

# 2026 State of Skills Report: SDR

## The 10 Skills Defining the New Standard of SDR Performance in 2026

The SDR role has changed more in the last 24 months than in the previous 10 years. Buyers are harder to reach and even harder to convince to engage. Gartner's 2024 survey of 632 B2B buyers found that 73% of buyers actively avoid suppliers who send irrelevant outreach. AI has flooded the market with outbound noise, deadening your buyer's responsiveness to vanilla outreach. A full generation of SDRs—still early in their careers—has developed in environments shaped by remote work, a global pandemic, limited coaching, and constant organizational volatility.

The result?

The bar for booking qualified pipeline has risen dramatically. But most SDR skillsets have not risen with it. So most teams are operating with a significant SDR Skills Crisis: Skill proficiency levels are well below the required standards needed for durable success. Teams that don't address this SDR Skills Crisis will continue to:

- **Generate pipeline that looks healthy but doesn't convert**
- **Rely on a small subset of top performers**
- **Struggle to scale predictable pipeline generation**

What you're about to read is not a blog post or a thought leadership piece.

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## This is an industry standard-defining benchmark report

A clear look at what top-performing SDRs actually do differently in 2026 (and where most teams are falling short). We're at the beginning of a shift in how SDR performance is understood and managed.

For years, SDR performance was driven by tools, activity, and process. Now, leading organizations are moving toward something fundamentally different:

### Capability and skill as the primary driver of pipeline performance.

Over the last few years, technology and AI have been the primary lever for improving SDR performance. In 2026, that's no longer true.

*AI has made tools abundant—and increasingly interchangeable. Most SDR teams now have access to similar data, similar automation, and similar sequencing capabilities. And yet, performance gaps are widening. This is the root cause of the SDR Skills Crisis.*

*Teams have modernized their tools—but not their capabilities. The result is a widening gap between what SDRs are expected to do—and what they're actually able to execute.*

*Most teams are investing heavily in technology— but starving for durable skill capability. Most SDR leaders can feel this shift. Few can clearly diagnose it. Even fewer have a system for fixing it.*

**The teams that break this pattern gain something far more durable than a better tech stack: They build pipeline-generating capabilities that pay dividends forever.**

*And that is quickly becoming the defining advantage of high-performing SDR organizations.*

## Where do these insights come from?

The skills in this report are not opinion. Think of the skills in this report as the current Gold Standard of Excellence for SDR role-based proficiency.

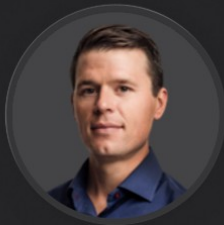
They represent a converging signal across the SDR ecosystem—what top performers consistently do differently, regardless of company, segment, or tech stack. We derived these skills from three sources:

### 1. An Industry Council of Revenue Experts

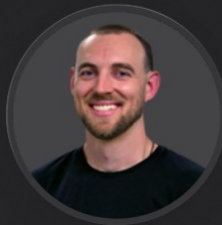
We assembled a council of operators, builders, and leaders who have collectively trained, led, or influenced thousands of SDRs across high-growth and enterprise organizations. This group includes:



**Kevin Dorsey**  
CRO @ Finally



**Kyle Coleman**  
Global VP @ ClickUp



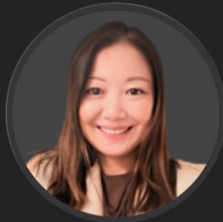
**Kyle Norton**  
CRO @ Owner.com



**Emily Worrell**  
Rev Enablement



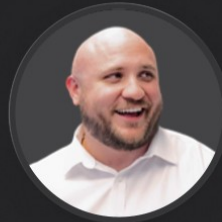
**Chris Ritson**  
Founder/Sales Trainer



**Vivian Yan**  
Revenue Leader



**Chris Orlob**  
CEO @ pclub.io



**Dalton Jensen**  
Sales Development



**Abdul Javed**  
Sales Leader @ Eftsure

*Rather than relying on any single philosophy or methodology, this council helped define a shared standard of what “great” looks like for the modern SDR role. Their perspectives appear throughout this report, with direct quotes anchoring each of the 10 skills.*

### 2. Observed Performance Patterns Across SDR Teams



Using our AI skill intelligence diagnostic platform, we analyzed patterns across SDR teams operating in today’s environment—looking at what actually correlates with:

Higher meeting conversion rates

Better-qualified pipeline

Stronger progression into late-stage opportunities

The goal was simple: identify the skills that consistently show up in top-performing reps—and are absent in average ones.


### 3. Field-Tested Application in Live Revenue Environments


The final source is our direct observations working with hundreds of revenue and SDR teams. They reflect what we see working inside real revenue organizations to transform their SDR organization's capabilities and build deep pipeline generation capabilities—across onboarding programs, upskilling initiatives, and transformation efforts.


**In other words:**  
This is what holds up under pressure, not just in theory.

## Our methodology

The three pillars of the 2026 SDR Skills Benchmark

  
**Industry council of experts**  
Collective expertise from:  
Kevin Dorsey  
Kyle Coleman  
Emily Worrell  
Chris Orlob, and more...

  
**Performance data analysis**  
Analysis of  
SDR team performance  
Conversion rates  
Pipeline quality  
Win progression

  
**Field-tested validation**  
Real-world application  
in SDR teams.  
Skill proven in live sales  
environments

### What this means

No single data set can perfectly define SDR excellence. But when expert consensus, data driven performance patterns, and real world application all point to the same capabilities... you're no longer looking at opinions. Instead, you're looking at a benchmark.

And more importantly, you're looking at the standard required to overcome the SDR Skills Crisis. The rest of this report defines what that actually looks like in practice.



### A Note on AI before we begin.

*AI is not a standalone skill anymore. It's table stakes. The highest-performing SDRs in 2026 don't treat AI as a separate capability. They use it to amplify every skill that matters.*

*From research and personalization to messaging, objection handling, and follow-up – AI is embedded across the entire outbound motion. That's why you won't see "AI" listed as one of the skills in this report. Because in 2026, the question isn't whether your SDRs use AI. It's whether they use it to execute at a higher level across the skills that actually drive pipeline.*

*AI is the amplifying skill, not the differentiating skill. And this reinforces the core thesis that skills > tools. If the rest of your skills are weak, AI makes that painfully obvious. If your capabilities are strong, AI accelerates that.*

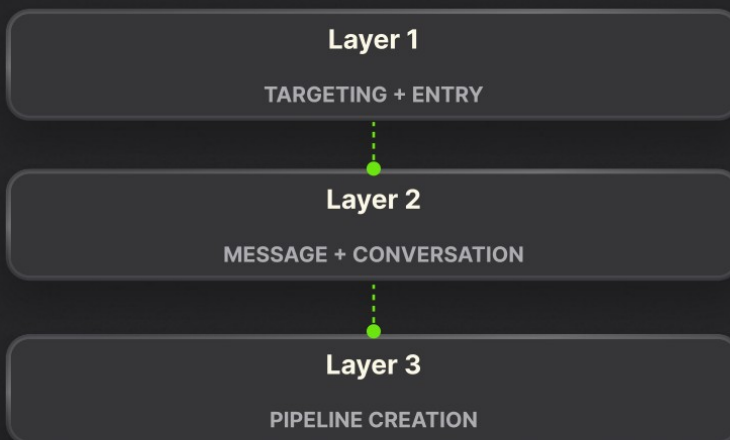
# The New Standard of SDR Capability: The SDR Capability Stack

SDR is one of the only functions in revenue where performance is measured in outputs, basic AI call scoring, or spotty manager observations—but not in underlying capability.

The following 10 skills represent the emerging gold standard for SDR performance in 2026. They are not a list of tactics. They are not a collection of best practices. They are the core capabilities that consistently separate high-performing SDRs from everyone else—across companies, segments, and industries. Each skill reflects a shift in how pipeline is actually created today:

- From volume → precision
- From single-threaded outreach → buying committee engagement
- From generic messaging → signal-driven relevance
- From activity → capability

Individually, each skill matters. Top SDR teams are already building this system. Most aren't. This is the bar. And for most teams, it's higher than they think. Which is exactly why the SDR Skills Crisis exists. The required level of capability has moved up—but most teams haven't moved with it.



## The SDR Capability Stack

The 10 skills in this report are not random. They form a structured system for how modern SDR teams generate pipeline.

We call this the SDR Capability Stack—a layered model that defines how top-performing teams operate across the entire outbound motion. And it is exactly what you need to solve your own SDR Skills Crisis.

This is the emerging model for how SDR pipeline is actually generated.

## Layer 1: Targeting & Entry

*Who you go after—and how you break in*

- Propensity Targeting
- Buying Committee Mapping
- Multi-Threaded Engagement
- Multi-Channel Orchestration

This layer determines whether your team is focused on the right accounts, engaging the right people, and entering accounts with a coordinated strategy. Most teams get this wrong—and compensate with volume. **Teams strong in this layer typically see 2–3x higher reply rates.**

## Layer 2: Message & Conversation

*What you say—and how you earn engagement*

- **POV Formation**
- **Problem-Led Cold Email**
- **Problem-Led Cold Calling**
- **Signal-Based Social Engagement**

This is where most outbound efforts fail. In a world saturated with AI-generated messaging, the bar is no longer personalization. The bar is insight, relevance, and problem-level understanding. **This layer is the primary driver of response and engagement quality.**

## Layer 3: Pipeline Creation

*How you turn engagement into real, durable pipeline*

- **Network-Activated Pipeline Generation**
- **Outbound-Led Discovery**

This is where the best SDR teams separate themselves. They don't just generate meetings. They generate pipeline that progresses, converts, and closes. **This layer determines whether pipeline actually converts or slowly dies.**

### Why this matters

Most SDR teams don't fail because they lack effort. They fail because they have gaps in one or more layers of this stack.

- Weak targeting leads to low-quality conversations
- Weak messaging leads to low engagement
- Weak discovery leads to fragile pipeline

And without a clear model, these gaps are hard to see and even harder to fix. Top-performing teams don't treat these as isolated skills. They build and manage them as a system. This is how the SDR Skills Crisis shows up operationally. It's not one failure. It's gaps in targeting, messaging, and pipeline creation that add up.

**Let's get 10 skills that make up the SDR Capability Stack.**

# 1 Propensity Targeting

## What Is It?

Propensity Targeting is the ability to identify which accounts are most likely to engage and convert right now. It goes beyond static ICP criteria and instead focuses on timing, signals, and buying readiness.

## Why it matters

Most SDR teams have a prioritization problem. They're reaching out to the right types of companies... at the wrong time. The result:

- **Lower response rates**
- **More no-shows**
- **Pipeline that looks full—but doesn't convert**

Top-performing SDRs focus their effort where buyer readiness already exists, dramatically increasing reply rates, meeting conversion, and pipeline quality. As Vivian Yan puts it: "You're selling to job titles, not to problems." This is one of the earliest and most common manifestations of the SDR Skills Crisis.

## Benchmark: Top Performers vs. Everyone Else

### What Most Teams Do:

- Build static lists based on ICP (industry, size, title)
- Work through accounts in a linear or random order
- Treat all accounts within a territory as equal priority
- Rely heavily on volume to compensate for low engagement

### What Top Performers Do:

- Prioritize accounts based on live buying signals (especially trigger events that map to a well-crafted POV)
- Continuously re-rank accounts based on likelihood to engage now
- Focus effort on a smaller set of high-propensity opportunities
- Combine data + judgment to identify “why now” moments before reaching out

### What to do about it

#### Start by shifting from static targeting → dynamic prioritization.

- Define the key signals that indicate buying readiness in your market
- Train SDRs to identify and interpret those signals—not just pull lists
- Train SDRs to engage high-signal buyers with an integrated POV (see below).
- Train SDRs to anchor every outreach in a clear “why now” narrative
- Build a repeatable system for ranking and re-ranking accounts

Because in 2026, the new bar is timing. Top performers don't work more accounts. They work the right ones at the right moment.



#### Diagnostic Questions to Ask Yourself

*Can your SDRs clearly articulate why this account, why now for every outbound attempt?*

*Are your teams prioritizing accounts based on likelihood to convert, or just ICP fit?*

*How often are target account lists refreshed or re-ranked based on new signals?*

*Do your highest-performing SDRs focus on a different subset of accounts than the rest of the team?*

## 2 Buying Committee Mapping

### What Is It?

Buying Committee Mapping is the ability to strategically map an account before outreach begins—identifying the key personas, roles, and likely stakeholders involved in a purchase decision, and using that map to design a targeted, multi-threaded outbound strategy.

It's not about discovering the buying committee after engagement. It's about planning your approach to the account based on how decisions actually get made.

## Why it matters

Most SDR outreach fails because it's designed for a single person —not a buying committee. In today's environment:

- Decisions are made by groups, not individuals
- Different stakeholders care about different problems
- And a message that resonates with one persona often falls flat with another

When SDRs don't map the account up front:

- Outreach is generic and misaligned
- Messaging lacks relevance across roles
- And deals start single-threaded from day one

Top-performing SDRs start with the assumption that: *"If I don't understand the buying committee, I don't understand how to prospect into this account."* Emily Worrell frames it this way: "Map the real power structure. Titles show hierarchy. Influence shows motion."

## Benchmark: Top Performers vs. Everyone Else

### What Most Teams Do:

- Build outreach around a single persona (usually the most obvious one)
- Use the same messaging across all contacts within an account
- Add additional stakeholders reactively (only after initial engagement)
- Treat accounts as flat lists of leads, not structured decision-making units

### What Top Performers Do:

- Map out the likely buying committee before outreach begins
- Identify key roles (economic buyer, champion, end users, influencers) and tailor messaging to each
- Design coordinated, multi-threaded outreach strategies across stakeholders
- Use early outreach to create internal visibility and alignment, not just generate a reply

## What to do about it

Shift from contact-level prospecting → account-level strategy design.

- Define the standard buying committee roles for your ICP and segment
- Train SDRs to map accounts before building sequences (not after)
- Train SDRs to use role-specific messaging and coordinated touch patterns
- Reinforce the expectation that great prospecting starts with a clear answer to: "Who needs to care about this and how do I reach each of them?"

**Because in 2026, the best SDRs don't just reach out to accounts. They strategically penetrate them.**



### Diagnostic Questions to Ask Yourself

*Before outreach begins, can your SDRs clearly articulate who is likely involved in the decision (and why)?*

*Are your outbound sequences persona-specific, or are they reused across all stakeholders?*

*How often does your team engage multiple stakeholders in parallel vs. sequentially?*

*Do your SDRs approach accounts as lists of contacts or as structured decision-making units?*

### 3 Multi-Threaded Engagement

#### What Is It?

Multi-Threaded Engagement is the ability to actively engage multiple stakeholders within an account in parallel—using coordinated, role-specific outreach to build awareness, credibility, and momentum across the buying committee.

If Buying Committee Mapping is the strategy, Multi-Threaded Engagement is the execution of that strategy in outbound.

#### Why it matters

Most SDR teams are still operating in a single-threaded world—even though buying decisions are made by groups. They map one contact → reach out → wait for a reply → then follow up. Top-performing SDRs don't wait for a reply to expand. They create simultaneous engagement across the buying committee, increasing:

- Response rates
- Internal visibility
- The likelihood that the opportunity gains traction early

New opportunities are fragile. If your AE starts with one person in a vacuum, the odds of that deal going anywhere are slim. Gong analyzed 1.8 million B2B deals and found multi-threading boosts win rates by 130% in deals over \$50K. Single-threaded deals close at 5%. Deals with five or more stakeholders engaged close at 30%. That's a 6x difference. As Emily Worrell says: "Access isn't traction."

#### Benchmark: Top Performers vs. Everyone Else

##### What Most Teams Do:

- Engage one primary contact and wait for a response before expanding
- Add stakeholders sequentially, often too late in the process
- Use identical or lightly modified messaging across all contacts
- Treat multi-threading as something that happens after a meeting is booked

##### What Top Performers Do:

- Engage multiple stakeholders in parallel from day one.
- Coordinate outreach across personas with role-specific messaging and angles
- Use early touches to create internal awareness and cross-functional visibility
- Intentionally build momentum across the account, not just with a single contact



#### Diagnostic Questions to Ask Yourself

*Are your SDRs engaging multiple stakeholders at the same time, or waiting for a single reply first?*

*Do your outbound sequences reflect a coordinated, multi-person strategy—or isolated touches to individuals?*

*How often are opportunities single-threaded at the point of meeting creation?*

*Are SDRs trained to think in terms of account momentum, or just individual responses?*

## What to do about it

Shift from sequential outreach → parallel multi-threaded engagement.

- Train SDRs to engage multiple stakeholders from the start
- Train SDRs to use role-specific messaging tied to each stakeholder's perspective
- Coordinate touch patterns so outreach across contacts feels intentional, not random
- Reinforce the expectation that successful prospecting creates account-level engagement—not just individual replies

**In 2026, pipeline isn't created by winning over one person. It's created by building early momentum across a multi-threaded blend of people.**

## 4 Multi-Channel Orchestration

### What Is It?

Multi-Channel Orchestration is the ability to coordinate outreach across multiple channels—email, phone, social, and beyond—in a deliberate, signal-driven sequence that reinforces your message and increases the likelihood of engagement. It's not about "using more channels." It's about using the right channels, in the right order, with the right message (across stakeholders) to create a cohesive outreach experience.

**If Buying Committee Mapping defines who to engage, and Multi-Threaded Engagement defines how many, Multi-Channel Orchestration defines how you show up. Dalton Jensen breaks it down simply: "Email is the context channel. Phone is the conversation channel. LinkedIn is the credibility channel."**

### Why it matters

Most SDR teams are active across multiple channels—but not effectively.

- They send emails
- They make calls
- They engage on LinkedIn and social

But each action is isolated, not coordinated. So they deal with:

- Repetitive or inconsistent messaging
- Low signal-to-noise
- And outreach that feels generic—even when it's personalized

**Top-performing SDRs treat channels as a system, not a checklist. They understand that no single touch drives engagement. But a well-orchestrated sequence does. When done well, multi-channel orchestration:**

- Increases reply rates
- Improves recognition and familiarity
- And creates the sense that outreach is intentional and relevant... not random



## Benchmark: Top Performers vs. Everyone Else

### What Most Teams Do:

- Run templated sequences that include multiple channels, but with little coordination
- Repeat the same message across email, phone, and social with minimal variation
- Treat each touchpoint as an independent attempt to get a response
- Optimize for activity volume rather than engagement quality

### What Top Performers Do:

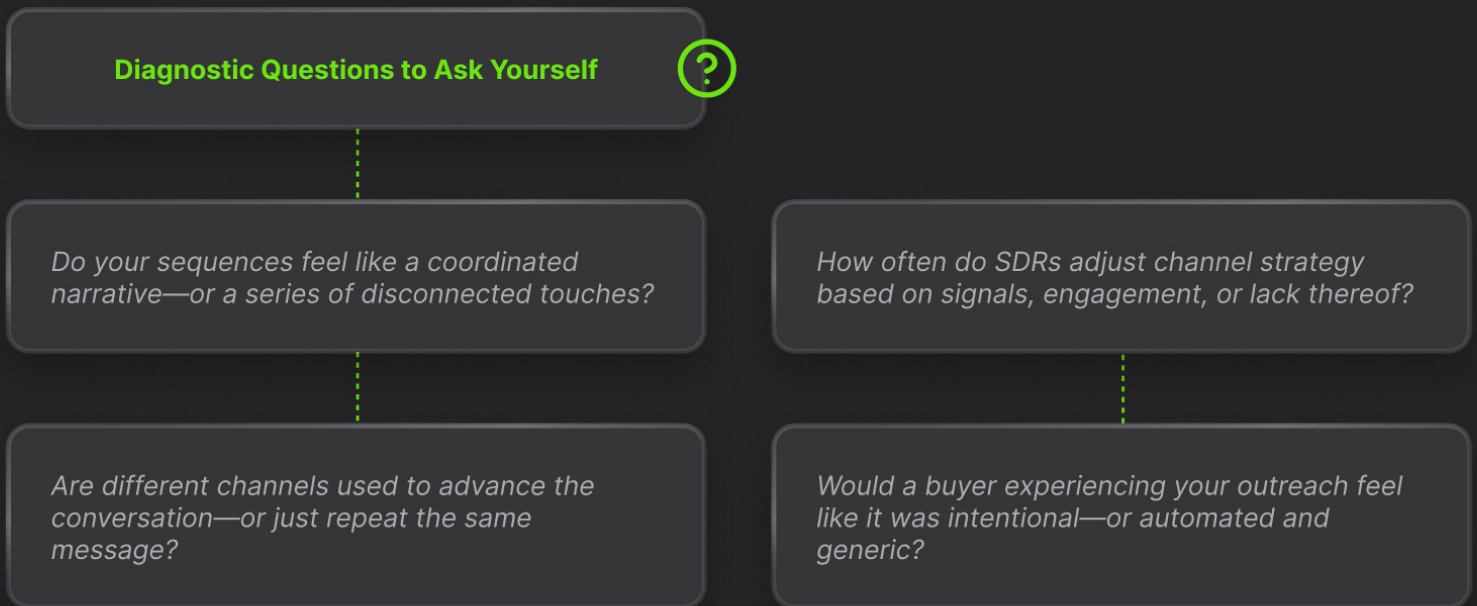
- Design coordinated sequences where each touch builds on the last
- Use different channels to deliver different angles of the message (not just repetition)
- Time outreach based on buyer signals, behavior, and context
- Create a cohesive experience across channels and stakeholders that reinforces relevance

## What to do about it

Shift from multi-channel activity → multi-channel orchestration.

- Redesign sequences so each touchpoint has a clear purpose and progression
- Train SDRs to use channels differently (e.g., email for context, calls for urgency, social for visibility)
- Train SDRs so their outreach feels like a coordinated campaign—not a sequence of attempts

**In 2026, it's not enough to reach buyers across channels. You have to orchestrate how your message lands across them.**



## 5 POV Formation

### What Is It?

POV Formation is the ability to develop a clear, insight-driven point of view about a prospect's business—including the problems they likely have, why those problems matter now, and how they should think differently about them. It's not generic messaging.

It's a hypothesis about what's going on inside the account and why it's worth their attention. This is an advanced skill, and only the most elite SDRs do this today.

### Why it matters

Most outbound fails because it lacks a compelling reason to respond. It's personalized. It's well-written. But it doesn't say anything new, sharp, or valuable. AI-generated outreach is everywhere now. The bar is higher:

- **Relevance gets you opened.**
- **Insight gets you replied to. As Chris Ritson puts it: "Credibility is specificity."**

Top-performing SDRs don't just reach out with information. They reach out with a point of view: one that reframes how the buyer sees their situation and creates not just a tolerance to engage, but a leaning-in willingness to engage. That's the bar. This is where the SDR Skills Crisis becomes most visible because this is where generic messaging breaks down completely.

### Benchmark: Top Performers vs. Everyone Else

#### What Most Teams Do:

- Rely on templates with light personalization
- Focus on describing their product or value props
- Lead with "we help companies like yours..." messaging
- Struggle to articulate a compelling "why now"

#### What Top Performers Do:

- Develop a clear hypothesis about the prospect's problems and priorities
- Anchor outreach in a specific, opinionated point of view
- Connect external signals (market, company, role) to a relevant business issue
- Lead with insight—not product—creating a reason to engage



#### Diagnostic Questions to Ask Yourself

*Can your SDRs clearly articulate what they believe is happening inside the account and why it matters?*

*Does your outreach introduce a new perspective, or just restate known problems?*

*How often do your messages answer the question: "Why should I care about this right now?"*

*Are SDRs trained to develop a POV or just execute messaging frameworks?*

## What to do about it

**Shift from message execution → point-of-view development.**

- Train SDRs to build problem hypotheses based on triggers and signals
- Define a set of repeatable POVs tied to your core value drivers
- Reinforce the expectation that every outreach answers: “What do I believe is happening here—and why does it matter now?”
- Train SDRs on how to communicate insight simply and directly

**In 2026, the bar for great messaging is not personalizing or relevance (as most SDR teams define it). The bar is a compelling point of view. Only the best do this well.**

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## 6 Problem-Led Cold Email

### What Is It?

Problem-Led Cold Email is the ability to write outbound emails that lead with a deeply understood, clearly articulated problem—one that reflects the buyer’s reality more accurately than they would describe it themselves. It’s not about pitching a product. It’s not even about selling outcomes. It’s about demonstrating such a precise understanding of the buyer’s world that the message feels like: “This person gets exactly what I’m dealing with.” Kevin Dorsey says it directly: “You have to master problem-based language in your prospecting, otherwise you will get ignored, ignored, ignored.”

### Why it matters

Most cold emails are written upside down. They lead with:

- The product
- Product benefits
- Or product outcomes

But at the top of the funnel, buyers aren’t thinking about solutions yet. They’re not even thinking about benefits or desired outcomes. None of this has reached their consciousness quite yet. They’re thinking about:

- What’s not working
- What’s frustrating
- What’s unclear or broken

When outreach skips straight to outcomes, it feels premature—and gets ignored. It doesn’t have any context. Top-performing SDRs understand a critical shift: You don’t earn the right to talk about solutions or outcomes until you’ve demonstrated you understand the problem. Their emails don’t read like product brochures. They read like a page from the buyer’s internal dialogue—creating immediate trust and credibility.

## Benchmark: Top Performers vs. Everyone Else

### What Most Teams Do:

- Lead with product, value props, or outcomes
- Use templated messaging with light personalization
- Focus on “what we do” rather than “what you’re dealing with”
- Write emails that sound like marketing, not insight

### What Top Performers Do:

- Lead with a specific, well-articulated problem the buyer likely has
- Describe that problem with a level of clarity that feels uncomfortably accurate
- Delay mention of the product—or omit it entirely in early touches
- Write emails that feel personal, observational, and grounded in reality

### What to do about it

#### Shift from solution-first messaging → problem-first articulation.

- Define the core problems your buyers experience, in their language (not yours)
- Train SDRs to describe those problems with specificity and nuance
- Remove or delay product mentions in early outreach
- Reinforce the expectation that a great cold email answers: “Can I articulate this person’s problem better than they’ve expressed it themselves?”

In 2026, the best SDR emails don’t sell the future. They hold up a mirror to the present.

## 7 Problem-Led Cold Calling

### What Is It?

Problem-Led Cold Calling is the ability to lead live conversations with a clear, insight-driven articulation of the buyer’s likely problems, and navigate the call in a way that deepens that problem awareness. What it’s truly about is entering the conversation with a strong hypothesis about what’s going wrong—and pressure-testing it in real time. If Problem-Led Email demonstrates understanding asynchronously, Problem-Led Cold Calling proves it live, under pressure.

### Diagnostic Questions to Ask Yourself

Are your SDRs trying to be understood or are they trying to make the buyer feel understood? Big difference.

Do your SDR emails lead with problems or outcomes?

Would a buyer read your outreach and think: “this sounds like me”?

How often do your messages articulate the problem more clearly than the buyer can themselves?

Are your SDRs trained on the what, why, and how to sell problems instead of just selling product benefits?



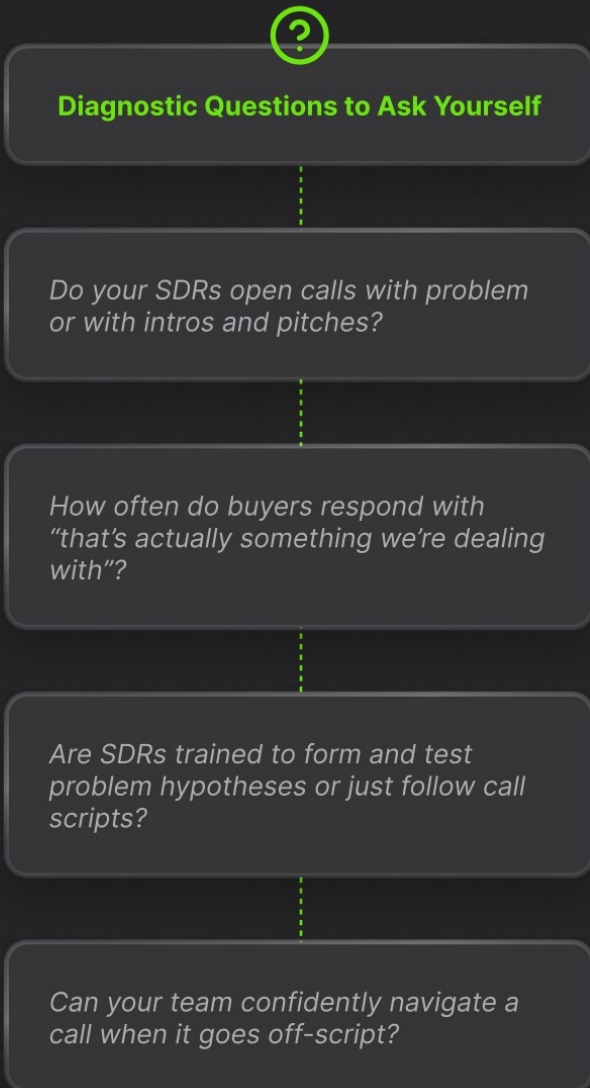
## Why it matters

Most cold calls fail in the first 30 seconds. They sound like pitches your product marketing team wrote, stuffed into a 30 second timebox with a hope and a prayer the buyer says “tell me more.” That never happens, for the same reason we covered in Problem-Led Cold Email. At the top of the funnel, buyers are not thinking about you, your product, its benefits, or even the desired outcomes you can deliver. They are struggling with their problems.

So for most outbound or cold calls, buyers quickly decide: “This person doesn’t understand me.” Top-performing SDRs flip this dynamic. They use the opening of the call to articulate a problem in a way buyers immediately identify with and earn the right to continue the conversation. Instead of trying to “get through a script,” they create a moment where the buyer thinks:

**“Damn... that’s exactly what I’m seeing.”**

That’s the bar. Kevin Dorsey puts the principle simply: “If there is no problem, there is no meeting.”



## Benchmark: Top Performers vs. Everyone Else

### What Most Teams Do:

- Open with generic intros and permission-based scripts
- Lead with product, value props, or vague “we help companies like yours...” statements
- Ask surface-level discovery questions without context
- Rely on memorized talk tracks rather than real understanding

### What Top Performers Do:

- Open with a clear, relevant problem hypothesis
- Quickly establish credibility by demonstrating situational awareness
- Use the call to validate, refine, and deepen the problem
- Adapt in real time based on the buyer’s responses

### What to do about it

Shift from script execution → problem-led conversation.

- Train SDRs to follow a problem-led cold calling structure.
- Redesign call openings to lead with relevance and insight—not permission or product
- Train SDRs to listen for signal and adapt in real time, rather than stick to talk tracks
- Reinforce the expectation that a great cold call answers: “Do I understand this problem well enough to have a real conversation about it?”

**In 2026, great cold calls don’t feel like interruptions. They feel like someone finally putting words to a problem that matters.**

## 8 Signal-Based Social Engagement

### What Is It?

Signal-Based Social Engagement is the ability to engage prospects on social platforms based on real-time signals and relevant problems – not generic activity.

It means identifying when and why to engage, showing up with context, and contributing in a way that reflects a deep understanding of the buyer's world. It's not about posting more. It's about engaging at the right moments, with the right perspective.

### Why it matters

Most SDR social activity is invisible and ignored. It usually lacks timing, relevance, substance, and meaningful context – all critical ingredients to successful social engagement with potential buyers. Likes, comments, and connection requests become background noise when they're not tied to anything meaningful. Top-performing SDRs treat social differently.

They know social is not a volume channel. It's a context channel. They use it to engage when a signal creates relevance, reinforce their point of view, and demonstrate understanding before ever sending a direct message. Chris Ritson's framing captures the skill: "AI is the reporter. You're the editor." And critically, they don't just engage with signals. They engage with problems revealed through those signals.

### Benchmark: Top Performers vs. Everyone Else

#### What Most Teams Do:

- Send generic connection requests with templated notes
- Like or comment on posts without adding meaningful perspective
- Engage randomly, without a clear reason or strategy
- Treat social as a lightweight add-on to email and calls

#### What Top Performers Do:

- Engage when specific signals create a reason to show up (posts, role changes, company updates)
- Add comments or interactions that reflect a clear understanding of the buyer's problems
- Use social to build familiarity and credibility before direct outreach
- Treat social as an integrated part of their outbound strategy—not a separate activity



#### Diagnostic Questions to Ask Yourself

Are your SDRs engaging on social with a clear reason tied to a signal—or just staying "active"?

Do their comments and interactions demonstrate real understanding—or surface-level engagement?

How often does social engagement create familiarity before a direct message or email?

Are SDRs using social to explore and validate problems—or just to get visibility?

## What to do about it

Shift from generic social activity → signal- and problem-driven engagement.

- Define the key signals on social platforms that indicate relevance (posts, hiring, announcements, engagement patterns)
- Train SDRs to engage with substance—adding perspective, not just visibility
- Reinforce the expectation that every interaction answers: “Why am I engaging now—and what problem or perspective am I bringing?”
- Integrate social into outbound plays so it supports and reinforces other channels

**In 2026, the best SDRs don't just show up on social. They show up when it matters. And say something that actually resonates.**

## 9 Network-Activated Pipeline Generation

### What Is It?

Network-Activated Pipeline Generation is the ability to systematically leverage internal and external networks to create warm, high-quality entry points into target accounts.

It means identifying who already has access, where trust already exists, and how to activate those relationships to create introductions, context, and credibility. It's not about asking for favors. It's about strategically unlocking pathways that already exist.

### Why it matters

Warm intros, referrals, and network-activated pipeline are 3.5x more likely to close than cold outbound. The lead-to-opp conversion rate sits at 10.99%, compared to 1-3% for most lead sources. And according to Nielsen, 92% of people trust recommendations from people they know, compared to 33% who trust advertising. Most SDRs know this works. The most elite SDRs systematize it. Abdul Javed captures the gap perfectly: '91% of customers are happy to make a referral. 11% of reps ask.

Top-performing SDRs don't rely exclusively on cold entry. They actively look for ways to turn cold accounts into warm opportunities, borrow trust from existing relationships, and enter conversations with context already established. The result is higher response rates, faster meeting conversion, and stronger initial conversations.

### Benchmark: Top Performers vs. Everyone Else

#### What Most Teams Do:

- Rely almost entirely on cold outbound (email, calls, social)
- Occasionally ask for referrals, but in an ad hoc or uncomfortable way
- Overlook existing relationships within their company or network
- Treat introductions as a bonus—not a core strategy

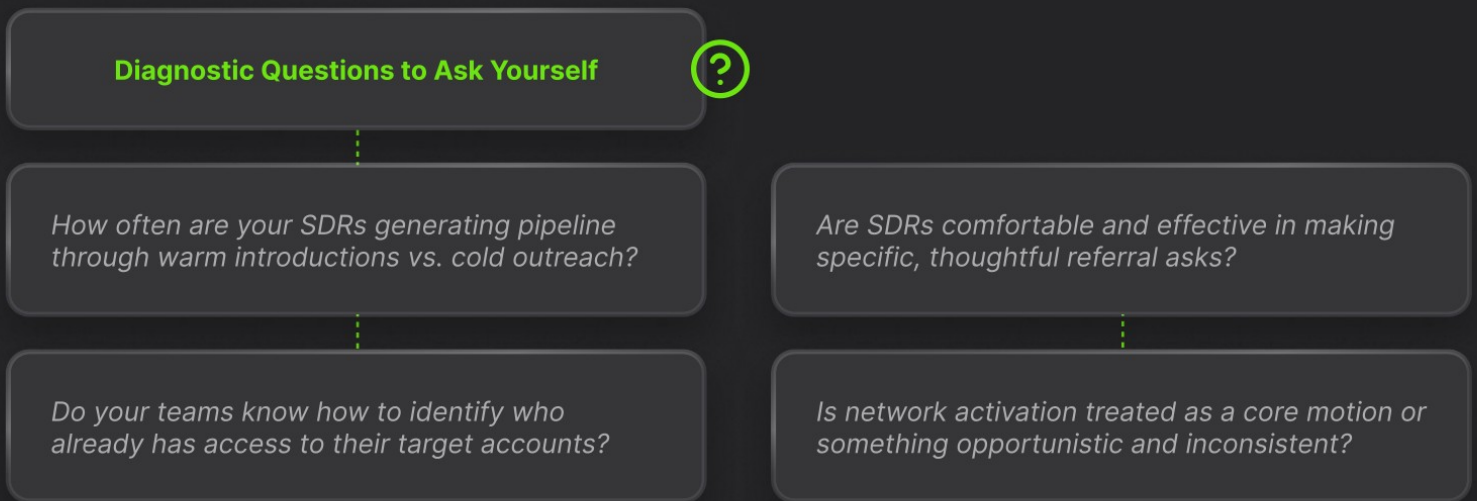
#### What Top Performers Do:

- Proactively identify who in their network (or company's network) can provide access
- Map connections across customers, colleagues, partners, and second-degree relationships
- Make targeted, context-rich asks that are easy for others to act on
- Treat network activation as a repeatable pipeline generation motion—not a one-off tactic

## What to do about it

Shift from cold-only prospecting → network-augmented pipeline generation.

- Train SDRs to map internal and external networks around their target accounts
- Train SDRs on simple frameworks for making clear, context-rich introduction requests
- Systematize network activation into a repeatable motion; not something only your best SDRs remember to do every once in a while.
- Encourage SDRs to look for mutual connections, customer overlap, and partner relationships
- Reinforce the expectation that before going fully cold, SDRs should ask: “Who already has a path into this account?”
- In 2026, **the best SDRs don’t just break into accounts. They find ways to be let in.**



## 10 Outbound-Led Discovery

### What Is It?

Outbound-Led Discovery is the ability to initiate, guide, and qualify discovery within outbound conversations—using a strong point of view to earn the right to explore real problems. It is a distinct form of discovery. Unlike inbound or discovery with fully-qualified buyers—where they are already engaged—outbound discovery requires SDRs to:

- Thaw out cold buyers
- Establish relevance quickly
- Earn the right to ask meaningful questions

It’s not about asking a list of discovery questions. It’s about orchestrating a conversation that starts with insight—and evolves into real business-level discovery (without buyers feeling like they’re being interrogated, interviewed, or ‘qualified’).

## Why it matters

The role of the SDR is evolving. In the most advanced teams, SDRs are no longer measured solely on meetings booked. They're also measured on things like:

- **Pipeline quality**
- **Early-stage deal progression**
- **And their ability to create opportunities that actually convert**

Why? Because booking meetings is becoming easier to automate. Creating durable, high-quality pipeline is not. This is where Outbound-Led Discovery becomes critical. Most SDRs make a fundamental mistake: They attempt to run traditional discovery in a cold context.

The result?

Buyers see the generic discovery coming a mile away. And they disengage, chalking the entire conversation up to a junior-varsity-level interaction.

Top-performing SDRs understand: In outbound, you have to earn the right to do discovery. Kyle Norton puts it bluntly: "Pipeline problems start the moment you choose which accounts to work." Ebsta's benchmark data backs this up: 63% of deal losses happen before needs assessment ever begins."

They do this by leading with a strong, problem-driven POV, using that POV to spark curiosity and relevance, and gradually guiding the conversation into real problem exploration. They qualify out instead of just qualifying in.

Because in enterprise selling: Winning starts with choosing the right deals to pursue. This is the downstream consequence of the SDR Skills Crisis—pipeline that looks real, but never converts.

## Benchmark: Top Performers vs. Everyone Else

### What Most Teams Do:

- Focus primarily on booking meetings, not shaping pipeline quality
- Ask generic discovery questions too early in cold conversations
- Treat discovery as the AE's responsibility
- Pass along low-quality or poorly qualified opportunities

### What Top Performers Do:

- Use outbound conversations to initiate meaningful discovery early
- Start with a problem-led POV to earn engagement before asking questions
- Identify and prioritize high-value problems worth pursuing
- Act as the first line of qualification – disqualifying weak opportunities and elevating strong ones

## What to do about it

Shift from meeting booking → pipeline creation.

- Train SDRs on outbound-specific discovery techniques—not just generic frameworks
- Reinforce the use of problem-led POVs to initiate and guide conversations
- Establish clear criteria for what constitutes a qualified, high-quality opportunity
- Train SDRs to qualify bad deals OUT—and focus effort on winnable deals

**Because in 2026, the best SDRs don't just create meetings. They create pipeline that can close.**



### Diagnostic Questions to Ask Yourself

*Have your SDRs ever run a discovery conversation so good, your AE team was actively impressed?*

*Have your SDRs ever run a discovery conversation so good, the buyer was actively impressed?*

*Do your SDRs attempt to run generic discovery, only to be met with disengagement?*

*Are your SDRs measured on meetings—or on pipeline quality and progression?*

*Are your SDRs measured on meetings—or on pipeline quality and progression?*

*How often do outbound conversations lead to real problem exploration vs. surface-level engagement?*

*Do your SDRs know how to earn the right to ask discovery questions in a cold context?*

*How frequently are low-quality opportunities passed to AEs—and how much time is wasted as a result?*

## Benchmark and upgrade your SDR team

At this point, the pattern should be clear. The SDR Skills Crisis is not caused by a single missing tactic. It's the result of gaps across an entire system of capability. Teams that don't systematically address the SDR Skills Crisis at the capability level will continue to:

- Generate pipeline that looks healthy—but doesn't convert
- Rely on a small subset of top performers
- And struggle to scale predictable pipeline generation

As teams close the SDR Skills Crisis, something happens. AEs spend less time qualifying bad opportunities—and more time advancing real deals. Pipeline doesn't just increase. It becomes more efficient to close. A high-performing SDR team in 2026 looks fundamentally different:

- They prioritize fewer accounts—and generate more pipeline
- They engage buying committees before meetings are booked
- Their outreach feels coordinated, not fragmented
- Their conversations create momentum—not just meetings
- And their performance is measurable, diagnosable, and improvable

As a result, Top SDR Teams vs Average Teams:

- 2–3x higher meeting → opportunity conversion
- 30–50% fewer accounts touched per rep
- 2–4x higher multi-threaded engagement per account

You've just seen the 10 skills that define this new standard of SDR performance in 2026. Not tactics. Not best practices. Capabilities. Most SDR teams operate far below this standard because they can't see where they stand.

### The Real Problem Isn't Awareness. It's Diagnosis.

Most leaders have a gut feel that something is off.

- Pipeline looks healthy on paper—but quietly dies in Stage 2 and Stage 3
- Meetings are getting booked—but AEs treat them like low-probability lottery tickets
- Your top 10–20% of SDRs generate a disproportionate share of pipeline—and no one can clearly explain why
- New hires follow the same playbook, use the same tools, run the same sequences—and produce wildly different results
- Activity is high, dashboards look full—but pipeline quality is inconsistent, fragile, and unpredictable

And the worst part? When you try to diagnose it, everything sounds plausible—but nothing is precise: **“We need better messaging.” “We need more activity.” “We need better tools.” But none of those actually explain the gap.** Because the real issue isn't what your team is doing. It's what they're capable of doing. SDR performance is not an activity problem. It's a capability problem. And right now, that capability layer is:

- Invisible
- Unmeasured
- And completely unmanaged

So performance feels like a black box:

- You don't know why your best SDRs are winning
- You can't replicate their performance across the team
- And you have no clear way to identify which capabilities are actually holding pipeline back

## The Next Step: Benchmark Against the Standard

If this report resonated, here's the next step: It's understanding where your team stands—specifically, and objectively—against this standard.

That's exactly what we built pclub to do.

## Benchmark Your SDR Team

We help revenue teams measure, benchmark, improve, and manage revenue team capability (including SDRs) across the exact skills you just read. Through our platform, you can:

- Benchmark your team across core SDR capabilities
- Identify specific skill gaps impacting pipeline performance
- See how your team compares to top-performing organizations
- Get a clear, structured path to upgrade capability—not just activity

This isn't a generic assessment. It's a capability diagnostic system—built to make SDR performance measurable, improvable, and scalable. In 2026, the gap between top-performing SDR teams and everyone else is widening. A small group of teams are systematically building pipeline-generating capability—and most are not.

You've now seen what that looks like. **The question is: Where does your team actually stand?**

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## Get Your SDR Capability Benchmark

- Benchmark your SDR team against core capabilities
- Identify the gaps holding back pipeline performance
- Build a capability development system to close them

[Book your SDR Capability Benchmark](#)

In 2026, the teams that win aren't the ones who do more. They're the ones who **build the capabilities that matter, and know exactly how strong they are.**