

A Little Help

the app for Do-It-Yourselfers

Getting it

How the design thinking process plus old-fashioned psychology can transform a floundering business model into The Next Big Thing

Overview

The following case study and prototype are the culmination of my coursework with CareerFoundry, where I learned UX Design.

My prototype, **A Little Help**, represents a fictitious enterprise loosely based on real-life businesses offering DIY guidance.

Duration

February 2021 - August 2021

Role

Research
UX Design
Usability testing
Prototyping

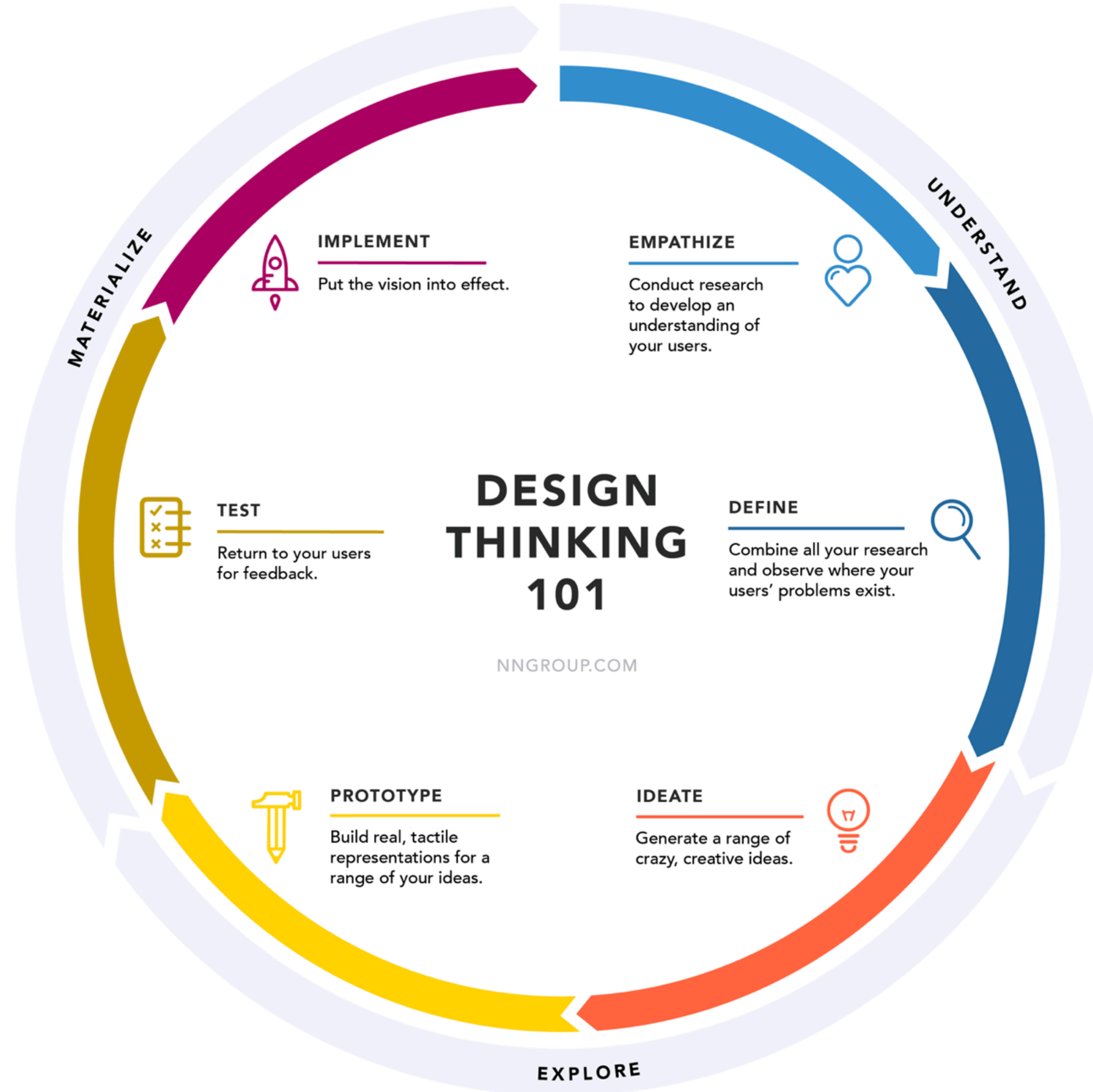
Tools

Whiteboards
OptimalSort
Balsamiq
Sketch
InVision
UsabilityHub
Figma
Zoom

I	THE DESIGN THINKING PROCESS
II	THE NEED IS THERE
III	TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS
IV	WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND?
V	THE TARGET AUDIENCE
VI	THE PITCH
VII	REFINING THE MESSAGE
VIII	YOU'VE GOT THIS
IX	FRANKLIN GOT IT
X	BEHIND THE SCENES
XI	LESSONS LEARNED
XII	A LITTLE HELP 2.0

While an explorer might consult her compass before charting her course, the wise designer refers to a different sort of guide.

The Nielsen-Norman Group created this schematic to keep designers on track.



It's a good idea to reference the Design Thinking wheel throughout your design process.

Note that the designer's journey is circular — suggesting that one's work is never truly complete.

Sooner or later, it happens: you meet that someone special, you settle down, you buy your first home.



And sooner or later, something in your home falls apart. You can't pass the buck to the landlord, because, for the first time ever, *you* are the landlord.

You're capable of mowing your lawn. You're not capable of replacing your furnace. But what about those in-between jobs like repairing a leaky faucet?

You could spend hours scouring Youtube for just the right tutorial, but you've been down that road.

All you want is a few quick answers. All you need to pull off your weekend project is A Little Help.



The Problem

New homeowners are strapped for cash.

They're willing to invest sweat equity in their homes, but sometimes, they need real-time guidance for DIY projects.

You can't get that from a Youtube tutorial.

Solution

Create an app that combines the convenience of Zoom calls with expert advice offered by trade professionals.

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

There are very few players in this field.

Why?

Well, why would a master electrician who can command \$150 an hour agree to walk customers through DIY projects for \$60 an hour?

By the same token, if a tradesman is willing to accept far less money, is he or she really an expert or just some hack running a side hustle?

After two weeks of research, I had some answers; I uncovered several businesses that tried and failed to make it all work. It wasn't that their app was junk — they failed because they hadn't put much thought into their business models.

We'll take a look at two vastly different competitors.

One shows good-looking hipsters hanging out with their phones.

**Understanding
how a business
runs doesn't just
influence your
app's architecture
— it dictates
your architecture**

That understanding how a business runs doesn't just influence your app's architecture — it dictates your architecture.

The other shows pictures of its employees rolling up their sleeves, getting the job done.

(This company does old-school house calls, too.)

What did I learn from exhaustive research?

COMPETITOR ONE

Based in Amsterdam, CallTheOne doesn't focus strictly on DIY. In fact, it boasts, "We're the biggest encyclopedia of the world."

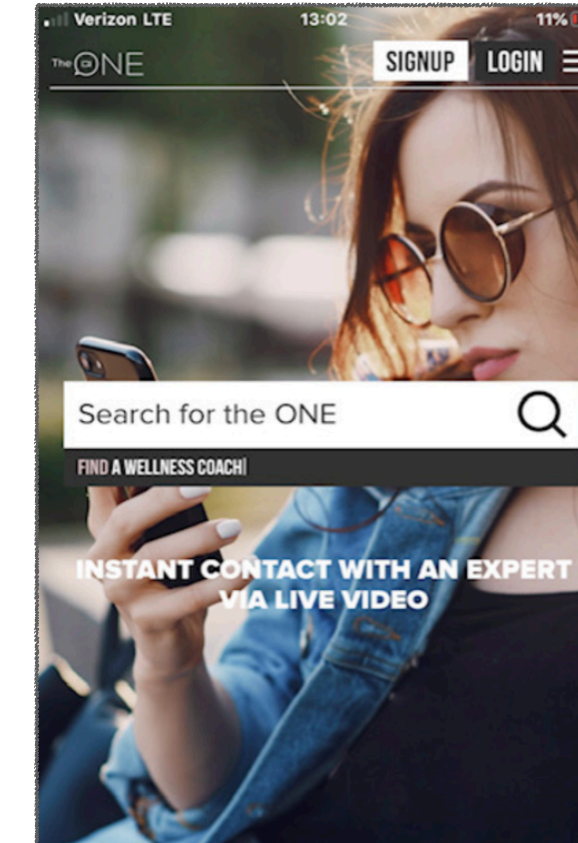
CTO's business model goes like so:

- Everyone is an expert at something
- We can share our knowledge online
- Join CTO, tell others what you have to offer
- Charge other members a reasonable fee for your expertise. (CTO takes a 10% cut.)

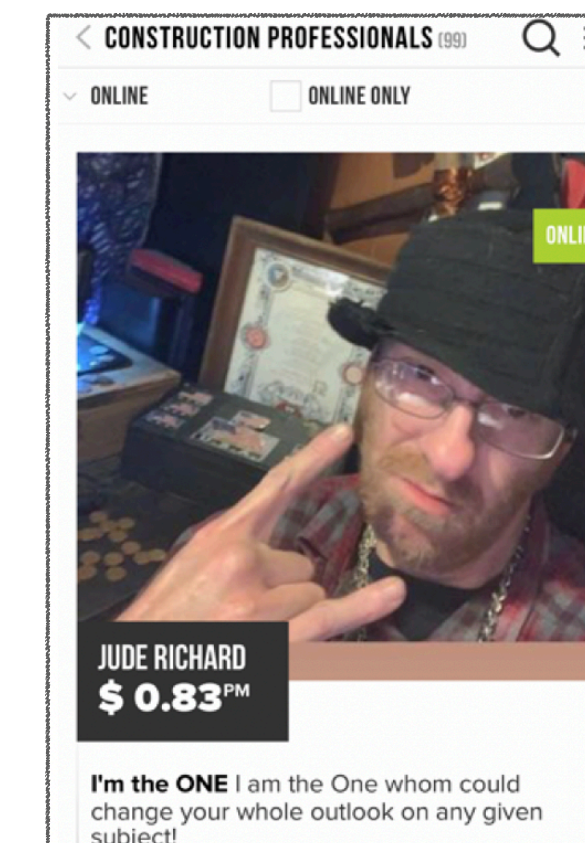
In case you missed that,

- CTO hosts "experts" from every walk of life
- Anyone can join
- Members set their own fees
- Members are recipients of information as well as providers of information

What CTO fails to mention, however, is what qualifies members as experts.



She's hip.
She's eye candy.
She's on her phone.
She's the face of CallTheOne.



But when I chose "Building Professionals" from the drop-down menu, CTO suggested I give Jude a call. Jude's profile read:
#Bootcamp workouts
#Make it rain
#Eight count bodybuilders
#Gas chamber
#Extensive water training
#Firefighting real fires
#Water water water
#3-1/2 days no sleep



I'm looking for DIY advice, not the meaning of life. Which means I won't be calling Jude any time soon.

The gentleman on the left may honestly believe he has ideas worth selling, but I'm not convinced.

COMPETITOR TWO

Fixer has been running a respectable handyman (and handywoman) business for years.

When Covid took hold, customers asked, “Can you walk me through my project using Zoom?” That’s when business really took off.

Fixer built a rock-solid reputation with the public and equally important, with its employees. The key to its success: Fixer trains its own team; it doesn’t play the losing game of matching customers with independent contractors.

Connecting online experts with clients works if your line of work is law or freelance writing. But if you think you can play matchmaker between homeowners and independent contractors, think again. You’ll have better luck herding cats.

The ramifications of Fixer’s business model need to be appreciated — because they completely

change the focus of the app.

Fixer’s model succeeds because it’s a handyman service that utilizes technology.

The businesses that failed were technology companies that tried to utilize handymen.

The app’s job isn’t to match. Its job is to sell.



This competitor
had a slick app.

But after three
years, the business
went bust.



CHRYSMO

Epilogue

Three years ago, I started my journey of building a platform for Homeowners - connecting them to fellow DIYers and Contractors for help on their repairs or new projects through text, audio & video chat. I believed that such a platform would save money for homeowners as well as help Contractors, their employees, retirees.. make that extra buck to support DIYers remotely.

On this journey, I met my co-founder Billy and whole lot of wonderful folks, all passionate to create a wonderful product for homeowners. We're proud of the product we built. Serving every homeowner, every user who reached us through Chrysmo - we served with passion, joy, empathy - all the things which as homeowners we ourselves expected.

Many challenges remain in this market, unfortunately I failed to create a sustainable platform for homeowners. For this, I'm deeply sorry.

Thank you for visiting Chrysmo.

Manoj Doshi
3rd March 2019

Our initial Problem Statement focused on the users' wants and needs. But competitive analysis suggests we need to fully consider our strategy before moving on.

The success of the business isn't just about the business "getting" the customer. Success also hinges on the business understanding its place within the industry.

In other words, simply saying "If you build it, they will come" doesn't cut it. Chrysmo hasn't been the only Do-It-Yourself player to get so wrapped up in its app that it overlooked the core business.

Ye Olde Problem Statement

New homeowners are strapped for cash. They're willing to invest in sweat equity, but sometimes, they need real-time assistance with DIY projects.

**Simply saying,
"If you build it,
they will come"
doesn't cut it.**

The original Problem Statement wasn't wrong, but it doesn't take all aspects of the business into account.

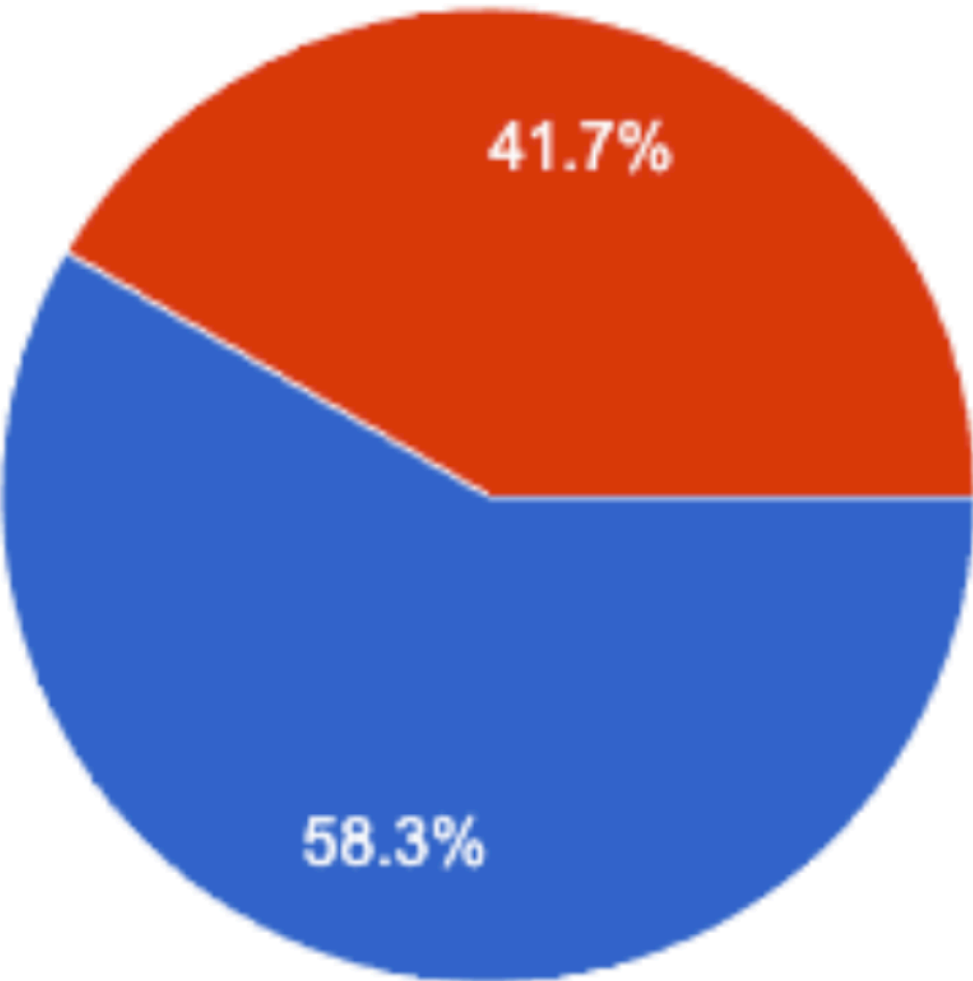
We'll be exploring ways to keep the business in business.

A designer's job is to solve problems!

Twelve survey participants answered a variety of questions that revealed their attitudes towards remote DIY guidance.

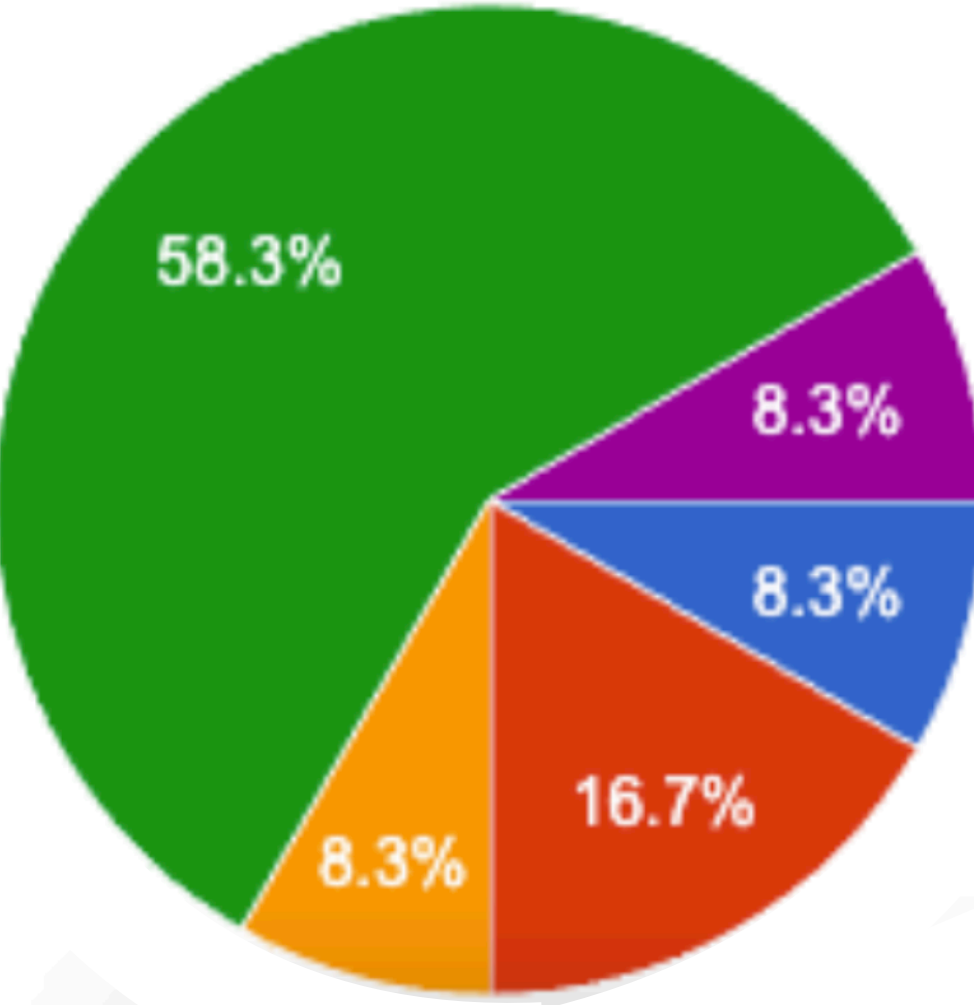
These are the key take-aways:

- Many people have not heard of remote DIY
- Three quarters were intrigued (or at least neutral) about the idea
- More than 90% assume the concept will go mainstream



Are you familiar with the concept of remote DIY guidance?

● Yes
● No

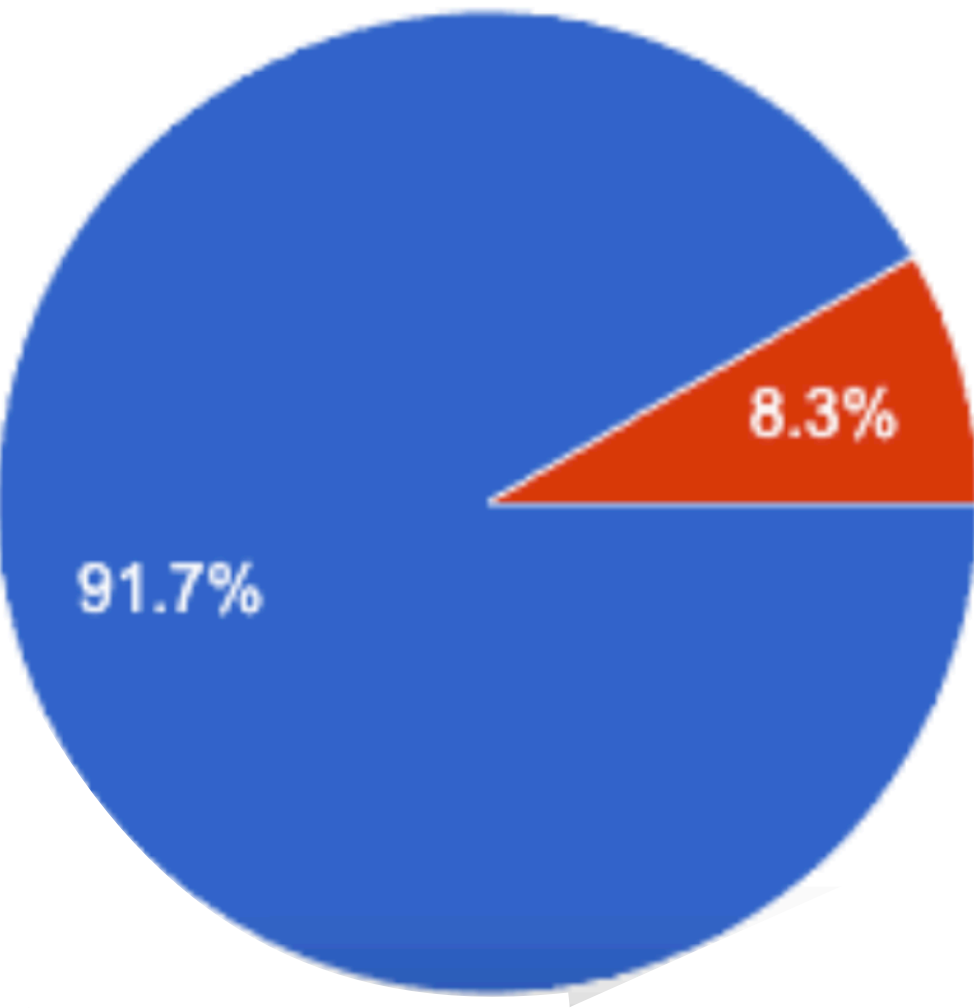


On your next Do-It-Yourself project, how interested would you be in seeking guidance from a DIY expert via Zoom?

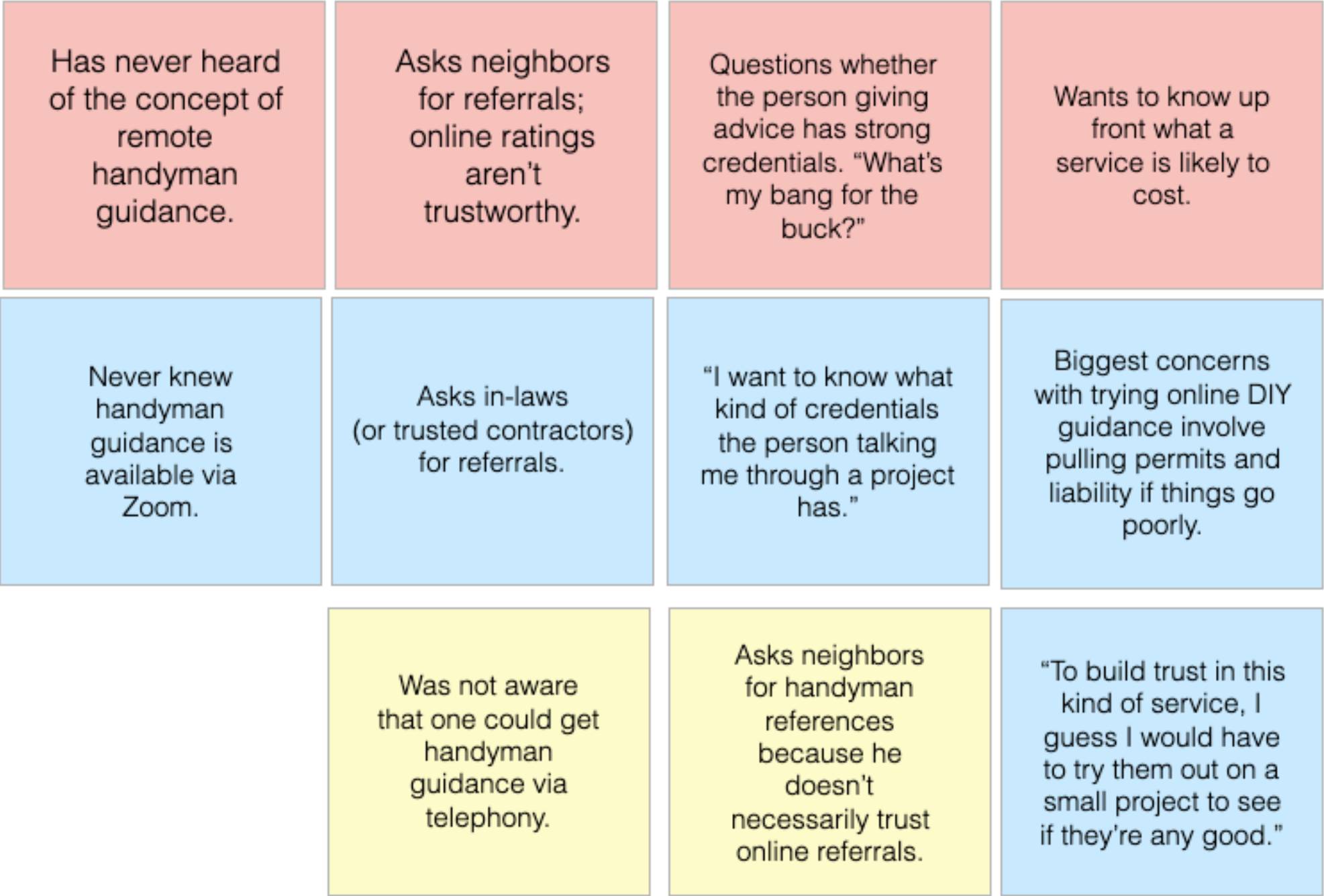
● VERY LOW INTEREST: I have absolutely no interest in trying a DIY p...
● MODERATELY LOW INTEREST: I'm curious about this concept, but right n...
● NEUTRAL: I'm on the fence about this concept.
● MODERATELY HIGH INTEREST: I'm not completely sold on this new metho...
● VERY HIGH INTEREST: I want to try this concept on my next home repair p...

Do you think remote DIY guidance will become more popular (even post-pandemic)?

● Yes
● No



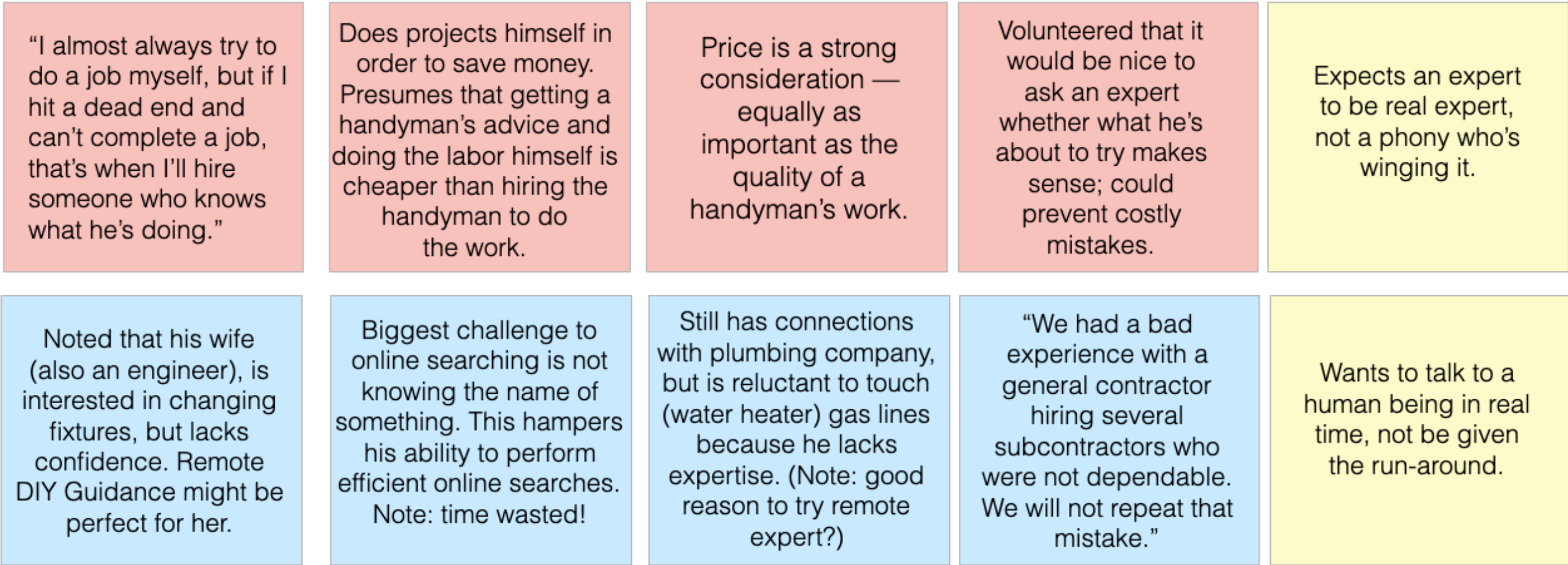
AFFINITY MAPPING



But once participants learned more about remote DIY guidance, they gradually warmed up to the concept.

Twenty-minute interviews with three participants revealed that no one had heard of remote DIY guidance.

Two of the three participants questioned experts' credentials.



USER PERSONAS



Colin

Primary(?): Male, mid-thirties.
He has a long list of things that need to be fixed. This is a time vs. money equation.



Rachel

Secondary(?): Female, mid-thirties.
Wants to spruce up her home with contemporary light fixtures.



Joe

Tertiary: Male, mid-sixties.
This isn't about saving money.
"It gives me something to do."

Clearly, the primary user persona is thirty-something.

This is the age when most people buy their first home and start a family (not necessarily in that order).

Initially, I was certain the primary user persona would be male, but an off-the-cuff comment from a 35-year-old interviewee made me pause. He said, "You know, my wife might be more into this stuff than I am."

Call it a stereotype, but psychologists and spouses notice the same thing: Men don't ask for directions.

At this point, it's not clear whether our primary is male or female (though the primary and secondary are definitely in their thirties).

Studies suggest that the desire to tackle DIY projects tapers off in one's forties and fifties, but picks up again after retirement.

SMALL SCREEN, BIG SCREEN

When people are doing online research, they usually reach for their laptops.

Once they're in familiar territory, they often choose their phones.

I had an opening sequence in mind for A Little Help's mobile interface, but wanted to flesh out the brand on the the big screen.

I'd be looking for an eye-catching photo to complement the headline and body copy.

Meanwhile, the mobile's pared-down opening sequence looked like this:



A Little Help 1.0
The automated mobile sequence
uses the same words as the headline
that will appear on the desktop's
Home page.

BIG SCREEN IMAGERY

A good deal of searching stock libraries yielded this photo.

It ticked off a couple of boxes that spoke to my user personas:

- Somebody was tackling a DIY project
- That somebody that was a young adult — and bonus — a woman!

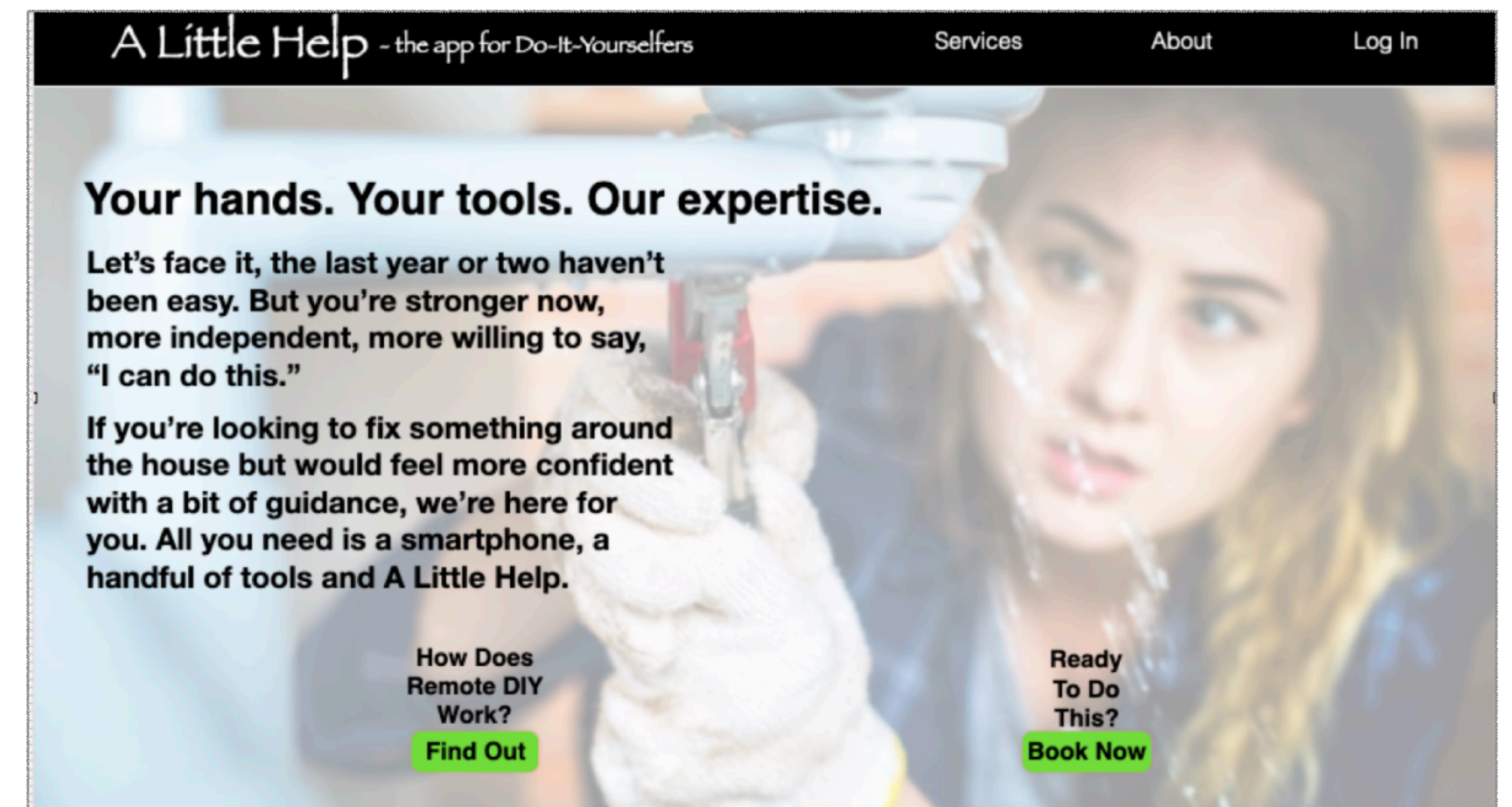
Later on, I expanded on the idea and asked interviewees what they thought of this for a desktop Home screen mock-up.

Everyone hated it!

“That’s too much copy.”

“The blurry photo bothers me.”

“Is she pointing a gun at me?”



"It looks janky!"

is complete. Is that wise?"

A Little Help
is too small to read
on the small screen."

P1

"Your laptop Home screen
does nothing for me."

"I think you should
reminders: one that
and one 30 minute
your appointment"

P4

"Your big screen Home
is too busy, too messy"

P5

"There's much too much to
I'd never bother reading it!"

Note to self:

x

Envisioning a concept
is one thing.

Executing that concept
is another.

P2

"I'm not sure what's going
on in that photo — is she
pointing a gun at me? And I'd
cut your first paragraph
— it's not really necessary."

P6

"Too much going on.
The other one is more clear cut."

very simple, easy to
d app, it just looks like
from a few years ago."

P3

"The photo distracts me
because it's blurry. If you slow
down and read it, it makes
sense, but my initial reaction
is that it's just a little unclear."

P2

Out of all volunteers,
Ken enjoyed the process

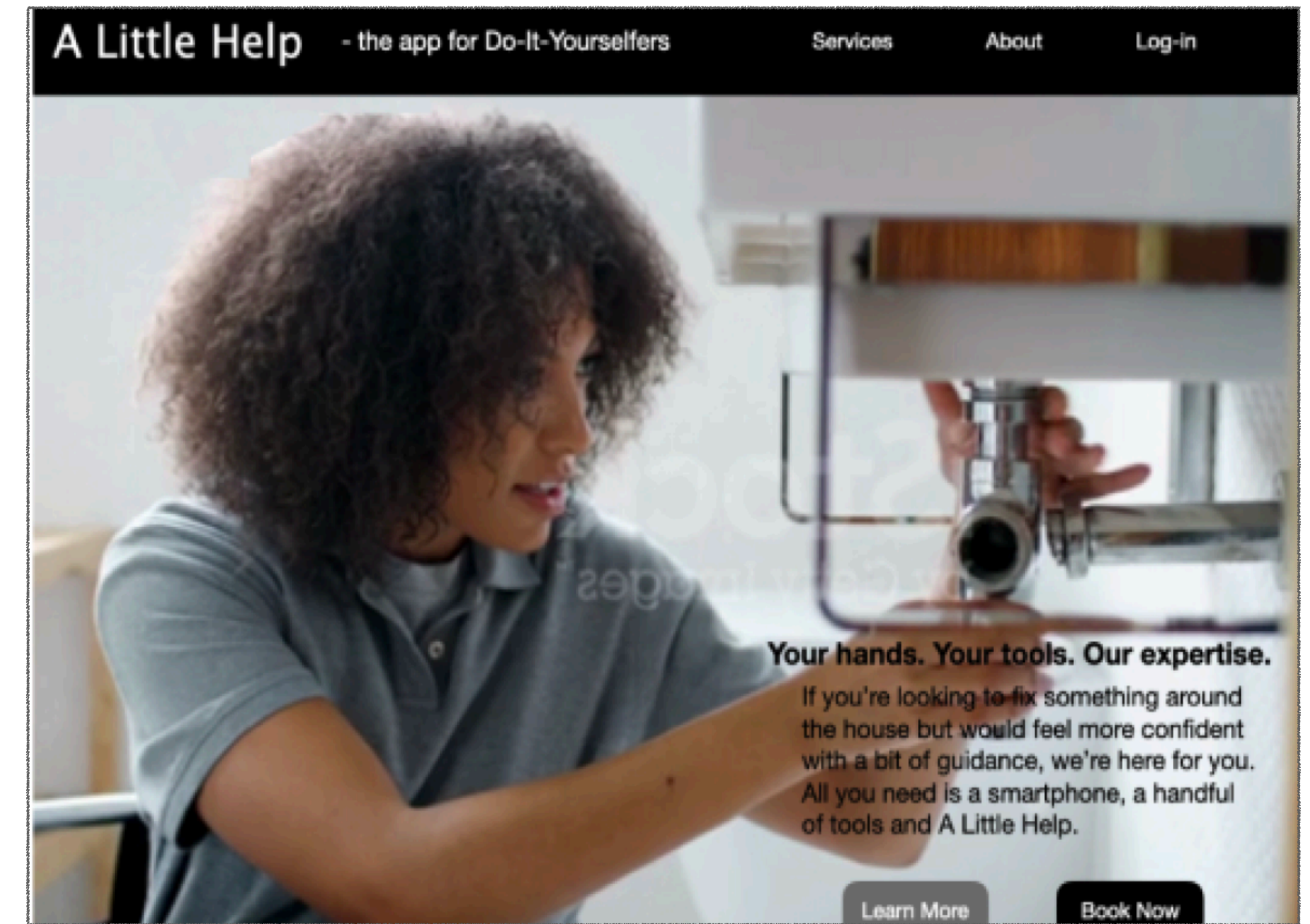
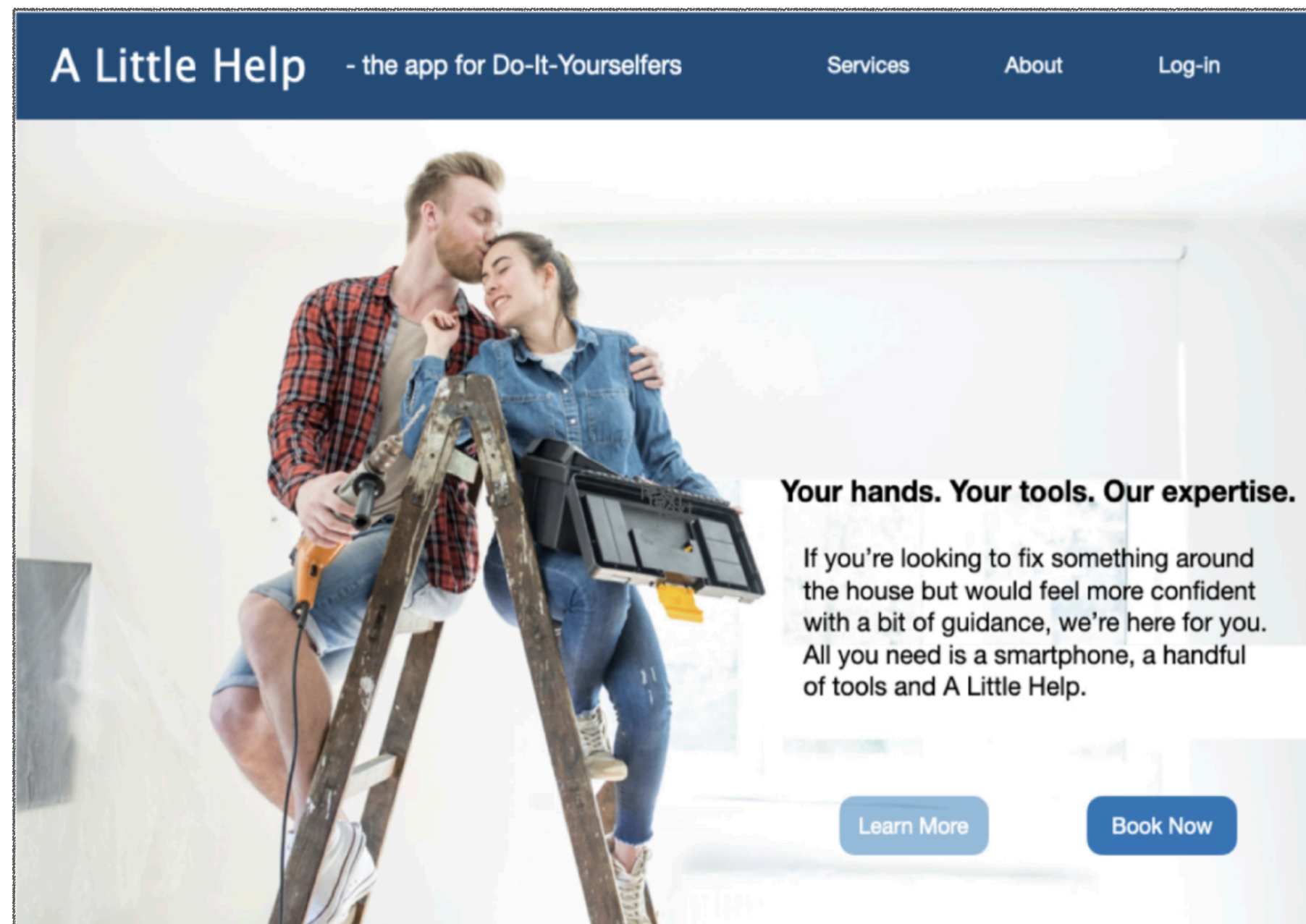
Mackenzie is a developer,
so she was able to
offer many valuable tips

PREFERENCE TESTING

Convinced that my concept was spot on, I soldiered on, spending days looking for a photo that captured the essence of my 30-something user persona fixing something around the house.

Should I use a woman? Perhaps a couple?

I offered two mock-ups. I knew each mock-up had its merits as well as a flaw. How would volunteers react?

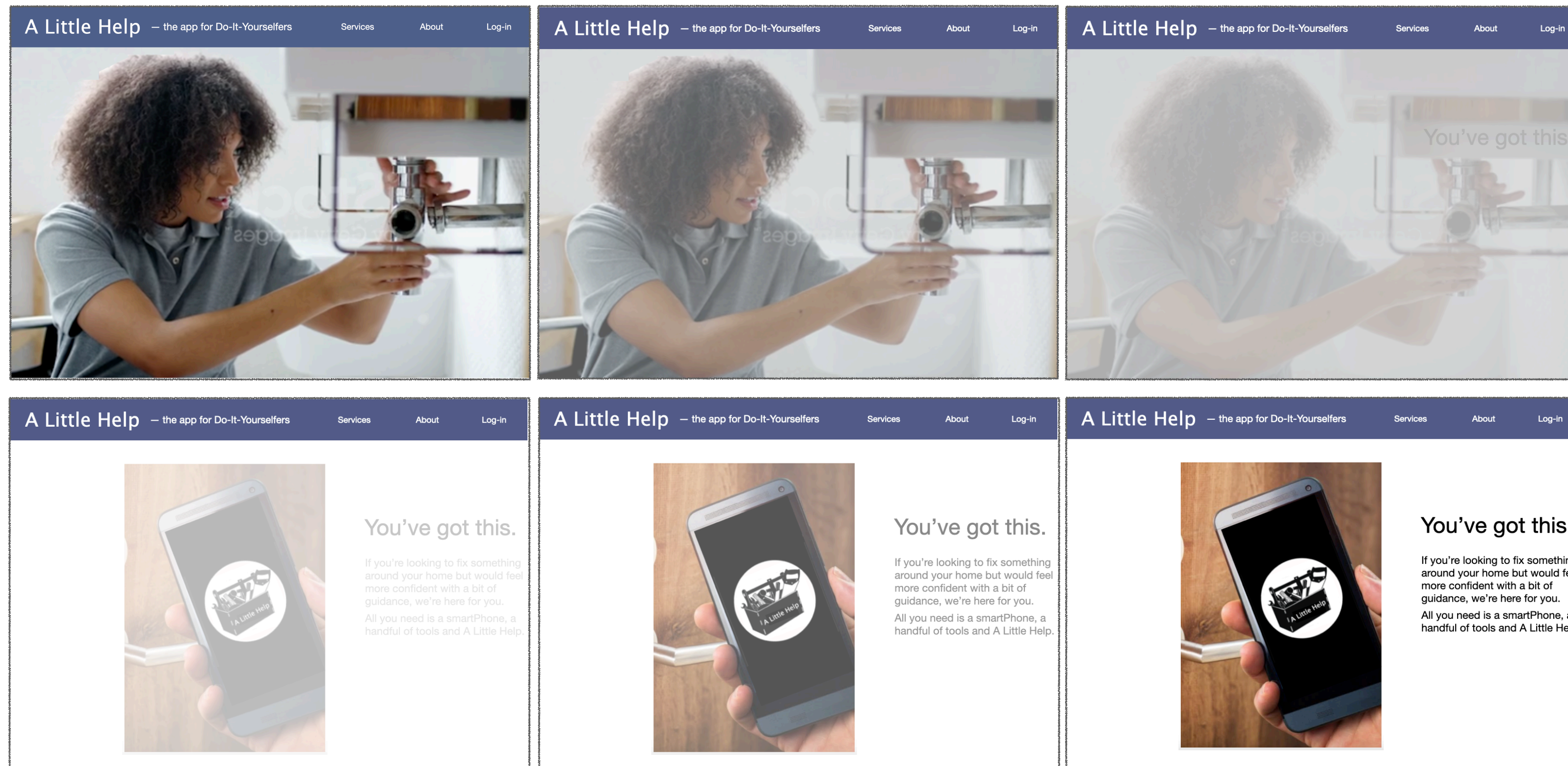


The vote was 55% in favor of the Couple photo, with participants noting that it presented a clean, balanced layout and space for copy.

But the other camp favored Sink Fixer because “She’s capable — and actually doing something!”

Would I ever find that perfect photo, one that would resonate with my user persona and still have room for a headline and copy?

$$1 + 1 = 3$$



Finally, I realized that the way to combine the best of both mock-ups would be to borrow a concept from filmmakers.

We begin with a few seconds of Sink Fixer working beneath her sink — this is a video — then fade to

a close-up of the mobile app in her hand.

This is classic problem-solution storytelling.

And now we have white space for body copy.

BRANDING

Your hands. Your tools. Our expertise.

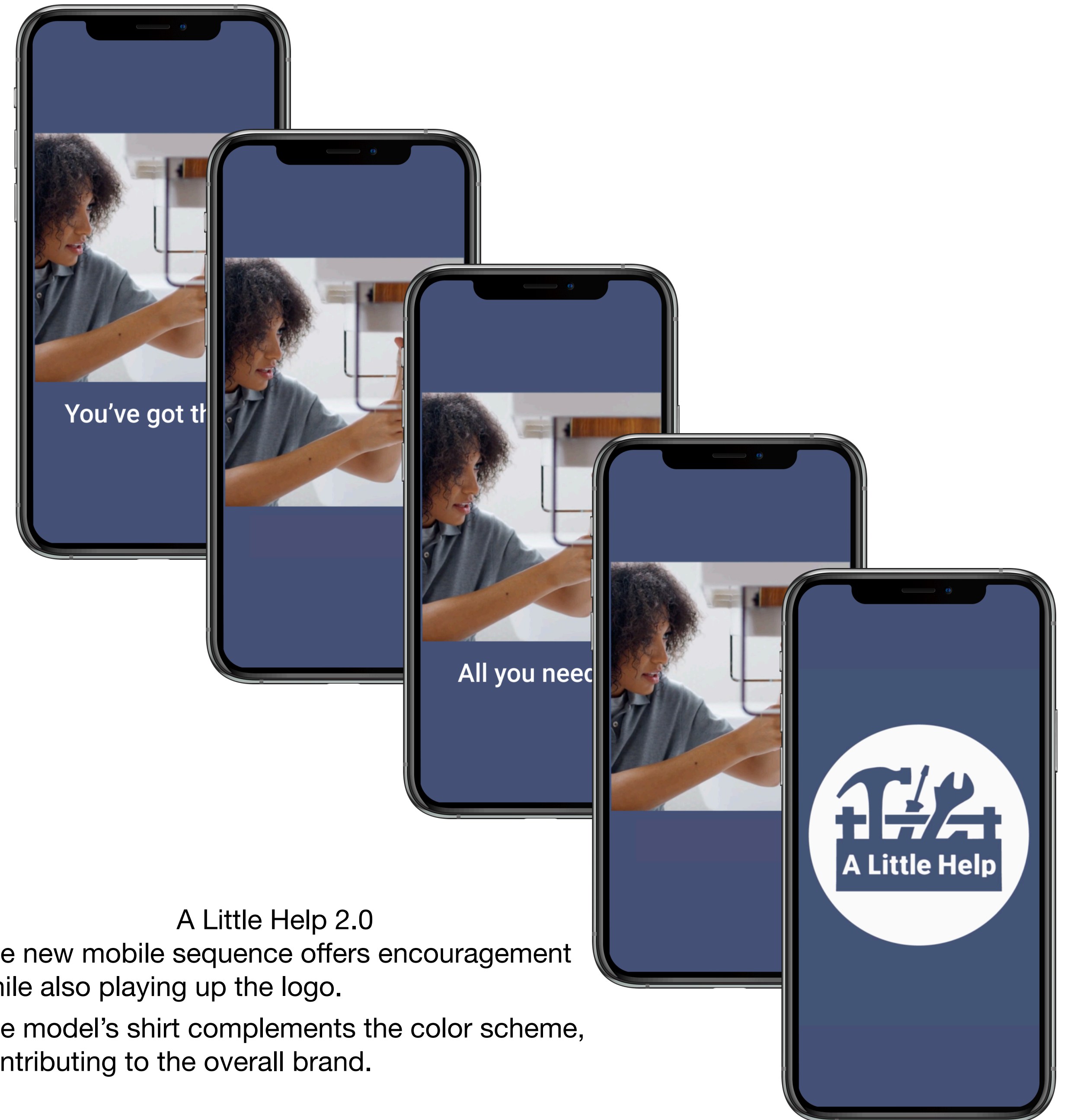
True, the message that Version 1.0 users found on the small screen explained **what** the app does, but the more I thought about it, I wasn't addressing their wants, needs and fears.

I've tagged ALH as "the app for Do-It-Yourselfers," so I ought to move beyond the **what** and talk about the **how** and **why**.

How would users benefit from using A Little Help?

Sifting through interview notes, I discovered one that I should have addressed earlier.

"I'm worried I won't have the skills to do the job."



A Little Help 2.0

The new mobile sequence offers encouragement while also playing up the logo.

The model's shirt complements the color scheme, contributing to the overall brand.

Let's talk about tipping Maria.

Sure, it's nice if ALH employees earn pocket money for a job well done, but lunch money for Maria isn't what this is really about.

Truth is, "Would you like to tip Maria?" is a clever tactic designed to pull in new customers.

Remember: The app's job is to sell.

Since even the most satisfied customers might not need A Little Help for several more years, we need a steady supply of new customers. One method of landing new customers involves a bit psychology.



It was 1727 or thereabouts when young Benjamin Franklin found himself in a quandary.

Clever but poor, Franklin had earned the ire of a man of means. So, what did Franklin do? He asked the gentleman if he might borrow one of his rare books.

If Franklin's tactic doesn't make sense to you, you're not alone. But counterintuitively, not only did the gentleman loan Franklin the book, afterwards, the two became friends.

Cognitive dissonance is a theory in psychology that helps explain Franklin's thought process.

When someone experiences two conflicting emotions, it causes stress — the person doesn't know what

he's feeling. In an attempt to reconcile his emotions, such a person will do a bit of reverse-engineering to try to understand *why* he did *what* he just did. Still with me?



Benjamin Franklin judged a book by its cover, then asked a rival if he could borrow his copy.

Though his formal education ended at age ten, Franklin intuited what modern psychologists call cognitive dissonance.

Portrait by Joseph Duplessis, 1788

In Franklin's case, his rival was unable to grasp why he'd just lent a valuable book to someone he couldn't stand — that young upstart Ben Franklin. So, the only plausible explanation for this man's behavior is that he must have liked Franklin all along. (Otherwise, this man would judge himself a fool.)

See where this is going with Maria? If a customer has tipped her, he must have had a great user experience.

In other words, our customer is primed to write a five-star review.

THE FIVE-STAR GAME

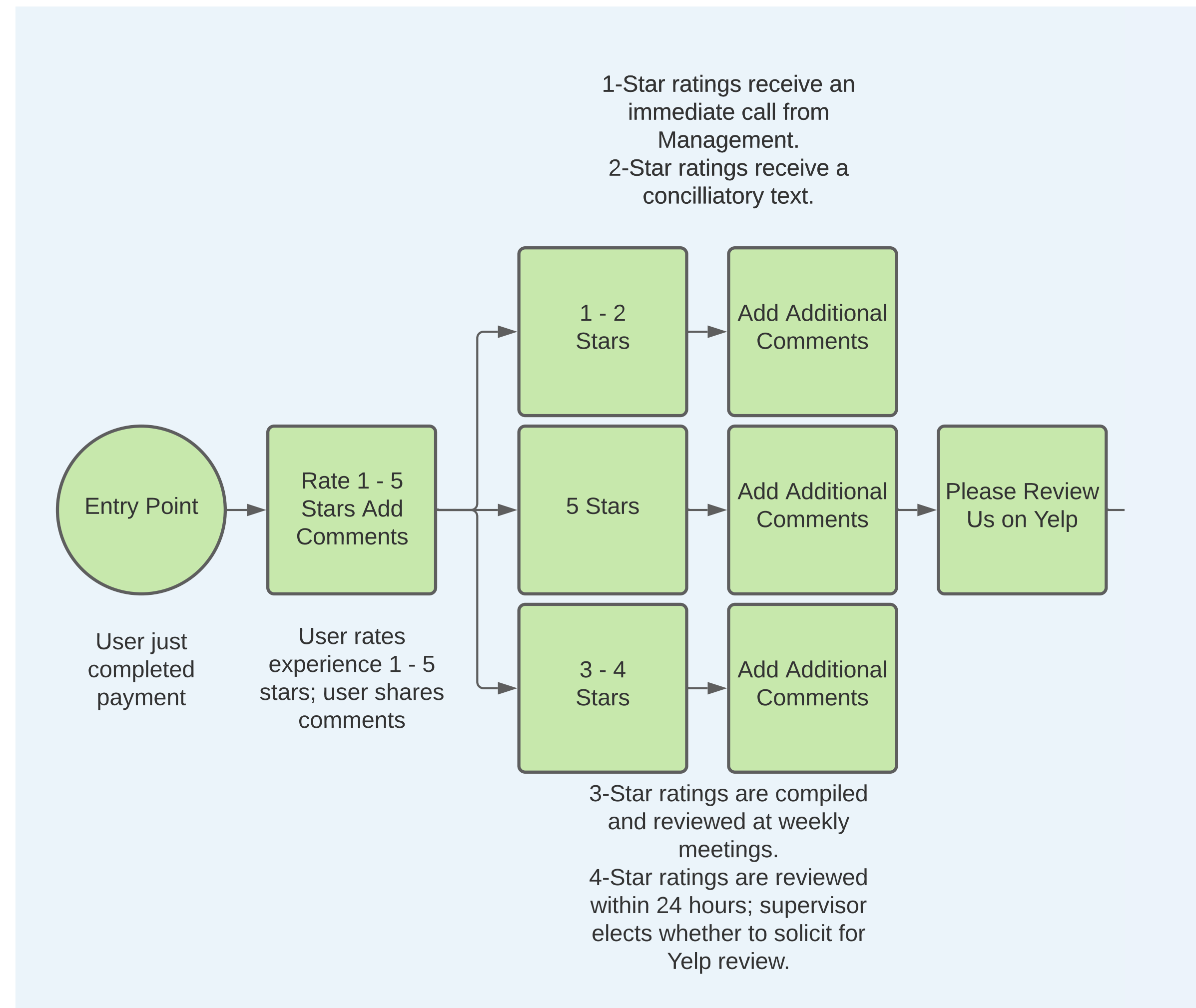
At the conclusion of a teleconference, the customer pays his bill.

That's when the request for a Yelp review comes up.

Most of the time.

The customer is asked to rate his experience, and if he's dissatisfied, management learns from the experience; they know what they need to work on.

The goal, of course, is



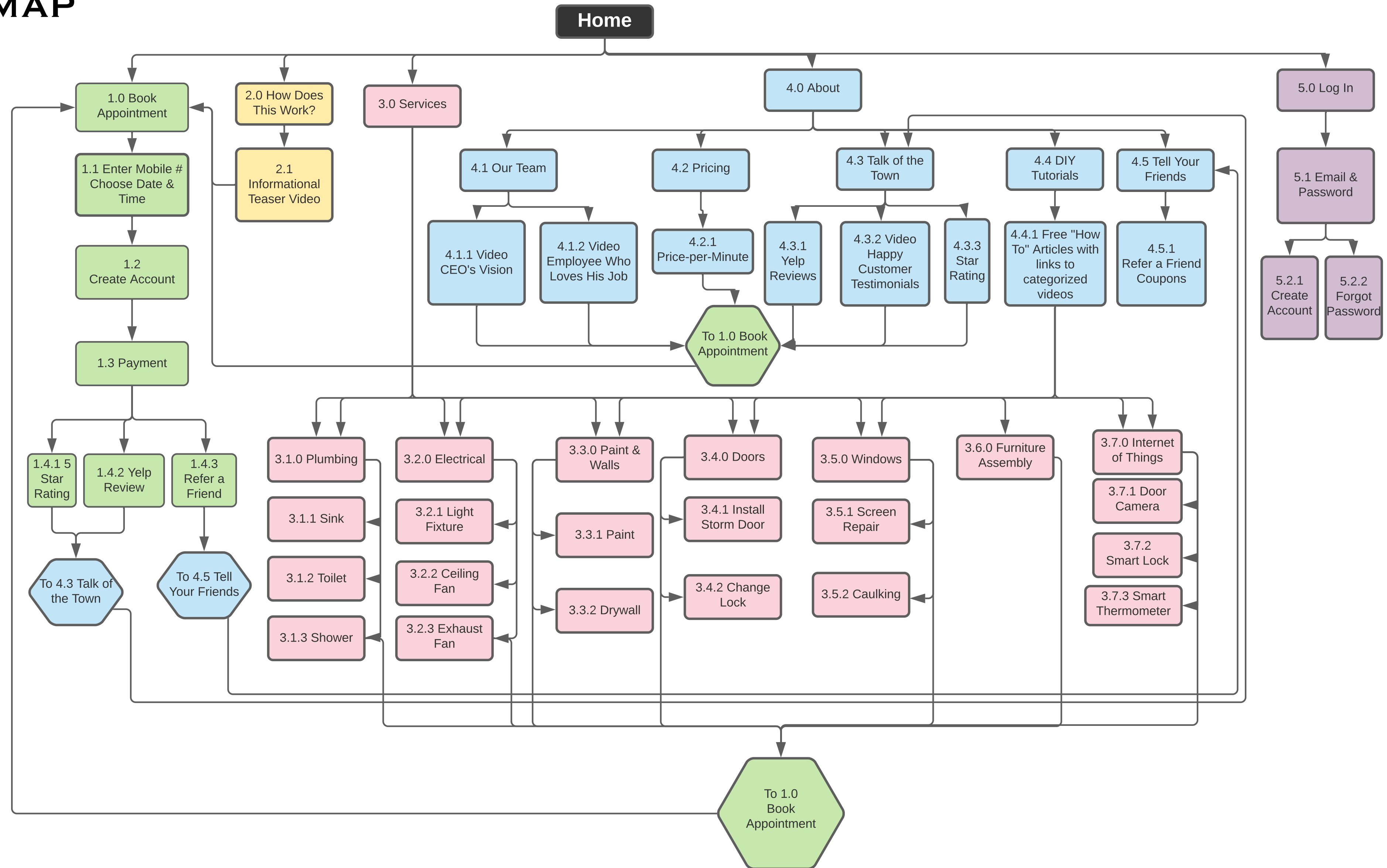
Only highly-satisfied customers are encouraged to write reviews

that all customers give A Little Help a Five-Star rating.

When customers award a perfect score, that's when those customers — and only those customers — are immediately asked to write a review on Yelp.

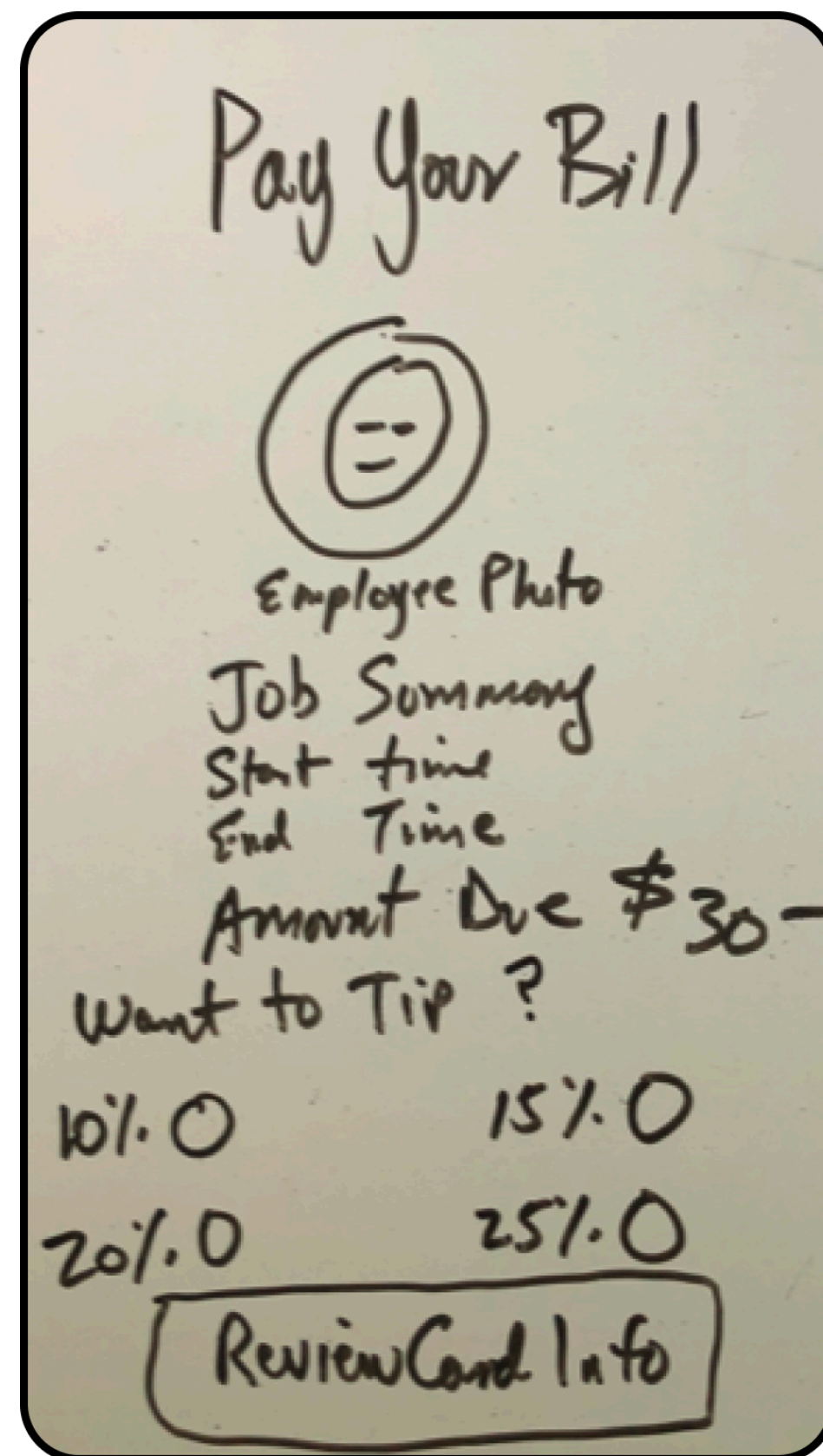
Nothing keeps the sales funnel full like a flood of Five-Star reviews.

SITEMAP

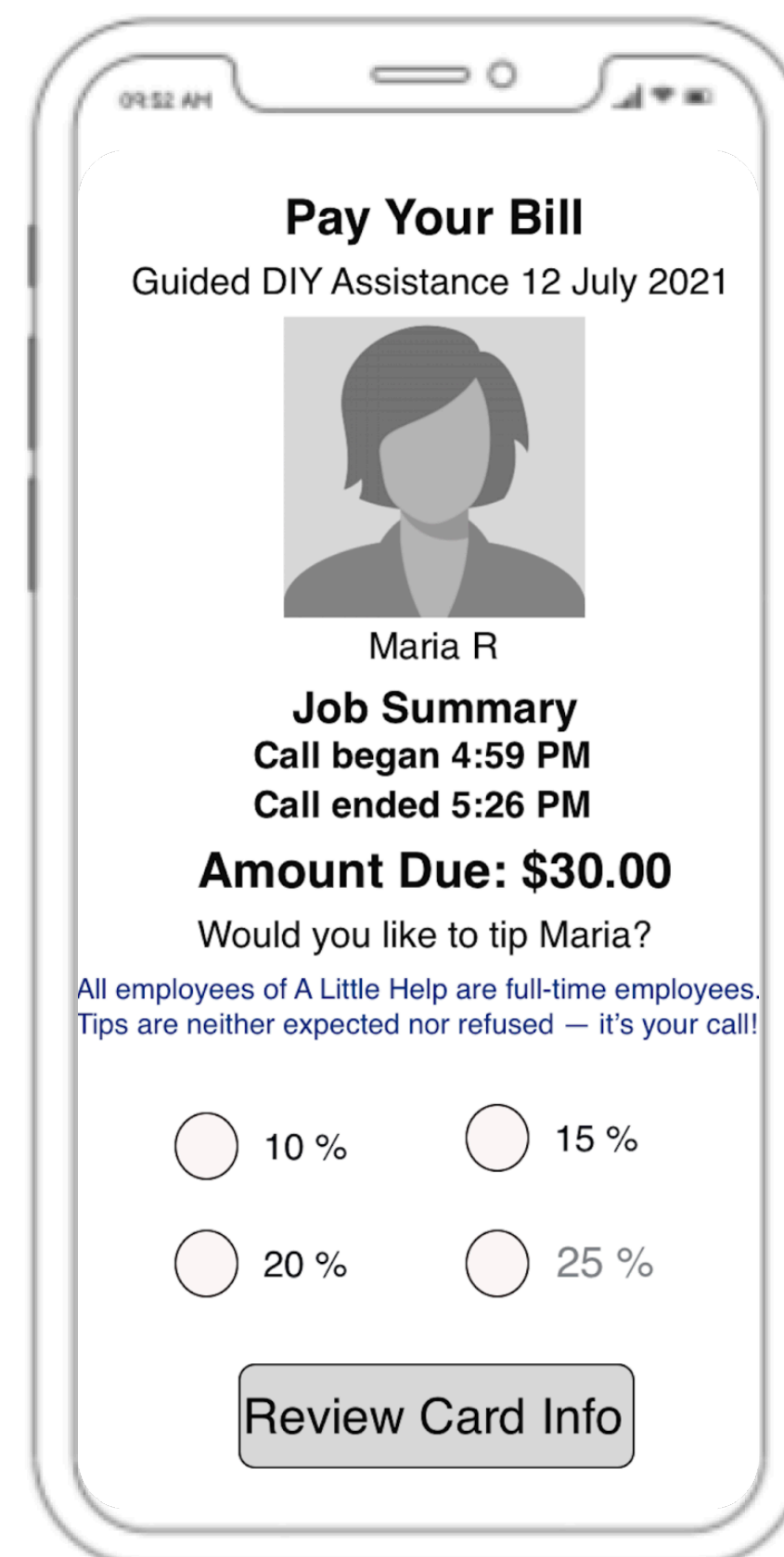


A sitemap provides a bird's-eye view of the app's architecture and flow

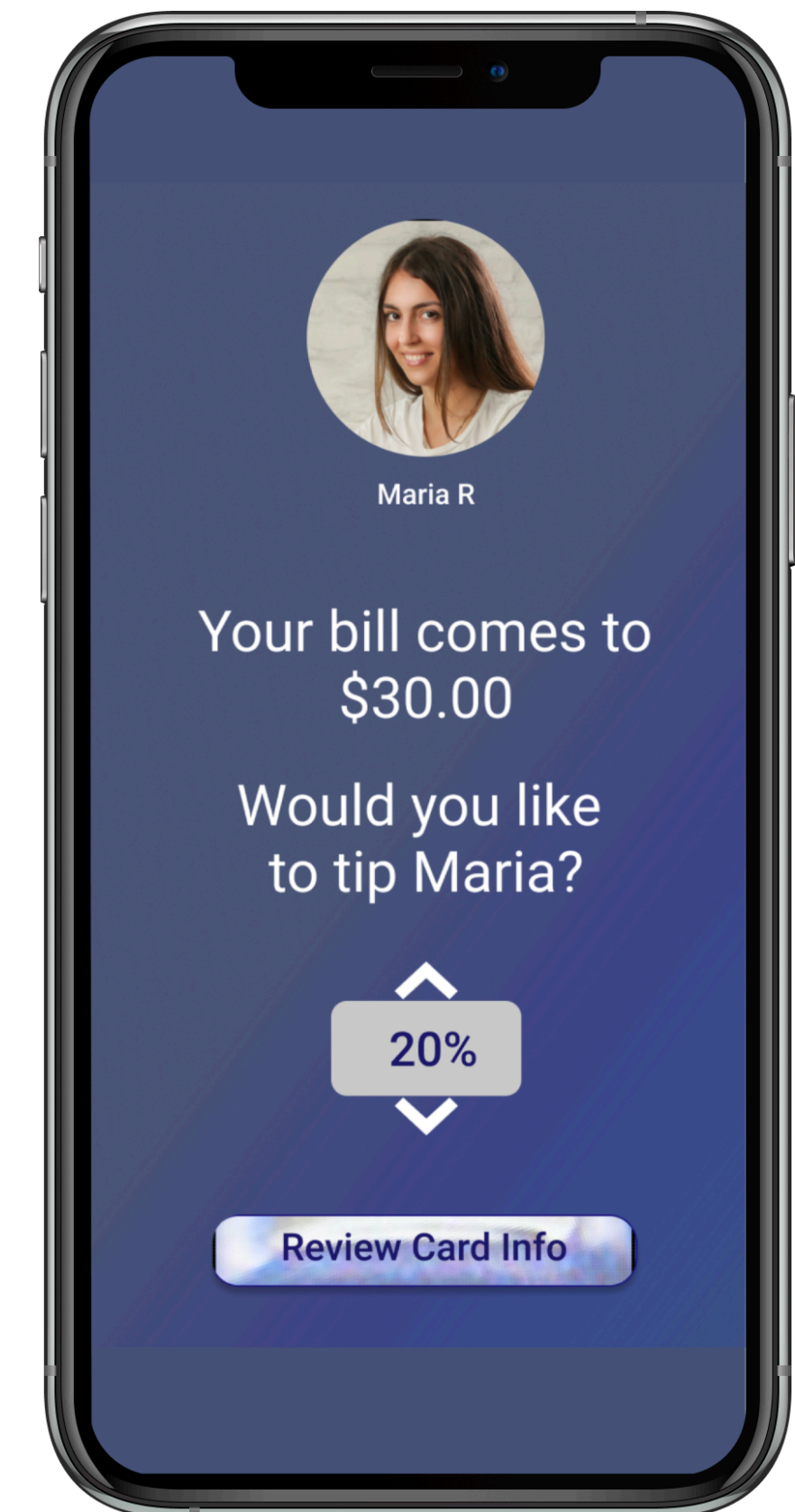
WIREFRAMES



Low-Fidelity



Mid-Fidelity



High-Fidelity

Rather than getting bogged down in details early on, knocking out quick ideas helps designers focus on the big picture.

Once general concepts are presented and given the green light, designers can come back and refine their ideas.

LOGO EVOLUTION



Cute, but the cartoon
vibe seems geared
for preschoolers.



Much better.
This version propels
the story.



User testing revealed
that the tiny tagline wasn't
legible on the small screen,
so it was eliminated.

Design. Test. Design again.

The logo was just one aspect of
A Little Help that went through
several iterations.



The final rendition
isn't a faithful illustration
of a toolbox; this is a logo.

**This app's job isn't to play matchmaker.
Its job is to sell.**

Numerous classmates have elected to design some version of this “Match consumer with expert” assignment. The prevailing wisdom is that the main function of the app is to match users with experts.

But the matching game doesn't work in the DIY sector! No master electrician is going to cannibalize his own livelihood by offering advice to online customers for one quarter of the price he can charge for making house calls.

The matching game does not work in the DIY sector

After two weeks of painstaking research, I finally found a successful business model for this sector. The success story is Fixer, and they're making it work because they hire and train their own team of generalists. They don't sub out jobs to pricey, independent specialists.

Hence, the task of matching the leaky sink customer to Bob the Plumber isn't necessary.

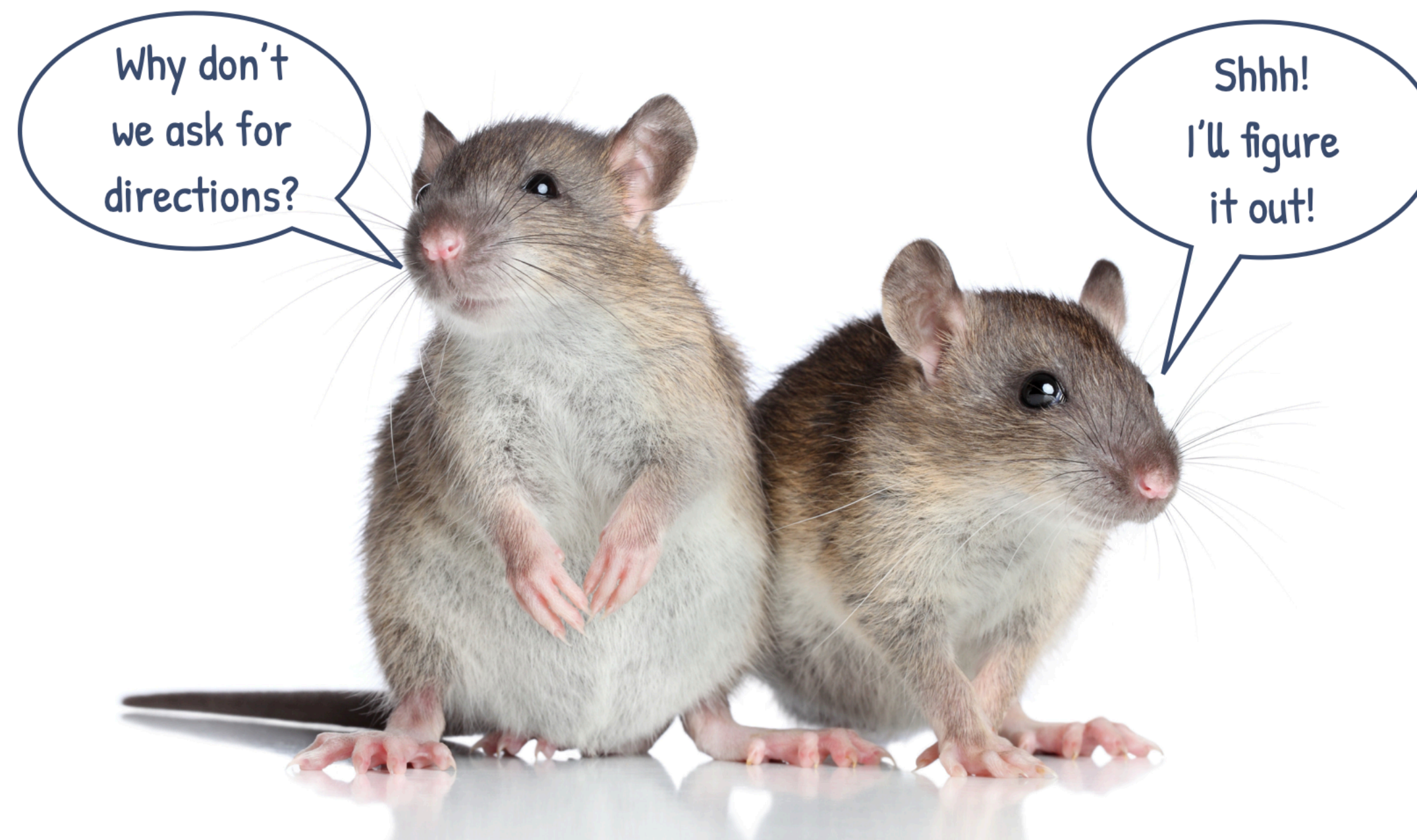
Moral of the story: Do your homework. If the business model looks shaky, the best app in the world cannot save it.

Our primary user persona might be a woman.

From day one, I knew my primary would be thirty-something — somebody who bought a fixer-upper not long ago.

I presumed my primary was male. But while interviewing a 35-year-old man I took to be the perfect candidate, he became reflective. “My wife might be more into this sort of thing than I am,” he said. “She bought some new light fixtures and she’s torn — should she try to install them herself, or play it safe and hire an electrician?”

That’s when the lightbulb lit up in my head. My interviewee is a big believer in Youtube tutorials. He’s bright. Youtubes are free. He’ll figure it out.



Men don't ask for directions.

If you think this male/female thing only applies to humans, you could be wrong. Psychologists found that male rats use different navigation strategies than female rats. Males use “dead reckoning” while females rely on landmarks.

Thank you, rats. Thank you, psychologists! You just handed me insight I can take to the bank. I think I know who my primary is (though a much

larger sample size would come in handy).

Moral of the story: You have two ears and one mouth for a reason. Listen to your interviewees — you just might learn something.

Psychology — not sparkly UI — will keep this business afloat. The end game is not to wow users with sexy user interface. Our job is to keep pulling in new customers.

This is the sequence of events that will keep the sales funnel full:

- Please tip Maria
- Please award us five stars
- Please write a glowing review

Franklin got it.

A Little Help gets it, too.

Moral of the story: Technology changes every five minutes. Human nature doesn't.



Franklin was never a US president, but his face adorns the hundred dollar bill.

Two brown and grey mice are standing on a reflective white surface. The mouse on the left is standing on its hind legs with its front paws held together. The mouse on the right is standing on all fours. Both mice have long whiskers and are looking towards the right. Above the left mouse is a speech bubble, and above the right mouse is another speech bubble.

We hope you
enjoyed our
story.

Wanna see
the prototype?
Click the link
below.

To view the A Little Help prototype, [CLICK HERE](#).