



# YOUR CUSTOMER IS A MARSHMALLOW

By Scott Beckett

**A**merican chemist Linus Pauling—one of the 20 greatest scientists of all time, according to *New Scientist*—is synonymous with his namesake Pauling Principle, which states, “**The best way to have a good idea is to have lots of ideas.**” As one of only two people ever to be awarded two Nobel Prizes in two different fields (the other being Marie Curie), Pauling knew a thing or two about great ideas.

Moreover, the Pauling Principle is rooted in science. Research suggests that if you list 100 ideas on a given subject, the most innovative ideas are in the second half of the list. Quantity, therefore, truly does yield quality.

So how can we apply the Pauling Principle to create richer, more compelling products and experiences for our customers— whoever they may be? At Insigniam, we start by utilizing design thinking and its six-step framework.

The first step is to **understand the challenge** at hand. Second, **observe how it impacts customers**. By understanding and observing, we can move to the third and fourth stages, which are to **strategize a needs-focused approach** in order to **begin ideating on a solution**.

But here’s where things get interesting: step five, **prototyping**. By definition, a prototype is something tangible that conveys an idea. The prevailing attitude inside many organizations is that a prototype should be an attempt at perfection. This couldn’t be further from the truth. Ideally, prototypes should be relatively inexpensive and easy to evolve. Quantity doesn’t just yield quality during ideation. It’s also critical during the prototype phase.

With that in mind, how can we leverage prototyping to better

serve our customers? The simple answer is to begin with the customer in mind and work backward.

Consider the Marshmallow Challenge. Maybe you’ve seen this used as a team-building exercise. The rules are simple: build a free-standing structure using spaghetti sticks, tape, string and a marshmallow—the last of which must be placed atop the structure before time expires.

It’s common for teams to review the rules, observe the progress of others and plan for architectural perfection. Yet in the final moments there’s always a rush to put the marshmallow atop said brilliantly designed structures—which is when they collapse. Interestingly, when children do the same exercise, they start with the marshmallow. Why? Because it’s most important.

## Your customer is the marshmallow

It’s critical to understand that prototyping is a highly iterative process. The goal is not to validate your best idea, but to observe and learn how your customers use (and sometimes misuse) it. The more—and sooner—the better, since testing is the sixth and final step within the design thinking framework.

By taking a quantitative approach, we have a better chance of making customers feel like they designed the solution. Not only can this speed adoption once a product goes to market, but it boosts the odds of delivering something truly innovative that creates new value.

When we put the customer at the center of all we do and shift our thinking about what a prototype needs to be, we can leverage the full power of design thinking to improve customer experiences. **IQ**

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