



Rule No. 2 — Fall in love with the problem, not the solution.

Why? Because, it keeps you customer-centered, not ego-driven.

Rule Summary:

Solutions come and go, but a deep understanding of the real problem creates lasting value.

Focus on the true needs and challenges of your customers—not your preconceived ideas.

By anchoring yourself to the problem, you remain flexible, innovative, and better positioned to deliver meaningful solutions.

Too many businesses fail—not because they lacked passion or intelligence—but because they became emotionally attached to the wrong thing. They fell in love with their idea, their product, their pitch deck... and forgot to stay obsessed with the customer’s actual problem.

This Rule will help you:

- Avoid emotional attachment to “pet projects”
- Build products that customers actually want
- Pivot more effectively when initial ideas fall flat
- Stay adaptable in fast-changing markets
- Make decisions backed by real customer insight



Recommended Reading

The Mom Test, by Rob Fitzpatrick

“The Mom Test is a set of simple rules for crafting good questions that even your mom can’t lie to you about.” - Rob Fitzpatrick

Key Executive Takeaway:

Never trust compliments, guesses, or hypotheticals in customer conversations. Instead, focus relentlessly on uncovering real problems, real priorities, and real behavior. Great businesses aren’t built by pitching ideas and hoping for validation—they’re built by listening, testing, and solving problems that matter.

Ask Yourself —

Are you defending your solution...or solving the customer’s real need?

Action Step

When was the last time you deeply re-examined your customers’ pain points without trying to sell them your solution?

Commit to having two customer or prospect conversations. Don’t pitch—just ask questions. Then, list three ways your current solution could fail, and rethink from the problem backward.

If our current solution disappeared tomorrow, what else could we try to solve this same problem?

How do we know this is a real and urgent problem worth solving? What evidence do we have?



Actionable Strategies

Implement “Problem Reviews” instead of just Product Reviews

In your leadership meetings or sprint kickoffs, dedicate time to reviewing what problem you’re solving, for whom, and how you know it still matters. Track this the same way you would KPIs.

Ban solution-first thinking in early-stage brainstorming

For the first half of ideation sessions, only allow team members to bring up customer problems, not solutions. It forces deeper empathy and widens your field of view.

Set a “3 Alternatives” Challenge

Anytime a new solution is proposed, require the team to list three other ways to solve the same problem. This exposes assumptions and encourages creative, problem-first thinking.

Create a Problem Validation Scorecard

Before investing in a new initiative, score it across criteria such as problem urgency, frequency, financial impact, and customer behavior. Don’t move forward without a high score.

Assign a “Problem Owner” for each product or initiative

While product managers focus on delivery, the Problem Owner ensures the team remains grounded in the actual user challenge. They are responsible for continuous validation and redefinition.

Regularly revisit and reframe the problem statement

Every 30-60 days, require teams to restate the core problem they’re solving in one sentence. If it’s changed—or unclear—that’s your cue to pause or pivot.

Use job-shadowing or direct observation, not just surveys

Encourage your teams to sit with customers, observe workflows, or join customer support calls. Real problems often reveal themselves in behavior, not answers.

Reward internal red-flag raising

Create psychological safety by praising team members who question whether a solution is still solving the right problem. It builds a culture of intellectual honesty.

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