



FOUNDER-LED SALES

When Should a Technical Startup Hire Its First Salesperson?

A salesperson cannot make an unclear commercial model clear by selling harder.



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KNOW FIRST. THEN ACT.

This Narrow Insight is designed to help technical founders separate commercial signal from noise and identify what is worth repeating.

The founder usually has to learn first

In an early technical business, the founder carries context that no new salesperson can immediately replicate. They know why the product exists, how the technology works, where it is genuinely differentiated and what early customers have said.

That makes founder-led sales valuable even when selling is not the founder's natural strength. Early conversations are not only about closing revenue. They are how the business learns which problems matter, which buyers engage and what the market needs to believe before it will act.

Hiring sales too early can hide the real problem

If the ICP is unclear, qualification is weak or every opportunity requires a different story, a new salesperson inherits ambiguity rather than a sales process.

When results disappoint, it is easy to conclude that the hire was wrong. Sometimes that is true. But sometimes the salesperson was asked to repeat something the founders had not yet made repeatable.

A salesperson can bring discipline, capacity and skill. They cannot manufacture market clarity that the business has not yet discovered.

Hire sales when there is something worth repeating.

What should exist before the hire

You do not need a perfect playbook. You do need enough evidence to give the new hire a credible starting point.

That usually means a reasonably clear view of who you are selling to, what problem matters, why the buyer acts, what a qualified opportunity looks like, how a deal tends to progress and what repeatedly blocks conversion.

There should also be enough opportunity volume to learn from. Hiring into a business with almost no real pipeline makes it difficult to separate the salesperson's performance from the company's underlying demand problem.

What the founder should be able to hand over

A useful handover is not a 70-page sales manual. It is a set of practical commercial truths: the strongest customer pattern, the language that lands, the common objections, the evidence that creates confidence, the stages that matter and the warning signs that an opportunity is unlikely to progress.

The founder may still remain involved in complex opportunities, particularly in deep tech and biotech where technical credibility matters. The objective is not to remove the founder overnight. It is to reduce the amount of selling that only the founder knows how to do.

A simple test

Before making the first sales hire, ask: are we hiring someone to repeat a commercial motion we increasingly understand, or are we hiring someone in the hope that they will discover the motion for us?

If it is the second, there may be more commercial learning to do first.

Hire sales when there is something worth repeating.

WHERE NARROW FITS

If the technology is progressing faster than the commercial model, Focus is designed to establish what is actually happening, where the friction sits and what should be prioritised next.

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