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SALES GUIDE:
HIRING STRATEGY FOR
YOUR FIRST SALES HIRE

Enterprise Playbook Series

INTRODUCTION

In an earlier Work-Bench Enterprise Playbook, we covered the first steps in any enterprise startup sales process - **conquering founder-led outbound sales**. Once founders have defined and executed on a repeatable sales playbook (successful in closing an initial ~5-10 logos), its time to take the next step in scaling your sales team. This means hiring entry-level sales support to help offload the timely outbound sales process (research and outreach) and free up the founders' time to focus on other areas of growth.

As Seed-stage enterprise investors at **Work-Bench**, we often see founders dive headfirst into hiring too many and too senior sales reps at too fast a pace, excited to scale outbound sales and get it off their own plate. However, this is a delicate transition. Hiring the right reps and training them on the company's unique sales playbook takes time, iteration, and requires the founders' involvement.

This Enterprise Playbook outlines how to define a successful hiring strategy beyond founder-led sales, including best practices for compensation, sourcing, and candidate assessments.

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This Enterprise Playbook is co-authored by our friends at CloserIQ:

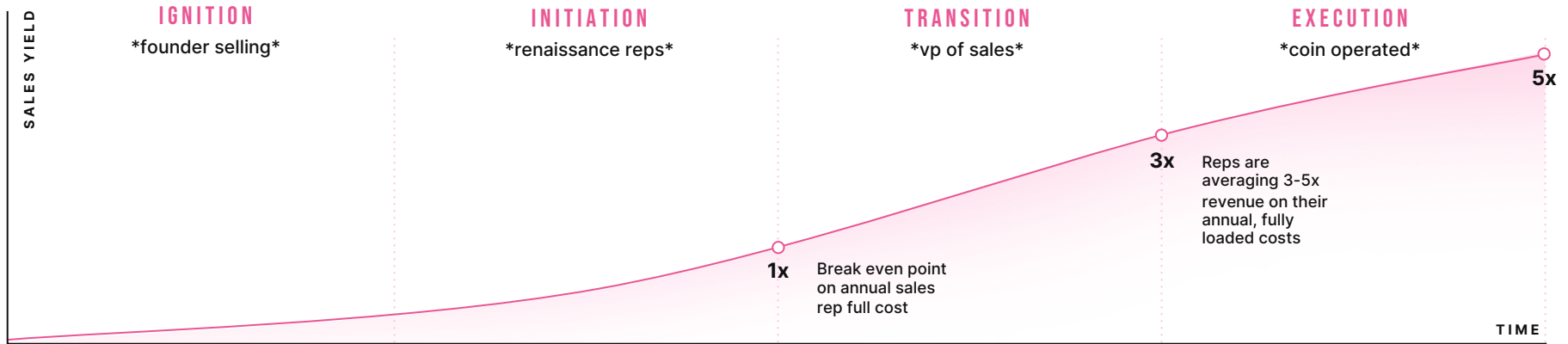### KIRA COLBURN

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HIRING STRATEGY

THE SALES LEARNING CURVE

IGNITION
founder selling

INITIATION
renaissance reps

TRANSITION
vp of sales

EXECUTION
coin operated

SALES YIELD

5x

3x Reps are averaging 3-5x revenue on their annual, fully loaded costs

1x Break even point on annual sales rep full cost

TIME

Fail fast

— Founder(s) should sell the first 5-10 logos to drive revenue and keep the lights on.

— Lay the foundation on experimenting with demand generation strategies.

— Use simple tools like spreadsheets and lightweight CRMs to stay agile.

— Use consultants and network with sales leaders to get free advice.

— Once you get a sense of what's working (and can create an initial "sales playbook"), hire renaissance sales reps to help scale the process: driven, scrappy, product evangelists.

See the Work-Bench Enterprise Playbook on founder-led outbound sales here.

Pass the torch

— Extract founder knowledge into the first real version of a "sales playbook."

— Demonstrate reps other than founder can consistently sell.

— Adopt core sales tools and specify how everyone should use them. Try to forecast revenue using data.

— Accelerate demand generation to get ahead of sales team needs.

— Hire diverse sellers to test and learn what works.

— Rapidly experiment with new sales techniques and zero-in what works at a given stage.
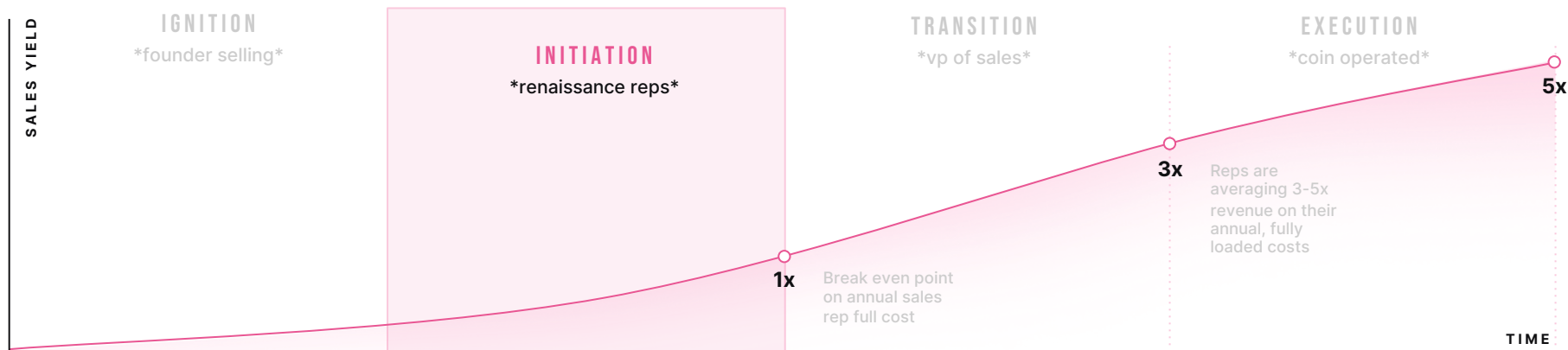
Standardize the playbook

— Create a standardized sales playbook and internal SLA.

— Set the standards and hold reps accountable for performance, behavior, methodology, and activities.

— Improve forecasting, level up operations, sales analytics and enablement.

— Groom and promote middle managers and decentralize decision making. Create a training program for new sellers.

— Hire sellers who thrive in a system.

Systemize & optimize

— Measure and optimize all sales strategies levers. Leverage outside consultants.

— Experiment selling into new customer segments and markets using a small, SWAT team (a new sales learning curve within!).

— Improve margins and try to hire cheaper, raw sellers who can be molded and shaped. Build career path and promote from within.

— Optimize sales tools, comp plans, training and HR processes to get ahead of 'big company' challenges.

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THIS PLAYBOOK FOCUSES ON 'PASSING THE TORCH'
HIRING YOUR FIRST SALES HIRE

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WHEN TO PASS THE TORCH?

When do you know its time to hire your first sales rep?

This person is most likely going to be a Business Development Representative (BDR).

1. Your product and tech stack is launched and ready to sell

2. You've defined your ideal customer profile (ICP)

3. You've developed your product messaging

   *Note: Your ICP and product messaging will likely evolve a lot at this early stage, so just make sure you have a solid direction a BDR can run in at the start

4. You've developed a repeatable sales process - email templates and phone scripts, and early outbound email experiments have been successful

5. You're at the crossroads where you need to scale sales, but the founders) no longer have the time to be involved with the day-to-day sales process

6. You have someone the BDR can handoff the prospect to once they are ready for a demo (this can be the founder or an AE)

PRO TIP

Hire in groups of two. This will allow you to A/B test and prove out the best BDR strategies.

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PASSING THE TORCH: GENERAL TIMELINE

FOUNDING & SEED	SERIES A	BEYOND

*Note: These stages are approximate and can vary pending your industry, team, funding, etc.

FOUNDER-LED SALES

Founders are responsible for the end-to-end sales process, including researching prospects and cold outreach, qualifying inbound and warm introductions, and closing the deal.

HIRE YOUR FIRST BDRS

Once you have a sales process in place, hire entry level sales reps - BDRs. Have them test, iterate, and ultimately repeat this sales process.

EXPAND YOUR SALES TEAM

Hire experienced sales reps - AEs with 1-4 years of experience.
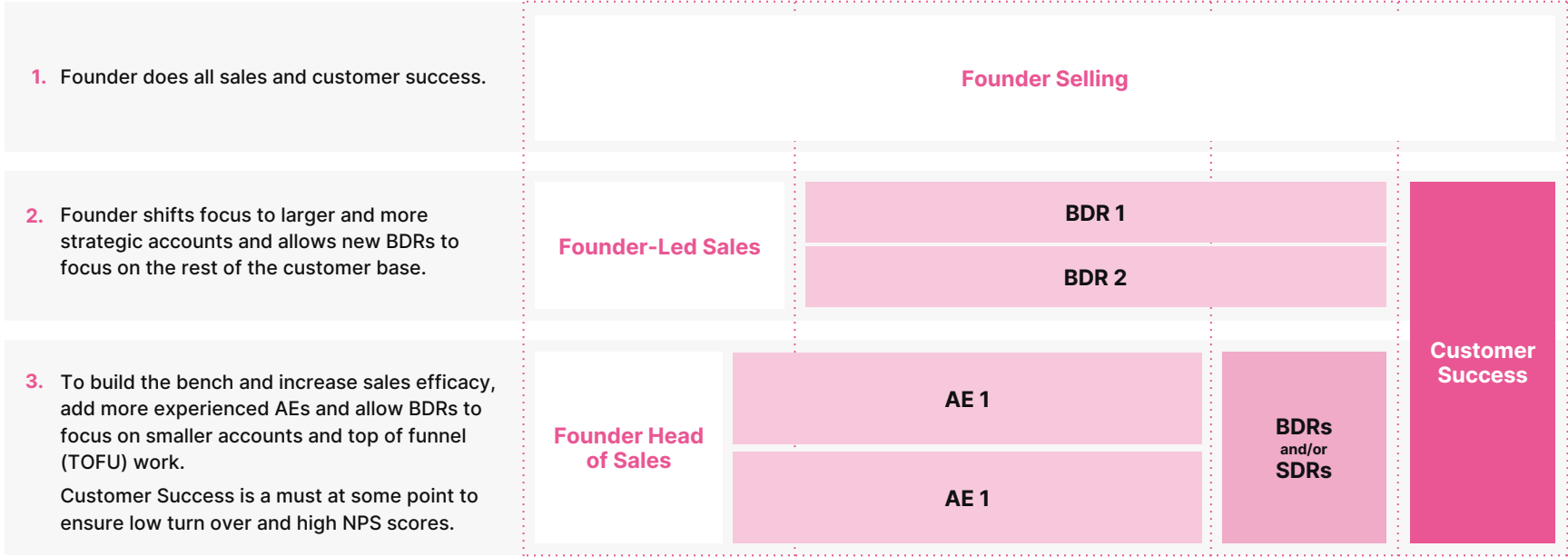
HIRE A SENIOR SALES LEADER

Once your sales team is scaling consistently, hire a Head of, VP of, or Director of Sales. Do NOT hire a VP of Sales before you have a repeatable sales motion in place.

FURTHER READING | When You SHOULD hire a VP of Sales: SaasStr's Jason Lemkin: here & here
Emergence Capital's Doug Landis: here

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PASSING THE TORCH: THE COMMON PATTERN

1. Founder does all sales and customer success.

Founder Selling

2. Founder shifts focus to larger and more strategic accounts and allows new BDRs to focus on the rest of the customer base.

Founder-Led Sales

BDR 1
BDR 2

Customer Success

3. To build the bench and increase sales efficacy, add more experienced AEs and allow BDRs to focus on smaller accounts and top of funnel (TOFU) work.

Customer Success is a must at some point to ensure low turn over and high NPS scores.

Founder Head of Sales

AE 1
AE 1

BDRs and/or SDRs

TIER 1 ACCOUNTS:
— Large ACV "whales"
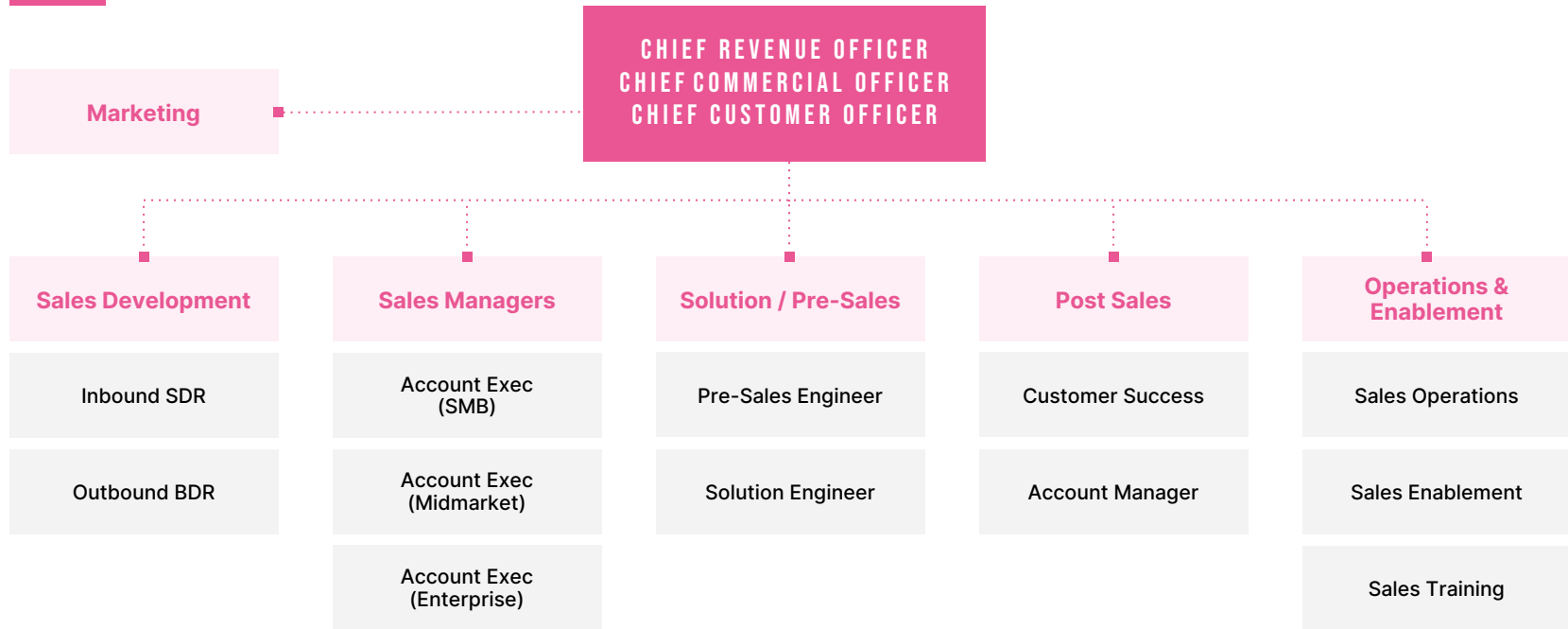— Strategic logos
— New segments

TIER 2 ACCOUNTS:
— Mid to large ACV, but has proven success in the customer segment and an established sales motion
— These are the "doubles" and "triples"

TIER 3 ACCOUNTS:
— SMB and smaller ACV's ("singles")
— Faster sales motion and baked out process

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ORGANIZATION CHART AT SCALE

CHIEF REVENUE OFFICER
CHIEF COMMERCIAL OFFICER
CHIEF CUSTOMER OFFICER

Marketing

Sales Development	Sales Managers	Solution / Pre-Sales	Post Sales	Operations & Enablement
Inbound SDR	Account Exec (SMB)	Pre-Sales Engineer	Customer Success	Sales Operations
Outbound BDR	Account Exec (Midmarket)	Solution Engineer	Account Manager	Sales Enablement
	Account Exec (Enterprise)			Sales Training

Most companies have a separate Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) because a strong CRO with marketing expertise is rare.
CRO who also owns marketing can be called Chief Commercial Officer or Chief Customer Officer.

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EXAMPLE PERSONAS FOR FIRST SALES HIRE

	Product-Led Growth	Developer Evangelist	SMB Sales	Corporate (MM) Sales	Enterprise Sales
Key challenges of role	Process and workflow driven mindset with growth hacker tools	Technical bar and product acumen	High velocity sales that requires high activity seller not afraid of rejection	Strong pipeline management and commitment to top of funnel	Rolodex and credibility (domain knowledge). Strategic selling and relationship management
What to look for	- Growth hacker with strong conversational skills - Adaptable and can problem solve off the cusp	- Technical background - Effective writing and blogging	- Tenacious (cold calling) and high energy - Has sold something with low access rates and doesn't mind monotonous work	- Organized, prepared and high level of commitment and follow through - Naturally curious, asks great questions	- Industry expert and lifelong learner - High relationship EQ and organizational IQ
Great interview questions	Take a look at our current customer acquisition flow, what are some ideas for improvement?	What are some developer communities you're a part of? How do you learn a new technology?	What was something you did that you didn't like but you stuck with for a long period of time?	What is the largest contract you've closed and how did you do it?	What is your critique of our product against our competitive landscape?
Compensation	- Higher percentage of earnings in base salary - Variable incentives (commission) could be qualitative	- Higher percentage of earnings in base salary - Variable incentives (commission) could be qualitative	- Base + OTE (typically 50/50) - Typically $ per close and very transactional commission plan	- Base + OTE (typically 50/50) - Commission rate on bookings. Keep simple to start, but can add accelerators and spiffs	- Base + OTE (typically 50/50) - Base commission rate, with bonuses for multi-year deals, and achieving certain annual revenue milestones

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COMPENSATION

SALES COMPENSATION
TERMINOLOGY

Base salary: Guaranteed base income

Variable compensation: Commissions (income based on performance)

OTE (on target earnings): Total compensation including base + commission @ 100% year 1 target

Commission rate: Percentage/dollars paid on closed revenue

Commission plan: Document that explains commission operations

Accelerators: Elevated commission rates for exceeding revenue goals

SPIFs (sales performance inventive funds): Good for driving short-term incentives behaviors

MBO (management by objectives): A Peter Drucker concept, the idea of using objective-based goals as opposed to revenue-based goals to align commissions. Good for early sales learning curve and leadership hires.

Draw: Loans against future expected earnings/commissions

- **Recoverable:** Rep <u>does</u> have to pay it back in event of termination. The outstanding draw amount accumulates from month to month.

- **Non-recoverable:** Rep <u>does not</u> have to pay it back in event of termination. No accumulation. More like an elevated salary for a defined period of time.

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GENERAL ADVICE

CONSTRUCTION:

— Cash compensation is typically not the primary driver for a first sales hire. Mission, equity, seat at the table, autonomy are why people join. Consider cash high / equity low and cash low / equity high options for early employees.

— Having success is why people stay, so let reps overachieve in the early days.

EXPECTATIONS:

— Don't stress about overpaying for performance. During early days, try to commit to at least 6 months for comp plans. Over/under earning is then limited to a time period.

— Set expectation that earnings will be (semi) annually reviewed and quotas, and OTE will go up as business matures.

— If you're trying to close a candidate below market, show them a year 2 step up plan.

COMMISSIONS:

— Keep it simple. Stick with only 1 or 2 factors driving earnings.

— Provide visuals and/or calculators, so it's a candid conversation on possible year 1 earnings.

— Pay expense reports and commissions as quickly as you can. However, larger commissions can be spread out.

GENERAL IC COMPENSATION LEVELS IN THE UNITED STATES

Role	Base Range	OTE Range	Design
SDR/BDR (SMB)	$50-60K	$60-80K	– 65-85% of total earnings is base salary
SDR/BDR (Midmarket)	$60-75K	$75-100K	– Commission primarily based on qualified meetings set, sometimes a small % of revenue is provided as a kicker to give SDR/BDR upside exposure
SDR/BDR (Enterprise)	$75-100K	$100 - 130K	– See a SDR Compensation Plan Template here
AE (SMB)	$60-80K	$90-130K	
AE (Midmarket)	$75-120K	$150-240K	– Generally, 50% of earnings is base salary, but early-stage sales hires may have higher base while product is going to market
AE (Enterprise)	$125-175K	$250-350K	
CSM/AM (SMB)	$50-65K	$65-85K	– Higher proportion of earnings is base salary (typically 70-90%)
CSM/AM (Midmarket)	$75-115K	$90-150K	– The remaining 10-30% variable is based on net revenue, and product utilization. AM tends to be compensated on net revenue while CSM on product utilization (success).
CSM/AM (Enterprise)	$90-$140K	$120-220K	

*Note: Figures above are based on New York City and San Francisco benchmarks. Smaller markets will be touch lower by 10-20% depending on local cost of living.

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DEVELOP A BASELINE FRAMEWORK OF COMPENSATION LEVELING

Start with a simple Base Salary + OTE plan with flat commission structure, but visualize how it fits into spectrum of seniority above/below this individual. Bring candidates with similar experience and expectations in at the SAME compensation plan. Use signing bonuses if you need (amortized over 6 months), but try to have consistency early.

Level	Title	Base	OTE	Quota
1	Account Executive	$60K	$120K	$600K
2	Senior Account Executive	$70K	$140K	$700K
3	Strategic Account Executive	$100K	$200K	$1M

| | Comp Band | OTE | INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS | | | | | MANAGEMENT | | | | |
			External Title	Internal Title	Base Salary	Variable Bonus	Total Earnings	External Title	Internal Title	Base Salary	Variable Bonus	Total Earnings
Entry Level	1	$60,000	Growth Associate		$58,500	$1,500	$60,000					
	2	$70,000	Senior Growth Associate		$60,000	$10,000	$70,000					
	3	$80,000						Team Lead		$70,000	$10,000	$80,000
	4	$90,000										
	5	$100,000										
Mid Level	6	$110,000	Strategic Growth Associate		$70,000	$30,000	$100,000	Manager		$80,000	$30,000	$110,000
	7	$120,000										
	8	$130,000										
	9	$140,000										
	10	$150,000						Senior Manager		$120,000	$30,000	$150,000
Senior IC's + Management	11	$160,000										
	12	$170,000										
	13	$180,000										
	14	$190,000										
	15	$200,000										
	16	$210,000										
	17	$220,000										
	18	$230,000										
	19	$240,000										
	20	$250,000										

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DON'T CONFLATE COMMISSION PLAN WITH PERFORMANCE PLAN

Commission plans provide the carrots and describes how variable earnings work.

Performance plans set the baseline expectations and defines underperformance.

A PSIP is a great template (best practice) for thoughtful preparation of hiring your first salesperson.

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS AND INCENTIVES PLAN (PSIP)
Effective 06/01/2020

INTRODUCTION

This **Performance Standards and Incentives Plan** (the "Plan") provides Employees ("You") with a plan that is designed to motivate you to produce your best results while also achieving the following business objectives for the Company:

● Sustained long-term business profitability and growth;

● Provide customers with an attentive, ethical and caring experience;

● A high performance sales team culture with accountability to self and others;

● An opportunity for individuals to grow responsibility and compensation commensurate with their impact..

As with all plans, payments under this Plan are made at the discretion of _____ (herein referred to as "Company") and its affiliates. The Company reserves the right to modify, amend or cancel the Plan at any time.

DEFINITIONS

Bookings is the revenue Company actually receives and is recognized on a candidate's actual start date. The Fee is calculated net of any discounts. Your commission will be calculated based on the Fee and subject to clawback due to churn (both "clawback" and "churn" are defined below).

Churn occurs when Company does not receive the expected revenue from a customer. A few typical reasons for churn include:

a) Customer cancels contract

b) Customer did not pay the amount owed to the Company within 180 days of the due date, the close will be marked as Churned.

If a candidate accepts an offer, but never actually starts with a company, this will not count as Churned revenue.

Clawback is the process in which the commission amount already paid to you is returned to the

---

VARIABLE INCENTIVE PLAN

You are eligible for variable incentives in accordance with Appendix A.

General Provisions

● Payments will occur in the same manner as your normal paycheck, for example, direct deposit, if elected.

● Commission payments are considered compensation from the employer and you will pay all taxes that may be assessed on the payment.

● In addition to your sales responsibilities, you will also have numerous responsibilities for which there is no additional compensation, including but not limited to:

  ○ coaching, mentoring, assisting new colleagues;

  ○ participating in Company staff meetings and training sessions;

  ○ developing and improving processes, systems, and tools;

  ○ assisting in marketing initiatives such as events and content;

Quarterly Commission Payment Operations:

● Quarterly commissions are calculated and paid out four times a year. The commission amount is calculated during the first week of each quarter (ex. first pay period of January, April, July, October respectively) based on placements which have passed the Guarantee Period AND payment has been received from the client.

● The commission payment will be processed after it is reviewed and signed off by you and your manager.

Termination

In the event of termination of employment, you will be eligible for full commission on placements whose Guarantee Period elapsed prior to your last day of employment.

For placements who have started in which the Guarantee Period elapses after your termination date, you are eligible to receive up to 50% of your commission in the quarter after the client has paid their full invoice and the Guarantee Period has elapsed.

For placements who have not started by your termination date, you will not be eligible for commission.

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SOURCING

# JOB DESCRIPTIONS ARE LANDING PAGES, NOT YOUR INTERVIEW ASSESSMENT

Build job descriptions using modular components:

- Start with an inspiring company-level EVP that can be used across all of your job posts. This will save you time.
  - Talk about your purpose and impact in the world
  - Social proof with investors and customers
  - Showcase reasons why this is the time to join
- **Responsibilities** (aka. job duties) should focus on the primary areas. Don't put a scattered laundry list that will scare candidates away.
- **Requirements** (aka. qualifications) should be specific insofar as you need them. This promotes diversity and maximizes your applicant pool. You can dial up the filter later if you get too many applicants.
- Clarify telecommuting and location requirements
- Include an **EEO statement**

Most importantly:

- Use less words
- Describe what you can do for your future employee (vs. asking what your future employee can do for you)
- Use videos, images, and artifacts to create visuals
- Find ways to stand out

See a SDR Job Description Template here.

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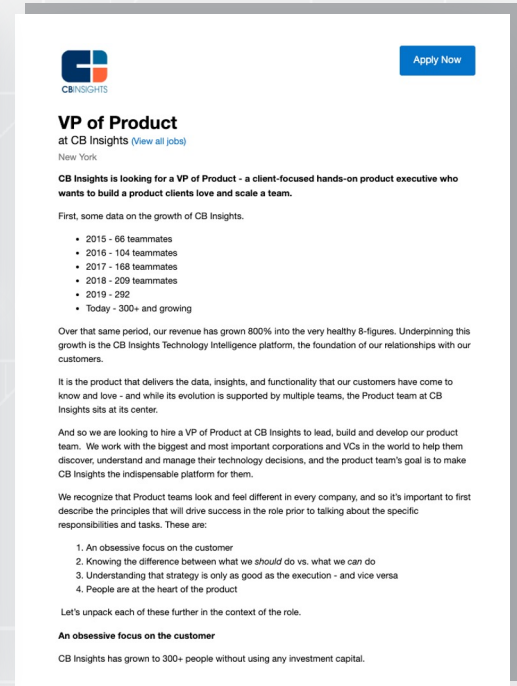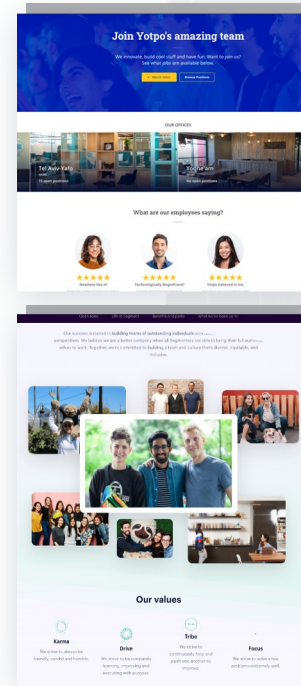
SOURCING CANDIDATES IS LIKE SALES:
IT TAKES TIME, BUT IS HIGH IMPACT

Meet candidates where they are:

- LinkedIn posts (fold in a personal touch)

- Investor community job boards

- Investor updates (give them a blurb to copy/paste)

- ATS Systems (ex. Recruitee, Greenhouse, Lever) are better than free job posts (ex. Indeed, Google, Glassdoor, etc.)

- Amplify across your networks – be specific, link to the job post, and maybe even offer a small referral bonus (ex. AirPods)

- Bring it up in every convo!

Kat Orekhova · 1st
Co-Founder & CEO @ Vara
1w · Edited · 🌐

Joining an early stage startup is less "risky" than you think.

1. *Job security*: Large companies like Airbnb, Uber, Lyft, and LinkedIn have laid off thousands of people. Meanwhile, our startup Vara has 2 years of guaranteed runway.

2. *Compensation & Benefits*: Startups aren't printing cash (yet), but you'll be comfortable. Did you know an experienced tech lead can get paid up to $180K at a seed stage company while also getting significant equity? At Vara, we also offer multiple great medical, vision, and dental plans.

3. *Family.* Vara's founders have 5 kids, and we welcome yours. Vara has a better parental policy than most US companies of any size (3 months of fully paid leave for the primary caregiver).

4. *Diversity & Inclusion.* Vara was 50/50 gender split when Lalit Singh and I first started the company. We're working hard to keep it that way as we grow, even going as far as to slow down the hiring process to ensure we're getting an equal # of women in the pipeline.

5. *Culture.* Vara doesn't do "bros", all-nighters, and foosball tables. We're a team of responsible, thoughtful people who work reasonable hours and celebrate both our wins and our learnings together.

Are you at a big co and thinking of switching? Come talk to us.

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TAKE MATTERS INTO YOUR OWN HANDS: LINKEDIN OUTREACH

- You can buy a LinkedIn license or you can use **Meet Alfred (~$39 to $69 per month)** to upload a list of candidates and set a messaging cadence once they accept your connection request. You can also use tools like Nymeria to find their email and put them into your marketing automation tool.

- For high value targets, you can send a semi-personalized message using 80% template and 20% personalized sentence.

Hey ____, great to connect! I'm hiring for a founding enterprise account executive to join us as our first sales hire. We've raised _____ from __, __, __ and have closed some big logos like __,__,__.

I was impressed by your previous SaaS sales experience and would love to tell you more about the opportunity. It looks you may have worked with ____ previously at Marketo who is a good friend of mine.

Let me know when you may have 15 mins for a quick call.

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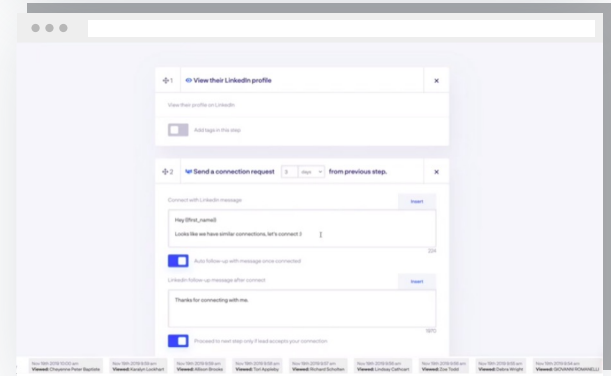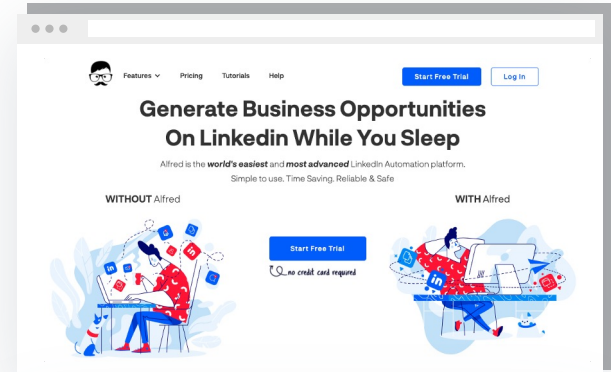
RECRUITING
PARTNERS

You get what you pay for:

– **End-to-end** (agencies) will be more expensive, but aligned with success - only if speed matters and difficulty is higher in this job market. Also they can help you become an expert on new talent verticals.

– **Platforms** are basically job boards 2.0 - be wary of paying money for leads, while having to do most of the work yourselves.

– **DIY** is best option when you are smaller (higher EVP to the right candidate), know what you want, and you only need a few hires.

How to evaluate partners:

– Reputation in the community

– Track record with related previous searches

– Expertise and focus...great recruiting partners will make you better at hiring

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CANDIDATE ASSESSMENT

WHAT TO LOOK FOR ON A RESUME

Red Flags

- No sales numbers or any detailed metrics of performance
- Decrease in company quality or stagnant responsibility over course of career
- Large, <u>unexplainable</u> gaps in resume

Yellow Flags

- Sales metrics that are unbelievable (300% to quota) or qualitative without substantive answers on how
- Short stints at jobs (there could be good context)
- Resume with spelling errors and poor attention to detail

Green Flags

- Specified sales metrics and awards that are reasonable
- Track record of sticking with it in tough situations (ex. tough sale, company turmoil, acquisition event)
- Steady career progression, promotions (success follows them) and reasons for leaving (intentional)
- Extracurricular activities demonstrating an overachiever and ambition (i.e. sports, certifications, etc.)

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WHAT SHOULD I FOCUS ON IN A BDR INTERVIEW?

While many BDR candidates may not be looking for a long-term career as a BDR or even in sales, there are pointed interview questions and conversations to help determine if they are the right fit for your team and company:

1 **Do discovery on your candidate:**

Find out what's important to them and what their career goals are. This will become important later on in the process when you are trying to close them. To do this, dig deep, ask for clarity, and challenge responses. Then connect them to your employer value props.

I'm looking for a company with great culture >>
What is important to you in culture?

I don't feel challenged at my current company >>
What would you want to see out of your future company? When were you last challenged and what was that environment like?

I want to work with a great team >>
What isn't great about your current team? What do you want to learn?

2 **Build interest for the company and role:**

Tell them the founding story. Speak with energy and passion. Other questions to answer:

- What is the founder's background and ethos?
- Why is your solution and approach unique?
- Do you have product market fit (customer examples and case studies help)?
- What is the company culture like?
- What will I learn and get out of this role?
- What's the vision of the company? Where will it be in 1 year? In 5 years?

3 **Make sure they understand what exactly a BDR is:**

Answer what their role as a BDR will entail and give general information about how that fits in with the larger company (team structure, working styles, overview of the day-to-day, etc.)

4 **Ask questions to determine if they are the correct culture fit. Generally, at the early stage you are looking for someone who has work ethic, passion, and is coachable.**

– How do you like to receive feedback?
– Tell me about a repetitive task you've had to do and how you stayed focused?
– How do you handle rejection?
– How would you handle a difficult prospect?

– What type of leadership dynamic are you looking for?
– What is your communication style?
– Why do you want to be in THIS sales role NOW?
– What are you looking for this role and why?
– How do you learn best? (Reading, watching videos, watching others, etc.)

5 **Give them an assignment to assess their hard skills:**
Written:

– Create an ICP based on the company's landing page
– Find 3 companies that fit that ICP
– Choose a contact at each company
– Craft an initial email

Oral / role playing:

– Ask candidates to sell you something they're passionate about (can be anything - an hobby, an app, a home product, a piece of clothing), then give them live feedback and have them give a revised pitch on the spot. If they don't make improvements the second time around and can't get you excited about this, then they probably can't sell very well. This tests for passion and coachability!

SDR/AE Written Assignment Template and **Sales Interview Grading Rubric**

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CLOSING YOUR CANDIDATE

OFFER CALL:

1 Present offer on Zoom or in-person, if possible.

2 Congratulate them on a tough interview process and what you liked about their candidacy so they know how they earned the offer.

3 Walk through verbally all the terms of the offer. Ask them at the end on what they think. Try not to provide written until they give you their thoughts. Candidates may keep their decision close to their chest, but it's worth trying to get a verbal prior to spending time on paperwork.

4 Give them 2-3 business days to decide - explain you want someone who is excited to join, but also need to move quickly to be fair to other candidates.

FOLLOW UP:

- Have other interviewers who developed strong rapport with individual reach out and congratulate them.

- Offer them a conversation with a board member or investor.

work—bench

ABOUT CLOSERIQ

CloserIQ is one of the world's largest recruiting and search firms specializing in modern sales and engineering talent.

Founded in 2014, we have served 800+ global startups and are the top recommended search firm by leading institutional investors.

We offer contingency, contained, and retained search models to help startups scale at all stages of growth.

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Head of Business Development
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800+	100,000+
GLOBAL EMPLOYERS	**TALENT NETWORK**

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wework	Collibra	DATADOG	lightspeed	algolia	Andela	fundera
Chainalysis	mx mendix	GLG	pendo	toast	adyen	pentaho

work——bench

ABOUT WORK-BENCH

Work-Bench is an enterprise venture capital firm based in New York City. We lead Seed rounds in enterprise software startups throughout the country. We are laser focused on supporting early-stage startups on all things go-to-market and have built a dynamic enterprise tech community in New York City and beyond.

Sign up for the Work-Bench Enterprise Weekly Newsletter, to stay up-to-date on all things enterprise tech with 21K+ subscribers.

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