GUIDE 03 / CUSTOMER DISCOVERY

Ask About the Last Time

Customer discovery for healthcare founders

A kidney clinic keeps finding a blank where it expects a lab result. A reminder app seems like a reasonable first idea. Before you build one, sit down with the person who had to find the last missing result.

THE PITCH

“Would a reminder app help?”

THE INTERVIEW

“Think of the last visit where a result was missing. What did you do when you noticed?”

The interview question lets you follow the work from the moment someone noticed the result was missing. If the test was already done, you can ask where the result went. If the test never happened, you can ask the patient what happened after the order.

Pick one assumption. Here, it’s that missed lab visits explain the missing results. Before the call, write down what would make you reconsider. A result that already existed somewhere else would change where you look.

The kidney clinic and all dialogue in this guide are hypothetical.

THE INTERVIEW

Follow the work

Ask one question. Give the person time to finish. Follow the part of the answer you couldn't have predicted.

	MOVE	ASK	LISTEN FOR
1	**Find an episode**	"When did this last happen?"	A case the person remembers firsthand.
2	**Trace the steps**	"What did you do next?"	Who acted, in what order, and where they looked.
3	**Find the cost**	"What did that take?"	A workaround, someone's time, or a change to the visit.
4	**Check the pattern**	"How many times in the past two weeks did you have to do that?"	An estimate tied to a time period. Ask how they know.

If you hear "It happens all the time," ask for the most recent instance. If you hear "We need a dashboard," ask what they did the last time they couldn't find the result. Ask "What happened next?" before supplying an explanation of your own.

Innovation Equipoise™. Write down the answer that could move you away from your first idea. Make room for it in the interview.

A WORKED EXAMPLE

Hear the answer that changes the question

An illustrative interview with a clinic coordinator.

YOU ASK	THE COORDINATOR SAYS
“Tell me about the last visit with a missing result.”	“Last Tuesday. The patient told us they’d already gone to an outside lab.”
“What did you do next?”	“I called the lab and asked them to resend the report. Then I checked our incoming fax queue.”
“What happened when you checked?”	“In the queue. It hadn’t been attached to the chart.”
“What did that change for you?”	“I spent about 20 minutes on it, and the clinician started the visit without the result.”
“Can you remember a recent time it went differently?”	“Yes. Last week someone hadn’t been able to get to the lab.”

What changed. You have two reported cases with different causes. For Tuesday, a reminder would have targeted the wrong step. You can now ask how outside reports reach the chart and which patients struggle to get to the lab. Record the 20 minutes as one person’s estimate for one case.

WHO SEES THE NEXT STEP?

Test the story from another seat

Pick the next person based on the part of the story you still need to check.

Patient	“After your most recent lab order, what happened next?”	Whether instructions, scheduling, or travel affected their ability to get tested.
Lab or records staff	“Walk me through the last outside report you had to resend or match to a chart.”	Where the handoff can break and who can change it.
Clinic manager	“When you last changed how outside results were handled, who approved it and what did it take?”	Who owns the workflow and how decisions get made.

USE WHAT YOU HEAR

GO DEEPER	Comparable cases point to one bottleneck. Ask the workflow owner to help trace a few more.
REFRAME	Cases have different causes. Narrow the problem before testing a change.
SET ASIDE	Several people who do the work recall no case or consequence. Look for a stronger problem.

An introduction that actually happens or time set aside to review the workflow gives you a next step. To learn who can pay, ask about a comparable purchase and who controlled the budget.

WORKSHEET / TEN MINUTES

Plan one interview

Bring a friction point you've seen. Use the worksheet to prepare one conversation this week.

1. **The assumption.** What would have to be true for your idea to help?

2. **The person.** Who saw a recent instance firsthand?

3. **The opening.** What exact question will get them to tell you about that instance?

4. **The follow-up.** What will you ask to learn what they did and what it took?

5. **The decision.** What answer would send you to a different person or change your idea?

First Move workshops and sample exercises

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Rob Fitzpatrick, *The Mom Test* · Ask about a specific experience and listen for what people did.

U.S. National Science Foundation, I-Corps customer discovery · Interview the people who use, influence, or would buy a solution.