

URL: <https://ecorner-prod.tcg.stanford.edu/in-brief/pitch-to-their-pain-points/>

CNote Co-Founder Catherine Berman discusses how listening carefully and understanding the needs of customers helped her redefine a service they didn't want into a one they desperately needed. While working to get homeless people jobs at large companies earlier in her career, Berman found greater success by telling employers she could help address their diversity issues.



## Transcript

- I just moved myself out to San Francisco, with a job I thought I had.. The economy's tanking in front of me.. What am I going to do now? And so I spent sometime thinking through, alright I love being out here.. If I could do anything what would I do? And what I realized is what I really wanted to do was take everything I learned working on Madison avenue in New York, working with high caliber clients, and everything I had learned working for community development over the years, and see if I could build bridges.. And so I ended up getting a really cool job at what is now considered a social enterprise.. And so at the time there was a consortium built in San Francisco, to bring in formerly homeless individuals, back into the workforce by training them through technology, and I thought that was awesome.. And so my role was to build a bridge, was try to get large corporations to care about what we were doing.. And so I would go into Wells and I would go into Citi and I would go into Genentech and I would talk to all of these large corporations and say, don't you care? Look at the homeless situation in San Francisco, look at the tech campus that we created, we can get people back into the workforce.. Don't you care? Don't you want to join us? And you won't be shocked by the answer.. The answer was no, they didn't..

I'm sure people did.. I'm sure individuals did.. But as a corporate firm that wasn't their chief motive.. That wasn't their operational goal.. And so I decided to take a different approach.. I started interviewing these corporations and I said, well what do you care about? What are your pain points? What's actually hard for your job? And what I learned, was while they didn't really care about the nonprofit side of what we were doing, they had a diversity problem.. They could not get enough diversity candidates.. And so I said, well, if I could get some incredible diversity candidates for you, do you care where they came from? Nope.. And so I created a diversity recruitment agency out of this nonprofit.. 100% for-profit, totally motivated by these corporate recruiter's desire to bring in diverse candidates, but got hundreds of diversity candidates jobs..

Just by changing the positioning.. And so at the time I was working very closely with the board, including the vice president of Goodwill Industries, and he took me aside and he said, hey Cat, you know what you just did right? This recruitment agency you just built, that's getting all these people jobs? That's called a social enterprise, it's called a social venture.. Totally new to me, was not a common phrase at the time.. But I instantly knew, that's what I wanted to do..