

BUILD THE RIGHT THINGS

**How to Design and Build a
Product People Will Love**



ERIC WEISS

Table of Contents

About the author.....	3
Introduction.....	4
Part 1 - User-Centered Design.....	6
Chapter 1:	7
Chapter 2:	10
Chapter 3:	17
Chapter 4:	21
Chapter 5:.....	30
Chapter 6:.....	36
Chapter 7:.....	43
Part 2 - Agile Product Development.....	48
Chapter 8:.....	49
Chapter 9:.....	51
Chapter 10:.....	54
Chapter 11:.....	57
Chapter 12:.....	60
Chapter 13:.....	64
Chapter 14:.....	68
Conclusion	70
Get the toolkit!	71

About the author

Eric Weiss has been building technology products and leading highly-effective development teams for over 15 years. While he's always loved writing code, his greatest passion is entrepreneurship. Eric helps start-up founders build their products and companies in a way that ensures their success, while creating real value for their customers. He's helped dozens of companies, from fledgling start-ups to Fortune 100 companies, gain maturity in their leadership, product strategy, and agile development process.



Eric Weiss

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Introduction

It's a common cliché that 90% of startups fail, and the two main reasons are that they run out of cash, or they don't solve a significant problem in the market. In most cases, it's a combination of both. As the founders continue to pivot in search of product-market fit, they burn cash until they eventually run out. Building a technology product today costs, on average, \$50,000 to \$250,000 for the first release. The amount of time and money wasted in the tech industry is staggering.

I wrote this book because I've seen too many founders go down this path to ruin. I've dedicated my life to tackling this problem head on. In this book I'll show you the philosophy, frameworks, and tools you can use to drastically increase your chance of success by decreasing the cost of development and ensuring you're building a product that solves an urgent need.

This book is intended for startup founders, product leaders, and anyone involved in driving product development. The principles and tools in this book will help you engage your customers in the product development process and build the exact product your customers need as efficiently and effectively as possible. The primary frameworks we will be covering are User-Centered Design and Agile Product Management. By applying the tools and frameworks in this book, you will be able to defer the high cost of development until you have thoroughly understood the problem and validated the solution, and then leverage user feedback to build exactly the product your customers want.

What you'll learn from this book:

- How to succeed as a startup founder by solving an urgent market need and maintaining your cash reserves
- How to save money by eliminating waste and deferring the high cost of software development until the product is fully validated
- How to deeply understand and create empathy for your customers
- How to amplify the user voice in your product development process
- How to discover and understand your customers' biggest problems and find opportunities to create valuable solutions
- How to build the right features based on the most critical business drivers

Most importantly, this book will help you deliver high-quality products quickly and cost-effectively, by developing only the features that are most valuable to your customers, and not spending any money building things that don't move the needle.



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Part 1 - User-Centered Design

Chapter 1:

What is User-Centered Design?

I spent the majority of my career developing software products and leading software development teams. Very early on I adopted and became an evangelist for agile development principles. I was very successful in making myself and my teams efficient and effective within the boundaries of an engineering team. We ran our Scrum ceremonies effectively, eliminated waste, built solid architecture and leveraged cutting edge frameworks and design patterns.

We were doing everything we were supposed to do to be the best engineering team we could be, and yet we would still falter and fail. We would build features that our customers wouldn't adopt. We would deliver something proudly, only to be told by our CEO or product managers that we didn't build what they intended. We didn't seem to speak the same language as the "business people," and resentment and misalignment would eventually follow. Our optimizations and efficiency gains were insignificant compared to the enormous waste of working on the wrong things.

When I was Chief Technology Officer of a music streaming service startup, my CEO and I decided I would take over product management, UX, and design to see if I could create an integrated, streamlined product development process. I dove head first into the world of product management and realized very quickly why I was having such a hard time being effective as an engineering lead. While my engineering team was focused on tight iterations and feedback loops, my product team was working in long, drawn out cycles with very little organized feedback. Features were defined in a vacuum without customer input, releases were planned months in advance in long-term roadmaps, and once features were released to the world, the customer feedback was not incorporated into the process.



Then I had an epiphany. Why couldn't we apply the same agile development principles to product management? Well, we can, and the answer is User-Centered Design.

User-Centered Design is a philosophy and framework of building products that engages the users in every step of the process. All too often, startup founders come up with an idea for a product, spend enormous amounts of time and money building the solution, dump it out into the market, then wonder why no one wants to buy it. After months of searching for "product market fit" and several pivots, they may eventually figure it out, or they may crash and burn. How wasteful is that?

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Instead, focus on creating empathy for the user, and deeply understanding the problems they face. Attempt to understand what alternatives they use to solve their problems, and how those solutions fail them. Brainstorm ideas for new solutions that improve on what they already have. Then create tight feedback loops to validate our thinking all along the way.

One of the key principles and benefits of UCD is *deferring development costs until you've fully validated your product*. Developing software is typically the most expensive part of building a product. It takes the most time, and is the most difficult to change once it's been implemented. UCD allows us to rapidly validate and change the solution, increasing fidelity on what works, and discarding what doesn't at the moment in time that it's least expensive to do so.

"A problem well stated is a problem half solved."

— Charles Kettering

Chapter 2:

Find Your Tribe

Before you even begin thinking about a product, you need to find your tribe. You need to find a group of people you want to serve, and learn everything you can about them. By deeply understanding and creating empathy for a group of people, you will discover their most critical problems, the ones that need solutions. Rather than building a product and then looking for a market, the product will emerge organically from our understanding of the problem.

To ensure you're able to get a constant flow of high quality feedback from your tribe you should have:

- Access - You're going to need to be in regular contact with them over the course of this process. You should have easy access to many members of this group.
- Empathy - You will need to get in the minds of this group and figure out what makes them tick. You must intentionally strive to put aside your own biases and assumptions, and truly see the world from their perspective.
- Trust - You must have the ability to create deep relationships with these people, so that they share their true thoughts and opinions with you, and so that they're willing to put up with the messy process of development.

"The product will emerge organically from our understanding of the problem."

User Personas

The user persona is a digital representation of our users, and is useful for explaining their mindset and context to the rest of the team. A typical persona template will capture their demographics, goals, frustrations, and preferences. You should also go beyond this artifact and collect stories, photographs, and videos that allow us to further connect with them. Even better, invite them into your office and give everyone a chance to meet them first hand and create a bond.

PERSONALITY

- Prototyping
- Interviewing
- Design Thinking
- Empathy
- Coding

BIO

Eric Weiss has been building technology products and leading highly-effective development teams for over 15 years. While he's always loved writing code, his greatest passion is entrepreneurship, and helping startup founders build their products and companies in a way that ensures their success, while creating real value for their customers.

He's helped dozens of companies, from fledgling startups to Fortune 100 companies, gain maturity in their leadership, product strategy, and agile development process.

Quote: "I want to help startup founders be successful"

Motivations

IMPACT: [Progress bar]

TEAMWORK: [Progress bar]

PROMOTION: [Progress bar]

USER NEEDS: [Progress bar]

Goals

- Evangelize User-Centered Design and Agile Product Development
- Help startup founders build and scale their businesses
- Live a healthy life and spend time with family

Frustrations

- Working with teams that don't take accountability and ownership
- Arrogance and egoism
- Lack of commitment and purpose

Behavior

Overseeing builds: [Progress bar]

Writing specs: [Progress bar]

Designing features: [Progress bar]

Meetings: [Progress bar]

User testing: [Progress bar]

Influences

- CREDIBILITY
- COLLEAGUES
- TECHNOLOGY
- BLOGS/ FORUMS
- PSYCHOLOGY
- UI TRENDS

Frequently used apps

Jira, Google Docs, Atom

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• STATUS MARRIED • SALARY \$200K
• TIER EXECUTIVE • ARCHETYPE LEADER

Example User Persona

To create personas, you must first research and survey your target market. Collect as much data as you can from as many people as you can, then begin to group them into clusters or segments. At this point, you may only have high level demographic data, but it should be enough to group them into categories.

Once you've identified your major segments, choose an individual to represent them, and interview them. This will allow you to flesh out the psychographic elements and internal goals and frustrations.

The more you can capture the perspective and internal motivations of the personas and convey them in various media, the easier it will be for you and your team to create empathy and ultimately develop a product that will resonate with them.

Personas typically include:

- Personal demographics
- Professional demographics
- Bio
- Personality profile
- Goals
- Frustrations
- Brand or product preferences

Exercise: Create a Proto-Persona

It's easy to create a stripped down persona to begin the discussion around who your target users are. To run this proto-persona exercise, simply draw this template on a whiteboard, and use sticky notes to flesh out your understanding about the users.

User Name and Photo	Behaviors
Demographics	Needs and Goals

Example Proto-Persona

User Perspective

In order to truly understand our users, you have to get inside their heads. You need to capture the complete User Perspective, which includes:

- Needs and Wants
- Goals, Motivation, & Triggers
- Struggles and Fears
- Tasks, Activities, and Behaviors
- Geography and Language
- Culture
- Relationships
- Environment
- Equipment

It's literally everything that shapes their world view, intentions, and behavior. With this information, you can begin to understand not only what they do, but why.

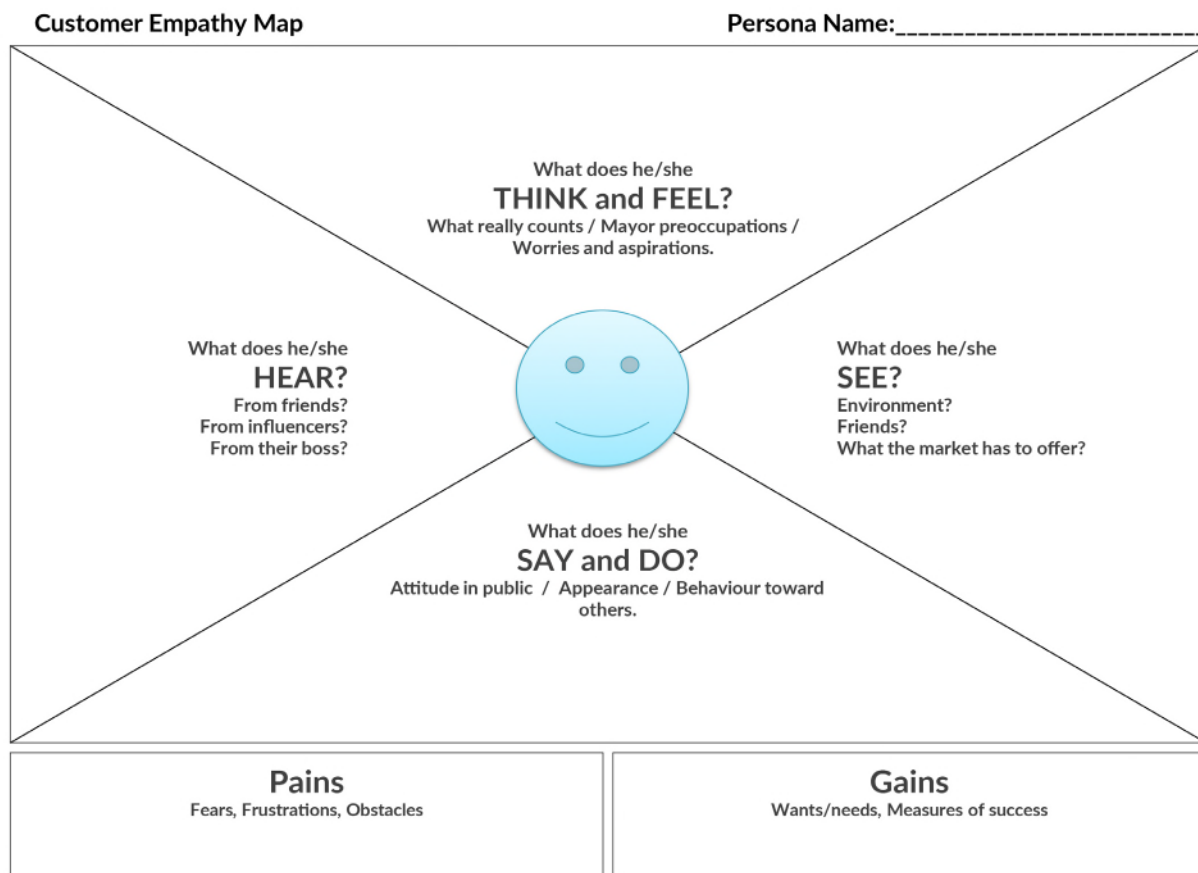
You can attempt to gather this information by:

- Surveying them
- Shadowing them
- Immersing yourself in their world
- Becoming close friends with them

The better you are at seeing the world from your users' perspective, the more naturally your product will fit into their lives. One mistake many founders make is they never get out of their own heads. They design a product that works for them, but only for them. Then they wonder why no one else wants to use their product. Deep understanding of the User Perspective is the essence of good design.

Empathy Map

The empathy map is a useful tool to use throughout the product development process. It attempts to capture a snapshot of the mind of the user at a point in time. While they're experiencing the problem, as well as while they're using your solution, you should attempt to understand what they think, feel, see, hear, say, and do.



Empathy Map Template

While the persona captures the perspective and motivations of a user in the general sense, the empathy map captures their perspective as they move through time. As you create your journey maps and user flows, you can create an empathy map at each stage to understand what they're feeling and thinking as they interact with your product.

“Get closer than ever to your customers. So close, in fact, that you tell them what they need well before they realize it themselves.”

— Steve Jobs