

VIBEMOTION LABS · PRODUCT MANAGEMENT

AMAZON FRAMEWORKS

Working Backwards

Complete Toolkit

\$27

The customer-obsessed product development system used by Amazon to build everything from AWS to Alexa. PRFAQ, 6-Pager Narrative, Tenets, and Working Backwards process — fully templated.

DESIGNED FOR

Product Analysts

Use PRFAQs to frame problem statements and articulate customer value before building anything.

Product Managers

Lead the Working Backwards process for your team — replace decks with narratives.

Senior PMs

Coach teams on 6-pager writing, run silent reading sessions, and scale narrative culture.

Product Strategists

Apply Working Backwards for new market entry, portfolio decisions, and innovation bets.

AI Product Managers

Use PRFAQ structure to define AI product outcomes before committing to model selection.

THE PHILOSOPHY

Working Backwards — Why It Works

Most companies build features then ask 'who wants this?' Amazon reverses the process — start with a vivid picture of the customer experience and work backwards to figure out what must be built to make it real.

The Four Rules

Start with the customer

Define the customer and their problem before writing a single line of code or designing a single screen.

Write it in the press release

If you cannot explain the product in a press release a customer would read, you don't understand it well enough to build it.

Disagree with data

Opinions don't win arguments at Amazon — mechanisms, data, and customer anecdotes do.

Invent and simplify

The goal is not to manage complexity — it's to eliminate it. The simpler the mechanism, the better.

TOOL 1 OF 4

The PRFAQ — Press Release + FAQ

The PRFAQ is a 1–2 page document that forces you to articulate what success looks like before building begins. It is the primary input to the Go / No-Go decision for any new initiative at Amazon.

Press Release Section (max 1 page)

Headline

Write the headline a journalist would use the day your product launches. Make it compelling enough that a customer would click it.

Subheadline

One sentence expanding on the headline. Include the customer segment and the core benefit.

Opening Paragraph

Date and city. Lead with the customer problem. Announce the product as the solution. Use plain language — no jargon, no acronyms.

Problem Paragraph

Describe the customer's current situation in vivid, empathetic language. Quote a specific customer type. Make the pain feel real.

Solution Paragraph

Describe the product and how it solves the problem. Focus on the customer experience, not the technology. What does the customer now feel, do, or achieve?

Executive Quote

A quote from your CEO or GM that articulates why this matters to the company's mission. Make it sound human — not like a press release. Example: "We built this because we were tired of seeing [customer] have to [workaround]."

Customer Quote

A quote from a hypothetical early customer that describes the tangible value they received. Be specific:
"[Product] saved me 4 hours a week — I used that time to [meaningful outcome]."

Call to Action

Where can customers sign up, download, or learn more? What happens next?

PRFAQ — FAQ SECTION

Frequently Asked Questions (Internal)

The FAQ section answers every hard question a sceptic would ask. It is not written for customers — it is written for leadership, engineering, and legal. Write the brutal questions first.

Customer FAQs — 5 questions

The questions real customers will ask. Each answer should be 2–4 sentences.

Q: How is this different from [existing solution]? A:

Q: How much does it cost / what is the pricing model? A:

Q: What happens to my data? A:

Q: What if it doesn't work for my specific situation? A:

Q: How do I get started? A:

Internal Stakeholder FAQs — 5 questions

The questions your CEO, CFO, and head of Engineering will ask.

Q: Why are we better positioned to build this than anyone else? A:

Q: What is the business model and path to revenue? A:

Q: What does the 3-year vision look like if this succeeds? A:

Q: What is the minimum viable version and what does it cost to build? A:

Q: What metric will tell us in 6 months if this is working? A:

TOOL 2 OF 4

The 6-Pager Narrative

Amazon banned PowerPoint for executive decisions. The 6-Pager is a structured 6-page written memo that forces clear thinking. Meetings begin with 20–30 minutes of silent reading. Then the discussion begins.

Page 1

Executive Summary (1 page)

The entire memo in miniature. The reader should be able to make the decision from Page 1 alone if needed. Cover: the goal, the current state, the proposed solution, the expected outcome, and the ask.

Key content for this page: What is the goal? What is broken today? What are we proposing? What do we expect to happen? What are we asking for?

Page 2

The Problem (1 page)

Define the problem with specificity. Use data and customer anecdotes. Quantify the pain. Explain why it is not solved yet and why now is the right time.

Key content for this page: Customer segment affected · Current behaviour · Pain points with data · Why existing solutions fail · Why now

Page 3

The Proposed Solution (1–2 pages)

Describe the solution clearly. What does it do? What is the customer experience? What does it explicitly NOT do? Include diagrams only if they replace text, not decorate it.

Key content for this page: Solution description · Customer journey · Key features (no more than 5) · Non-goals · Dependencies

Page 4

Goal, Tenets, and Success Metrics (0.5 pages)

State the single goal. List 3–5 tenets (principles for making hard decisions). Define your north star metric and the 2–3 supporting metrics.

Key content for this page: Single goal statement · 3–5 tenets · North star metric · Supporting KPIs · Guardrail metrics

Page 5

Risks and Mitigations (0.5–1 page)

What could go wrong? Be specific and honest. Leadership will respect candour far more than false confidence. For each risk, state a mitigation and an owner.

Key content for this page: Risk description · Likelihood (High/Med/Low) · Impact if it occurs · Mitigation plan · Owner

Page 6

Appendix — Data and Supporting Evidence

Charts, research, financial models, and supporting data go here — never embedded in the main narrative. Reference them explicitly in the text: 'see Appendix A.'

Key content for this page: Data tables · Financial model · Research references · Technical architecture diagrams · Legal notes

TOOL 3 OF 4

Amazon Tenets — How to Write Them

Tenets are the principles your team will use to make hard decisions when the answer is not obvious. Good tenets are opinionated, specific, and somewhat controversial. Bad tenets are platitudes.

The Formula

We believe [OPINIONATED POSITION] even though [CONVENTIONAL WISDOM SAYS OTHERWISE].
Example: 'We believe that a customer who waits 30 seconds for a page to load has already decided to leave — even though our conversion data shows 60% of customers complete the purchase after 5+ second load times.'
(The conventional data says it is fine. The tenet says it is not. The tenet wins.)

Write Your Team's Tenets

Tenet 1

We believe _____ even though _____. This means in practice: _____ This tenet guides decisions like: _____

Tenet 2

We believe _____ even though _____. This means in practice: _____ This tenet guides decisions like: _____

Tenet 3

We believe _____ even though _____. This means in practice: _____ This tenet guides decisions like: _____

Tenet 4

We believe _____ even though _____. This means in practice: _____ This tenet guides decisions like: _____

Tenet 5

We believe _____ even though _____. This means in practice: _____. This tenet guides decisions like: _____

TOOL 4 OF 4

The Working Backwards Checklist

Use this checklist before starting any significant initiative to confirm you are working backwards from the customer, not forward from an idea.

- I can name the specific customer segment this is for (not 'everyone')
- I can describe the problem this customer has today in their own words
- I have spoken to at least 3 real customers about this problem in the past 30 days
- I have written a one-sentence problem statement that any employee would understand
- I have written a PRFAQ and had it reviewed by at least 2 sceptics
- I can articulate why we are uniquely positioned to solve this — our unfair advantage
- I know the single metric that will tell us in 6 months whether we are succeeding
- I have identified the top 3 risks and have a credible mitigation for each
- Engineering has read the PRFAQ and confirmed the scope is technically feasible
- Leadership has approved the PRFAQ before any design or engineering work begins