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What Job?

Jobs to be done (JTBD) is a powerful framework for thinking about how and why people select and neglect. Clayton Christensen told Marc Andreessen, "Understanding the job is the critical unit of analysis."

Andreessen went on to say that he's read about a thousand business books and 998 went straight to the shredder. "There were only a couple of books that stuck with me. Clay's book and, of course, Andy Grove's book."

There are three big ideas we should address before the cases.

First, JTBD change slowly but means may change quickly. Social media is a means and sharing is the job. The jokes, memes, politics, recipes, photos, etc that people post to Facebook are the same things they used to share in real-life. Nothing's changed, it's just faster.

Second, metrics are precise but not necessarily correct. Some jobs are quantifiable but many are not. The reason is that customers only count the perceived value. There are no metrics for happiness, satisfaction, delight, or loyalty yet they matter.

Third, culture is an ecosystem. Just like different parts of the planet have the right environment for certain floral, fauna, and food chains, different companies will have the right culture for adapting, finding, and serving JTBD. Ben Horowitz puts it best, "your culture is what people will do when you don't tell them what to do."

We'll use examples as an approach to recognizing JTBD. In the same way, immersion teaches language better than classrooms, we'll do a brief, deep-dive, into JTBD.

These examples should inspire. These examples should breed imitation and then innovation. Most problems have been solved before, just not by us.

What makes JTBD so powerful is that small changes can lead to large effects. Sometimes all that matters is a different phrase that reveals the JTBD and increases a customer's perceived value. Remember, it's not better products that people want, it's better solutions. Let's get on to the cases.

What looks, walks, and quacks like a duck but isn't a duck.

Chris Spiek has worked with Bob Moesta for several years and told the origin story for when Moesta realized that though both were candy bars, Snickers and Milky Way were not competing products.

Moesta had recently left his job at Ford and a friend worked for the Mars candy company. 'Come out to New Jersey to help us with figuring out how to raise Snickers and Milky Way sales,' Bob's buddy offered.

So Moesta boarded a plane for New Jersey. After a series of meetings, focus groups, brainstorming, and other best-practice-corporate-innovation-techniques Moesta returned to the airport for his flight home, literally and figuratively, empty-handed. The meetings didn't yield

any ideas and Mars needed ideas. They wanted a way to differentiate the two candy bars so one wouldn't cannibalize another and so they could accumulate shelf space.

To solve his actual empty hands Moesta queued up at an airport store and who was in line in front of him, but someone buying a Snickers bar. Like an anthropologist, Moesta tracked the man to his gate, and once he sat down, Moesta plopped down next to him.

'Excuse me,' we can imagine him asking, Moesta seems impeccably polite, 'I noticed you bought a Snickers bar.' From there the colossal candy conversation commenced and Moesta learned the job-to-be-done. People hire Snickers to satisfy and people hire Milky Way to delight. Though both chocolate bars, each served a different role. That guy at the airport was hungry but didn't want to miss his flight waiting for food. So he bought a Snickers.

This airport conversation was the first of many (seriously many) conversations Moesta would have. Bob saw the world through demand-side rather than supply-side innovation. Moesta said, "we over-engineer the crap out of stuff because we think about all the places it should go versus the places it will go."

The success of Snickers had nothing to do with changing the bar's attributes but with the consumer's attitude. Snickers satiate. At the airport and don't want to miss your flight? Grab a Snickers. Now you know why you're not you when you're hungry.

Pour a glass, lace-up shoes, or load the game?

Bob Moesta talks about JTBD a lot because he practices JTBD a lot. With experience in consumer, B2B, and government work he's seen a lot.

In a 2016 YouTube talk, he said, "Real growth comes from Xbox stealing from Nike. It comes from horizontal integration, not vertical integration."

This insight came from one consumer who explained to Moesta that she hired bottles of wine, pints of ice cream, and running shoes for the same job—to unwind after work. Her means changed day-to-day but her job didn't.

Competition too is in the eye of the beholder. Restaurants, for example, are one category but only a handful of restaurants compete with a handful of others. How often does fine dining compete with fast-casual or fast food? Seldom. Or we can see that everything competes with Netflix and Netflix competes with everything.

“I was in the moving business, not the building business.”

Moesta first saw JTBD when he built houses in a Detroit suburb. He acted logically and asked people what they wanted.

'We'd like a large guest bedroom,' they told Moesta. That was easy enough. Bob made the change and started building. But these new homes weren't selling. Bob had asked the wrong question. He started with the 'What do you want?' approach figuring people knew what they wanted. They didn't. He changed tactics and asked 'What do you want and why?'

The question-answer part of JTBD takes a lot of practice, says practitioners, but Ryan Singer gives the best simple answer, "it's like a friendly interrogation."

Moesta's homes were good but when people said they wanted a larger guest room they created 'the dining room table problem'. Most of Moesta's customers were aging and downsizing. That meant getting rid of the dining room table because this new home (with the large guest room) wasn't large enough. And those dining room tables were loaded with memories. They were scratched up from carving pumpkins. They held stains from cups of coffee and glasses of wine. Rolls of birthday pictures were snapped and hundreds of slices of cake were scarfed.

Moesta's homes were everything a buyer wanted but the hurdle to get there was too high. But then Bob realized his problem, "I figured out I was in the moving business, not the building business, and the more I understood I was in the moving business the more I grew my company."

Moesta raised the price and included moving and two-years of storage. Now the dining room table had a temporary home until it found a permanent one. Bob's business took off.

The mistake and correction made Bob an evangelist for JTBD. It wasn't just that people wanted to move but that they wanted an easy move. "I didn't understand the anxiety of packing a house up. Going into the basement was like going into an abyss. They'd walk out blubbering and crying because they've got to get rid of stuff."

Bob's brilliance was in his curiosity, not his intellect. A demand-side approach requires empathy, a supply-side approach is misguided by ego.

Hiring Cinnabon.

In 2010, Kat Cole became President of Cinnabon, a subsidiary of Focus Brands. Only a year-and-a-half into the financial crisis and Cinnabon, rather than its customers, found itself in a sticky situation.

Sales had slowed. Foot patter petered out. In addition to the macro-financial trends were the macro-macro nutrition trends. People were now saying that carbs, not fats, were why people were overweight.

Had Cole been an economist, she would have solved the JTBD in an economic way. Smaller sizes, fewer calories, at lower prices. Each attribute had a number that food scientists, logistic supervisors, and store managers could tweak. Like the dials on a machine they just had to find the right economic settings for these economic conditions.

Cole wasn't an economist, she was a pragmatist. In one interview she said, "There was all this research that sales went up with a lower-calorie alternative." Again, that makes complete economic sense. However, "That's not our model. We are in infrequent venues, like malls or airports. Our products are designed for the once-in-a-while, blow-your-socks-off indulgence. This was a problem because an artificially sweetened roll wouldn't be as yummy and is still 599 calories (rather than the 800 of the original)."

The Cinnabon job is the same job as birthday cakes, girls-night-out, and 'Saturday's are for the boys'.

To see the contrast more clearly, imagine your family is invited to a summer celebration. There will be swimming, sangria, and sun. However, rather than apple or cherry pie, they make quiche for dessert.

‘What?’ they’d offer, ‘it still has a pie crust and the contents are full of healthy fats, proteins, and nutrients. Everyone should love this mixture of eggs, bacon, mushrooms, and cheese.’

The JTBD of a Cinnabon was not to be cheap, was not to be light, was not to be small (though they have since introduced a smaller size). The job is to “blow-your-socks-off.” It’s one of many examples where the economist focuses on the numbers while the pragmatist focuses on the JTBD.

New Coke, Old Coke, Broke Coke, Bold Coke.

Looking back, people see New Coke as a failure. What kind of idiots, we might wonder, would mess with the proven classic formula. ‘If it ain’t broke don’t fix it.’

Well, those idiots tinkered with the formula and introduced products like Diet Coke and Cherry Coke. The Coca-Cola executives of the 1980s were quite good at their job. They expanded the brand to the last parts of the world, competed with Pepsi, acquired local brands and optimized global distribution. They were good.

But New Coke was not.

The problem with New Coke, Chris Spiek points out, is that it came about the wrong way. You see, in blind taste tests like The Pepsi Challenge, people have always preferred the sweeter Pepsi. I remember being surprised by this during a summer festival of my youth. By then New Coke had been retired, but the technique was still active.

However, the whole context was wrong. Pepsi Challenge participants gulped from paper cups rather than savored chilled bottles. My experience also included a snack of crackers between swigs. It was to cleanse the pallet they told us. Given those conditions, we chose Pepsi.

But those conditions never exist. Spiek said that this was a “classic case of how not to do focus group research.” The Pepsi challenge offered plenty of numbers but no JTBD.

A better way would be for someone to watch a set of vending machines with opposite options. Upon a selection, our observer could saddle up next to the customer and ask what led them to that choice. That gives context and with context, we don’t get the cheater, sweeter answer.

Basecamp.

Another JTBD advocate is Ryan Singer who works for Basecamp. We won’t describe what Basecamp does because Basecamp doesn’t describe what they do—at least not always.

One example of this was an ad that featured the headline copy, “We’ve been expecting you.” The landing page explained: “All growing businesses run into the same fundamental problems. Hair on fire, buried under email, stuff everywhere. The good news? Basecamp solves them.” The ad featured an image of a woman with her hair on fire but featured no features.

Filling a job rather than any job involves trade-offs. In a presentation, Singer notes how Basecamp differs from chat apps, storage services, and tic-tac-task-apps. Since he’s worked

with Moesta, Singer explains it in terms of the classic Snickers and Milky Way situation. The former is for calories and sustenance whereas the latter is for delight and decadence. “If you put caffeine in a Milky Way,” Singer suggests, “it would be weird. But if you did that to a Snicker’s bar people would at least consider it.”

What's nice about listening to Singer talk about JTBD is his emphasis on trade-offs. Moesta gave up bedroom room for dining room memories. Cinnabon neglected the health-conscious market. Software can be magical, but only for a certain JTBD.

Why don't my pictures look as good as your friend?

The idea before Instagram was a check-in-app. This was a terrible idea because check-in-apps were popular. Developers Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger quickly pivoted to a photo-sharing app but Systrom’s girlfriend (eventually wife) didn’t think she’d use the service much.

‘Why?’ we can imagine Systrom asking.

‘Well,’ as Kevin recalled in his conversation with Guy Raz, ‘They’re not as good as your friend Greg’s pictures.’

‘Greg uses a bunch of filter apps to make them look nice.’

‘Well, you should probably add filters then.’

Launched in 2010, Instagram was hired to communicate. Rewind to this time, Systrom and Krieger told Patrick O’Shaughnessy, and there were three problems; people took bad photos, people had fragmented sharing options, and photos took a long time to load. Keep in mind, this was the era of the Twitter fail-whale.

Filters solved the first problem, an elegant solution at a time when phone cameras were not good. Sharing options solved the second as connections to services were open as services tried to scale. Slow uploads were a clever trick. Systrom explained, “As you were captioning your photo we would upload it in the background regardless of whether or not you completed it...if you spent five minutes on a caption, all that time your photo was uploading in the background and when you click done it says done. That little sleight I’d hand meant that Instagram felt enormously fast compared to all the other apps.”

What’s notable about the three problems for this job was the perceived value Instagram delivered its users. Competition for 'an app with filters and social' was slim and consumers compared the Instagram value to zero. For a business, that's a great contrast.

As the service grew, technology changed, and users adapted the JTBD remained the same but the means migrated. Founders Systrom and Krieger recalled this particular case: “It turned out that teen boys loved asking questions to their friends. They’d color out the background to a solid color, wouldn’t even take a photo, and ask a question. One of our engineers had this insight to build a polling sticker for stories. I saw that and thought, ‘I don’t know, am I going to use that?’ but they said, ‘Trust us, the teens are going to love it.’ Day one they launched it and it was a hit.”

Instagram's JTBD is communication—and users want means the founders didn’t use, predict, or appreciate. The product evolution shows this shift: static photos, sticker photos, stories, IGTV.

Another 'what are the users doing' discovery was an account that was uploading and deleting photos. At first glance, it looked like spam but upon investigation, it was someone in Indonesia using Instagram as a storefront. They’d upload a photo, negotiate on price in the comments, and remove the photo when the item sold.

Instagram is an elegant product. It rode the social wave and had good luck (their success was half luck the founding duo say), but the service also delivered on a JTBD.

Which diapers?

I was shocked when my wife and I left the hospital after our first daughter was born. There was no training, no warning, no checklist of things to do. Rental car agreements take less time and require more proof of responsibility. I was twenty-five and along with my wife (thank goodness) was expected to keep another human alive.

One of the decisions was which diapers to buy. Brand A, Brand B, Store-Brand C. Like many others when presented with options A, B, and C and unsure about the JTBD I used the Goldilock's rule: choose the median price.

A decade before I made my diaper choice, P&G wanted to sell diapers in China. Figuring that the market was growing, but had low per-capita income, P&G made a cheap version of Western Pampers.

The product stunk.

Picture the last diaper campaign you saw. It probably involved blue liquid poured into an open diaper. But absorption isn't why people hire diapers—it's what the absorption allows.

The Pamper's assumption was that cheaper was better. Revising that assumption, they looked for the JTBD. They talked to mothers in China and found out that two things dominated their thoughts; more sleep for them and better sleep for their babies.

The Pamper's response was to team up with the Beijing Children's Hospital's Sleep Research Center. They tracked thousands of babies and found that Pampers pampered babies fell asleep thirty percent faster and sleep better and longer.

Pampers took this information to the Chinese public and reframed the JTBD. If mothers wanted more sleep and better, especially for physical and cognitive development, baby sleep then they should switch to Pampers. It worked.

Pampers called it the Golden Sleep campaign and it led to them leading the market for diapers in China despite being a new product to the growing middle class. It's a good reminder too that jobs are zero-sum. Diapers replaced kaidangku, "split pants".

Who buys a milkshake at seven in the morning?

McDonald's was curious (a theme with demand-side innovation). Anytime customers act against expectations it means they're hacking your service to fit their JTBD. So, McDonald's was curious why eighty-percent of their milkshakes sold each day were sold before eight-thirty in the morning.

So McDonald's hired Harvard Business School professor, and Moesta collaborator, Clayton Christensen who with his team (including Moesta) sat around and counted people buying the shakes. They counted every visible metrics. Accumulating enough data, they ran a Harvard-type analysis and the pattern was clear: there was no pattern.

Reflecting on the analysis Christensen noted about himself, "There are all kinds of characteristics and attributes about me, but my characteristics and attributes have not yet caused me to buy the New York Times today." It's not the WHO that leads to JTBD but a WHY.

Christensen and his team headed back to the field and talked to people. They couldn't just ask people, 'Why did you hire this milkshake?' because in that context that question doesn't make any sense. Moesta says his JTBD interviews take an hour. Christensen asked questions like, 'If you hadn't got a milkshake what might you get instead?' and then asked about the differences between the milkshake and the alternative.

What he found surprised everyone. Milkshakes are full of calories, milkshakes are delicious, and most important, milkshakes take a long time to drink. Christensen found that customers hired milkshakes because "they had a long and boring drive to work."

This means that McDonald's doesn't only compete with other places slinging milkshakes through drive-thru windows but anything that tastes good and reduces boredom. A grab-and-go-breakfast from home cooked and scarfed while listening to a podcast also competes with a morning milkshake.

No one sells a Tuesday night wine.

The most difficult businesses are the ones with the most skilled competitors. Basketball games in the NBA and YMCA are both basketball but not really the same game. Generally, businesses that pay in profits and prestige attract the most competition. Movie-making for example. Sports team ownership is another. Restauranteurs are a third. A fourth is making wine.

Though there may be as many 'winemakers' as there are varieties. Some in the industry just grow grapes. Some buy and blend. Some market well. Successful winemaking is more about coming up with good stories than blending great grapes. Like Instagram, it helps if the JTBD is unclaimed. So, timing matters.

One wine that leaped into a JTBD role is Barefoot Wine. Started in 1986, the company began with a foreclosure and grassroots marketing campaign before that was a thing. What founders Bonnie Harvey and Michael Houlihan did well was serve the JTBD.

Houlihan explained in one interview that in the 1980's wine-drinking Americans, and winemaking Americans were apologizing for not being French enough. The wine at the time "was a Saturday night wine where the men would sit around and talk about things like mid-notes. But it turned out the majority of wine buyers were a thirty-seven-year-old mom with two-and-a-half kids pushing a cart down the supermarket aisle and she wanted a Tuesday night wine."

Harvey adds that, "At the time wine was intimidating. People couldn't pronounce the name on the labels."

The wine market, like the morning milkshake market, had untapped demand. With the attitudes of the day, we can imagine winemakers working against this market. Their Francophile fetish constricted sales. Harvey and Houlihan showed that what people wanted was simplicity.

Retrace the steps that led to that first glass of Barefoot and the last glass for you, and we see the obstacle on the JTBD path. Glasses of wine are preceded by bottles that wait in stores full of overwhelming options. What to choose?

Winemakers have gotten better. They employ mouths to tell stories as well as tongues to taste grapes. They cover labels with animals (read: target-relevant primes) and suggest food pairings. People now hire wine for all kinds of JTBD and Barefoot led the way.

Where are all the designers?

Years ago I wrote an ebook, “28 Lessons from Startups that Failed”. It cataloged the post-mortem reflections from nearly fifty failed startups. The biggest problem was basically, “nobody wants this”. There was no JTBD. Founders could and should have talked to the (potential) customers.

The IDEO design studios offer an example of what good talking and listening look like. When CEO Tim Brown gives tours, people often ask where the design teams are. They expect reality to be like commercials; Spartan offices, blocks of clay, walls of white, desks of pine. It’s not like that at all Brown says. The teams aren’t isolated, they’re implanted.

He wrote in the book, *Change by Design*: “Walk into the offices of any of the world’s leading design consultancies, and the first question is likely to be ‘Where is everybody?’ Of course, many hours are spent in the model shop, in project rooms, and peering into computer monitors, but many more hours are spent out in the field with the people who will ultimately benefit from our work.”

Even Steve Jobs, the man IDEO designed the first Apple Mouse for, the man who said the customer doesn’t know what they want until you show them, got feedback from his customers. Jobs and Apple didn’t look for explicit feedback, to make things smaller, wider or whiter. No, Apple looked for the latent needs of customers. What are the things a customer wants?

It’s in these needs that people find the JTBD.

In addition to consulting, IDEO offers workshops on their approach. The IDEO way for a day.

One exercise is making a wallet for a partner. When most people are given a sheet of paper they fold it like an envelope. That may be what a wallet looks like but it’s not what a wallet does. Wallets have all kinds of jobs: appearance, function, size, and so on. Expand the wallet to include the phone case, which has wallet aspects, and we see more JTBD. Expand too to include a purse, messenger bag, and backpack and there’s a whole list of jobs.

The point IDEO makes is that the wallet maker (paper folder) needs to talk to their partner about why they need a wallet.

It was January 15, 1998, that George Costanza told Jerry Seinfeld that “I need everything in there,” when they talk about the wallet that’s so thick it’s giving Costanza back problems. Before digital, the JTBD of a wallet was as thick as a phonebook. Decades later and things have changed, though probably not for George.

We don’t make beer, we make friends.

Another industry with a macro boost was the beer industry. From 1820-1870 the American population swelled to twice its size with nearly two-thirds of those immigrants from German and Ireland. This was good for beer makers like Anheuser-Busch founders Eberhard Anheuser and Adolphus Busch. Though better for Busch as Anheuser died a year after co-founding the company.

It would be Adolphus who set the company up to survive anti-German sentiment during the World Wars (via heavy pro-American advertising), prohibition (making ice-cream), and the Budweiser frogs (delegating the marketing to 21-38-year-olds to staff that was 21-38).

Gussie Busch, Adolphus's great-grandson explained the JTBD of beer brewers. From the book, *Bitter Brew*: "It all went back to the beginning, when his grandfather Adolphus first explained to his new partner and father-in-law, Eberhard Anheuser, that their business was not just making beer. 'Making friends is our business,' he said. Gussie had made that his motto; rarely did he go a day without uttering it."

Beer was a commodity. Anheuser-Busch saw this when they tried to raise their prices in the 1950s and Schlitz Brewing became the largest brewer by volume in the United States. Part-of-the-reason Anheuser-Busch regained the lead was a switch to Norman-Rockwell like Saturday Evening Post paintings. They showed families, couples, and neighbors laughing, smiling, and drinking Budweiser.

In some ways, our three profiled beverages followed similar paths. Coca-Cola in Atlanta, Anheuser-Busch in St. Louis, and Barefoot Wine in California all had good timing (and minimal competition) and found a clear, strong, resonate marketing message that communicated the JTBD.

Oh, no. It broke again.

Over time and across people the JTBD changes slowly. One friend who invests in businesses said that the reason his company owns a pool installation company is that people have dipped bodies in water for millennia. The way (pool, tub, whirlpool, hot tub, etc.) will change over time and vary across people, but the JTBD won't. Because JTBD change slowly, fast-thinking is forward-thinking.

Before Adam Savage and Jamie Hyneman starred in *Mythbusters*, they were commercial, literally commercials, artists. They created special effects to advertise the product du jour.

In his book, *Every Tool is a Hammer*, Adam Savage writes about one difficult job for a toy company. They'd contracted for a certain effect over a series of commercials but the effect was more stubborn than special. Savage wrote, "When it came time to set it up for filming, a key component exploded into three separate pieces. It was immediately obvious to Jamie and me that the rig was DOA."

According to the letter of the contract, Jamie and Adam failed the JTBD. But that's not right at all. A company didn't hire them for any particular effect so much as their expertise creating effects.

With forty people standing around (getting paid) Hyneman solved the JTBD right on the spot. Savage explained, "Jamie's response to this incredible pressure was both surprising and inspiring. He didn't show any emotion, neither perturbation nor anger, not even nonchalance. He just calmly looked at the producer and said: 'To get this done by the end of the day I figure we have three options.' Then he carefully laid out three brand-new solutions, complete with the pros and cons for each as they related to the original storyboard."

Thanks to lots of practice, Hyneman found a solution to the JTBD. Jamie and Adam weren't hired for a particular ad, but a memorable one. That was the JTBD.

Pitching investments.

Two things matter in the knowledge economy: having good ideas and communicating them. As a quick side note, employees also hire employers to handle the legal, governmental, and coordination problems associated with work. The next time you're frustrated at work, remember that you've hired your boss for a JTBD that entrepreneurs handle on their own.

Investors and professors Paul Johnson and Paul Sonkin wrote a book about having and communicating good ideas. As Johnson noted in one interview, "Not getting an idea adopted into the portfolio is the equivalent of having no good ideas."

Johnson recalls his uncle's advice, "If a portfolio manager asks for a blue umbrella don't bring them a red umbrella and tell them how it will keep them dry."

The reason for the Pauls' crusade is a mismatch of JTBD. For a manager, the job is a sound portfolio. For an analyst, the job is a good idea. To match these two jobs, Johnson suggests bringing up ideas sooner to "Socialize the idea as early as possible...go in earlier than when you are done."

It's taken a while to bring up, but here we are. Prototypes are helpful in the JTBD approach. Because this is demand-side thinking, possible solutions come out of the oven half-baked. Innovators then need to solicit feedback and try again.

For a cafeteria, this might mean asking people what foods they want and then making samples and tracking consumption. For software, it means shipping an MVP and a/b testing. For investment analysis it means asking questions about both the quantitative and qualitative aspects—and for investment managers it means giving good feedback. Johnson said, "If you don't give feedback other than 'No' it's organizationally unacceptable."

Though tucked away in a tidy acronym, we see again and again that JTBD is more of a philosophy of business than a silver-bullet solution.

Do you want the trip to be more comfortable or faster?

One of the biggest obstacles to finding the JTBD is the difficulty in quantifying it. When JTBD is a marketplace of ideas, then the ideas with clear metrics will be adopted first, fastest, and most thoroughly.

Sports (free-throw-percentage or batting-average) have easy metrics. Investments have easy metrics too (annualized-rate-of-return). Travel has easy metrics (price, duration, stops). However, as we'll see with travel, just because we can measure something doesn't mean we should. To riff on the classic line: what gets measured may not matter.

Longer trips are sometimes better. What matters is the quality of time, something difficult to quantify. Isn't half-an-hour working in the back of an Uber better than twenty-minutes driving yourself through stop-and-go traffic? Yes, and it's fifty-percent longer.

Rory Sutherland has emphasized this point. Sutherland's ethos is to find things that are important but not explicit. "Don't assume that to change the consumer perception of something," Sutherland says, "you have to change the thing in reality."

Or put another way, reframing physical solutions can solve the job.

Sutherland is fond of citing faster rail travel as a place where we may be optimizing something just because we can measure it. Rather than faster trains, Rory will say, make them more comfortable. However, these kinds of changes are hard to justify. People want to appear logical, post-hoc-ergo-propter-hoc, though that may not be a JTBD solution.

Benefits, not specs.

During my middle school days, I operated a paper route. It was a great route of sixty duplexes and townhouses a five-minute bike ride from my childhood home.

One perk was looking through the advertisements and I remember seeking out the Best Buy ad and looking at all the emerging technology. Compact Disc players advertised the length of the skip protection. Computers advertised RAM and hard drive. Cameras advertised mega-pixels. During this phase of technology, it made sense to educate the consumer. It was rational.

But, like Rory's trains, limited.

In the book *Insanely Simple*, Ken Segall writes about his time working at Apple and one point of emphasis was the focus on JTBD. Apple sold on benefits, not specs. Apple computers were to "Think Different".

Steve Jobs famously said that people don't know what they want until you show them. Our interpretation of that is that Jobs knew the JTBD. Even today if a business owner asks a customer what they want the first answer will be for something to be cheaper, faster, or better. Oh, ideally all three.

In his work for Basecamp Ryan Singer explains it this way, "Even when customers come to us with requests with what they think that they want, they express that in supply-side language. A button for this. Sort like this. A calendar view. Those are all solutions, all supply-side language, so the work is to backtrack it into demand-side language. This is a particular solution but it's all the context around a problem."

But using the JTBD approach we can see that cheaper, faster, or better doesn't address the issue.

Another famous expression is that people don't want quarter-inch drill bits, they want quarter-inch holes. Making drill bits cheaper, faster, or better doesn't solve the JTBD. In fact, the focus on jobs led to the invention of something that didn't drill-- the Command brand hooks.

At the end of 2019, a glance at their website shows the focus on JTBD. The site lists specs (in this case weight) but it also shows household items that weigh that amount. A bag of onions weighs about three pounds, a bag of potatoes weighs about five, a gallon of milk weighs about eight. That's a JTBD approach.

That was the Apple approach too. It's not about what the product is but what the product allows you to do.

I'm hiring you not to talk to me.

Andy Rachleff is the co-founder of Wealthfront, a digitized financial service. Hailed as part of the robo-advisor revolution.

What Wealthfront and its peers do well is provide a new way to solve the same job. People hire money to serve as a consistent means of exchange and hire financial advisors (more on them later) to keep their money safe and, sometimes, grow it.

In the JTBD framework, the job hasn't changed but the means have. Rachleff explained it this way to Jason Calacanis: "What might surprise people is the thing that most attracts people to our service is we do everything in software."

Merely supplementing with software, Rachleff went on, "is great for baby boomers because baby boomers like to talk to people but millennials pay us not to talk to them."

The JTBD is advice and service and different groups want that JTBD completed in different ways.

Why did Penn Jillette hire Donald Trump?

In his book, *Presto*, Penn Jillette does not have nice things to say about The Apprentice star, Donald Trump. However, he points out that reality television has a certain JTBD and it may go unnoticed.

Penn wrote: "On reality TV competition shows, there are always at least two competitions going on. There's the competition that's the make-believe of the show, and there's the real competition that happens outside the TV show. Winning the make-believe competition does help with winning the real competition, but they're not the same."

The real competition that Jillette writes about is to put butts in the seats in the Penn & Teller Theater in Las Vegas.

So Trump and Jillette hired (You're hired!) each other for their cause. Penn was hired to help the ratings of Trump's show and Trump's show was hired to boost ticket sales to a Las Vegas attraction.

Some people call this the "meta-conversation" and it's worth being aware of. Financial television is sometimes criticized for its meta-conversation. In the same way that Trump and Jillette hired each other, advertising companies hire networks and networks hire advertisers with the implicit goal to 'keep things interesting.'

The Tasty recipe.

It's amazing that the largest food entertainment company in the world is Tasty, a division of BuzzFeed. What Tasty executive Ashley McCollum figured out was that the internet had changed the JTBD of food preparation.

In the past, brands advertised and people believed. If a restaurant said, 'Our food is classic Italian and uses grandma's recipes from the homeland,' people trusted the chef so long as the food was good. Then the internet came along. With online reviews came the criticism that it was cottage cheese, not ricotta, stuffing the pasta.

McCollum's insight came from BuzzFeed's data. People wanted social food, not social-status food. People had hired traditional television cooking shows to be aspirational (Martha Stewart). But the JTBD shifted and drifted from aspiration to conversation.

In one interview McCollum said, "We look to make products the same way BuzzFeed looks to make content, to make it shareable." And, "Our point of view on food is that it's about what you would want to tag your friend in to say 'let's do this this weekend.'"

Rather than seeing a fancy-pants chef, the Tasty recipe is POV simplicity. Looking back at the start McCollum said, "The start was rooted in the user, it was never about our authority." The start was in demand.

With their data and innovation Tasty expanded to cookbooks, products, and as of this writing a partnership with Walmart. Their first inductive cooktop sold out the first production run. Rather than a planning mistake, we can see this as a prototype model. Listen to your customers and test your understanding along the way.

Sabermetric savants.

We'll address now one of the major aspects to consider when thinking about JTBD: price. Cost matters for choosing a job. Later we'll look at Club Crown and see how that JTBD cost too much.

The group that demonstrates this idea best is the sabermetrics movement in sports. Popularized by the book, Moneyball and movie with Brad Pitt, it's the idea that some methods for a JTBD are inexpensive relative to others.

The main job (a supplemental job is next) of sports has been to win. Al Davis lives on in his advocacy to "Just win, baby." Sports like baseball have a numerical fidelity and so it was easy to count things like walks, home-runs, steals, runs, and so on. Team managers could count these numbers and better players earned more.

Then a man named Bill James started counting too. What James noticed, and shared with his handful of early readers, was that walks and home-runs both helped a team win. James's insight that was shared in Moneyball was that anything other than getting out was good for a batting baseball team.

There was no JTBD insight--yet. The real revolution came when analysts looked at the salaries of the players. If Tom was great at drawing walks and Kevin was great at hitting home runs then both would help the team win, however almost always Kevin's market salary was disproportionately larger.

The same thing happened in basketball and became visible June 28, 2006, when Shane Battier was traded from the Memphis to Houston team. Though the stat analysis is different the JTBD approach was the same. Battier was cheap for the means he provided.

Recall our morning milkshake or the idea that 'everything competes with Netflix'. Both those points emphasize the varied means for success. Sports though is one place where the means have been quantified and sorted by efficiency.

When sabermetric savants aren't enough.

In his 2001 letter, addressing the reinsurance business, Investor Warren Buffett wrote "After all, you only find out who is swimming naked when the tide goes out. At Berkshire, we retain our risks and depend on no one. And whatever the world's problems, our checks will clear."

Buffett's point is that while the times are good someone's flaws are overlooked. To put it another way; everyone looks like a genius in a bull market. Love covers a multitude of sins and winning encourages neglect.

It was Sam Hinkie who forgot the second (maybe primary) job of sports: to entertain. Winning is one way to entertain but having something to talk about is too. Consider the system around sports: preview shows, hot-take shows, podcast shows, analysis shows, and so on.

Here's how Haralabos Voulgaris summed up Hinkie's hiccup: "The problem with what he did was he alienated the media, which is what you don't want to do by not wanting to talk. It was kind of smart because, as a gambler, if you know something you don't want to tell everyone what you know so he was really quiet about what his theories were. But, having that type of job is such a ... smarmy, handshake, wink-wink kind of business. You need to have relationships and do all these other things. You can't just be the guy in the back with a bunch of spreadsheets."

What Hinkie underestimated was the JTBD that narrative serves. Sports fans want to be optimistic about the future when their team is bad. They want to brag when their team is good. Sports fans need conversation oxygen. When it appeared that Philadelphia fans didn't get that, Hinkie was gone.

Fortunately for him, Jeff Luhnow got to see the Philadelphia process (which ultimately worked) and he reflected on the JTBD: "I think it's important in our position we spend the requisite amount of time managing the stakeholders; the fans, the media, the influencers in the organization, the ownership - all of those stakeholders. I spend a large part of my job managing those stakeholders. It all comes down to communication."

What is Luhnow communicating? The story. To fans he gives hope. To staff he gives reasons. To ownership he gives strategy. That's a manager's JTBD.

Who's going to buy fruit on sticks in a basket?

Tariq Farid has always been an entrepreneur. His first business was a local flower shop and his first business insight was that flower customers wanted to shop after work. As simple as it sounds, Farid's Connecticut competition closed early and that gave him a foot in the door.

Flowers as a gift solve a certain JTBD. Flowers look nice, smell nice, but are also impermanent. Compare flowers with food, which also looks nice, smells nice, and is impermanent and we see a unique JTBD. Like earlier when Ryan Singer contrasted the idea of adding caffeine to Milky Way and Snickers, we can contrast food and flowers to see the distinctiveness of each's JTBD.

After Farid grew his first flower shop into a second he expanded more and even created a software backend that he sold as a product. After years of work he took his first vacation in a long time (a cruise) and saw something that became his next business idea: fruit cut and arranged like flowers. He explained on the How I Built This podcast, "I saw those arrangements and I started to dabble...I got a knife and started doing it. The same way we did the flower shops, you just experiment until you get it right."

Farid shared his prototypes. Friends thought it was a bad idea. His father even invited a college of business professor over to talk Tariq out of the idea. However, customers liked it.

The friends, father, and professor were using logic to figure out why this would work (pragmatists vs economists, like with Cinnabon). They probably noted that the fruit cost more, spoiled sooner, and was inconvenient to acquire. Who would choose that?

However, those sticks of fruit cut up to look like flowers weren't hired for the same JTBD as a grocery store produce bin. Though the same product, the transformation changed the solution. This wasn't for nourishment, it was for pleasure.

Farid sold the first ones in Easter 1999. He offered a money-back guarantee if customers weren't wowed. Customers were. One so much so he placed an order for a store. The man wanted to open a franchise in Boston. As of this writing, there are more than one-thousand Edible Arrangement franchises in eight countries.

In an interview with Entrepreneur magazine, Farid shared his perspective on JTBD. "Pick the right rival. Though you might believe your direct competitor is your rival, take a macro view of your industry and business category. You may be surprised to see that your true rival doesn't even offer the same goods and services but rather something that captures customers' fancy."

Hiring an investor.

When Apple released the iPhone 3G they also released the 'There's an App for that' commercial series. Remember that Steve Jobs's brilliance wasn't in keeping the app store closed but how quickly he realized he was wrong and allowed the app store to be open.

At our house, we riff on this Apple idea and note that "there's a spreadsheet for that". I once explained to neighbors that a Disney World annual pass (we live an hour away) was cheaper than going to the movies on a per-hour basis.

Another sheet I created was the 'drag' of a financial advisor that charges one-percent. That doesn't sound like a lot, but may reduce annual retirement incomes by 10-15%. So why hire a financial advisor? What's the JTBD?

Maybe it's for performance. It costs the investor 1% but the sage advisor will earn 2% and on net, our investors will be ahead. Maybe, but I think the real reason is different. Financial advisors are hired not to optimize but to satisfice.

For example, we could shave time off a commute if we drove like hell, optimized routes, and upgraded to the synthetic oil and performance tires. But we don't because our commute is fine. The extra work isn't worth saving seconds and by driving harder we risk larger accidents.

People hire financial advisors to reduce ambiguity and not have terrible outcomes. Josh Brown of Ritholtz Wealth Management said that people hire his firm to get a good plan, and "if you're just telling a client, 'Shut up I got this,' you're not going to be the client's advisor for a long period of time."

The financial advisor is like a brand and as information spreads brands will matter less. However, as with financial advisors or commutes, there's a collection cost with all that information. In the 1980s when I wanted a portable cassette player I bought a Sony Walkman rather than the generic brand which cost half as much. It was a serious debate the Sony cost so much I could afford only one cassette.

Buying a Walkman offered downside protection. Thirty years later and I order products straight from China based on stars, reviews, and comments. Like the fog that flees as the sun's rays arrive, ambiguity in product quality has seeped away.

Will that apply to individual investors? We don't know. The stakes are so much higher. What we can see is the JTBD of a financial advisor; performance, planning, and prevention of catastrophe.

Feeling great.

Many new products are scoffed at because they're different. However, when a new product succeeds, people praise it because it's different. Any approach that's different from the norm will bring results different from the norm. This cuts both ways. To have positive deviations it takes a JTBD.

Jenn Hyman found a job in her sister's apartment on the weekend of Thanksgiving. "Becky (the sister) had just gone to a store and bought a dress that cost more than her rent and as her responsible older sister I remarked that she should probably wear one of the dresses in her closet again rather than go into credit card debt."

Remember, hacks, tweaks or acts that appear illogical are all signs to a JTBD.

Hyman had that staring in her face. She explained on the How I Built This podcast, "It was a lightbulb moment for me because I realized I was having a conversation with my sister about the experience of wearing an amazing dress. Of walking into a party feeling self-confident, feeling beautiful."

The JTBD was in wearing not owning. Hyman got to work.

She got a meeting with Jim Gold at Neiman Marcus. He thought the business was a good idea because people had been hacking his system for years. He told Hyman that people bought dresses, kept the tags on, wore it once, and then returned it to the store.

With a strong connection to a JTBD, Hyman prototyped her idea.

"We went to Bloomingdales and bought one hundred dresses - all in our (Hyman and her co-founder Jennifer Fleiss) own sizes. So if this experiment didn't work out we'd have an awesome new wardrobe. We spent a lot of our savings on this. We hosted a pop up for Harvard undergrads. We invited a bunch of different groups. The idea behind this was to see if: Women will rent dresses. What will they rent? How much will they pay? What brands do they want? And most importantly, if they do rent, what happens to these dresses after they get rented?"

People loved the idea but more importantly, people paid for it. Someone on her email list had an @nytimes email address. Figuring it was all upside if Rent the Runway was profiled, Hyman emailed that person with her story. They were.

With the influx of attention came a cash-flow crunch. They needed more dresses. Hyman and Fleiss set sail for Silicon Valley to raise money. There they had to pitch the JTBD to people who never had this job: men. The problem was compounded because for most of the venture capitalists the wife was too rich, the daughter was too young and the admin was too old. Eventually, they got a deal.

JTBD is all about the customer. What's the need and can you solve it? It takes more empathy than ego. Hyman's insight began that day in her (illogical) sister's apartment.

The Value City Cafe.

Before Andrew Glaser was the Chief Strategy Officer for a furniture store he invented something great. It was an adhesive that let golfers customize the top of their driver or three-wood. The product collected awards and accolades from the golfing world. But one thing it didn't collect was orders.

Glaser never had a meme moment (Shut up and take my money!). There was a JTBD. Golfers bought head covers, hats, and shirts. But for Club Crown, there wasn't enough "energy" (Moesta's expression) to get people to commit.

When JTBD are easy, people act. When JTBD are important, people act. When JTBD are difficult and superfluous people don't. The Club Crown required dropping off the club and not having it (and hoping nothing happened to it).

This business flop (though it paid in experience) and hearing about JTBD created a "lightbulb moment". Immediately Glaser sent Moesta a message on LinkedIn. Moesta teaches a pushing and pulling approach that perfectly overlays Glaser Club Crown experience: do people want it enough and is it easy enough to get.

Learning about the JTBD framework, Glaser wanted to try it out immediately and he returned to his employer, Value City Furniture. He started with the cafeteria. It was a good project because with the cafe, "I had no pushback from anywhere in the business. I could just go do it." That's good, Moesta said in their podcast together, "go find something no one can reject you for."

Glaser waited, watched, counted, and then questioned. He found out that people hired the cafe for two reasons: comfort food and quick food. The problem was that they were over-serving the former. Moesta summed up the key change, "It doesn't have to be delicious. It just has to be quick and sustaining enough so I'm not hungry in my next meeting."

Employees didn't want spaghetti and meatballs at work. They wanted spaghetti and meatballs at home and something at work that got them home in time for dinner with their family. Glaser made this change and it worked. Cafeteria metrics went up.

Seeing that JTBD worked, Glaser then went to the real business, selling mattresses.

By now we can see that selling mattresses isn't about selling coils, foam, counts, size (well, maybe size), or any other metric. Selling mattresses is about sleep. Once Glaser and his team focused on that JTBD their sales increased.

Coffee Crisp.

Part of what makes JTBD so powerful is that reframing the JTBD can have large effects. We just noted how Andrew Glaser sold the same product only framed it differently. In his book, This I Know, Terry O'Reilly writes about the value of framing the job:

"Coffee Crisp wanted to increase sales. The brand analyzed the competition in the candy bar category, and realized most were positioned as treats. But a treat only triggers an occasional purchase. So Coffee Crisp decided to occupy the 'snack' real estate in your mind. Therefore, when Coffee Crisp said it was a 'nice light snack,' it was vying for frequent usage. Not monthly treats."

Everything around Coffee Crisp is about how it's a 'snack' not a 'treat' and when messages are framed this way people hire in this way too.

We start and end this work by seeing the value of words and framing. Being 'hangry' makes people reach for a Snickers. Sometimes all it takes to find the right JTBD is the right words, and that's a good investment.

/ thanks for reading