# Stanford eCorner

## Identifying True Needs

**Julie Zhuo,** *Facebook*

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**Video URL:** http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/4696/Identifying-True-Needs

Julie Zhuo, vice president of product design at Facebook, says the first question to ask when trying to provide a solution is, "What people problem are we trying to solve?" This means defining the challenge in everyday terms, not tech lingo, and remaining agnostic to the solution's form, Zhuo explains. A problem should also be stated in a way that "gets at the why," and when possible, acknowledges human needs beyond functionality, according to Zhuo.

### Transcript

- What people problem are we trying to solve? And the key word here is really the word people, because of course whenever we build anything, we're trying to solve a problem. But what tends to happen is that you start to think in the mentality of your team or your company. And you start to say things like, "The problem we need to solve is that "we need to optimize the click-through rate of our page." And you'll hear things like this all the time boiled down in small ways and large ways. And that's not a people problem. A people problem, as we define it, is if you go out and you to talk to someone on the street and they were to articulate a problem that they were having, that's how they would say it. That is the people problem statement. There's a couple things that we look at to make sure that this is a valid people problem statement. The first is that it needs to be human and straightforward. So we're not using words like CTR. We're not using words like optimize or integrate.

These are not words that people on the street would use. These are not words that people who are outside of the tech community are gonna use to talk about their problems. The second thing is, we want to make sure that it's solutions-agnostic. A lot of times, we start problems by saying, "I am going to build an app that blank." Or "I'm going to design a website that blank." And already in that statement is an inkling of what the solution is. But what if an app is not the right way? Or what if it's not supposed to be a website? So a good people problem statement gets away from trying to already constrain it into a particular solution. The third thing is that it shouldn't be about Facebook or your company or your team or whatever winning. And I think a classic example is if you say, "Our service is going to be the best at blah, blah, blah." A person on the street doesn't care if your service is the one that is the best at that. They just want to know, "Hey, for this problem that I have, "what is the best solution?" So stating any problem as we, our team, our company, whatever wants to win is not getting close to the things that people actually want. The fourth thing is that it gets at the why. So, sometimes you might have a problem like people aren't discovering this page.

And that is a problem that we need to solve. But it doesn't go one layer deeper. It doesn't get at what's actually the root cause of why people aren't discovering this page. Is it too hidden for them? Is it too confusing for them to find? It's got to get to not just what is happening, but what is the reason why it's happening. And finally, a good people problem statement can not just solve functional problems like a confusing flow, but could also get at emotional or social problems. Sometimes people just want to feel like they belong. Sometimes people just want to feel like they're validated. Those are things that also constitute something that when you ask people, they might say.