FOUNDER PLAYBOOK NO. 1

How to staff your first 50.

The order to make your first 50 hires, and what to build around them.

Most founders make their first hires in the order the fires start. This playbook puts the hour from our November 19 webinar on paper, so you can make them in the order your company needs. Work through it with your co-founder in about 30 minutes.

From the live webinar | **Fill-in one-page template inside**

INSIDE: THE HOUR IN SEVEN PARTS

01 The plan
02 The foundation
03 Swiss Army knives
04 Doers, not big titles
05 Your people process
06 The one page
07 The 90-day check

ON THE PANEL



Zohra Sarwar Veach
Founder and CEO, Nu | Erraa



David Gaspin
Founder, IncubateHR



Sondra Connor
Host

PART 01 · THE PLAN

What a wrong hire costs.

Lose one $150,000 hire before their first anniversary and you're out about $50,000. That's before the months the seat sits empty.

33%
of base pay to replace one employee
WORK INSTITUTE, 2025

40%
of turnover, at most, lands in the first year
WORK INSTITUTE, 2025

20%
of organizations measure whether a hire worked
SHRM, 2025

PART 01 · FIND YOUR COLUMN

Your stage tells you which part comes first.

Every stage runs the same loop for every hire. What changes is where your attention goes first.

WHERE YOU ARE	WHERE YOUR ATTENTION GOES	START WITH
0 people	Know your goals before the first hire. Your first offer sets the pay and equity precedent for everyone after it.	Parts 01 and 02
1 to 6	Hire people who can pivot. The plan will change under them.	Part 03
7 to 15	Hire doers who build the function with their own hands.	Parts 04 and 05
16 to 50	Build structure before it breaks. Pay nobody can explain becomes a retention problem.	Part 05
You run talent	Hold every role to a business goal. No goal, no req.	Parts 01 and 06

PART 01 · THE TEST

Name the goal a role moves before you post it.

"We need a designer" is a task. "Ship the onboarding redesign by Q2" is a goal. Pre-revenue? Your goal may be the proof itself.

YOU Next role: _____ It moves this goal: _____

Headcount is the last number you set, not the first.

PART 02 · THE FOUNDATION

Put clarity in place before you need it.

At three people it feels like overkill. By the time you need it, it's a fire.

- ☐ **Clarity**
  Everyone knows the goal and what they own.
- ☐ **Communication**
  The team hears what changed, and why.
- ☐ **Accountability**
  Each person reports on what they own, every week.

START For every role, write two lines: why it exists now, and what's visibly different at 90 days.

Your why might only hold for six months. A short why is still a why.

PART 03 · SWISS ARMY KNIVES

For hires 1 to 6, hire for proof, not pedigree.

Your first six people will each do three jobs, and the plan will change under them at least twice. Hire for proof they've hit goals like yours.

ASK IN THE INTERVIEW

"Tell me about a goal like this one that you've already hit. What did you decide, and what did you change when the plan moved?"

LISTEN FOR

- ✓ Decisions they made
- ✓ What they changed mid-plan

Warning: only tasks they did

If you run talent: rewrite your screening questions around decisions and pivots, not logos.

PART 04 · DOERS, NOT BIG TITLES

Hires 7 to 15 build it with their own hands.

Your first specialists build each function themselves before anyone runs a team.

The big title

Ran a 40-person team at a public company

Needs a team in place before the work starts.

The doer

Built the spreadsheet last quarter

Builds yours this quarter.

ASK Will this person do the work themselves this quarter? If not, they're the wrong hire for now.

PART 05 · YOUR PEOPLE PROCESS

Start your people process at five people, not 16.

At five you still have the time to decide what company you want to build. By hire 30 you're retrofitting structure onto whoever happens to be there.

STAGE	PUT IN PLACE	WHY NOW
At 5 people	A handbook, an equity plan, levels and pay, and a clear way decisions get made	A fractional leader can build all of it. You don't need a full-time hire yet.
5 to 30	Every offer runs through the same levels and ranges	No one-off deals you have to explain to the next hire
30 to 50	Your first full-time People leader	When depends on your pace: revenue targets, customers and headcount

PART 05 · YOUR FIRST PEOPLE LEADER

Build the structure first, then hire to run it.

	FRACTIONAL	FULL-TIME
Fits when	You need structure built once, then a few days a month to run it	People work is daily: hiring every week, frequent employee issues, compliance to watch
Ask them	"What would you build first?" A good one names three things, in order, with how long each takes	"What would you stop me doing?"
Watch for	Response time. Agree on it up front	Hiring before the structure exists, so year one goes to building what a fractional leader could do in a quarter

Or both: a full-time coordinator for the day to day, and a fractional leader who keeps building.

PART 06 · THE ONE PAGE

One hour, seven questions, one page.

Write it before the role posts and before you're attached to a candidate. Every answer should be something you could check.

01 Why does this role exist now?

02 At 90 days, what's visibly different?
This is what you check at day 90.

03 At 12 months, what do they own outright?

04 What do they decide without asking you?
The one founders skip.

05 Who do they report to, work with and manage?

06 What would tell you at day 60 it isn't working?
Your warning, agreed before you meet anyone.

07 What's the comp range and level?
Set before you meet anyone, not after.

The check
Two teammates name the same two things this hire is judged on. If they can't, the page isn't done.

PART 06 · AN EXAMPLE

The page for a first account executive.

A 12-person seed-stage SaaS company. An example to learn from, not a template to copy.

QUESTION	ANSWER
01 Why now	Founder-led sales closed our first 20 customers. The founder can't run 30 demos a month and the roadmap.
02 Day 90	Runs demo to close alone. The founder joins final calls only. First three deals closed.
03 Month 12	$800K in new ARR, and a written sales playbook the next AE can run.
04 Decisions	Discounts up to 15%, which deals to qualify out, and their own pipeline priorities.
05 Works with	The founder and the product lead. Manages no one this year.
06 Day 60	Still asking the founder to run demos, or fewer than 15 qualified opportunities in pipeline.
07 Pay	Senior IC. $120K to $140K base, on-target earnings at double the base, equity from the level band.

PART 06 · YOUR ONE PAGE

Fill it in for your next open role.

Role: _____ Business goal it moves: _____

QUESTION	PROMPT	YOUR ANSWER
01 Why now	Why does this role exist now?	
02 Day 90	What's visibly different at 90 days?	
03 Month 12	What do they own outright?	
04 Decisions	What do they decide without asking you?	
05 Works with	Who do they report to, work with and manage?	
06 Day 60	What would tell you it isn't working?	
07 Pay	Comp range and level, set before you meet anyone	

THE CHECK Two teammates named the same two things this hire is judged on: ☐ Yes ☐ Not yet

DAY 90 Check booked for: _____ (book it the day the offer is signed)

PART 06 · FULL CIRCLE

The page runs the whole hire, start to finish.

The page you wrote before you posted is the page you check at day 90.

1 · Define
Answer the seven questions before the role goes live.

2 · Interview
Every interviewer asks about the same outcomes on the page.

3 · Onboard
Day one: what they own, and what day 90 looks like.

4 · Evaluate
At day 90, check question 02 against what's true.

LOOP What you learn at day 90 goes into the next page you write.

PART 07 · THE 90-DAY CHECK

At day 90, check the hire against the page.

Ramp every hire to the outcomes on their page and check in every week, not at the annual review. Then answer three questions. Only 20% of organizations measure quality of hire at all (SHRM, 2025).

01 Which 90-day outcomes are visibly true?
Point to the evidence. _____

02 What do they decide on their own now?
Compare it with day 30. _____

03 Would you make this hire again?
☐ Yes ☐ Not sure ☐ No. A no means a conversation this week.

Two of three answers matching your page, with a plan for the third, is a good hire.

Nu | Erraa

THE WHOLE ROLE, START TO FINISH

NEXT

Write the one page before the role posts.

Filled in your page and want a second pair of eyes on it? Send it to us and we'll book 15 minutes to go through it with you.

hello@nuerraa.com

Sources: Work Institute, 2025 Retention Report (14,215 exit interviews). SHRM, 2025 Recruiting Benchmarking.