



V

The Loop.

THIRTY CONVERSATIONS, THE RIGHT WAY

mits.ro

FIELD GUIDE

17 PAGES

FREE

CONTENTS

What's *inside*.

01	Why thirty, not three or three hundred	p. 3
02	The <i>three questions</i>	p. 4
03	Who to talk to (and who not)	p. 6
04	Booking the call	p. 8
05	Running the call (15 minutes)	p. 9
06	Tagging the answers	p. 11
07	Reading the <i>patterns</i>	p. 13
08	Common mistakes	p. 14
09	Official resources	p. 15

HOW TO USE

This is a six-week project. One call per workday. Use the script on page 9. Use the tagging system on page 11. After thirty calls, sit down for one afternoon with the patterns. That afternoon is worth more than every focus group you will ever run.

I

*Why **thirty**, not three or three hundred.*

Three calls is gut feeling pretending to be data. Three hundred calls is a market research project pretending to be a company. Thirty calls is the number where patterns appear and you are still small enough to act on them this week.

What thirty calls produce

- The same three reasons people almost did not buy. You will hear them five times each.
- The two surprises that you would never have guessed sitting at your desk.
- The exact words your best customers use to describe you, which become your next ad.
- The one objection that is killing your conversion rate.

What three calls produce

Three opinions, weighted by which person was loudest or most flattering. Three calls are dangerous. They make you think you have heard the customer when you have heard one personality.

What three hundred calls produce

The same patterns as thirty calls, plus 270 calls of confirmation, plus six months of your life. Diminishing returns set in fast. The next thirty calls always deepen the original thirty rather than overturn them.

The cheapest research method that has ever existed is asking customers what almost stopped them from buying. The most expensive research method that has ever existed is doing it for too long.

The thirty-call rule

- One per workday.
- Fifteen minutes each.
- Three questions, every time, in the same order.
- Tag the answers in the same place.
- One afternoon at the end to read the patterns.

II

The three questions.

Three questions, not five, not ten. The same three for every call. The constraint is the magic. With three questions across thirty conversations you can compare answers; with ten questions across thirty conversations you cannot.

The questions, exactly

1. "What almost stopped you from saying yes?"
2. "What surprised you, good or bad, after you started?"
3. "What would you tell a friend who is thinking about it?"

Read them again. Each one does specific work.

Question 1: what almost stopped you

This finds the friction. Every "yes" customer almost said "no" first. Their hesitation is your conversion problem in plain words. Listen for the verb (price, trust, complexity, integration, time).

Question 2: what surprised you

This finds the gap between what you said you do and what you actually deliver. Surprises (good or bad) are the truth. The good ones become testimonials. The bad ones become next month's roadmap.

Question 3: what would you tell a friend

This gives you copy. Whatever they say is the language they use to describe you to other humans. Steal it word for word. Your home page hero is hiding in these answers.

Why these three, not "your three"

You will be tempted to add "what feature do you want?". Do not. That question encourages opinions about the future. The three above interrogate the past, where the truth lives.

A SMALL WORDING TIP

Use "almost" in question 1, not "what stopped you". "What almost stopped you" works on yes-customers. "What stopped you" works only on no-customers. Almost is the universal version.

The follow-up moves

Each question has one allowed follow-up. Just one. Do not interrogate.

QUESTION	ALLOWED FOLLOW-UP
1. Almost stopped you	"What did you do to get past it?"
2. Surprised you	"Was it a good surprise or a bad one?"
3. Tell a friend	"In one sentence, how would you say it?"

*What you do **not** say*

- "Yeah, we have heard that before."
- "That is on our roadmap."
- "What if we built [feature]?"
- "Most of our customers actually..."

Every one of these stops the customer from telling you something true. Bite your tongue. Take notes. The call is for them.

Silence is allowed

After they finish, count to four in your head before you speak. The most useful sentence often comes after the pause. Founders interrupt that pause out of habit. Train yourself out of it.

III

Who to talk to.

The thirty calls split into three groups, ten each. The mix is the point. Do not call only your happiest customers; you will only hear the good news.

Ten "yes" customers

People who paid you and are still paying you. Pick the most recent ten. Recent matters because their decision is fresh in their memory.

Ten "almost-no" customers

People who paid you but it was a near thing. Long sales cycle, multiple objections, almost dropped out. Your CRM (Field guide 02) makes these visible. Pick the ten with the longest "Talking" stage.

Ten "no" prospects

People who said no, or went silent. They are the hardest to get on a call but the most valuable. They will tell you exactly why your product or pitch is broken.

Plan for half of them to ignore you. Reach out to twenty to land ten calls.

Who to skip

- **Friends and family.** They will be polite. Polite is useless data.
- **Other founders in your space.** They will pitch you back. Different exercise.
- **Anyone you owe money to or owes you money.** Power dynamic ruins the answer.
- **Anonymous social media respondents.** They are not real customers.

How to make the list

1. Open your CRM. Filter for the three groups above.
2. Sort each list by recency.
3. Pick the top fifteen of each group (you will lose 30 percent to no-shows).
4. Save the list as "Loop / 30-call wave 1" with a date.

CHAPTER 03 (CONTINUED)

How to think about consent

You are not running formal user research. You are having short, candid conversations with customers. You do not need a consent form for that. But:

- Tell them up front this is a 15-minute call to learn what they think, not a sales call.
- Ask if it is OK to take notes. Default yes; almost everyone says yes.
- Do not record without permission. Notes are enough.
- Do not quote anyone publicly without explicit permission.

Incentives, only when needed

For yes and almost-no customers, no incentive is usually needed. Most are flattered to be asked.

For no-prospects, a 25 EUR coffee gift card is the smallest thing that materially raises response rate. Do not offer more than 50 EUR. The right respondents say yes for the conversation, not the money. The wrong ones come for the gift card and tell you nothing.

WATCH OUT

If a respondent's answers feel too aligned with your hopes, ask the same question a different way ten minutes later. If the answer changes, you were getting flattered, not informed.

IV

Booking the call.

A short, honest message gets a 25-50 percent reply rate. A "do you have time for a quick chat?" message gets 5 percent. Below is what works.

The reach-out template (yes / almost-no customers)

Subject: 15 minutes, three questions

Hi [name],

I'm trying to get better at understanding why people choose us and where we make it harder than it should be. I'd love 15 minutes of your time, on a video call, just to ask three questions. No demo. No sales. No follow-up.

If you're up for it, here's my calendar: [link].

Thank you,
[your name]

The reach-out template (no-prospects)

Subject: I owe you a thank-you

Hi [name],

You looked at us a few [weeks/months] ago and chose not to move forward. That is more useful information for me than most of our happy customers' feedback. If you have 15 minutes, I'd ask three questions about what made it a no.

If you'd rather skip a call, even a 3-line email reply would help: what almost made you say yes, what made you say no, and what would have changed your mind.

Whichever is easier. Thank you.
[your name]

Why these messages work

- They are short.
- They state the time cost up front (15 minutes).
- They name the deliverable (three questions).
- They make it explicit that it is not a sales call.
- They give an alternative for low-effort respondents (the email reply).

CHAPTER 05

V *Running the call.*

Fifteen minutes. Three questions. One scribe. One promise to keep it short, kept.

The call script

TIME	WHAT YOU DO
00:00 - 00:30	"Thanks for the time. Three questions, fifteen minutes, then I am out of your day. Mind if I take notes?"
00:30 - 04:30	Ask question 1. Listen. Allowed follow-up. Silence after they finish.
04:30 - 09:00	Ask question 2. Listen. Allowed follow-up.
09:00 - 13:30	Ask question 3. Listen. Allowed follow-up.
13:30 - 14:30	"Anything I should have asked but did not?"
14:30 - 15:00	Thank them. End on time. Always.

The "should have asked" question

This single question, asked at the end, is responsible for most of the unexpected insights you will get from the thirty calls. It signals you are open to being told something you did not know to ask.

End on time, every time

If they want to keep talking, you can. But you must offer the exit at the 15-minute mark. The promise of "15 minutes" is a feature of the call. Breaking it is a small breach of trust. The next person you call will hear about it.

What to do if they go off-script

Let them. If a question 1 answer accidentally answers question 2, that is fine. You are after the truth, not the structure. Tag the answer in the right column afterwards.

Solo or paired

Solo is fine. Paired (you ask, a colleague writes) is better. The note-taker can capture exact phrases while the asker maintains eye contact.

Where to take notes

One simple template per call. Save in the same place every time. The cheapest, most reliable setup:

- One Notion page or Google Doc per call, in a folder called "Loop / Wave 1".
- Header: name, role, date, group (yes / almost-no / no).
- Three sub-headings, one per question, with the answer in their own words.
- One section "Quotes worth stealing" for direct phrases you might use in copy.
- One section "Tags" with one or two of your tag categories (chapter 06).

What to do right after the call

Two minutes before you do anything else. Read your notes. Add the tags. Underline the one phrase you would put on a billboard. Close the document. Move on.

If you wait until end of day, you will lose 40 percent of what was said. The call must be tagged in the five minutes after it ends.

A TRICK FOR VIDEO CALLS

Block 5 minutes after every loop call on your calendar. Same color as the call. Title it "Loop tag". Honour the block. Without it, the patterns you find in chapter 7 will be 30 percent worse.

VI

Tagging the answers.

Tags are how thirty messy conversations become readable patterns. The taxonomy is simple. Resist the urge to add tags as you go.

The fixed taxonomy

Friction tags (for question 1, "almost stopped you")

- price
- trust (brand new, never heard of you)
- complexity (too hard to understand or set up)
- integration (it does not fit into existing tools)
- timing (right product, wrong time, no budget yet)
- internal–buyin (had to convince a partner, boss, or finance)
- competitor (already evaluating someone else)
- other

Surprise tags (for question 2)

- surprise+ease (easier than expected)
- surprise+speed (faster than expected)
- surprise+support (better human help than expected)
- surprise+depth (more capable than expected)
- surprise–ease (harder than expected)
- surprise–bug (something was broken)
- surprise–pricing (felt unexpected pricing pain)
- other

Phrase tag (for question 3)

- Just one, the verbatim phrase. No taxonomy. Save the exact words.

Two-tag rule

Each call gets at most two friction tags and two surprise tags. If you find yourself adding three or four, you are tagging too much. Pick the strongest two.

Where the tags live

If you keep notes in Notion, add a "Friction" multi-select property and a "Surprise" multi-select property to the database. Pre-populate them with the lists above. Tag from the dropdown. Never type free text into a tag column.

The "exact phrase" log

Keep a separate doc called "Loop / Phrases worth stealing". Every time someone gives a question 3 answer that sounds like ad copy, paste it verbatim. Add the date and the customer name (or pseudonym, if they prefer privacy).

By the end of the thirty calls, this doc has 30 to 60 phrases. The best three are your next home page hero, your next ad, and your next sales email subject line.

NOTION / OFFICIAL

MULTI-SELECT PROPERTIES FOR TAGGING

- [notion.so / help / database properties](https://notion.so/help/database-properties)



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GOOGLE / OFFICIAL

DATA VALIDATION IN SHEETS (FOR TAG DROPDOWNS)

- [support.google.com / docs / data validation](https://support.google.com/docs/data-validation)



SCAN

VII

Reading the patterns.

An afternoon, alone, with the thirty notes and the tag database. Phone off. No team meeting. Just one founder reading and counting.

The four-step read

Step 1: count the friction tags

Sort by tag. The top two friction tags are usually responsible for 60 to 80 percent of "almost said no". They are also the next two improvements you should ship.

Step 2: count the surprise tags

The "good surprise" tags are your strongest marketing claims, in the customer's own words. The "bad surprise" tags are your most underrated bug list. Both are gold.

Step 3: read the phrase log out loud

Read every "tell a friend" phrase aloud. The three that make you smile or sting are the ones to test in your next ad. Yours, not the focus group's.

Step 4: write five lines

- The top two reasons people almost said no.
- The single biggest good surprise.
- The single biggest bad surprise.
- The phrase you will put on the home page.
- The one change you will ship in the next two weeks.

Five lines. Save them in a doc called "Loop / Wave 1 / Findings". Date it.

The next wave

Six months later, do another thirty. Same questions. Same tags. Compare. The shifts (and the things that did not move) tell you whether your work has changed reality. Three waves over eighteen months is the most honest customer-research program a small company can run.

VIII

Common mistakes.

1. Sales calls in disguise

If at any point in the call you are tempted to upsell, cross-sell, or "see if there is more we can do", stop. The call is research. The moment it becomes a sales call, the data is contaminated.

2. Calling only happy customers

The mix of yes / almost-no / no is the point. Skipping the "no" group is the most common failure of customer research because it is the hardest tier to schedule. Reach out to twenty to land ten.

3. Asking about features

"What feature would you like next?" produces a long list of contradictory wishes. Stick to the three questions about the past. The roadmap will write itself once you understand the friction.

4. Adding questions

Three questions, every time, in the same order. Five questions across thirty calls means you cannot compare answers cleanly.

5. Tagging at the end

Tag in the five minutes after each call, not in a 3-hour batch at the end of the project. Memory decays fast. Batch-tagging is partial fiction.

6. Reading the calls one by one

The patterns are visible only when you sort the tags. If you read each call as a story, you remember the loudest voices. If you sort the tags, you see the quiet majority.

7. Sharing the findings as a long doc

Five lines. Send the team five lines, not a 20-page report. The action is what matters. The 20-page report makes everyone feel responsible and nobody act.

IX

Official *resources.*

HUBSPOT ACADEMY / FREE

CUSTOMER RESEARCH AND FEEDBACK

- [academy.hubspot.com / customer-feedback](https://academy.hubspot.com/customer-feedback)



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Y COMBINATOR LIBRARY / FREE

TALKING TO USERS

- [ycombinator.com / library](https://ycombinator.com/library) (search "talking to users")



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BUILD THE CALL DATABASE

- [notion.so / help / intro-to-databases](https://notion.so/help/intro-to-databases)
- [notion.so / help / database-properties](https://notion.so/help/database-properties)



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GOOGLE WORKSPACE / FREE

SET UP A CALENDAR BOOKING PAGE (GOOGLE CALENDAR APPOINTMENT SLOTS)

- [support.google.com / calendar / appointment schedules](https://support.google.com/calendar/appointment-schedules)



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HUBSPOT / FREE MEETING TOOL

FREE 1-TO-1 BOOKING PAGE

- [knowledge.hubspot.com / meetings-tool](https://knowledge.hubspot.com/meetings-tool)



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Thirty calls. Six weeks.

Block one fifteen-minute slot per workday. Send ten reach-outs to each of three groups by Friday. Use the script. Tag inside five minutes of every call. Save the afternoon at the end for the read.

Most companies will never run this loop. The few that do learn more in six weeks than the others learn in two years.

NEXT / HANDBOOK 06 / THE CHANNEL

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