

GTM

A FIELD GUIDE FOR \$500K-\$10M B2B EXECUTIVES

Six Patterns.

The six patterns that show up between \$500K and \$10M, and the order to fix them in.

STUDIED IN \$500K-\$10M COMPANIES · HOLDS IN MOST B2B UP TO ~\$50M, WHERE
FOUNDER MEANS WHOEVER OWNS THE REVENUE MOTION

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22 YEARS IN THE FIELD
\$100M+ IN REVENUE

DRAWN FROM 36 ENGAGEMENTS
IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS
\$500K TO \$10M COMPANIES

AUTHOR'S NOTE

They're not demand problems. They're what happens when growth outpaces instincts.

Across 36 engagements in the last 12 months with companies from \$500K to \$10M in revenue, the same six patterns keep showing up in almost every one of them. What follows is how to avoid them.

Below is what shows up, why it keeps happening, and what works when someone decides to fix it. Written for the executives running the company and for the people overseeing from a board seat.

If three of these patterns are live in a business, nothing has necessarily gone wrong: they're what shows up almost every time. Here's how to fix them before they get worse. The data here is drawn from \$500K–\$10M companies; the patterns hold higher, where *founder* reads as whoever owns the revenue motion. Figures throughout are based on observed patterns across these engagements, not best cases.

36 ENGAGEMENTS OBSERVED	\$500K– \$10M REVENUE RANGE STUDIED	6 patterns THAT KEEP SHOWING UP
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01

The sales process that **isn't** a sales process.

A CRM with stages, a deck about the process. Underneath it, a sequence of meetings that occasionally ends in a closed deal.

THE DIAGNOSTIC

Ask three reps to define what moves a deal from Stage 2 to Stage 3.

TIME TO FIX

Six weeks of disciplined application, once enforcement holds.

WHAT MOVES

Forecast accuracy from ~40% to north of 75% in a single quarter.

HARD PART

Holding the line the first time a senior rep pushes back.

A sequence of meetings, not a system.

§01 WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

The person leading sales describes a process. Sometimes there's a deck for it, sometimes there's a CRM with stages someone set up in 2022, and sometimes there's nothing yet. If the founder's still involved in sales, they often say: "I just close them." All three shapes have the same gap underneath: No defined criteria for what moves a prospect from one step to the next, no exit requirements anyone enforces, no mutual action plan with the buyer pinning down who's doing what.

Forecasts get built on how the last call felt so nobody can objectively say where a deal is actually stuck because there's nothing structured underneath the stage label to measure against.

§02 WHY IT PERSISTS

This persists because the absence is invisible to the people inside it. Whoever's selling believes they're being "consultative," which is the word salespeople use to defend not having a system. It's easy to mistake activity for structure when the calendar is full and the CRM is populated.

"I think" and "It seems like" are two phrases sellers use that prove that they don't actually know, and need to find out.

Dashboards measure outputs like deals closed and revenue booked, which look fine until they

don't, and by the time they don't, six months of muscle memory around guessing has set in. Early on, nobody is incentivized to surface the gap because their whole job is built on top of it, and changing habits is harder than building new ones.

THE DIAGNOSTIC

What moves a deal from Stage 2 to Stage 3? Ask whoever owns the deal. If the same answer can't be repeated twice, the process is a label, not a system. This has never failed to be diagnostic.

§03 THE FIX

Start with a recent won deal, reverse-engineered. Map what the buyer actually did, said, and committed to at each step, then convert those into stage exit criteria that require evidence before a deal can advance in the CRM. Forecast credibility gets tied to the evidence, not to the opinion of whoever's running the deal.

Six weeks of disciplined application surfaces every weak deal sitting in pipeline that nobody wants to admit is weak. Forecast accuracy usually moves from somewhere around 40% to north of 75% in a single quarter once the criteria hold. The hard part isn't building it, it's holding the line the first time someone senior pushes back on using it.

With a sales leader in seat, the fix runs through them: they own the stage criteria and the enforcement, and the founder's job narrows to backing the line when a senior rep pushes on it.

02

Selling the product instead of the problem.

A "good demo" gives off heat that masks whether anything useful actually happened. Win rates drop as deal size grows.

THE DIAGNOSTIC

Pull five recorded calls. Count the minutes before the rep asks about business impact.

TIME TO FIX

≈60 days of call coaching, not a deck about it.

WHAT MOVES

Average deal size climbs as reps stop competing on price.

HARD PART

Stripping demos out of discovery entirely.

FEATURE LAND. PRICE BECOMES THE ONLY LEVER.

"More features" isn't going to make people buy. It's upstream of pain.

§01 WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Whenever's selling opens with what the product does and demos start inside the first ten minutes of a discovery call, which isn't discovery; it's a presentation. The pitch lives in feature land, which means every competitor who also has features can match it, and differentiation collapses into a comparison grid where the buyer eventually picks on price.

Win rates drop as deal size grows. Bigger deals require a bigger reason to act, and "more features" isn't a reason, it's a list.

§02 WHY IT PERSISTS

Feature-first selling persists because it's the path of least resistance. Product knowledge is deep but the buyer's business usually isn't fully discovered, so the questions that put cost-of-inaction on the table never get asked. The slide deck gets reached for instead.

There's a dopamine hit to a "good demo" that masks whether anything useful actually happened.

Marketing and people's favourite LLMs reinforce this by handing over sales decks built around capabilities rather than around the cost of doing

nothing. Pipeline reviews compound it, focusing on stage rather than on whether the buyer has expressed real commitment to changing something.

THE DIAGNOSTIC

Pull five recorded calls and count the minutes before anyone asks about business impact. If the answer is "nobody did," that's the pattern. It will not be subtle.

§03 THE FIX

Strip demos out of discovery entirely. Uncomfortable, but necessary. No demo until three things are documented: the cost the buyer is incurring in the current state, the trigger event that caused the meeting in the first place, and what changes for the buyer's business if nothing happens. A nice to have is who cares the most in the prospect's business about fixing something, because that's an early Champion.

That discovery-led process must get trained into reflex through call coaching, not through a deck about it. A discovery scorecard and structured questions give the conversation somewhere to land. Within 60 days, average deal size starts climbing because the conversation stops competing on price and starts competing on the size of the problem.

03

The wrong first sales hire.

The first sales hire (or the first VP, depending on stage) shows up with a playbook that doesn't fit. Twelve to eighteen months pass before anyone admits it didn't take. This is for earlier stage companies, but it's a serious problem.

THE DIAGNOSTIC

Ask the leader and the hire each to describe the motion. Do the answers match?

TIME TO FIX

30-day structured diagnostic. Three months of disruption.

WHAT MOVES

Clarity on whether the gap is process or motion-type.

HARD PART

Admitting the loss publicly to the board.

RIGHT RESUME. WRONG MOTION.

The playbook they showed up with doesn't translate.

§01 WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

The founder made the first real sales hire. Sometimes it's an AE expected to grow into a leader. Sometimes it's a VP or Head of Sales lifted from a larger company. The playbook that person shows up with doesn't translate because it's not built for this business. They came from a different motion and, maybe, this business runs transactional, or they ran inbound at their last company and this one needs outbound, or they ran channel at a public company and now they're being asked to figure out a direct motion at \$3M with no support team underneath them.

Diagnosing which version of the mismatch it is requires more sales fluency than most technical founders have built yet. The whole point of the hire was that the founder didn't have the skill so needed someone else. The result is that twelve to eighteen months pass before anyone admits the hire didn't take.

§02 WHY IT PERSISTS

Sunk cost keeps it in place. Six months of recruiting, a search fee, an equity grant on the books, and restarting means admitting the loss publicly to the board. Nobody chooses that lightly.

Rep headcount looks like progress but the structural vacuum gets bigger and more expensive.

The hire, who can feel the mismatch even if they can't name it, defaults to whatever activity was

rewarded at the last company: building a pipeline review deck, asking for more SDR headcount, formalizing process before there's anything to formalize. Growth flattens or declines, and the consensus story becomes that the new hire just needs more time to ramp.

THE DIAGNOSTIC

Either the owner of the motion and the hire describe the same job, or they don't. A mismatch is a structural gap, not a coaching one, and hiring into it just adds randomness that doesn't scale.

SEE PATTERN 04

Compounded when the founder has never written down what makes them successful. Nobody else can replicate it.

§03 THE FIX

Firing the hire isn't always the answer. **A thirty-day diagnostic maps what the motion actually requires (deal size, cycle length, buyer titles, channel mix, technical depth) against what the hire has actually done before. This needs to happen before the hire, not after twelve months of drift.**

A process-knowledge gap can be coached, sometimes with a fractional senior providing scaffolding. A motion-type gap closes for no amount of coaching, and delaying the call only makes it more expensive. Eighteen months of slow decline costs more than three months of acknowledged disruption.

Above the founder-led stage, the same diagnostic runs on the VP or CRO already in seat.

04

The founder is still on (or is) the sales team.

The founder can disqualify a bad-fit prospect in 90 seconds without being able to put the heuristic into words. The dependency is what caps the business. Most acute in founder-led companies; higher up, read *founder* as whoever owns the revenue motion.

THE DIAGNOSTIC

Of the last 10 deals over the company's average size, how many did the founder personally touch?

TIME TO FIX

9–12 weeks of structured extraction, done seriously.

WHAT MOVES

A documented operating system reps can actually be hired into.

HARD PART

Articulating what the founder has never had to articulate.

Knowledge so **internalized** it's no longer visible.

§01 WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

The founder knows exactly why customers buy. They can do it in their sleep at this point, and that's part of the problem, because the knowledge has become so internalized it's no longer visible to them. It hasn't been codified into messaging, objection handling, qualification heuristics, or competitive positioning that anyone else can run.

The founder usually remains the best seller in the company by a wide margin, which feels good and also doesn't feel quite right. Reps, when hired, loop them into "help close" calls regularly. Most deals over a certain size end up touched personally and nobody else closes at the same rate, while nobody is quite sure why.

§02 WHY IT PERSISTS

Extracting what the founder knows is hard, slow, and unglamorous, partly because most of what gets done naturally has never had to be put into words. The founder can disqualify a bad-fit prospect in 90 seconds without being able to articulate the heuristic in play.

Everyone has a reason to keep the dependency in place. The dependency is what caps the business.

Real objections and smokescreens get filtered automatically after 800 reps of the same conversation, but the filter has never been

written down. Reps, for their part, get rewarded for closing, not for building the system, and as long as the founder remains the safety net there's no incentive to develop the muscle.

THE DIAGNOSTIC

Pull the last 10 deals over the company's average deal size and count how many the founder /rev leader personally touched. Above 60%, the dependency is structural rather than situational.

§03 THE FIX

Structured extraction takes nine to twelve weeks when done seriously. Record the founder running discovery, demo, and close calls. Transcribe and tag every move: the questions, the reframes, the objections pre-empted before the buyer raises them, the silences held.

All of that becomes a documented sales operating system: messaging, an objection map, a qualification framework, deal-stage exit criteria, a mutual action plan template. **The team gets trained against the system rather than against the founder's improvisations, then a rep who has never run a deal solo closes one above the company's average size. That win is the proof the system transfers.**

With a sales leader in seat, read *founder* as whoever the deals still route through. The dependency is the same single point of failure whether the name on it is the founder or the CRO.

05

Pipeline by hope.

No repeatable source of new pipeline. Whatever inbound or referral momentum got the company to here is flattening, and there's no outbound muscle underneath it. One lost deal craters the number.

THE DIAGNOSTIC

Where is next quarter's pipeline coming from?

TIME TO FIX

A quarter to install. Two quarters to calibrate the motion.

WHAT MOVES

Pipeline coverage from 1.5x to 3x within a quarter.

HARD PART

The cost is immediate; the payoff is a quarter or two away.

CALENDARS FULL. FUNNEL THINNING.

Closers, not generators. Nobody systemizes the prospecting.

§01 WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

There's no systematic pipeline source. The company got here on the execs' network, on a couple of marquee logos that generated referrals, on some inbound that arrived without being invited. Outbound either doesn't exist or it's whatever individual reps cobble together on their own with no process or accountability around the prospecting work. Marketing spend, if any, can't be cleanly tied to pipeline created.

Calendars look full, which is easy to mistake for progress. The top of the funnel is thin and getting thinner. Revenue lumps up and down quarter to quarter, and one lost deal can crater the number.

§02 WHY IT PERSISTS

Hope-based pipeline is the natural end state of any company that grew on something other than systematic outbound. Whether it was inbound that flattened, a founder network that's exhausted, or a couple of referral sources that have dried up, the symptom is the same: nobody owns net new pipeline creation, and nobody's measured on it.

A full calendar is not pipeline. Reps confuse the two and so do their managers.

Marketing gets blamed for not generating enough leads. Sales gets blamed for not closing

what's there. The structural answer (a dedicated outbound function with real ownership and real KPIs) doesn't get built, because the cost is immediate while the payoff is a quarter or two out. The tell is in the calendars and the activity logs, not the standups: lots of motion, little net-new contact.

THE DIAGNOSTIC

Ask where next quarter's pipeline is coming from, by name. If the answer involves deals not yet identified, that's hope, not a plan.

§03 THE FIX

Separate prospecting from closing as roles, either through SDR hires or by carving out dedicated prospecting blocks for AEs with their own KPIs and their own comp lever. Build a target account list (an actual account list tied to ICP criteria, not a lead list) and install a multi-channel cadence with measurable inputs around connects, conversations, and meetings booked per week.

Comp gets tied to the input metrics for the first two quarters until the motion is calibrated, then shifts toward outputs. Pipeline coverage tends to move from 1.5x to 3x within a quarter once this is built and run with discipline.

With a sales leader in seat, they own the prospecting function and its KPIs; the fix is identical, only the founder isn't the one carving out the blocks.

06

Hiring for the wrong two traits.

Years of sales, domain knowledge, a Rolodex. The candidate checks every box, still doesn't perform, and the founder blames the talent pool. The pool isn't the problem. The filter is.

THE DIAGNOSTIC

Ask for an ownership story. Give live feedback in the interview itself.

TIME TO FIX

Rebuild the loop before the next hire. Slower upfront, cheaper inside a year.

WHAT MOVES

Ramp time on a driven, coachable rep is half of what the wrong hire takes.

HARD PART

Passing on more candidates. Tolerating a higher cost-per-hire.

RESUME FILTERS. UNTESTED TRAITS.

Drive and coachability. Everything else is secondary.

§01 WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

Different from Pattern 03's motion-fit problem. This is about how candidates get screened, regardless of motion. The conviction is that the company needs more experienced reps. The job spec reads like a resume filter: years of sales, domain knowledge, a Rolodex, a track record in adjacent companies. Candidates who check every box still don't perform, and the conclusion always lands on the talent pool. The pool isn't the problem. The filter is.

§02 WHY IT PERSISTS

Experience and domain knowledge are visible on a resume in a way the two traits that actually matter aren't. Drive is hard to test for in an interview. Coachability is harder still: every candidate claims to be coachable, and most genuinely believe it about themselves, right up until the moment coaching arrives and resistance does too.

Behaviour in the room is the only honest signal. What candidates say about themselves rarely is.

Hiring managers reach for the proxies they can see (years in seat, logos on the resume, quota attainment numbers that may or may not be real) because those proxies feel like rigor. The hire shows up, six months get spent trying to "develop" them, and by month seven everyone agrees the rep "just isn't a fit," which is the polite way of saying the wrong thing was hired.

THE DIAGNOSTIC

For drive: ask the candidate to walk through the hardest stretch of their career. Listen for whether the story is what they did about it, or what was done to them. Driven candidates own the story. The rest narrate it. For coachability: give real, specific feedback during the interview itself, then watch the next 90 seconds. Coachable candidates engage on the spot, ask a follow-up, try the new version. Uncoachable candidates explain why it doesn't apply, or thank the interviewer politely and pivot.

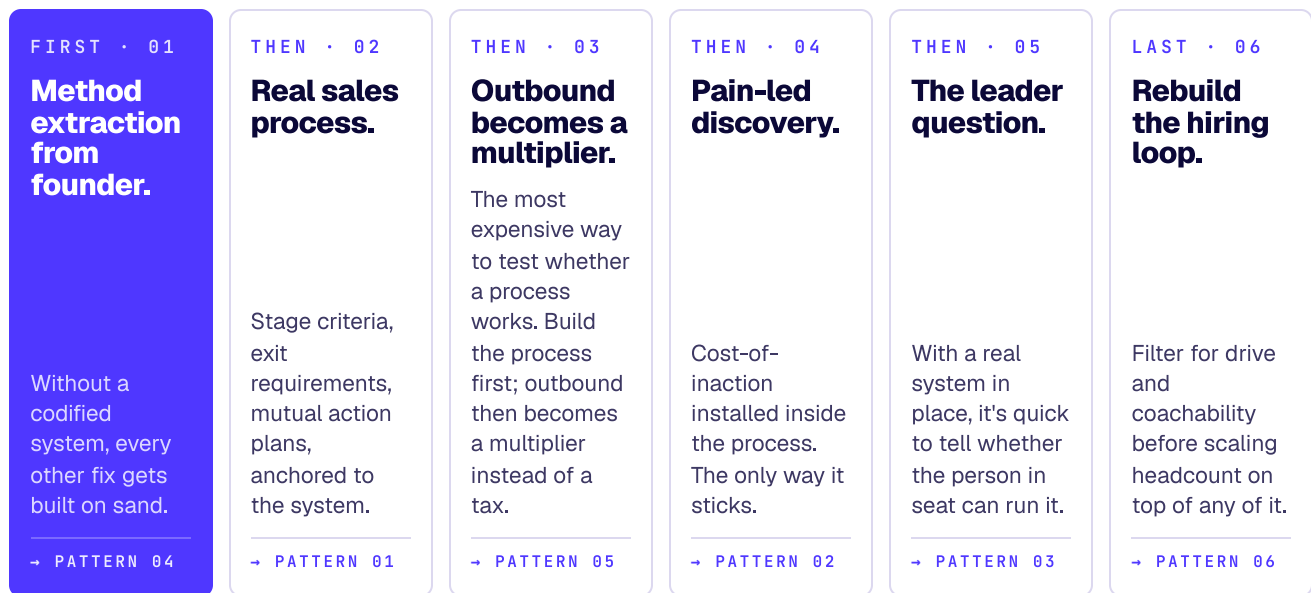
§03 THE FIX

Rebuild the hiring process around drive and coachability as the disqualifying filter, with experience and domain knowledge as secondary. Structured behavioural interviews focused on ownership stories. A live coaching exercise inside the loop where the candidate has to take in feedback and adjust on the spot. Reference checks that ask former managers specifically about coachability and effort under pressure, not about quota attainment.

Hires get slower. The bar gets higher. Cost-per-hire goes up because more candidates get passed on. Total cost of a sales team drops materially inside a year, because ramp time on a driven, coachable rep is roughly half what the wrong hire takes, and the wrong hire was going to wash out anyway, just expensively and twelve months later than it should have.

CLOSING

The order matters more than the **work**. Most companies attempt these fixes in the wrong order. Here's the right one.



The wrong order is a common one: launch outbound to fix pipeline, hire a CRO to fix the reps, add reps to fix conversion. None of it sticks. The sequence persists because spending money on the visible problem is easier than fixing the invisible one underneath it. Once the order is right, the rest moves faster than most teams expect.

Outbound sits ahead of discovery for a blunt reason: there is not enough call volume to coach discovery against until outbound supplies it. Build the process, turn on outbound to generate the calls, then coach discovery into those calls as they land.

Step one is for founder-led companies, where extraction is the first domino. Higher up the band, where the motion already runs without the founder, start at step two and read *founder* as whoever owns the revenue motion.

FOR FOUNDER USE, OR A PORTFOLIO REVIEW

Six questions. Honest answers.

Run these six questions through any company in this band. The point isn't shame, it's sequence: knowing which ones are broken tells the team where to start fixing.

Pattern 01

What moves a deal from Stage 2 to Stage 3? Ask whoever owns the deal.

If the same answer can't be repeated twice, the process is a label.

Pattern 02

In the last five recorded calls, how many minutes pass before anyone asks about business impact?

If the answer is "nobody did," the conversation is about features.

Pattern 03

Ask the founder (or revenue leader) and the first sales hire each to describe the motion the hire is running. Do the answers match?

A match means the job is legible and transferable. A mismatch is a structural gap, not a coaching one.

Pattern 04

Of the last 10 deals over the company's average size, how many did the founder personally touch?

Above 60%, the dependency is structural, not situational.

Pattern 05

Where is next quarter's pipeline actually coming from, by name?

If the list includes "deals not yet identified," that's hope.

Pattern 06

In the last interviewed hires, what was the actual interview signal for drive and coachability?

If the answer is the candidate's own self-assessment, the wrong thing was hired.

Then

Which one is the upstream cause of the other five?

The order matters more than the work. In most companies at this stage, at least three of these are live at once.

END OF BRIEF

Fixed in the right order, the next board conversation stops being about survival. It's about leverage.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ben J. Abbey is the founder of GTMomentum. GTMomentum systemizes sales for B2B companies from \$500K to \$10M and then coaches the leaders running them and the sales reps where present. The goal is to have them running the systems so success continues after the engagement ends.

Field Notes 001 draws on 36 engagements over the last 12 months with B2B companies from \$500K to \$10M. The patterns hold higher, where *founder* reads as whoever owns the revenue motion.

WORK WITH US

If one of these patterns is live in the business, we run diagnostic, extraction, and team-enablement engagements designed to address the structure underneath the symptom, not the symptom itself.

Book a 30-min diagnostic call.

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