

The First Sales-Hire Rubric

Hire, grow & fire your first AE or sales leader — on evidence, not a feeling.

Why this exists. Most founders make the first sales hire on a feeling. A feeling can't be compared across candidates, can't be coached against, and can't carry a hard conversation early. One rubric does three jobs: hire the person, grow them, and — if it comes to it — exit them. Build it once; use it three times. **Give away the X-ray; this is yours. The install is ours.**

How to use it

Score each behaviour **1–5** against the maturity scale: **Developing (1–2)** · **Competent (3–4)** · **Expert (5)**. Mark each **NN** non-negotiable (must be at least Competent to proceed) or **[C]** coachable (a lower score is fine if the interview exercise shows strong *rate of change*). Don't average your way to a decision — the rubric makes instinct comparable and conversations early; it doesn't replace judgement.

1 · Define the role first

Role (first AE / first sales leader):

Stage & motion (ARR; founder-led or scaling):

A real deal you won, and why they bought:

What success looks like in the first 6–12 months (be specific):

2 · The rubric (first AE)

Keep the domains that matter for your motion; rewrite the scale in your own terms. Weight Pipeline creation and Coachability heavily at early stage.

Domain	Developing (1–2)	Competent (3–4)	Expert (5)	NN / C	Score
Pipeline creation Builds from nothing?	Relies on inbound; outreach generic, sporadic.	Consistent, targeted, value-led outreach.	Creates executive demand from a standing start; self-generated pipeline.		
Discovery & diagnosis Finds & frames the problem?	Surface questions; jumps to features.	Finds pain, stakeholders, outcomes.	Insight-led; reframes the problem; quantifies impact.		
Deal control & qualification Runs a cycle; qualifies honestly?	Single-threaded; vague next steps.	Structured qualification; agreed next steps.	Controls the deal; anticipates risk; kills dead deals early.		
Commercial & buyer fluency Business conversation, senior buyers?					

	Product/features talk; deferential to seniority.	Speaks the buyer's KPIs; frames value.	Builds the business case; peer to the C-suite.		
Coachability & habits Rate of change; CRM truth?	Defensive; same week to week; CRM an afterthought.	Accepts coaching; reliable CRM & self-management.	Seeks feedback and compounds it; raises the bar for others.		

First sales leader instead? Swap to: Hiring & talent · Coaching & enablement · Deal strategy & forecast inspection · System building · Commercial leadership & founder alignment. (A leader is a different job — only hire one when there's a repeatable motion to scale.)

3 · Use it to hire — the live interview exercise

A CV tells you where someone has been, not how they sell. So make them sell — and score what you watch.

1. Pick a **real customer you won** and be clear why they bought. You'll role-play that buyer.
2. Send **real call clips** ahead (actual prospects, real objections). How they prepare tells you a lot.
3. Have them run a **5–7 min discovery + ~60-sec demo**. You play the buyer. Watch the rubric behaviours happen live.
4. **Pause and give real feedback** — specific, useful. A great candidate is assessing you too; make it worth their time.
5. **Run it again**, new buyer. Watch the **gap between run 1 and run 2** — rate of change predicts ramp better than baseline.
6. Have them turn the discovery into a **written follow-up** sharp enough a buyer would forward it.

Run 1 → Run 2: did they change? (flat / some / strong):

4 · Use it to grow — and to decide

Grow: the interview scores become the hire's first development map — pick the one or two domains furthest from where the role needs them and make those the quarter's coaching target. **Decide:** re-score at a set ramp checkpoint. If the non-negotiables aren't moving and rate of change is flat, the gap is written down and not closing. That clarity is a kindness — to the business and usually to the person.

Decision (hire / pass / second exercise):

This is the DIY version. When you want the hiring standard and the ramp built into how the team actually sells — not just downloaded — that's the work we do. Run the GTM Benchmark or book a call at closingfoundry.com.