

## Back of the Envelope Exercise and Submittal Guide

*You have just opened up the guide to the **Just Run It!** Back of the Envelope with a template at the end that you can complete for your own business. If you choose to submit your draft to me I will read and acknowledge it and will select at least one a month to feature and review on the DickCross.com website. In addition, I will spend 1-2 hours on the phone reviewing the business with the selected business owners or general managers.*

### The Example

*The example features Central Building Supply, an independent building supply company serving regional residential builders in south-central Virginia. Steve took over the business from his father 6 years ago. Business slowed considerably with the economy, and was made even worse by national chains further eroding his top and bottom lines. Steve still has a loyal following of builders but is straining to add more accounts and waiting for things to pick up for his existing customers.*

*As the example for your own exercise, we'll track Steve's thinking through the four quadrants of the Envelope, with a recap of the intent for each quadrant followed by the example from Central.*

### Customer - Intent

The Back of the Envelope Exercise starts with developing a profile for how your customers think. About what's important to them in their lives, and maybe not having anything at all to do with what you are selling. If you can understand them on this basis, as an additional dimension to the usual demographic descriptors, and then tap into their psychological make-ups, you'll be starting at the right place to build special relationships, loyalty and referrals.

Imagine you are meeting a typical customer, not in your business or over the phone, but rather at face-to-face at social gathering. And that you want them to like you. What's your approach?

You don't break the ice by telling them how great you are. You ask them questions about themselves to demonstrate interest, to make them feel good about themselves and to figure out what they like to talk about and care about most. This approach puts them first, reduces the natural aversion to people selling things, and reduces the barrier between you, as a business person, and your customer.

When you do this you'll find two things. One is that people are different. But the other is that there are a few characteristics --- differentiating markers --- that are common to most of them. That's what you're looking for.

## Customer Example – Building Supply Example

Here's Steve's first exchange with a prospective new customer, Bob.

Steve: Thanks for coming in. I don't think we've met. Are you a local builder?

Bob: Yep.

Steve: I sure hope your business is looking better than some of the other builders around here.

Bob: Well, yes and no.

Steve: You know, there's a question I like to ask to most of the builders I meet and I hope you don't mind.....what do you like most about your business these days?

Bob: Truthfully, it's hard to like anything about it right now, but it's what I know how to do, and at least I'm not working for anyone else.

Steve: Pretty much the way I feel, too. But we do have some bright spots. If you wouldn't mind just one more question.....if you could change a few things about your business tomorrow, what would they be?

Bob: Well, first it would be more people wanting new houses. With so few buyers, it's gotten viciously competitive for new work. And next would probably be stress.

Steve: Stress?

Bob: Sure. It seems like more things go wrong on jobs these days than ever before. Things that blow schedules, frustrate customers, add costs and take more hours in a day than I've got to fix them. In fact, the only reason I'm here is that Wilson Supply just short shipped me a second time on windows. And even those were late!

Steve: So, where do you see your business a couple of years down the road?

Bob: Truthfully, I don't even think about the future these days. Seems I'm working harder than ever just to stay in place.

Steve: I know how that feels, particularly with college and retirement to think about.

Bob: I'm not really sure which of those keeps me up at night the most. But for right now, I'm just trying to get through my current jobs on time, make a little money, and hope that something better's coming along behind them.

## Needs - Intention

Steve's initial conversation with Bob was full of clues about how to win him as a Customer. Clues for winning him not on the basis of all the great things Steve could tell him about Central versus Wilson, but rather starting from the point of what Bob has told Steve about his own Needs.

Steve's job in this second quadrant of his Envelope is to translate what he's learned from his first conversation with Bob into a list of ideas about what might help Bob in dealing with the things he's most concerned about.

### Needs Example – Central Building Supply

It took Steve a few tries to get his list of ideas about what might help Bob to the right level. His temptation was to build his list around things that would put himself and Central, as opposed to Wilson, into the picture. But he caught himself.

Instead, he kept working --- from the perspective of standing in Bob's moccasins --- to think beyond what Central could do for Bob at that time, until he had three unadulterated ideas about Bob's greatest concerns:

- Job performance
- Business sustainability and future
- Stress

Then he kept himself thinking way beyond the limits of Central's current business model, about what might help Bob reduce those concerns and help Bob most in feeling better about himself. Here's what Steve came up with:

#### Bob's Greatest Concerns

Job performance

Outlook for his business

Stress

#### What Would Help Bob Most

Better estimating  
Better scheduling  
Better job tacking  
Better deliveries

Time to think  
A plan  
A coach

Confidence in job progress  
A backlog of jobs  
More time away from work  
A favored place to visit

### Positioning - Intention

Now that Steve understood Bob, from Bob’s point of view and had some idea about what might help him, his next challenge would be figure out if Central could address Bob’s Needs and get Bob, and maybe to get others like Bob, to recognize Central, as more than a just another supplier. Rather as a persona that might be able to help them with their concerns in ways other suppliers couldn’t

### Positioning – Central Building Supply Example

So Steve constructed a chart. The items that he’d identified as ways to help Bob were the rows, to which he added two columns for ratings.

In the first column he assigned a rating of 1-5 to indicate his sense of the relative importance of each row item to Bob and to others like him --- with 3 being neutral, five a hugely important and 1 not important at all. In the second column he assigned another rating of 1-5, to indicate how well Central’s current business model matched what it would take to satisfy each item, with 3 being an ok match, 5 a complete solution and 1 being a complete miss. The tough part for Steve in both columns was to be brutally honest about seeing Central through Bob’s eyes, not his own.

Steve added a third column to note the differences, then underscored the items where the differences between the left and right columns were -2 or lower, and where the scores on the left were 4 or 5. Steve figured those would be the most powerful ways for Central to become a compellingly attractive supplier for Bob --- the “Blockbusters” for his positioning. He then categorized the remainder of his items as either Medium or Small in terms of their roles they might play in his desired persona, and added a B, M or S to designate his scorings.

<u>Bob’s Greatest Concerns</u>	<u>How to Help Bob Most</u>	<u>Import.</u>	<u>Match</u>	<u>Differ.</u>	<u>S,B,M</u>
Job performance	Better estimating	4	3	1	M
	<u>Better scheduling</u>	5	2	3	B
	<u>Better job tacking</u>	5	2	3	B
	Better deliveries	5	4	1	M
Outlook for his business	<u>Time to think</u>	4	1	3	B
	<u>A plan</u>	4	1	3	B
	<u>A coach</u>	5	1	4	B

Stress	<u>Confidence in job progress</u>	5	3	2	B
	<u>A backlog of jobs</u>	5	2	3	B
	<u>More time away from work</u>	4	1	3	B
	A favored place to visit	3	1	2	S
	A sympathetic ear	3	1	2	S

### Competencies - Intention

Having diagnosed how Bob thinks as a Customer, having translated his diagnosis into a set of Needs and into some ideas about what might solve those needs, and then into how Central might Position itself as Bob's unarguable choice, Steve's next task was to think about what Competencies --- or capabilities --- Central actually might need to add in order to complete the logic --- to actually to be the supplier that would get Steve's business.

### Competencies Example – Central Building Supply

Here's how Steve closed the loop.

He started by focusing on the items he'd characterized as "blockbusters" for Positioning and assigned another rating of 1-5 to indicate the difficulty/cost of raising Central's Match score to 5 on each item, with 5 being impossible and 1 being a lay-up.

#### Blockbuster Items

<u>Bob's Greatest Concerns</u>	<u>What Would Help Bob Most</u>	<u>Importance</u>	<u>Gap</u>	<u>Difficulty</u>
Job performance	<u>Better scheduling</u>	5	3	3
	<u>Better job tacking</u>	5	3	3
Outlook for his business	<u>Time to think</u>	4	3	3
	<u>A plan</u>	4	3	4
	<u>A coach</u>	5	4	4
Stress	<u>Confidence in job progress</u>	5	2	3
	<u>A backlog of jobs</u>	5	2	5
	<u>More time away from work</u>	4	3	3

He then did the same for his the items he'd characterized as Medium or Small ideas.

Medium and Small Items

<u>Bob's Greatest Concerns</u>	<u>What Would Help Bob Most</u>	<u>Importance</u>	<u>Gap</u>	<u>Difficulty</u>
Job performance	Better estimating	4	1	3
	Better deliveries	5	1	2
Stress	A favored place to visit	3	2	1
	A sympathetic ear	3	2	1

At this point flashes of insight started exploding in Steve's mind. Ways of seeing his business in entirely new light from the one he'd inherited from his father and been toiling to preserve ever since. Though not yet developed into hard-edged outlines of where these insights might ultimately lead, he was gripped with excitement:

- About how his new perspectives on the greatest concerns that Bob, and he suspected many other builder Customers, think about.
- About how these perspectives translated into a new consciousness of their real Needs
- Which led him to new theories about how Central might be Positioned to be uniquely attractive in its market.

As he absorbed the charts he'd just completed, his thinking went one step farther about the Competencies he'd need to add in order actually to close the loop.

Scanning the items and the scores, an initial program for what he thought might work started taking form. The rigor of creating the lists and the ratings that had gotten him to the last quadrant of his Back Of The Envelope had inspired in him a set of ideas about Central that he'd never considered before. And that he suspected just might turn everything around for the better.

If Steve could add just four Competencies at Central, he could surely differentiate his business from all his rivals and become the unassailable first choice for lots of builders.

<u>Competencies to Add</u>	<u>What Would It Help Most</u>	<u>Importance</u>	<u>Difficulty</u>
Free job management service with hands-on support	Job scheduling	5	3
	Job tracking	5	3
	Confidence in job progress	5	3
	More time away	4	3

	from work		
Free business planning service with hands-on support	Time to think	4	3
	A plan	4	4
	A coach	5	4
Newsletter and builder breakfasts focusing on outlook for new work	Backlog	5	5*
Make Central a place builders looked forward to visiting	Place to relax	3	1
	Among friends	3	1

\*Steve knew that creating backlog for Bob wasn't his responsibility, but that some of his other improvements might contribute to that end.

Steve settled back from his Back Of The Envelope exercise with a combined sense of excitement and anticipation. Excitement about what he might be able to make Central become. And anticipation for what would come next. Figuring out exactly how to make it all happen, and what parts of it he actually could get done.

But some of the most important hurdles were already behind him. Simply getting started thinking about his business in a new and more powerful way could be a "breakaway" step. And having a general heading for starting the journey gave him great confidence that he could make it all happen.

## Summary

A wide-open rethinking of your business on the Back of the Envelope opens new insights for most owners and business managers about how to expand their futures, both with existing and with new customers. Why? Simply because the day-to-day demands of most of our businesses leave little time for this kind of thinking. Which after all, is the most important part of your job.

Try it yourself and submit your analysis on the forms below. Feel free to adjust the row titles for the charts if you need to in order to best reflect your business.

# Your Back Of The Envelope Template

## Your Customers

### Questions

1. *What are their greatest sources of satisfaction in a typical day?*
2. *Greatest sources of stress?*
3. *What worries them most?*
4. *If they could change three things about their lives what would they be?*

### Answers

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Their Needs

- Their Greatest Concerns\*
1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
  4. \_\_\_\_\_
  5. \_\_\_\_\_

- What Would Help Them Most\*\*
1. \_\_\_\_\_
  2. \_\_\_\_\_
  3. \_\_\_\_\_
  4. \_\_\_\_\_
  5. \_\_\_\_\_

\*Fears, pp 10-11

\*\*What would make them feel better about themselves, pp 10-11

## Your Positioning

<u>Customer Concerns</u>	<u>How to Help Most</u>	<u>Import.</u>	<u>Match</u>	<u>Differ.</u>	<u>S,B,M</u>
1. _____	_____	—	—	—	—
	_____	—	—	—	—
	_____	—	—	—	—
2. _____	_____	—	—	—	—
	_____	—	—	—	—
	_____	—	—	—	—
3. _____	_____	—	—	—	—
	_____	—	—	—	—
	_____	—	—	—	—



4.	_____	_____	—	—	—	—
		_____	—	—	—	—
		_____	—	—	—	—
5.	_____	_____	—	—	—	—
		_____	—	—	—	—
		_____	—	—	—	—

### Your Competencies

	<u>Greatest Concerns</u>	<u>What Would Help Them Most</u>	<u>Importance</u>	<u>Gap</u>	<u>Difficulty</u>
1.	_____	_____	—	—	—
2.	_____	_____	—	—	—
3.	_____	_____	—	—	—
4.	_____	_____	—	—	—
5.	_____	_____	—	—	—

	<u>Competency to Add</u>	<u>What would It Help Most</u>	<u>Importance</u>	<u>Difficulty</u>
1.	_____	_____	—	—
		_____		
		_____		
2.	_____	_____	—	—
		_____		
		_____		
3.	_____	_____	—	—
		_____		
		_____		
4.	_____	_____	—	—
		_____		
		_____		

### Conclusions

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If you would like to submit your draft, please scan and send it to [Dick@DickCross.com](mailto:Dick@DickCross.com).  
With the following additional information :

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Business Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Line of Business: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employees: \_\_\_\_\_  
Approx. Revenues: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
Website: \_\_\_\_\_  
Business Aspiration \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

And please include a note about what you got from the exercise.

*Thanks,  
Dick*