



## STOKE B2B SERIES

### EPISODE 5

#### **Love the problem, not the solution.**

Here's a thorny question for you – what business are you in? You probably have an answer to that and it's probably mostly right. But you know what? The answer to this question reveals how big or how small your thinking is about the business you are in. The last time you were asked what you do, or the last time you were pitching to a prospect, chances are you pitched *how* you do what you do – rather than *what* you do. As an example, you probably talked about the mechanics of what your company does and how that is different than your competition – i.e., we have a better price or we have a better process. Typically, what organizations and their sales staff don't talk about is the **Problem** that their customers have – the problem they solve for their customers.

We **love** to understand and talk about the problems we solve because that's where the energy and emotion are. When you talk about the problem, the focus is on the customer. When you talk about the solution, the focus is on yourself. I hate to tell you this, but your prospect does not care about you or your solution yet. You haven't earned their care yet. They have not agreed they have a problem, they have not agreed they want to solve it, and they have not agreed you are a potential solution. Until all those are in place you have no business discussing a solution. Solutions are small and problems are always bigger than your solution.

#### **Own the Problem and the Outcome**

Once we understand the problem and what outcomes the client seeks in solving it, we now have an opportunity to assume the responsibility for solving the problem on behalf of our client. It is a subtle but powerful shift in perspective and accountability. In fact, the investment we are making in the Onemata Stoke series is evidence of us taking accountability for our customer's problem of "growing and retaining new customers." We recognize that great prospect data by itself is not the complete answer to helping them grow new customers but rather a part of the solution to the larger problem of how they grow their business.

Once you clearly understand the problem, you will likely uncover many additional needs that the client has that derive from the same problem. Chances are your business has a much deeper charter than appears at the surface and that your customers actually need a lot more help from you than your current solutions provide. Let's take your average housecleaning outfit. What problem do they solve?

Are they there to clean toilets and vacuum, or are they there to give you precious time with your family? If they are only there to remove dust and clean toilets, it's about price. If they are there to give you time, then the issue of price falls to the background. And all the other time-saving interventions that exist in and around your home become time opportunities for the customer and revenue and service line opportunities for the vendor. If I am there to save time, I could: clean windows, clean cars, change furnace filters, change light bulbs, swap out batteries in smoke detectors, regularly clean carpets and upholstery, wash-fold-put away laundry, decorate and clean up after parties. We could keep going but you get the idea.

By loving the problem, you end up communicating to customers about what is critically important to them. You discover additional ways to serve the customer and enhance your wallet share along the way and, ultimately, delight your customer. (Sounds like a referral opportunity to us.)

## Things to Think About / Implement

1. Being centered on the problem your firm solves for customers allows you to stay focused on the customer, not yourself. Being problem-focused is a way of approaching the market and staying relevant. As the problem evolves, you change to stay current. Anybody heard of the yellow pages directory?
2. What is the problem that your customers have that you solve? Can you give your elevator speech in terms of the problem? Well-articulated problem statements resonate deeply with your customers *emotionally*. People buy on emotion and justify with reason.
3. Stop thinking about solutions because solutions are small. Think bigger by thinking deeply about the problem your customers have. Because the problem is always bigger than your current solution. What other opportunities flow from this same problem? How many can you whiteboard with your team? Pick the best three to go back to the market and see what has traction.
4. The customer-problem-focused company and the customer-problem-focused professional is a *State of Being*. It is a way of experiencing the world that will make you and your teams better, and allow you to innovate and grow on behalf of your customers.

