

12 Red Flags That Predict a Bad Sales Hire.

A field guide for CROs, founders and revenue leaders.

Built on MEDDPICC. Backed by SalesProof data.

\$1M+

true cost of one bad Enterprise AE hire

Salary, missed quota, pipeline damage, management drag and replacement.

Benchmarks: DePaul Sales Effectiveness, Bridge Group SaaS AE Report, SiriusDecisions.

Why this matters.

Most hiring managers underestimate the true cost of a bad Enterprise AE hire by an order of magnitude. The fully loaded cost is not just salary. It compounds through missed quota, dead pipeline, leadership drag and the cost of starting over.

Line item	Typical 12 month figure
Base + commission paid during tenure (9 to 12 months)	\$200,000
Missed quota / lost revenue (vs. expected attainment)	\$650,000
Pipeline damage (two cycles of dead deals)	\$150,000
Management drag (CRO time, 1.5 hrs/wk @ \$150)	\$12,000
Replacement cost (recruiter fee + ramp)	\$95,000
True cost of one bad Enterprise AE hire	\$1,107,000

Sources: DePaul University Sales Effectiveness research, Bridge Group SaaS AE Report 2024, SiriusDecisions hiring cost framework. Figures shown for an Enterprise AE on \$200K OTE.

The 12 red flags.

Mapped to MEDDPICCC. Each flag includes one interview question to surface it.

01

Metrics

Talks revenue without numbers

Why it matters. Top reps narrate deals in hard numbers: ACV, cycle days, win rate. Vague answers signal a candidate who has been carried by a strong territory.

Ask in interview. Walk me through your last closed deal. ACV, stage durations, what unblocked it?

02

Economic Buyer

Cannot name the economic buyer

Why it matters. Underperformers sell to coaches and influencers. Strong reps map the EB by week two and validate budget authority directly.

Ask in interview. On your last three deals, who signed and how did you confirm budget authority?

03

Decision Criteria

Pitches features instead of buying criteria

Why it matters. If a candidate cannot articulate the buyer's selection rubric, they are pitching, not qualifying. Pitching loses to incumbents and to no decision.

Ask in interview. What were the top three buying criteria on your last won deal? How did you uncover them?

04

Decision Process

No mutual close plan

Why it matters. Reps who run a Mutual Action Plan compress cycle time by 20 to 35 percent. The absence of one is a tell that they let buyers drive the process.

Ask in interview. Show me what your last MAP looked like. Who owned which step?

The 12 red flags (continued).

05

Paper Process

Surprised by procurement

Why it matters. Procurement, security and legal are deal killers when ignored. Strong AEs sequence them in parallel from week one.

Ask in interview. Walk me through how you handled redlines and security review on your last enterprise deal.

06

Identify Pain

Pain is generic, not quantified

Why it matters. If the cost of inaction is not in dollars, the deal will slip. Top reps quantify pain in the buyer's own units.

Ask in interview. What was the dollar cost of the problem you sold into? How did you size it together?

07

Champion

Champion is a single point of failure

Why it matters. Building one champion is amateur. Senior reps cultivate two and arm them with internal selling tools.

Ask in interview. Tell me about your champion on your last won deal. Who was your backup champion and why?

08

Competition

Cannot name the competitive landscape

Why it matters. If a candidate says 'we never see competitors', they are losing to no decision. Calibrate against incumbents and DIY.

Ask in interview. Who do you most often lose to and why? What is your displacement play?

The 12 red flags (continued).

09

Qualification

Pipeline is bloated and stale

Why it matters. Healthy pipelines have ruthless disqualification. Stale pipelines hide a rep who chases anything that moves.

Ask in interview. How often do you disqualify? Show me a deal you killed in the last 30 days.

10

Forecasting

Forecast accuracy is unknown

Why it matters. Reps who cannot tell you their commit accuracy do not have one. CFOs hate surprises in either direction.

Ask in interview. What was your commit accuracy last quarter? How do you decide when a deal moves to commit?

11

Integrity

Story changes under pressure

Why it matters. Strong reps tell consistent stories across rounds. Inconsistencies on numbers, dates or roles are a red flag for fabrication.

Ask in interview. Repeat the deal story you told my colleague last week. Same numbers, same characters?

12

Coachability

Receives feedback as criticism

Why it matters. The number one ramp accelerator is coachability. Defensiveness in interview is defensiveness on the job.

Ask in interview. Tell me about feedback you initially rejected and later acted on. What changed your mind?

How SalesProof scores this.

Every assessment runs candidates through real MEDDPICCC pressure tests, then scores responses against the Experience Normalised Scoring Engine™. Two reps with the same raw score are not equal. A junior SDR scoring 7/10 on Champion is exceptional. An enterprise AE scoring 7/10 on Champion is below par.

The Operating Level Signal™ places the candidate at one of five bands:

Band	What it means
Strong Hire	Top decile. Hire fast. Brief them on stretch goals.
Hire	Solid fit for the level. Standard ramp plan.
Hire with Coaching	Specific gaps. Pair with a CRO coach for first 90 days.
Pass	Material risk. Continue the search.
Do Not Progress	Disqualifying flags. Close the loop politely.

Stop guessing on sales hires.

One bad Enterprise AE hire costs you \$1M+. Two free SalesProof assessments cost you nothing. Run your next two candidates through MEDDPICC pressure tests and get a hiring report you can share with your CRO in under 30 minutes.

[Start your 2 free assessments >>](#)

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