Founder Playbook: The Ten Steps

For: Founders of founder-led AI companies
Founder Playbook step: All
As of October 26, 2026

What You Need

Your product is built and the next job is cash. The next twelve months decide whether a sales team works for you. This guide gives you ten steps, in order. Each step fixes what the next one depends on.

Four signs you're ready for a sales org

- You've found your first deal.
- You want to start booking meetings.
- You've already launched your first paid pilot.
- You're thinking about hiring your first rep.

Inputs to gather

- Your closed and lost deals, with the buyer, the problem, the price and the length of the cycle.
- Your pilot terms and your pricing, as they stand today.
- Your inputs for the cash curve: number of sellers, deal size, ramp and billing terms. Run them at mayberryadvisory.com/cash-curve.
- One CRM and call recordings, the setup in the First 30 Days plan.

Who you add, and when

Order	Who	When
1	You sell	First
2	First seller	Next
3	Technical help	Before the third seller
4	RevOps	Before the fourth seller
5	First manager	At about five sellers

Research

A sales team costs cash before it pays back. Here's the example: you hire a seller at $225,000 OTE (on-target earnings, the pay for a seller who hits quota), about $321,000 a year with benefits. They ramp (the months a new seller needs to reach full output) in 2 months and sell $60,000 deals billed annually up front. To turn cash positive by month 12, they must close about one deal every 8 weeks. That is 0.125 deals a week, or 6.5 a year, 41% of quota.

Industry average attainment is 43%, so the average rep just clears that bar. And 57% of reps miss quota. At 43%, one hire needs $54,000 of cash at the lowest point, in month 2, and turns cash positive in month 11. The rep costs about $27,000 a month.

What quota attainment does to the same hire

Attainment	Deals a year	One deal every	Lowest point	Cash turns positive	Net cash, month 18
25% (below average)	3.9	13 weeks	-$143k	Not by month 18	-$94k
43% (industry average)	6.8	8 weeks	-$54k	Month 11	+$189k
100% (full quota)	15.8	3 weeks	-$54k	Month 4	+$1.09M

- Quota is $945,000 a year, 4.2 times OTE. A $60,000 deal makes full quota 15.8 deals a year.
- Ramp and billing move the dates fast. At 43% attainment, a 6 month ramp turns cash positive in month 21. Monthly billing instead of annual up front, month 23.
- Cash only. Delivery cost, managers and sales engineers are not counted. Deal size, ramp and billing are example assumptions, not a forecast.

Sources

Figure	Source
43% average attainment, 57% of reps miss quota	QuotaPath, citing RepVue Q2 2025 (quotapath.com/blog/saas-sales-reps-missed-quota)
Quota is 4.2 times pay	Optymyze, citing the Bridge Group (optymyze.com/blog/sales-compensation-benchmarks)
Benefits at about 30% of compensation	US Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.gov, Employer Costs for Employee Compensation, June 2026)

The Short Version PDF puts six research figures and the cash curve on two pages. Find it at mayberryadvisory.com/founders.

Step by Step

Take these in order. The Sales Team page at mayberryadvisory.com/sales-team shows the seats, the tools and a normal workday for each role.

Steps 1 to 2: Know Your Sale

Write down how you sell and who you sell to.

Step 1. Write Down How You Sell Today

Pull your closed and lost deals.

For each deal, note the buyer, the problem, the price and the length of the cycle, and look for what repeats.

> **Ready when:** You can explain why you won and why you lost without guessing.

Step 2. Pick Who You Sell To

Pick one type of company and buyer, and turn down the rest for now.

Name the type of company, the buyer, and the outcome that buyer must deliver this year. Turn down the rest for now.

> **Ready when:** A new seller can tell in one minute whether an account fits.

Steps 3 to 4: Set Up the Machine

Pilot terms, pricing and one source of truth.

Step 3. Write the Pilot and the Price so They Convert

Agree success metrics in writing before a pilot starts.

Say what happens when the metrics are met. A paid pilot is a short, paid trial with a written goal.

Pick one way to charge: seats, usage, outcomes or a mix.

> **Ready when:** Every live pilot has written success metrics and a date to decide.

Step 4. Choose the System of Record and Name the Handoffs

Decide where each fact lives and who owns each handoff.

Decide where each fact lives: lead, deal, quote, contract, usage, invoice, renewal. The system of record is the tool that holds the official version.

Name one owner for every handoff between them.

> **Ready when:** You can trace one signed deal from first signal to invoice without asking a person.

Steps 5 to 7: Add People in Order

Sellers first, then technical help, then RevOps.

Step 5. Hire Your First Seller, Then a Second

Hire sellers before managers, and check the cash curve first.

Hire for curiosity and drive over industry experience, and hire sellers before managers.

One seller costs half as much as two. Two show whether a problem is the seller or your sales motion.

Check the cash curve first. You keep coaching until the team reaches about five sellers.

> **Ready when:** You can hand a seller a target list, a pitch and a pilot template.

Step 6. Put Technical Help Next to the Seller

Add one sales engineer before the third seller.

A forward-deployed engineer works inside the customer's setup to get a pilot live.

> **Ready when:** Pilots stall on setup, not on interest.

Step 7. Add RevOps Before the Fourth Seller

Bring in a RevOps lead while there are few handoffs to fix.

RevOps, short for revenue operations, owns the data and rules behind the sales team. Bring in a lead while there are few handoffs to fix. Part-time is fine at first.

> **Ready when:** No deal waits on someone to copy data from one tool to another.

Steps 8 to 10: Run It and Grow

One weekly rhythm, a coach, and the rest in order.

Step 8. Run One Weekly Rhythm

Hold one pipeline review and one forecast call a week.

Write stage exit criteria: the buyer action that moves a deal to the next stage.

> **Ready when:** The forecast changes for a reason you can name.

Step 9. Add the First Manager at About Five Sellers

Add a coach once the team nears five sellers.

Hire or promote someone who will coach. Protect their time for coaching, not reporting.

> **Ready when:** You're the bottleneck on coaching and deal reviews.

Step 10. Add the Rest in Order, and Measure

Add roles one at a time, in order.

Add sales development reps (SDRs) only after your account list converts to meetings at a rate you trust.

Then add enablement, a deal desk that approves pricing and terms, and customer success.

A VP of Sales comes when you can't sell, coach and forecast at once.

> **Ready when:** You can say what the next hire will add, and when.

Troubleshooting

Problem	Likely cause	Fix
You can't say why you won or lost deals.	Closed and lost deals aren't written down.	Pull them. Note the buyer, the problem, the price and the length of the cycle, and look for what repeats.
A new seller can't tell if an account fits.	Your customer isn't named in writing.	Name the type of company, the buyer and the outcome the buyer must deliver this year. Turn down the rest.
Pilots drag on or end without a decision.	Success metrics aren't written down.	Agree success metrics in writing before the pilot starts, with a date to decide.
Pilots stall on setup, not on interest.	Sellers lack technical help.	Add one sales engineer before the third seller.
Deals wait on someone to copy data between tools.	Handoffs have no owner and no system of record.	Name where each fact lives and one owner for each handoff. Bring in a RevOps lead before the fourth seller.
The forecast moves and nobody can say why.	Stages have no exit criteria.	Write stage exit criteria, and hold one pipeline review and one forecast call a week.
You're the bottleneck on coaching and deal reviews.	The team is near five sellers with no manager.	Hire or promote a manager who coaches, and protect their time for coaching, not reporting.
Cash turns positive later than you planned.	Attainment is below average, or ramp or billing terms are slower than the example.	Rerun the cash curve with your own numbers before you hire. At 25% attainment, cash is still negative at month 18.

> **Doug can set this up with you.** Book a discovery call at mayberryadvisory.com.