Observant Observing

You will observe people in the environment in which they experience an object/space in order to understand how those people interact with the object/space. By watching people you can capture the physical manifestations of their experiences, what they do and say. This will allow you to interpret the intangible meaning of those experiences, what they think and believe. With this you can uncover insights about people that will guide the solutions you create for them.

The most important thing about need finding in design thinking is that we look without knowing what we are looking for. We trust that our ability to define the problem will emerge during the need finding process.

PRINCIPLES
- Human Centered Design (Look to users for design inspiration.)

GOALS
- Uncover Latent Needs: Gaps in Use, Usability & Meaning (Look for surprises, differences between what people say they do and what actually do.)
- Gain Empathy for Users (Discover the emotions that guide behaviors.)
- Look for Extreme Users (Users who are pushing the system may reveal needs before the mainstream.)

SOME METHODS
- "Deep hanging out" – spend time in the vicinity of the subjects
- Walk in the subjects shoes: assume the role of the subject
- Ask for a tour from an insider
- Paparazzi – observe and photograph anonymously
- Other – security cameras, head cameras for subjects, etc.

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WHERE TO GO
- Someplace where you know people are having the experience you seek to understand
- Find a place that has an analogous context, and see how people behave there (i.e. bank counter, dry cleaner)
- Find a place that is the antithesis of your design project context, and see how people behave there (i.e. fine dining restaurant)

SOME OBSERVATION TOOLS
- Camera studies: provide cameras to subjects who document their experience
  - Identify subjects
  - Explain purpose of study
  - Get permission to use images
  - Provide camera and instructions
- Process Mapping: from the user's point of view, mentally step back to the earliest stage of the process (i.e. when the bagel they pick up is getting formed at the bagel shop) and step through every element of the process
  - Record every stage of the process
  - How do the stages relate to each other? What opportunities do you see?
- Shadowing: ask your user or someone your user interacts with if you can shadow him/her for an hour. If you are trying to understand how people experience the rapid eating and drinking experience at Starbucks, see if a barista will let you hang behind the counter.

WHAT TO THINK ABOUT
- What do people care about in this setting? Why?
- What are the rules of this space?
- Where is the energy in the space? How does it flow?
- What are people thinking during this experience? What evidence points to this?
- Look for differences between **what people say they do** and **what they actually do**

SOME PROCESS HINTS
- Capture what you notice
  - who are the people and why are they together
  - what are they doing
  - where are they
  - what are their emotions
  - is this part of their regular routine
  - is there a conflict between what they say and do
  - at which points are decisions made
- Choose one area and observe the interactions that people have there. Focus on the details:
  - What are people saying
  - What are people's expressions
  - What are their hands and eyes doing
  - How long are they in that space
  - When are they engaged
- Find someone to be your main character

- Find someone who does not fit in with the other people having this experience. Find out why s/he is there, how often s/he comes, when s/he started coming and why.

CAPTURING THE OBSERVATIONS

After the observation phase, you will gather with your team to share findings and insights. Bias toward capturing your observations in ways that are visual, sharable & evocative.

- PHOTOS
  Use photos to isolate points of interest & generate later discussion. Take as many as possible: 20 / hr is a good pace.
- SKETCHES
  Sketches are a great way to interpret a scene, to create a broad representation or to call out specific details.
- QUOTES
  Short quotations can be a great way to communicate the essence of a conversation with a user. Transfer to post-its.
- STORIES
  Jot down notes as you speak with users in the field. Good stories are a tool for building empathy making meaning.
- RECORDINGS audio & video
  Recordings of users expressing their needs are compelling. These recordings are good storytelling media in the long run.
- ARTIFACTS
  Anything you can take with you from the location can be a good illustration of the cultural detail

From your observations, think about some needs that these users have. Look for gaps in use, usability and meaning.