

BOOTSTRAP
— YOUR BUSINESS —

FOUNDERS JOURNEY · STAGE 2 OF 9

Discovery Guide

Learn what's true outside your own head. Don't decide what to build yet.

You're trying to understand the problem, not prove your idea.

Discovery is where you stop relying only on what you think is true and start learning from real people, what they do, and what it costs them. The goal isn't to prove your idea. It's to find out whether there's a problem worth understanding more deeply.

WHAT MATTERS NOW	YOUR FIRST STEP	WHAT COMES NEXT
Real problems, what people actually do, the workarounds they use, and what keeps repeating.	Pick one way to learn from a real person, situation, or habit.	Idea: using what you learned to explore ways to solve a problem that seems worth it.

WHAT YOU'LL HAVE BY THE END

- A clearer picture of the problem and who has it.
- Real examples of what people do today, not just what they say they might do.
- A sense of what supports your guesses, what weakens them, and what complicates them.
- A sensible next learning step, without pretending the idea is already proven.

01 Look for what's real

Discovery swaps guesses for things you've seen and heard.

You might start with a belief like “freelancers struggle to keep receipts organized.” That's useful, because it gives you something to look into. It stops being useful the moment you treat it as true before you look.

GOOD DISCOVERY PAYS ATTENTION TO

- Recent, specific examples: what happened the last time the problem showed up.
- What people do now, not what they say they might do later.
- Workarounds: the tools, habits, spreadsheets, and manual steps they use today.
- What it costs them: time, money, effort, stress, or missed chances.
- What they've already tried, paid for, or given up on.

OPINION OR EVIDENCE?

Opinion	“I would buy that.” A guess about a future that hasn't happened.
Evidence	“I pay someone every month because this keeps happening.” A fact about what they do today.

> **The core idea**
> Your experience tells you where to look. Discovery shows you what the outside world actually supports.

02 Look for patterns

One conversation teaches you something. The same thing heard again starts to change what you believe.

Discovery isn't a vote. Ten people saying they like your idea can matter less than three of the right people describing the same costly problem and the same clumsy workaround, without being prompted. Notice what repeats, and what surprises you.

HOW STRONG IS YOUR EVIDENCE?

A guess	Something you believe but haven't seen support for yet.
An opinion	What someone says they think or prefer. Useful, but not the same as what they do.
A weak signal	One real observation that might matter, but hasn't repeated.
A pattern forming	Something meaningful is starting to repeat across the right people.
Strong evidence	Repeated behavior, costs, and workarounds all point the same way.

SIGNS THE PROBLEM DESERVES MORE ATTENTION

- People bring it up without you leading them there.
- You hear specific, recent examples.
- They already spend time or money dealing with it.
- The same workarounds show up again and again.
- It matters enough that they make trade-offs because of it.

SIGNS TO SLOW DOWN

- The problem mostly shows up when you explain it.
- People agree it's annoying but can't recall a real example.
- They already have an easy fix they're happy with.
- The evidence keeps pointing to a different problem or customer.
- Interest fades when time, money, or effort comes up.

> **Surprises are useful**
> Discovery is working when it changes what you understand, even when the change isn't the one you hoped for.

03 Choose your first step

Take one small action that teaches you something without a big commitment.

Your first step should produce information. You're not trying to finish Discovery in one move. You're trying to replace one important guess with something better.

GOOD FIRST STEPS CAN BE

- Talking with one person who has the problem about the last time it happened.
- Watching how someone handles the situation today.
- Looking closely at a workaround, complaint, or alternative people already use.
- Following up on one surprising thing you already heard.
- Using the free Customer Discovery Worksheet to plan, take notes, and make sense of what you learn.

SIGNS YOU'RE MAKING PROGRESS

- You can describe the problem in the customer's words, not just yours.
- You've seen some real behavior, workarounds, or costs.
- You can name what's still unclear.
- Your guesses got sharper, stronger, weaker, or changed.
- You know the next small thing to learn.

DO IT FOR LESS

Start free. Pay only at the wall.

Discovery is almost entirely free. The best evidence comes from people and places you can already reach.

- Talk to people you already know, and ask each one who else you should talk to.
- Read free online forums, Reddit, Facebook groups, and product reviews where people complain about the problem in their own words.
- Watch how people handle the problem today: what they use, what they put up with, what they pay for.
- Use the free Customer Discovery Worksheet and a free notes app to keep track of what you hear.

You don't need paid surveys, research tools, or ads to do Discovery. If free conversations stop turning up new people, ask for introductions before you pay to find anyone.

DO IT WITH AI

Let AI do the heavy lifting

Copy these into any free AI tool, like ChatGPT, Claude, or Gemini. Fill in the brackets first.

Find where people talk about it

I want to learn about this problem: [the problem]*, for* [who has it]*. Suggest the online places, groups, and kinds of reviews where people with this problem talk about it in their own words.*

Write questions that don't lead

Write eight open questions I could ask someone who has [the problem]*, about the last time it happened and what they did about it. Don't mention any solution, and avoid questions that lead them toward a yes.*

Sort what I heard

Here are my notes from talking to people: [your notes]*. Separate what people actually did from what they said they might do. Then list the patterns that repeat and anything that contradicts my guess:* [your guess]*.*

Check the answer: AI can help you prepare and sort your notes, but it can't tell you what real people experience. Only the conversations can.

NOT YET

What can wait

- Calling the idea proven because a few people were positive.
- Building the full solution before you understand the problem.
- Choosing final prices or a final offer.
- Spending on ads, outreach, automation, or hiring.
- Ignoring evidence because it doesn't fit the original idea.

COMING UP

Idea

Discovery helps you decide whether a problem deserves more attention. Idea asks what kind of solution might be worth exploring. You don't move forward because you finished a guide. You move forward when the evidence gives you a reason to explore a solution.

Discovery isn't about proving your idea. It's about learning enough to make the next decision better.