

SALES READINESS AUDIT

Are you ready to hire a Seller?

Hiring your first seller before you're ready costs 6 to 9 months of runway, wasted time, and untold amounts of frustration. You burn the leads they couldn't convert while learning. You lose trust with your team and your investors, and then you have to make the hire again, not knowing which mistakes to fix first.

I'm Niels. **5x Head of Sales**, first GTM hire at early-stage startups, and I've interviewed thousands of sellers and hired hundreds. This is the list I run founders through to get them 'Sales Ready'.

☐ **Score yourself and be brutally honest.** One point per Yes/Done.

Ready for what?

- 01 ☐ **You're clear on AE vs Head of Sales.** A founding AE closes and writes the playbook while closing. This works if you can hand them pipeline on day one, you'll still sell alongside them, and they've carried a bag before with no SDR and no brand at your stage. A Head of Sales works in 2 cases: they close 10 deals themselves before hiring anyone (agreed before the offer), or your process is complex enough that you're paying for pattern recognition with your buyer.
- 02 ☐ **You're managing them.** Teaching the product, the problem it solves, and why the buyer cares. Weekly pipeline review, deal inspection, call coaching. Expect significant time spent here.

Proof it sells

- 03 ☐ **Real PMF signal.** Evidence from outside your own conviction. Some signal while you're still testing is fine.
- 04 ☐ **You've closed 10+ deals yourself.** Same buyer type. Deals that came from your network don't count.
- 05 ☐ **The problem is written down.** What you solve, and why the buyer cares enough to move/create budget. In their language.
- 06 ☐ **The deal math works.** ACV, cycle length, win rate. Work out how many deals one person can close in a year at your cycle length and what that revenue pays for. Some motions can't carry a quota-carrying rep yet, and no candidate fixes that.

What they need on day one

- 07 ☐ **A value prop that gets meetings.** The 2-3 sentences that turn a cold contact into a calendar invite. Your positioning statement is a different document.
- 08 ☐ **A basic playbook.** ICP and buyer persona. Qualification framework. Discovery questions. Objection handling and a simple 5-stage sales process with exit gates.
- 09 ☐ **Pipeline they can work.** A rep's own outbound takes about 2 quarters to turn into revenue, and it won't be enough to carry someone whose salary is 50% commission.
- 10 ☐ **An onboarding plan.** Beyond call recordings, Notion docs, and meetings with engineering. Write down exactly what they need to do in the first 2 weeks and then a list of milestones for Day 30 and 60. Be ready to revise based on actual results.

What it costs you

- 11 ☐ **You're willing to fund 6 to 9 months before seeing results.** Sales doesn't start closing after 2 weeks of onboarding.
- 12 ☐ **Your time, still.** A seller doesn't take you out of sales. No one knows the product better than you, and that's still true 12 months in. Budget 1-2 days a week for the first 4 weeks, then adjust based on how they're tracking.

YOUR SCORE

11-12 **Open the role.** Hire for your product, buyer, stage, and cycle.

8-10 **Open the role, fix the gaps during the search.** You have 4 to 6 weeks while sourcing runs.

Under 8 **Don't hire yet. Fix these first.** It costs you a few weeks. Skipping it costs 3 to 6 months of time, money, trust, and a lot of frustration.

Whatever you scored, I'll get on a **free call** and go through it with you.

I place founding AEs and Heads of Sales at early-stage startups, and I fix the gaps above.

If the answer is that you shouldn't hire yet, I'll tell you that. I'd rather you hire me in 6 months when the role can succeed than take a search that fails.

Book time with me

or email niels@growthadvice.co