

December 2023

Designing for Real Life

Considering real life conditions to become more
compassionate UXers

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more compassionate UXers

**What does it
mean to design
for real people?**

We create products for real people.

So we need to design for real people.

But what does it mean to design for real people?

Design for Real People

Everyone is an edge case

We sometimes consider edge cases in UX: those cases that fall outside the standard case of use.

But the truth is, everyone can be an edge case for very different reasons

Something harmless for most can be harmful for some

Facebook's Year in Review 2014 vs. 2015

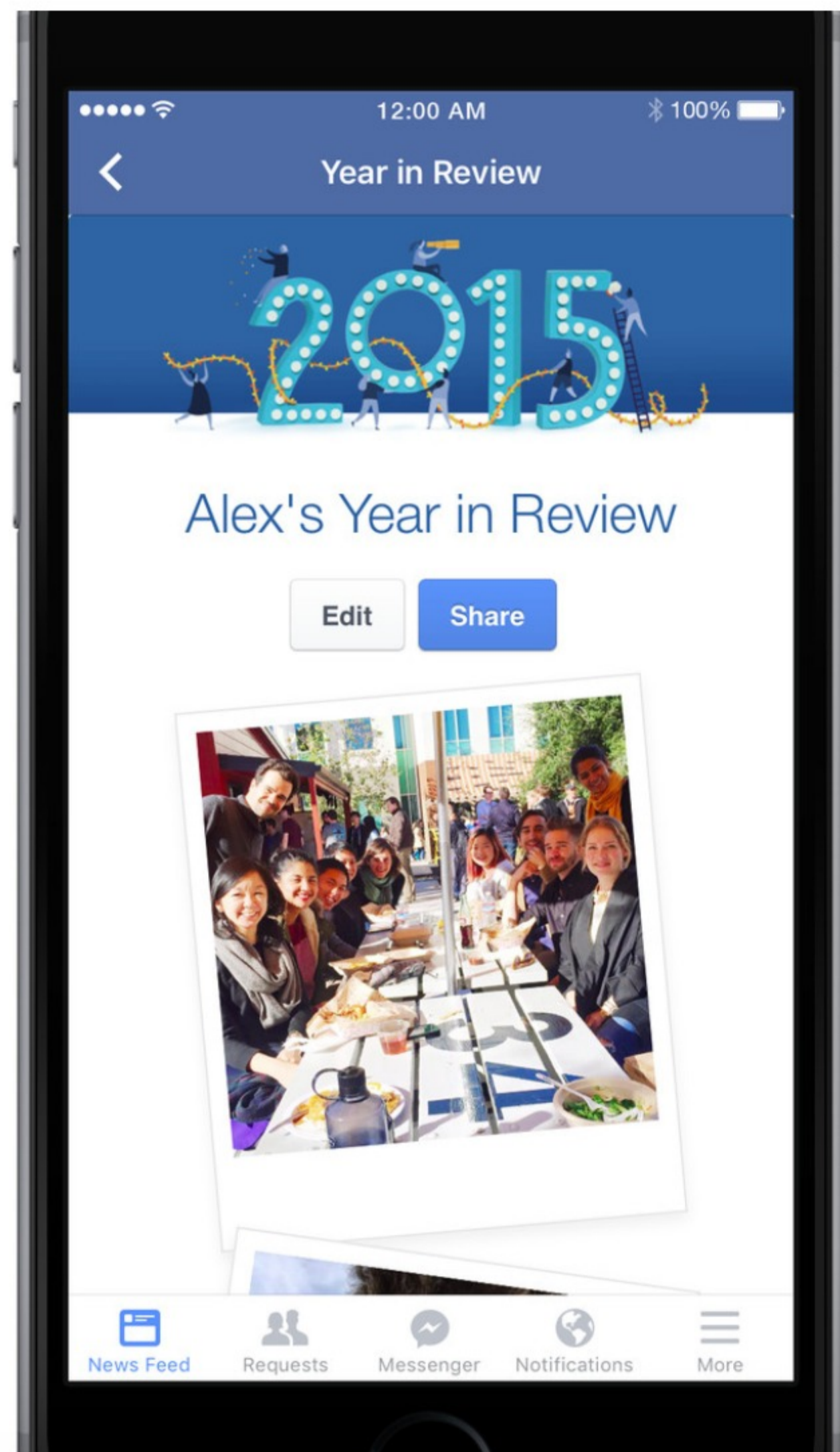
In 2014, Facebook assumed that users' top engaged content would always be good memories, not taking into account bad events that users would not want to be reminded of.



Something harmless for most can be harmful for some

Facebook's Year in Review 2014 vs. 2015

In 2015, they used gentler language and gave the user more control of their experience. By using a more neutral approach, they created a more compassionate design for people who had a bad year.



Call out your Biases

Our Brains create biases based on our own lived experiences and what we find most commonly around us.

(This is called "System 1 thinking" and it's part of how our brains sort information.)

Biases are not inherently good or bad.

But they can get in the way of understanding a wider range of potential users.

When considering the end user, we need to shift our brains to think outside of our everyday experiences.

Call out your Biases

It's easy to start doing!

Think of the first user you envision when you approach a new project- that's your "ideal user".

Understand what traits they have and why they have them.

Now imagine a user who is different in every single way.

Give them traits opposite of your idealized user.

Plan for the Worst

Users are going to be using your product under all kinds of conditions.

List out all possible user scenarios, even those that seem unlikely. Think of how you might counteract these in your approach.

For example, cars are designed with crumple zones to account for crashes and accidents.

They account for as many crash situations as possible, though most likely you won't get into a car crash.

**Everyone needs
space.**

**Get to know
the user.**

What would a human do?

You don't decide when people come to your site or use your product.

They do.

So we need to take into account all the reasons why a user might need our product, when they need it, and what conditions they are under while using it?

Stress

Users are likely to be facing some sort of stress while using your product. Stress uses up cognitive resources, meaning they might not be able to think clearly when using your product.

Emotional stress - Feeling sad, frustrated, confused

Situational stress - A high pressure situation, an upcoming deadline, an emergency situation

Technical stress - A slow internet connection, an old device that doesn't work as well, a webpage that doesn't load

Imperfect Personas

Most personas tend to be smiling, happy, idealized users. But are users always like that?

Try to find a different emotional mix of persona photos and states to better capture real users and better humanize them.

These details are important to truly capture what a user is likely to come up against in their daily life.

This context helps us design in a much more humane experience, grounded in reality and real need

Imperfect Personas

What could users be dealing with in their real life that affects their needs?

Consider a challenge or some piece of discomfort that a user might be experiencing, which may inspire use of your product or give you product a gap to fill.

Also consider the time of day they might be coming to use your product - where are they at? How are they feeling?

Imperfect Personas

An Example of an Imperfect Persona

Meet Kendall.

She's a mom of two with a third on the way. Her husband often travels for work, so she's the one taking care of most things around the house. She has some knowledge of her house's plumbing system, but has never faced a major issue -- until their water heater broke.

She needs to be able to quickly find the right products while browsing on her phone during her lunch break at work.. She also needs a quick turn around on delivery and getting a technician scheduled to come to her home. All while wrangling two young children in the store after a long day of work and school.



Device: iPhone 12

Visiting the store: Evenings and weekends.

Subject Knowledge: Basic

Stress level: High

Goals: Find the right product, schedule an installation

User Journey Map

Now we can take those imperfect personas and bring humanity into our user journey maps.

Make sure the story you are telling is the true story. Understanding how users might be feeling in their journey can help us design more humanely.

Keep using data to map out the course, but consider where user pain points might be based on stressful situations, different device usage, and real world situations

User Journey Map

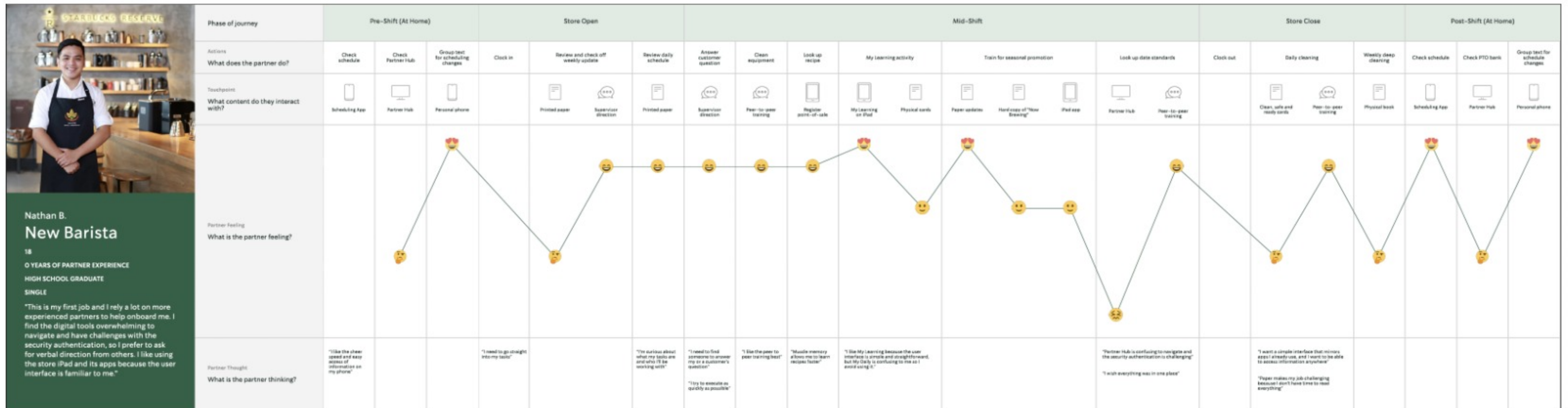
When building out the User Journey, consider real world situations.

Give your users real goals and actions.

What are their emotions throughout their journey? What conditions are they under?

When might they have to do something that contradicts their goal?

What are they asking themselves during their journey?



Nathan B.
New Barista
 18
 0 YEARS OF PARTNER EXPERIENCE
 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE
 SINGLE
 "This is my first job and I rely a lot on more experienced partners to help onboard me. I find the digital tools overwhelming to navigate and have challenges with the security authentication, so I prefer to ask for verbal direction from others. I like using the store iPad and its apps because the user interface is familiar to me."

**How to
approach the
work.**

Approach

Designated Dissenter

Have someone in your discovery sessions be the "Designated Dissenter". Their job is to ask dissenting questions to drive the group towards more humane, unbiased thinking.

Questions to ask as a Dissenter:

- "Who is the for? What kind of user?"
- "What are we assuming?"
- "What are different ways this could be approach without make assumptions?"
- "Is this harmful to a user?"
- "Is there a better way to introduce this?"
- "Is there potential for this to be misused? What could prevent that?"
- "What are some of the failure states? How can they be avoided or mitigated?"

Approach

Conduct a Premortum

Imagine your project is already done and conduct a post-mortem on it to anticipate any failure points.

With the whole team, go over the project plan and propose a few hypothetical failures. Brainstorm why the failure happened, and what could be done to fix or prevent it.

Approach

Questions Protocol

Get to the bottom of why you need to do things you think you need to do.

Ask questions like:

"Why do we need information from the user?"

"Who uses the information provided by a user and what do they use it for?"

"Is what we're asking from users required or optional?"

"If it's optional, can we skip it and spare the user cognitive load?"

Approach

Learn From People

No one is using your product in a vacuum, under perfect conditions.

They are surrounded by distractions, discomforts, and challenges.

When working with users in testing or interviews, try to drive towards "The Tipping Point" - the place where the session goes from Question > Answer to Question > Story.

Pay attention to "unrelated" stories! Even a user's tangent may unfold as informing their POVs and how they react to certain problems or tasks.

Approach

Ask Different Kinds of Questions

"Can you describe a typical workday?"

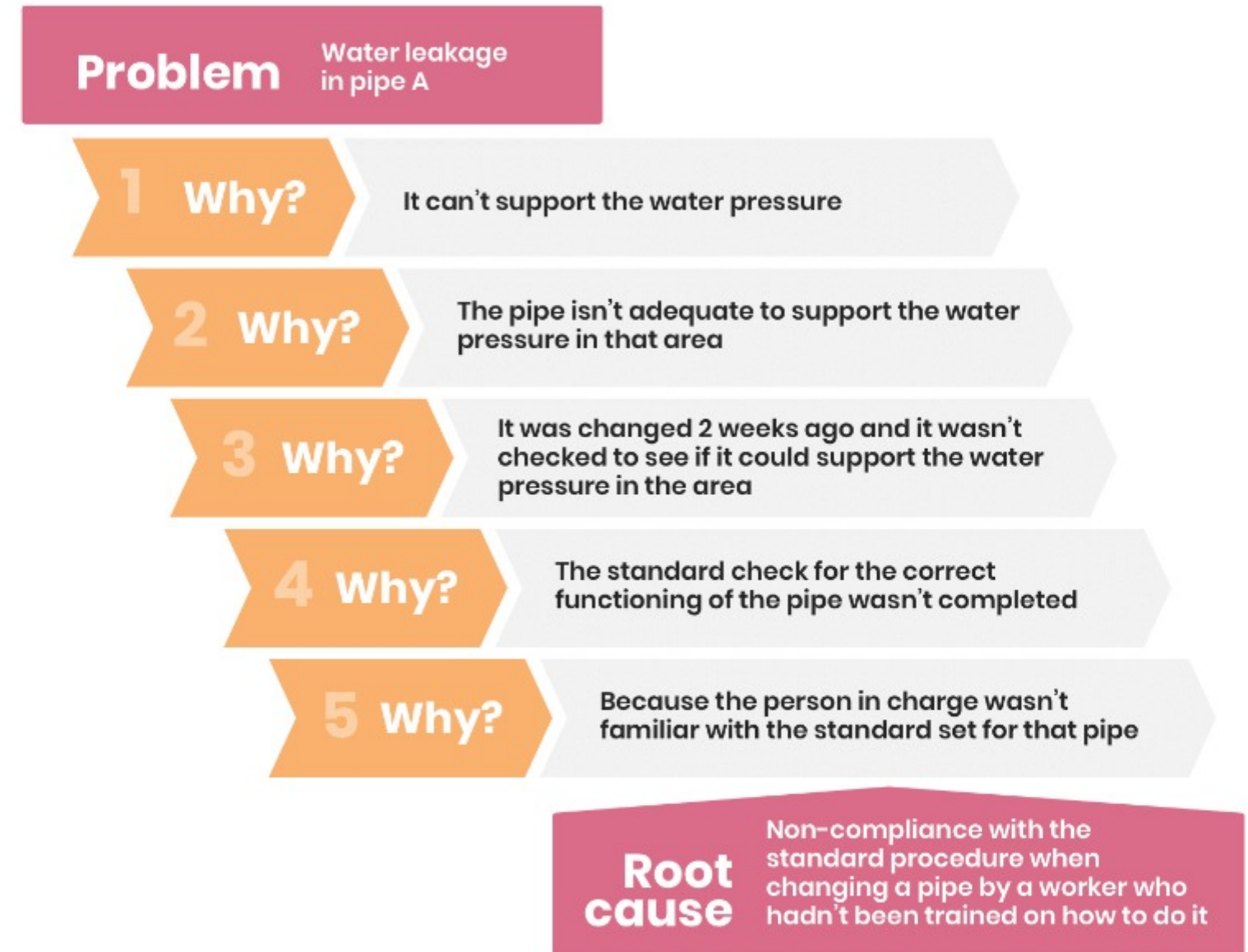
"Tell me about [experience with this scenario]."

"Can you tell me a little more about that?"

"How would you train someone to use this?"

The Five "Whys"

Asking "Why" five times in a row can help get you to the root cause.



User Testing

Broaden your horizons

Think about the following during user testing and discovery :

What have you previously thought was an edge case? Is it really an edge case?

Who have you tested in the past? Who *haven't* you tested?

How do different kinds of users experience our website/app/product?

**Keep asking
questions!**

Sources

For more information:

Design for Real Life by Eric Meyer & Sara Wachter-Boettcher

Design for Humanity: A New Perspective on User Experience
course: <https://teksystems.udemy.com/course/design-for-humanity-a-new-perspective-on-user-experience/>

