



# Rule No. 1 — Solve a real problem.

Why? Because, without a problem worth solving, everything else is wasted effort.

## Rule Summary:

If your product, service or strategy isn't solving a real problem for a real person, it's a vanity project - not a business. Painkillers outperform vitamins every time.

Businesses don't fail because their founders didn't work hard enough. They fail because the work wasn't aimed at something real. Something felt. Something worth paying for.

Rule No.1 is where every enduring business begins: Identify the problem your customers can't ignore—and prove that your solution matters. If you can't do that, nothing else you build will matter either.

## This Rule helps you:

- **Validate** new business ideas.
- **Pivot** from passion project to viable product.
- **Focus** on MVP development.
- **Avoid** expensive product flops.
- **Ground** innovation in real-world pain points.



## Recommended Reading

The Lean Startup, by Eric Ries

"The question is not 'Can this product be built?' Instead, it is 'Should this product be built?'" - Eric Ries

## Key Executive Takeaway:

The Lean Startup teaches leaders to replace guesswork with continuous learning—testing ideas quickly, measuring what matters, and adapting fast. Success comes from solving real customer problems, not from perfecting a product no one wants.

## Ask Yourself —

What problem does our business truly solve—and would our customers describe it the same way?

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## Action Step

Interview 3 or more existing or potential customers to uncover a problem they're actively trying to solve. Document exactly how they describe it in their own words. If you can't clearly articulate the problem in the customer's words after these interviews, you do not yet have a business — only activity.

Now, write down your core problem statement—not in your words, but in your customer's words.

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Are our customers buying our product for a reason different than we think?

What assumptions are we making about what our market really needs?



# Actionable Strategies

## How do we keep our team focused on solving real customer problems—not just adding features?

Staying problem-oriented is one of the most powerful disciplines a team can adopt. It keeps work grounded in purpose, guides better decisions, and prevents wasted effort. Use this section to help your team stay focused on solving real customer problems.

### 1. Start with the Problem Statement

Ensure every project, feature, or sprint begins with a clearly articulated customer problem.

Ask: “What pain point are we solving?” – and who feels it most?

### 2. Make Customer Empathy a Ritual

Use real customer quotes, videos, or complaints in team meetings. Regularly schedule customer interviews or shadowing sessions. Share “Customer of the Week” stories that highlight struggles and feedback.

### 3. Ask “Why?” – Relentlessly

Use the 5 Whys method to get to the root of every request. Don’t take feature requests at face value; ask what problem it solves. Teach teams to be skeptical of solutions not tied to a problem.

### 4. Measure Problem Impact, Not Just Output

Use KPIs that reflect problem-solving: reduction in support tickets, task completion rate, etc. Reward impact, not activity. Praise when problems are avoided or simplified, not when features are just “shipped.”

### 5. Say “No” – Clearly and Often

Create a “Not Doing List” to document shiny object requests you’ve declined and why. Train your team to defend focus with data, not opinions. Protect roadmaps from bloat by tying every initiative back to a validated problem.

### 6. Close the Feedback Loop

After launching a feature, circle back to the original problem: Did we solve it? How do we know?

If not, iterate or remove the feature. Let the team see that solving is the goal, not just shipping.

### 7. Instill a “Problem-First” Culture

Celebrate questions more than answers in team discussions. Appoint a “Problem Owner” for initiatives – someone whose job is to ensure the team doesn’t drift into solution-for-solution’s-sake mode.

Make your value proposition about customer outcomes, not product bells and whistles.

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