

Better Not Different

A self-assessment to reveal whether your strategy is competitor-focused or customer-focused.

How to Use This Worksheet

Work through each section in order. The prompts build on each other. Be honest rather than aspirational. The goal isn't to score well; it's to see clearly where your attention is pointed.

Set aside 20-30 minutes. If you're doing this with a leadership team, have each person complete it independently first, then compare answers.

Part 1 Language Audit

The words you use reveal where your attention goes. Capture how you currently describe your positioning.

1.1 Write your current positioning statement or tagline exactly as it appears in your materials.

1.2 List the three phrases you use most often to describe what makes you worth choosing.

1.

2.

3.

1.3 Review what you wrote. Circle any words that reference competitors (even implicitly).

Examples: "unlike," "different from," "the only," "first to," "not like other," "unique," "differentiated"

1.4 Now circle any words that reference customer outcomes or aspirations.

Examples: "helps you," "so you can," "for [specific audience] who want," "to achieve," "get to"

Reflection: Which type of language dominates? Competitor-referencing or customer-outcome language?

Where your organization spends time reveals what it actually prioritizes, regardless of what it claims.

2.1 Think about your last three strategy meetings. Estimate the percentage of time spent on each:

Topic	% of Time
Discussing what competitors are doing	%
Analyzing customer needs, outcomes, or feedback	%
Reviewing your own execution and capabilities	%
Other	%

2.2 When you look for ideas or inspiration, where do you typically look first?

- Industry peers and direct competitors
- Adjacent industries (other financial services categories)
- High-performing brands outside financial services
- Customer conversations and feedback
- Internal innovation and R&D

2.3 How often do these phrases appear in your internal communications?

Phrase	Never	Sometimes	Often
"What [competitor] is doing"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"Competitive positioning"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Phrase	Never	Sometimes	Often
"Differentiation"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"Market share"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"Customer outcomes"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
"Better for [specific audience]"	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Reflection: Is your attention pointed at competitors or at customers?

The Insight

John Wooden, the most successful coach in college basketball history, kept opponent information away from his players. His staff scouted, but players only knew one thing: execute what you've trained to do. The result: 10 championships in 12 years.

The insight isn't "ignore competitors." It's about where competitive intelligence lives and who it reaches.

3.1 In your organization, does competitive intelligence reach:

- Everyone (it's in all-hands meetings, Slack channels, team updates)
- Most people (managers share it with their teams regularly)
- Leadership only (execs use it for strategy, but it doesn't saturate the org)
- We don't do much competitive intelligence

3.2 When your teams fall short of a goal, what does the conversation focus on?

- What competitors did that we didn't anticipate
- External market conditions we couldn't control
- Our own execution and what we could have done better
- A mix of the above

3.3 Are your people accountable for outcomes relative to competitors, or for their own execution?

- Relative to competitors ("beat X's market share," "close the gap with Y")
- Own execution ("hit our targets," "deliver on our commitments," "improve our metrics")

Both equally

Reflection: If Wooden filtered competitive information to keep players focused on execution, where does your organization fall on that spectrum? Is competitive focus helping or creating noise?

The Specificity Test

"Different" is vague. "Better" requires specificity. This section tests whether you've done the work to define what better means.

4.1 Complete this sentence:

"We are better for [specific audience] who are trying to [their goal or aspiration]."

4.2 Now complete it two more ways for different audiences you serve:

"We are better for [] who are trying to []."

"We are better for [] who are trying to []."

4.3 For each statement above, what specifically makes you better for them?

Not "we're different because..." but "we're better because we help them [outcome] by [how]."

1.

2.

3.

4.4 Gut check: Would your customers agree with what you wrote?

- Yes, this is what they'd say about us
- Probably, but I'm not certain
- I'm not sure, we haven't asked

Honestly, no, this is aspirational

Reflection: How easy or difficult was it to complete the "better for whom, better for what" statements? If it was hard, that's data.

Review your answers across all four sections. Look for patterns.

5.1 Based on this worksheet, where is your organization's attention primarily pointed?

- Competitors (differentiation mindset)
- Customers (better mindset)
- Mixed, but leaning competitor
- Mixed, but leaning customer

5.2 What's one thing you noticed that surprised you?

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5.3 If you shifted 20% of the time/energy currently spent on competitive analysis toward understanding customer outcomes, what would you do with that time?

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5.4 Complete this sentence:

"The shift we most need to make is from

to

."

What's Next

This worksheet reveals the gap. Closing it requires intentional choices about:

- **Language:** Rewriting positioning around "better for whom" instead of "different from whom"
- **Attention:** Redirecting competitive intelligence time toward customer outcome research
- **Information flow:** Deciding what competitive intel reaches everyone vs. stays at leadership
- **Accountability:** Framing goals around execution and customer outcomes, not competitor benchmarks

The organizations that make this shift don't ignore competitors. They just stop letting competitors set the agenda. Different is about them. Better is about your customers. And in a market where everyone is chasing differentiation, being genuinely better for a specific group might be the most distinctive thing you can do.

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