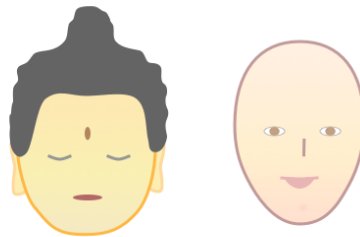


@kush\_apoorva

# BUD HA to Bezos



The Timeless Principles of  
Hyper Adopted Products

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction: Buddha to Bezos

*The Timeless Patterns of Thinking About Problems*



**In 498 BC**, Siddhartha entered a crowded space of ideas. There were hundreds of competing schools of thought that helped people navigate life.

His initial concept - the MVP if you will, was titled “4 Noble Truths”. It had four simple, easy to understand statements. That’s it.

It was an overnight success, and it attracted a quick following. But he did not stop there. Over the next 45 years, he created hundreds of novel ideas that resonated with people for 2 millennia.

In 1985, Microsoft launched Windows - a software that put a personal computer on every table. But they did not stop. 4 years later, they launched Word, which would go on to become the world’s dominant word processing software for decades to come.

In 2015, November the 19th, Square filed for an IPO that valued it for 3 Billion dollars. Jack

Dorsey, the CEO, had co-founded Twitter, another unicorn, 9 years ago.

Larry and Sergei not only invented PageRank, but they also built a product factory that helped build Gmail, Chrome, and Android.

A lot of times, we take these success stories, and tell ourselves - they got lucky, they were already rich, they had the brand, they had Wozniak. All true. But it is interesting that they managed to create great products over and over again.

You cannot deny that repeated success smells of a pattern.

My question is:

Is there any common pattern in the way the greatest makers think.

To answer that, I have been studying the stories of common products we see around ourselves for over 4 years. Then, instead of asking “why people use these products consistently”, I ask, “what were the makers thinking”. If you can find a common pattern in the thinking of the makers of the greatest products throughout history, there may be an answer.

This is not limited to the absolute outliers. From Buddha to Bezos, from Atlassian to Basecamp, from Jobs to Musk and from ProductHunt to Segment.com, the world is full of creators who have achieved success repeatedly. And they

have talked about their thinking processes via books, blogs, podcasts, videos, shareholder letters, and more.

I have been digging into the publicly available material - anything I could find, that contained first-hand knowledge on how these makers thought. Specifically, I wanted to know if there is any common element at all, in the way Bezos built Amazon, and in the way Steve Jobs built Apple, and in the way Siddhartha created Buddhism.

This approach is not subject to Survivorship Bias, because I am not trying to look at actions, or strategies, which are narrow and are subject to change as the environment changes. I was trying to look at their methods of thinking, which



allowed them to decide the strategies, no matter what the environment was.

So, is there a pattern?

## Unit 1.1

# Jeff Bezos

*“What Does Not Change?”*



**My favorite** Bezos quote is this: "You can build a business strategy around the things that are stable in time."

The complete statement is here:

“

*I very frequently get the question: 'What's going to change in the next 10 years?' ... I almost never get the question: 'What's not going to change in the next 10 years?' ... second question is actually the more important of the two -- because you can build a business strategy around the things that are stable in time.*

## **Jeff Bezos**

Notice how timelessness or immutability seems pretty central to this. Bezos wants to think about things that do NOT change a lot.

Let us dwell on that for a moment. What kinds of things do not change? Possibly, fundamental things. For example, people will always want to

be happy and avoid pain. This is so static that you can build a religion around this.

And what kind of things change very slightly? Still essential, but less fundamental than happiness. Like wanting to buy things at a low cost. Staying in touch with people we care for. Staying healthy. Eating well. These are the things that iconic companies either build on (like Amazon) or associate with (like Nike).

In every activity we do, some fundamentals do not change.

This is possible because there are many sources of these fundamental needs. You can get unhealthy by eating lousy food, catching an infection, or falling off a moving car. For all these

activities, the most used products associate themselves with these basic needs.

For higher-order activities, it becomes harder, but not impossible to discover the basic needs. If you are building an enterprise sales software, you help users overcome the fear of missing targets. Within that, if you are in the subcategory of data enrichment, you help your users get to know their prospects before they talk, thereby increasing the odds of success.

The most fundamental building blocks of any idea are called First Principles.

**First Principles**, as a concept, was first popularised by Aristotle.

In the 17th century, modern philosophers adopted and expanded it further.

In the 18th century, it became the centerpiece of Scientific Thought.

In the 21st century, it is entering the mainstream business, specifically tech Startups.

"You know, the sort of first principles reasoning .. boil things down to their fundamental truths .. as opposed to reasoning by analogy." - Elon Musk

Find value in unexpected places... by thinking about business from first principles instead of formulas. - Peter Thiel in Zero to One

Never pay attention to anything by the 'experts.'

- Richard Feynman

First Principles are very fundamental, axiomatic arguments. Statements like "People want to be happy," which cannot be broken down further.

Other examples are:

"People want to emulate the greatest" - **Apple, The 1984 Ad**

"People want to buy things at low cost, reliably"  
- **Amazon**

"Developers want to scale their infrastructure fast, reliably" - **AWS**

"Researchers want highest-quality information" -  
**Google**

"People want to know what their friends are up  
to" - **Facebook**

The best product thinkers can make most of their decisions with First Principles. Yes, even the most tactical ones like which features should go into the next sprint.

Steve Jobs famously removed 90% of the ideas from the roadmap, when he took over Apple the second time. His decisions were driven, at the base, by what Apple stood for - who it was.

ProductHunt launched the first version of its product Ship with umpteen number of bugs. I



know because I used an early version to feature my project twice, on the upcoming page, while I only paid for it once. They fixed it soon after and my hack did not work just 3 weeks later. How did they decide which bugs were worth, not critical in the first release?

## Unit 1.2

# The Buddha

*“What Everyone Wants?”*

**Siddhartha** trained hard in methods of Meditation and Yoga at a time when there were hundreds of “frameworks” in his domain. There were many experts on meditation and yoga. Every expert had their own way of trying to achieve “God” or “the Truth” or something equally lofty.

Siddhartha was a skeptic. Soon he started to question not just the methods, but the very reason these methods existed.

Siddhartha asked - “why do we do this?” instead of asking “how to do it better.” It took him many years, but he finally asked a simple question that changed everything.

His question was - “what do people want, have always wanted, and will always want?” In other words, what is that unchanging, static problem I need to solve?

And the answer was simple.

People just wanted to be happy.

His very first lecture was about the 4 Noble truths, which claim that it is possible to be truly happy.

That's it. That was the MVP.

Talk about shipping fast.

Siddhartha, for our purposes, ended up creating a great, slowly adopted product. And he did that by finding a timeless need for his target market - the humanity.

The methods of extracting First Principles for any thought process is the subject matter of a branch of Philosophy called Logic. Fortunately for us, this topic has been explored in-depth by scholars like Aristotle, Rene Descartes, Bertrand

Russell, and the others. We will go through these processes, and pull out just two tools and try to master them.

The best part is this.

The philosophers are in agreement with the most significant product thinkers of our time as well. So we will keep reaching out to Paul Graham, Nir Eyal, Steve Blank, and Shreyas Doshi, amongst many more.

**The next part of this sample is from**

**Chapter 5:**

**Art of Story Listening - How to  
Discover What for Customers Want.**

## Unit 5.1

# What Customers Need

*The Science of Emotions in Product Design*

**Clayton Christensen** of Harvard Business School spent most of his career figuring out how to model the needs of the customers. His book, *The Innovator's Dilemma* sold more than a million copies worldwide.

The core of the book is a framework called Jobs To Be Done - which, oversimplified, means that customers hire your product to do a job.

Due to its simple name, it is perhaps the most widely misunderstood business concept of all time. We read that one sentence and say “Ha - got it”.

Here is a [great article](#) by Christenson himself, dispelling many myths. In this article, Christenson shares the story of a friend who helped a construction company sell condominiums to couples and families.

The friend, Bob Moesta, found that the company had been able to get many visitors to view the condos - their product. They had conducted



customer research in the form of focus groups. They were still not able to convert enough sales. Their conclusions from the research “add bay facing windows” seemed to fall flat on its face.

Moesta soon found the culprit - the dining tables!

“People kept saying, ‘As soon as I figured out what to do with my dining room table, then I was free to move,’” said Moesta. This was really strange because the condos were priced at 120,000 to 200,000 dollars. And the dining tables, their nemesis, were old and worn out - suitable to be thrown away.

Moesta finally found the answer when he sat at his family dining table on Christmas. It was the

anxiety - the idea of letting go of a home that had so many memories associated with it. The Dining Tables seemed to personify that idea of the home because all the memorable events were done around it.

When people thought about moving into the swanky 150,000 dollar condo, they were making a big change to their lives. They were also leaving behind a part of themselves. It's that sense of loss (remember Loss Aversion bias) that made them delay or cancel the purchase.

A Job to be done is not a transaction, like moving into a new house. It usually has a strong emotional aspect, like leaving behind old memories.

**The HXC model** created by Julie Supan bears a strong resemblance to the ideas of Clayton Christenson in one aspect - focusing on the emotion.

“We sold the emotion,” she says, talking about her experience at Youtube. Her method prioritised cute cat videos over serious learning content. The same method of finding the right emotion eventually helped her find the High Expectation Customers for AirBNB and Dropbox.

For example, “The typical AirBNB customer was not the one who wanted to travel to a new place,

but someone who really wanted to belong.” It was a very specific emotion that no hotel chain in the world could offer nearly as well as AirBNB.

High Expectation Customers are those who have the highest motivation to solve the problem.

Before going any further I want to make one very important comparison. The idea of finding a problem worth solving is not new. It has been used by salespeople long before the internet was invented.

Consequently, a lot about Problem Discovery can be learned by simply looking at some of the greatest sales techniques people have ever invented.



The image shows a screenshot of a Twitter thread. The top tweet is from **utkarsh apoorva** (@kush\_apoorva), posted at 8:58 AM on Aug 13, 2020, via Buffer. The text of the tweet reads: "Product Discovery (and customer interview) is a Sales process. #prodmgmt". Below the tweet text is a grey bar with the text "View Tweet activity" and a vertical bar icon. Underneath that, it says "1 Retweet". The interaction icons for the tweet are: a speech bubble, a retweet icon, a heart icon, and a share icon. The bottom tweet is a reply from **Neeraj Mathur** (@neeraj), posted 6 hours ago. The text of the reply reads: "Replying to @kush\_apoorva and @McKenzyGermain Oooh! Please say more." The interaction icons for the reply are: a speech bubble, a retweet icon, a heart icon, and a share icon.

That entire body of knowledge has stayed out of the world of product development. One reason is our extreme focus on design.

The greatest product thinkers of our times have leaned towards design. But the real problem exists in problem discovery, which is closer to sales than design.

Some aspects of sales have made their way slowly inwards, especially as product managers are becoming more aware of problem discovery. For example, conversational selling became customer interviews.

I am trying to open the gates today.

## Unit 5.2

# Best Books on Customer Interviews

*Customer Interviews = Sales Conversations - Selling*

In his seminal book **Secrets of Closing the Sale**, Zig Zigler refers to Empathy as one of the greatest tools to close a sale. He calls it the Big E of Selling.

In order for the salesperson to get there, he advises them to “Listen. Really Listen.”

Zigler's books have been read by over 250 Million people all over the world in the last 45 years. In his books, a significant part of the selling process depends upon listening to the customer and developing empathy for them.

Brian Tracy says "Every decision is emotional" in his book, **The Psychology of Selling**. Tracy goes on to explain that the seasoned salespeople know that the customers are not interested in their products, but how the product will improve their own lives.

Based on this, the seasoned salespeople talk about how customer's "present situation" improves because of the product.



The same idea repeats in the book **The New Conceptual Selling** by Miller and Heiman when they say “Customers are not buying your product, but what your product means to them.”

Clayton Christensen’s **Innovators Dilemma** revolves around the same core idea when he says that people hire your product to do a specific job for them. Additionally, Christensen goes on to explain that “Job” has strong social and emotional attributes.

Sales Literature is full of examples and techniques to understand people, develop empathy for their situations, and then sell them something that improves their situation.

Reading all that literature will take time. Additionally, it also contains a ton of things we do not require while making products, like tricks for closing a sale.

The idea that is important for us is that Sales is about mapping all prospects on the Circumstance-Emotion Matrix, and then deciding which ones to go after (Sales-Qualified Leads), and how.

For salespeople, the core idea is to **identify a painful situation** the prospect is in and **sell a solution** by appealing to their emotion.

*For makers, the core idea is to **identify a painful situation** a user is in, and **build a solution** that appeals to their emotion.*

In order to do that, we need to talk to customers and use the same basic principles used by the greatest salespeople “Listen, Really Listen”

In the next chapter, we will create a method to talk to customers, closely modelled on Sales Conversations.

**The next part of this sample are the  
last few pages of the book**

# Acknowledgements

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**Ahmed Zain**, Product @ Razorpay

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# Special Thanks

*A special thanks to Monika*

“

*Being an indie-maker is hard, but being the better half of one is the hardest of all. Especially so if you created a little imp together, and live with an old devil :-)  
The three of you make everything possible. Thanks.*