GUIDE F3

TURN8

HOW TO **ACQUIRE** YOUR FIRST CUSTOMERS AND **BUILD** THE CUSTOMER ZERO PLAYBOOK

Product Development, Piloting & First Customer Acquisition

WHERE THIS IS USED

- Venture Studio programs
- Corporate Incubators
- Accelerators (corporate or government-backed)
- CVC portfolio companies
- Foundry-as-a-Service engagements

AUDIENCE

- EIRs / GMs
- GTM Leads
- Product Leads
- Venture Studio Program Managers
- Executive Sponsors
- First sales or growth hire

PHASE

Phase Three: Build and Launch → Customer Zero Acquisition
(Weeks 10–18, parallel with F2)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Zero is not the first person who says yes. Customer Zero is the first real user who (a) feels the pain acutely, (b) is willing to co-design the solution, and (c) gives you proof you can sell this repeatedly. That last condition is what distinguishes a reference customer from a friendly trial.

This guide takes the GTM strategy designed in Phase Two (Guide C3) and converts it into an execution playbook for acquiring the first 1–10 customers. The goal is not to maximize deal volume in the shortest time. The goal is to close customers who match the Ideal Customer Profile, document the exact sales motion that closed them — the sequence, the objections, the contract structure, the micro-commitments — and build a playbook that a growth operator can use to acquire customers 11–100 without the EIR in the room.

The three outputs of this guide are: 1–10 paying or contractually committed customers who match the ICP; a documented, step-by-step sales motion derived from actual calls, emails, and objections — not theory; and at least three usable assets: one strong case study, two to three testimonials, and one internal Customer Zero story where the corporate parent itself is the first user if relevant.

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THE CORE PROBLEM

The most common failure in early customer acquisition is confusing GTM with tactics. Running outreach is not a GTM strategy. Sequence, channel, and segment are the strategy. When the sequence is wrong, the tactics do not save it.

The five most consistent failure patterns in first-customer acquisition:

- Targeting everyone. A GTM that serves "all businesses" serves none. Without a beachhead customer defined at the persona level — role, company size, industry, specific pain — the outreach volume is high, and the conversion rate is near zero.
- Skipping the 1-to-10 bridge. Teams build a plan for 100 customers with no explicit plan for how to get the first 10. The tactics for customers 1–3 (personal network, co-design partners) are completely different from customers 4–7 (structured warm outreach) and 8–10 (focused cold). Applying 100-customer tactics to the first 3 customers produces nothing.
- Confusing the Buying Center. Engaging the wrong person in the buying organization is the single most common cause of a deal stalling after three months. The User loves the product. The Gatekeeper blocks procurement. The Approver has the budget. The Decision Maker has the authority. These are four different people, and they need four different conversations.
- Wrong contract structure for the stage. Asking for an annual subscription from Customer 1 creates friction that kills deals that would otherwise close. Offering a free pilot with no commercial commitment attached produces testimonials but no revenue signal for investors.
- No documented sales motion. The EIR closes the first 10 customers through personal network, intuition, and direct relationships. None of this is written down. The first growth hire arrives, asks for the playbook, and there is none. The 1-to-10 experience must be documented in real time — on every call, after every objection, at every contract stage — or the knowledge is lost.

The real issue:

The first 10 customers are not just revenue — they are the evidence base for the repeatable sales motion. If they are not acquired systematically, using a documented process, the venture cannot demonstrate to investors that the go-to-market is scalable. And a venture without a demonstrable sales motion is not fundable at Tranche 2, regardless of how good the product is.

PREREQUISITES

Must Be Complete Before Starting:

- Guide F2 completed — at least one pilot participant has been converted to a Customer Zero commercial conversation, LOI, or reference customer
- Guide C3 completed — ICP defined, Buying Center mapped for the priority segment, 1-10-100 Channel Framework designed, Customer Zero Plan names at least 5 specific target companies
- Guide E3 completed — corporate distribution channel access confirmed for F2 pilot participants who converted; any channel partner introductions available

Team Readiness:

- GTM Lead confirmed and available for the full 30–45-day outreach sprint
- CRM or pipeline tracking tool active — even a simple spreadsheet — before Stage 1 outreach begins
- Contract template (LOI or pilot agreement) reviewed by Legal before first customer conversation reaches the commercial stage

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EXPECTED OUTPUT/ SUCCESS CRITERIA

You have completed this guide when the following are true:

- 1–10 paying or contractually committed customers acquired who match the ICP from Guide C3
- All 6 commercial milestones from Guide C3 tracked — at minimum, Milestone 1 (first LOI or pilot agreement) and Milestone 2 (first paid contract) achieved
- Funnel conversion rates documented from first outreach: reply rate, meeting rate, pilot commit rate, paid conversion rate
- Customer Zero Playbook v1.0 complete — all six sections, ready to hand to the first growth hire
- At least one case study, two to three testimonials, and one quantified outcome proof point documented
- Objection library built from actual calls — top five to seven objections with tested Pause-Probe-Provide-Prove responses

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1 CONFIRM THE ICP AND MAP THE BUYING CENTER

Before the first outreach message is written, the Ideal Customer Profile must be confirmed against what was learned in the F2 pilot. Pilot participants who engaged most deeply are the empirical basis for ICP v1.0. Participants who engaged but did not convert to commercial interest are the basis for the "bad fit" profile — equally important and frequently overlooked.

1.1 **Update the ICP from Guide C3 using F2 pilot evidence** — The ICP is not a Phase Two hypothesis anymore — it is an evidence-based profile. For the customers who engaged most deeply in the pilot: what role did they hold? What company size? What specific pain triggered their participation? What was their buying trigger? Write ICP v1.0 as a specific profile, not a category

1.2 **Document the "bad fit" profile with equal rigor** — From the F2 pilot: who participated but never committed commercially? Who asked for features outside the core use case? Who had enthusiasm but no budget authority? The bad-fit profile prevents the team from wasting Stage 2 and 3 outreach on prospects who will never convert

1.3 **Map the full Buying Center for each target company type** — The Buying Center is not the person who responds to outreach. It is the complete set of people whose agreement is required for a deal to close

ROLE	WHAT THEY CARE ABOUT	OBJECTION THEY WILL RAISE	EVIDENCE THEY NEED	HOW TO ENGAGE THEM
Initiator	The problem is real and worth addressing now	Is this the right time to be exploring new tools?	External evidence that similar organizations are solving this problem	Thought leadership, peer benchmarks, industry data
Decision Maker	Strategic fit and business case	How does this align with our current priorities?	Clear ROI narrative, reference from a peer they respect, executive-level endorsement	Direct conversation with EIR / GM — peer-to-peer, not vendor-to-buyer
Approver	Budget impact and financial risk	What is the total cost of ownership including implementation?	Structured financial model, pilot economics, clear path from pilot cost to full contract value	CFO-level summary, pilot pricing structure with conversion terms
Gatekeeper	Procurement compliance, vendor risk, legal exposure	We have a standard vendor process and timeline	Pre-approved pilot agreement template, vendor registration shortcut from E3, data security documentation	Early Legal engagement, use E3 procurement fast-lane where available
User	Whether the product actually works for their workflow	Will this require significant time to learn and adopt?	Demo of the core use case, task completion evidence from F2, peer testimonial from a user in a similar role	Product walkthrough, reference call with F2 pilot participant
Wildcard	Varies — often organizational politics, existing vendor relationships, or personal preference	Why change what already works?	Be curious, not defensive. Identify their real concern through the Probe step of the objection framework	Dedicated 1:1 conversation focused entirely on listening — do not pitch in this conversation

1.4 **Apply the Buying Center map to the Customer Zero Plan from Guide C3** — For each of the five named target companies: identify which Buying Center role is the entry point, which role is the Decision Maker, and who is most likely to be the Gatekeeper. The outreach sequence is built around these three roles — not just the most accessible contact

AI PROMPT — ICP v1.0 and Buying Center Confirmation

```
I am confirming ICP v1.0 for a Phase Three venture based on F2
pilot evidence. Venture: [describe]. F2 pilot participants who
engaged most deeply: [describe — role, company size, specific
pain, what triggered their participation]. Participants who did
not convert commercially: [describe — what was different about
them]. For the confirmed ICP: write a one-paragraph ICP v1.0
profile with role, company size, industry, specific pain, buying
trigger, and budget authority. Then write the "bad fit" profile in
equal detail. For the top 3 target company types, map the Buying
Center: entry point role, Decision Maker, Approver, Gatekeeper,
User, Wildcard. Identify the most common Gatekeeper objection and
the evidence required to overcome it.
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STEP 2 RUN THE THREE-STAGE CUSTOMER ACQUISITION PLAN

The acquisition plan is structured in three stages, each with a different source, offer structure, and tactical approach. The tactics for Stage 1 will not work in Stage 3, and applying Stage 3 tactics in Stage 1 is the most efficient way to produce zero results. The stages are sequential by design — each stage produces learnings that sharpen the next.

STAGE	CUSTOMERS	SOURCE	OFFER STRUCTURE	PRIMARY TACTIC	GOAL
Stage 1	1–3	Personal network, ex-colleagues, industry peers, advisory board, investors, corporate internal teams (internal Customer Zero)	Founding customer or design partner: heavily discounted or small paid pilot with clear scope and structured feedback obligations	Direct 1:1 messages: "We built X to fix Y. I know you struggle with Y — can I walk you through what we are doing?" No pitch deck in first contact.	Reference customer. Proof of concept. First quantified outcome.
Stage 2	4–7	Warm outreach: 2nd-degree introductions, LinkedIn connections, referrals from Customer 1–3, F2 pilot participants who did not yet convert	Time-boxed pilot (60–90 days), free or low-cost, with a Letter of Intent or pre-agreed contract if success criteria are hit	Personalized outreach referencing a visible pain or trigger: "You recently expanded your compliance team — we built a tool that cuts reporting time by 30% for teams in your position."	Validate the repeatable sales motion. First LOI or paid contract.
Stage 3	8–10	Focused cold outreach: ICP-filtered prospect lists built from learnings of Stages 1 and 2 (firmographic filters, seniority, tech stack, buying triggers)	Standardized pilot package — fixed duration, standard success criteria, one pricing tier. Minimal bespoke terms unless the deal is strategically critical.	Short, researched cold emails and LinkedIn messages referencing a specific company-level signal. One simple landing page. Tight discovery-demo-proposal sequence.	Demonstrate the GTM motion works outside the EIR network. Confirm sales cycle duration. Build first funnel benchmarks.

The 30-45 Day Outreach Sprint:
Each stage runs as a focused sprint. This is not a background activity alongside product and pilot work — it is a primary sprint with daily actions, tracked metrics, and a weekly review at the stand-up.

2.1 **Day 0–2: Build the prospect list** — For Stage 1: list all contacts within 1 degree who match the ICP. For Stage 2 onwards: build a list of 50–100 high-fit prospects using the ICP checklist — decision-maker roles only. Use LinkedIn Sales Navigator, industry databases, or the corporate parent's network through E3

2.2 Day 3–10: Run the 4-step outreach sequence per prospect

- **Step 1 (Day 3):** Personalized message referencing the specific pain and a one-line outcome: "We cut compliance reporting time by 30% for teams at companies like [reference]." Send via email or LinkedIn — whichever channel the target persona uses.
- **Step 2 (Day 7):** Follow-up message with a short case vignette or insight: "What we are seeing with teams like yours is [specific insight from F2 pilot]." Reference a relevant external trigger if available.
- **Step 3 (Day 10):** LinkedIn connection with a brief contextual note — do not repeat the pitch. Establish presence.
- **Step 4 (Day 14):** Final "close the loop" message: "Should I close the loop on this? Happy to send a quick summary if the timing is not right now." This respects the prospect's time and occasionally triggers a reply from those who meant to respond.

2.3 Day 10–30: Run discovery calls, send same-day follow-ups — Every discovery call ends with a specific, written next step agreed on the call. Send a recap email within 2 hours. Follow up on any commitment within 48 hours. A deal that goes more than 5 business days without a next step has stalled — identify why before it dies

2.4 Track funnel conversion rates from Day 1

FUNNEL STAGE	METRIC TO TRACK	TARGET BENCHMARK	WHAT A DROP SIGNALS
Outreach sent	Total prospects contacted this sprint	50–100 per stage	Below 50 means the ICP list was too narrow, or the prospect sourcing channel was wrong
Reply rate	Replies ÷ outreach sent	15–30% for warm; 5–10% for cold	Below threshold: message is too generic, wrong channel, or wrong persona
Meeting rate	Meetings booked ÷ replies received	40–60% of replies	Below threshold: the reply hook does not convert — follow-up sequence needs work
Pilot commit rate	Pilot or LOI agreements ÷ meetings held	20–40%	Below threshold: wrong Buying Center contact (not Decision Maker), wrong offer structure, or product is not solving a priority pain for this ICP
Paid conversion rate	Paid contracts ÷ pilots run	30–50% of pilots	Below threshold: success criteria were not achieved, or the commercial path was not defined in the pilot agreement

AI PROMPT — Outreach Sequence Construction

```
I am building the 4-step outreach sequence for Stage [1 / 2 / 3]
customer acquisition. Venture: [describe]. ICP v1.0: [paste]. Entry-
point role for this stage: [role, company size, industry]. The
specific pain this product addresses: [describe]. The strongest
quantified outcome from F2 pilot: [describe]. Write the full 4-step
sequence: Step 1 (personalized pain-referenced message), Step 2
(case vignette or insight follow-up), Step 3 (LinkedIn connection
note), Step 4 (close-the-loop message). For each step: confirm the
channel (email or LinkedIn), the sending day, the word count limit,
and the specific outcome metric that defines whether this step
succeeded. Flag any message that relies on a generic claim rather
than a specific, evidence-based proof point.
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STEP 3 DESIGN THE DISCOVERY CALL AND THE MICRO-COMMITMENT LADDER

A discovery call that does not produce a specific next step has produced a conversation, not a deal. Every call in the Customer Zero acquisition process must end with one explicit next step — agreed on the call, sent in writing within 2 hours. The micro-commitment ladder converts a positive discovery into a signed contract through a series of small, low-friction commitments rather than one large ask.

3.1 Structure every discovery call around five questions

- **Question 1:** Tell me about how you currently handle [problem area]. Walk me through what the process looks like day to day. — Surfaces the current behavior and the pain level.
- **Question 2:** What does it cost you when [the problem] happens? In time, money, or errors? — Quantifies the pain. A prospect who cannot quantify the cost is not a priority buyer.
- **Question 3:** What have you tried to solve it? What worked, what did not? — Reveals existing solutions and competitive context. This question is more valuable than any competitive research.
- **Question 4:** If this problem were solved, what would that mean for your team or your organization? — Surfaces the outcome they care about. This becomes the value proposition language for this ICP.
- **Question 5:** Who else in your organization is affected by this? — Maps the Buying Center organically. The prospect names the Decision Maker, Approver, and Gatekeeper without being asked directly.

3.2 Apply the micro-commitment ladder across the full sales sequence

COMMITMENT LEVEL	WHAT IS ASKED	WHAT IT SIGNALS	CONTRACT STRUCTURE
Interest	Can I send you a short summary of what we are doing?	Prospect is open to learning more — not a buying signal yet	None — email follow-up only
Exploration	Can we schedule a 30-minute product walkthrough?	Prospect is investing time — mild buying signal	None — demo prep only
Validation	Will you run a 2-week proof of concept with 3 users?	Prospect is willing to involve colleagues — moderate buying signal	Free committed pilot: written scope, mandated usage (minimum 3 users for 2 weeks), commitment to a decision at the end
Conditional Commitment	If the proof-of-concept hits [success criteria], will you sign an LOI?	Prospect is signaling intent to buy — strong buying signal	LOI with conditional pricing: "If you demonstrate X in the pilot, we intend to purchase Y licenses at Z price." Non-binding but investor-credible.
Paid Pilot	Will you commit to a 60–90-day paid pilot at [discounted price]?	Prospect is paying — first revenue signal	Paid discounted pilot: 20–50% of target price, with a clause converting the pilot fee into a discount on the first-year full contract if success criteria are met
Contract	Will you sign a [duration] contract at [price]?	First commercial customer	Full contract: SLA, renewal terms, support level, success metrics, and the path to expansion seats or modules

3.3 **Ask for micro-commitments at 3-4 moments during the demo or walkthrough** — The demo is not a presentation — it is a conversation. At each key product moment, ask: "Does this address what you described in discovery?" "Would this step save the time you mentioned?" "Is this the kind of output your team would use?" These micro-commitments build the decision before the contract conversation begins

3.4 **Send the call recap within 2 hours — every time, without exception** — Recap format: (1) what we discussed and agreed, (2) the specific next step, (3) who owns it, (4) the date by which it will be done. A prospect who receives a same-day recap is more likely to honor the next step than one who receives nothing

AI PROMPT — Discovery Call Script

```
I am preparing the discovery call script for Stage [1 / 2 / 3]
Customer Zero acquisition. Venture: [describe]. ICP v1.0 target:
[role, company size, specific pain]. The strongest F2 pilot outcome:
[describe — what specific result did the best-performing pilot
participant achieve?]. Write: (1) the 5-question discovery script
with the specific language for this ICP, (2) 3-4 micro-commitment
moments to insert during the product walkthrough — the exact
questions to ask at each moment, (3) the standard call recap
template for this venture — what to include and what to leave out,
(4) the specific language for transitioning from discovery interest
to a concrete next step. Avoid generic phrases. Every question and
prompt must reference the specific pain this product addresses.
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STEP 4 APPLY THE CONTRACT STRUCTURE APPROPRIATE FOR THE STAGE

Contract structure determines whether the pilot commitment is real or cosmetic. The wrong contract structure kills deals: too heavy for early-stage discovery, or too light to produce investor-credible evidence. The correct structure depends on where the customer is in the acquisition stage and what evidence the investment case requires.

Four Contract Structures for the 0–10 Customer Journey:

CONTRACT TYPE	WHEN TO USE	KEY TERMS REQUIRED	WHAT IT PRODUCES FOR INVESTORS	AVOID
Free Committed Pilot	Stage 1 (customers 1–3). First logos. Internal Customer Zero.	Written scope. Mandated usage floor (e.g., minimum 20 users for 8 weeks). Defined success criteria. Written commitment to a decision at the end.	First logos. Product adoption evidence. Quantified outcome from a named organization.	Open-ended pilots with no end date, no usage commitment, and no success criteria. These produce activity, not evidence.
Paid Discounted Pilot	Stage 2 (customers 4–7). First paying customers.	20–50% of target price. Fixed duration (60–90 days). Success criteria that trigger conversion. Pre-agreed: "If we hit X, your pilot fee converts to Y% discount on the first-year full contract."	First revenue signal. Price-to-value evidence. Investor-credible commercial traction.	Pricing that is too low to signal commercial viability, or too high to close without established reference customers.
LOI with Conditional Pricing	Stage 2–3. When the customer cannot pay immediately but can commit intent.	Non-binding or light-binding letter stating: "If you demonstrate X in the pilot, we intend to purchase Y licenses at Z price." Named signatory. Expiry date.	Demand signal. Price level confirmation. Investor-readable even without revenue. Shows pipeline depth beyond the closed deals.	LOIs that are so non-binding they carry no weight. The LOI should specify the price level and the success condition explicitly.
Full Commercial Contract	Stage 3 (customers 8–10). After a successful pilot.	SLA, renewal terms, support level, success metrics, expansion path (additional seats or modules). Annual contract preferred for enterprise — matching the channel from C3.	First recurring revenue. Renewal signal. Unit economics data point. Enterprise contract evidence.	Month-to-month agreements for enterprise customers — they signal low commitment and inflate churn risk in the investor model.

4.1 **Use the corporate parent's procurement fast-lane for all pilot agreements** — From Guide E3: the pre-approved pilot agreement template and vendor registration shortcut reduce the legal cycle from 4–6 weeks to days. Use it for every customer, not only for strategic accounts. Speed of contract execution is a competitive advantage in early-stage sales.

4.2 **For internal Customer Zero (corporate parent as first user): apply shadow pricing from the start** — An internal deployment without a commercial structure is not a Customer Zero — it is a free product. Mirror the same terms internally as externally: shadow pricing, internal SLAs, success criteria, and a written commitment from the BU head to expand or discontinue based on results. This is the evidence that the corporate parent validates the business model, not just the product.

4.3 **Every contract must specify the commercial next step before it is signed** — "What happens at the end of this pilot?" must be answered in the contract, not in a subsequent conversation. Customers who complete a pilot without a defined next step default to inaction. The contract is the mechanism that prevents this.

STEP 5 BUILD AND DEPLOY THE OBJECTION LIBRARY

Objections at the 0–10 customer stage are the most valuable product feedback the team receives. They reveal what needs to be fixed in product positioning, pricing, ICP definition, and contract structure. An objection that is heard repeatedly is a signal — not an obstacle to overcome but an instruction to investigate.

The Pause-Probe-Provide-Prove Framework:

STEP	WHAT TO DO	WHAT NOT TO DO	EXAMPLE
Pause	Listen to the full objection without interrupting. Let silence exist before responding.	Interrupt before the objection is fully stated. This produces a response to a partial objection, which is rarely the real one.	Customer: "We are not sure this is the right time for us." EIR: [waits 3 seconds before responding]
Probe	Ask one clarifying question to identify the real concern beneath the stated objection.	Provide an immediate answer to the surface objection. The surface objection is rarely the blocking concern.	EIR: "When you say timing, is it more about budget cycle, or about bandwidth to implement something new right now?"
Provide	Give a tailored response addressing the specific concern identified in the Probe step — not the original surface objection.	Give a generic product pitch or feature list in response to a concern that was not product related.	If the real concern is implementation bandwidth: "We can run the entire setup in one afternoon. The first three customers were live in under 4 hours."
Prove	Back the response with evidence — a specific metric from a reference customer, a data point from the F2 pilot, or a quantified outcome.	Make a claim without evidence. At the 0–10 customer stage, unsubstantiated claims destroy credibility faster than any objection.	"In the F2 pilot, the average setup time was 3.5 hours. [Reference Customer] was live by day 2."

5.1 **Build the objection library in real time** — starting from the first discovery call — After every call: log the objection exactly as stated, the Probe question that uncovered the real concern, the Provide response that worked, and the Prove evidence used. Do this within 24 hours of the call while the conversation is fresh

5.2 **Apply the 3F method for emotionally-loaded objections** — For objections where the customer is expressing frustration or risk aversion: Feel-Felt-Found. "I understand how you feel — others in your position have felt the same. What they found, after running the pilot, was [specific outcome]." This method acknowledges the emotion before addressing the logic.

5.3 **Synthesize the library to the top five to seven objections by Customer 7** — Do not hand a 20-item objection log to the first sales hire — it will not be used. Synthesize to the objections that appeared in more than 30% of calls. Write one tested response per objection in the Pause-Probe-Provide-Prove format. Keep the full log in the playbook appendix for reference.

COMMON OBJECTION	PROBE QUESTION	PROVIDE RESPONSE TYPE	PROVE EVIDENCE REQUIRED
"We have no budget right now"	Is it that there is literally no budget available this quarter, or that this is not yet in an existing budget line?	Reframe as an LOI (no budget required) or offer a free pilot that demonstrates ROI before the next budget cycle	Pilot cost-to-ROI calculation from Customer 1 or F2 pilot — how quickly does the product pay for itself?
"We have tried similar tools before"	What did you try, and what specifically did not work about it?	Direct comparison to the named tool on the specific failure point. Do not defend against tools not mentioned.	F2 pilot data showing outcome improvement over the approach the customer currently uses
"Security and compliance concerns"	Is your concern about data residency, access controls, or the procurement approval process?	Address the specific concern with technical documentation. Do not explain security architecture in the sales conversation — provide a written summary for the IT/Legal reviewer.	Pre-approved pilot agreement from E3, security documentation, data-sharing agreement structure
"We are too busy to implement something new"	When you say implementation, are you thinking about the initial setup time or the ongoing management?	Quantify the actual implementation burden with specifics: "Setup takes X hours. Ongoing management takes Y minutes per week."	Reference from a customer with a similar team size on their actual implementation experience
"This is not a priority right now"	What would need to change for this to become a priority — a specific event, a budget cycle, a leadership decision?	Offer a no-commitment next step: "Let me send you a one-page summary you can revisit when the timing is right. May I follow up in [specific month]?"	No evidence needed at this stage — the goal is to maintain the relationship for a future cycle, not to close immediately

AI PROMPT — Objection Library Development

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I am building the Objection Library for a Phase Three venture.
Venture: [describe]. ICP v1.0: [paste]. The five objections heard
most frequently in Stage 1 and Stage 2 calls were: [list]. For
each objection: (1) write the Probe question that identifies the
real concern beneath the surface objection, (2) write the Provide
response tailored to the real concern — not the surface objection,
(3) specify the Prove evidence required (F2 pilot data, reference
customer quote, internal case study, financial calculation), (4)
write the 3F (Feel-Felt-Found) version for emotionally-charged
instances of this objection. Flag any objection for which the team
does not yet have Proven evidence — those are research tasks
before Stage 3 outreach begins.
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STEP 6 BUILD THE CUSTOMER ZERO PLAYBOOK

By Customer 10, the EIR has accumulated more practical sales intelligence than most early-stage ventures ever document. The Customer Zero Playbook is the mechanism for converting that intelligence into institutional knowledge — a document a growth operator can pick up and use to acquire customers 11–100 without the EIR in the room.

The playbook is built in real time across the acquisition sprint — not written retrospectively after Customer 10. Every call, every objection, every converted email template, every contract structure that worked goes into the playbook the day it happens.

Customer Zero Playbook — Six Required Sections:

SECTION	WHAT IT CONTAINS	OUTPUT BY CUSTOMER 10
1. ICP v1.0	Who buys: role, company type and size, industry, tools they use, key pains, buying triggers. Who is NOT a good fit: based on bad calls and non-converting pilots. Geography: entry market and expansion criteria.	A specific, evidence-based profile that eliminates ambiguity for the first sales hire. Two-sided: best fit and bad fit with equal rigor.
2. Problem and Value Narrative	The 1–2 core problem stories that resonated most consistently. The 1–2 proof points that moved deals forward (e.g., "after 4 weeks, [type of team] saw [specific outcome]"). The exact language customers used to describe their pain — taken directly from discovery call notes.	A one-page narrative the first sales hire can use in discovery calls and demo setups. Grounded in customer language, not internal product language.
3. Outreach and Funnel	Exact email and LinkedIn templates that generated replies. The 4-step sequence with timing, word count, and channel. Funnel conversion benchmarks: reply rate, meeting rate, pilot commit rate, paid conversion rate — by stage and by segment.	A replicable outreach system with performance benchmarks. New hires know what "good" looks like from Day 1.
4. Call Structure	Discovery call script: the 5 key questions, the sequence, the probing follow-ups. Demo flow: the 3–4 micro-commitment moments and the exact language. Recap template: the standard same-day follow-up format.	A script that is flexible enough for a conversation but structured enough to produce a consistent next step from every call.
5. Offer and Contract Package	Standard pilot package: duration, scope, success criteria, pricing tier. LOI template. Full contract template. Shadow pricing structure for internal Customer Zero. Any non-standard deal terms and the rationale for granting them.	A standard package that requires minimal customization. Growth operators can close deals without involving Legal for every contract.
6. Objection and Risk Library	Top 5–7 objections with tested Pause-Probe-Provide-Prove responses. 3F versions for emotionally charged instances. Procurement and legal checklist for this market. A running log of objections that are still unresolved or for which no strong Prove evidence exists.	A coaching tool that new hires can use before calls, not just after. The unresolved log is a product and positioning improvement backlog.

6.1 **Add a metrics and benchmarks section by Customer 10** — Actual conversion rates from 0–10 customers by channel and segment. The sales cycle duration from first contact to signed contract for each stage. The average deal size and the range. The target conversion numbers for the first sales hire — what they need to hit before a second hire is justified

6.2 **Produce one strong case study before handing the playbook to the first growth hire** — Format: customer role and company type (anonymized if required), problem they had before the product, what they did with the product, the specific quantified outcome. Length: one page. The case study is the primary sales asset for Stage 3 cold outreach — without it, cold outreach at Stage 3 produces low conversion rates

6.3 **Collect two to three testimonials with specific outcomes** — A testimonial that says "I recommend this product" is not useful. A testimonial that says "We reduced our compliance reporting time by 35% in the first four weeks" is an evidence asset. Collect these in writing from F2 pilot participants who converted, and from Stage 1 and 2 customers

AI PROMPT — Customer Zero Playbook — Full Draft

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I am producing the Customer Zero Playbook for a Phase Three venture. Venture: [describe]. Customer acquisition summary: [describe — how many customers acquired at each stage, which channels worked, which did not]. ICP v1.0: [paste]. Top 3 proof points from F2 pilot and Stage 1–2 customers: [list]. Outreach sequence performance: [reply rate, meeting rate, pilot commit rate, paid conversion rate by stage]. Top 5 objections and tested responses: [paste from objection library]. Standard pilot package terms: [describe]. Write the complete Customer Zero Playbook in the 6-section format. Every section must be written as if the EIR is handing it to a new growth hire who has never spoken to a customer. Flag any section where the evidence is incomplete or where the team has not yet generated a tested answer.
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STEP 7 TRACK THE SIX COMMERCIAL MILESTONES

The six commercial milestones from Guide C3 are the formal progress markers for the 0-to-100 customer journey. They are not aspirational targets — they are the specific evidence points that the Venture Board, the Executive Sponsor, and the Investment Committee use to assess progress and release the next capital tranche.

MILESTONE	WHAT IT CONFIRMS	TARGET TIMING	EVIDENCE REQUIRED FOR INVESTMENT CASE
Milestone 1: First LOI or pilot agreement signed	There is documented, commercial-intent demand beyond the F2 pilot	Weeks 1–4 of Stage 1	Signed LOI or pilot agreement with a named organization, named signatory, and success criteria. This is the first investor-credible demand signal.
Milestone 2: First paid contract signed	The product has commercial value that a customer will pay for	Stage 1–2	Signed contract with a specific price, duration, and renewal term. Shadow pricing qualifies if the internal BU has committed to the value in writing with a chargeback mechanism.
Milestone 3: Customer 10 acquired — repeatable sales motion confirmed	The GTM works at more than one data point and can be handed to a growth operator	End of Stage 3	10 signed customers or LOIs matching the ICP. Funnel conversion rates documented by stage. Customer Zero Playbook v1.0 complete.
Milestone 4: First customer renewal — retention validated	The product delivers ongoing value; churn risk is manageable	30–60 days after first paid contract	A signed renewal or contract extension from any of the first 10 customers. Or a documented intent to renew ahead of the renewal date.
Milestone 5: First enterprise account signed	The product can close larger, more complex deals with longer procurement cycles	Stage 3 or post-Tranche 2	A named enterprise account with a multi-seat or multi-module contract. The sales cycle duration for the enterprise deal documented.
Milestone 6: First channel partner producing qualified leads	The GTM can scale beyond founder-led sales through a partner ecosystem	Post-Tranche 2	A named channel partner (reseller, SI, corporate parent distribution) who has produced at least one qualified lead that converted to a meeting.

7.1 **Report milestone progress at every monthly milestone review and every Venture Board quarterly meeting** — The milestone tracker is included in the E2 board pack. Each milestone is either achieved or not achieved — no "on track" or "in progress" language. A milestone not yet achieved must have a named action owner and a specific date

7.2 **For CVC tracks: milestone 1 through 3 are the primary evidence for portfolio company investment thesis validation** — When the CVC holds equity in a portfolio company, these commercial milestones validate the strategic thesis of the investment. A portfolio company that reaches Milestone 3 — repeatable sales motion confirmed — is the primary candidate for the CVC follow-on capital deployment decision

TROUBLESHOOTING

SYMPTOM	LIKELY CAUSE	FIX
Customer Zero is enthusiastic but will not sign a contract	Enthusiasm has been mistaken for commitment. The commercial path was never stated explicitly.	Apply the micro-commitment ladder from Step 3: every discovery call ends with one specific next step. Move from interest to LOI to pilot agreement in sequential steps. An enthusiastic contact who will not sign anything is not a customer — they are a reference call.
The sales cycle has been running for 3+ months with no signed agreement	Wrong buying center contact — the person engaged is not the Decision Maker or Approver	Re-map the Buying Center from Step 1. Identify the Decision Maker and the Approver. Request an introduction directly: "Who else needs to be in the room for this to move forward?" If access is blocked, use the corporate parent's Executive Sponsor to open the path.
First 3 customers are all from the EIR's personal network and do not match the ICP	Stage 1 network sourcing worked as a starting point but was not bounded by ICP criteria	This is the Stage 1 to Stage 2 transition problem. Move to structured warm outreach (Step 2, Stage 2) immediately. Build the 50-100 prospect list using the ICP v1.0 filters. Customers from outside the ICP produce misleading signal about the sales motion.
Every deal requires bespoke terms — no standard pilot package is emerging	The pilot offer has been customized for each customer. No standard scope, pricing, or contract structure has been enforced.	By Customer 4, standardize the pilot package: fixed duration (60-90 days), standard success criteria, one pricing tier, one contract template. If a deal requires significant customization, it is likely outside the ICP.
The objection library has more than 20 items and the team cannot retain or use it	Objections are being logged without being synthesized. The library is a capture tool, not a coaching tool.	Synthesize the library to the top 5-7 objections. For each, write one tested response in the Pause-Probe-Provide-Prove format. The full log stays in the appendix. The playbook document carries only the actionable top-tier responses.
Customer 8-10 cold outreach produces replies but no meetings	The email sequence is generating interest at step 1 but not converting to discovery calls	The step 2 follow-up is the conversion point. It must include a specific, relevant case vignette or outcome metric. Replace generic follow-ups ("just checking in") with trigger-referenced messages ("I saw your team recently expanded — here is what teams in the same position found useful").
The first paid contract is signed but the customer goes quiet after onboarding	No success criteria were defined in the contract. There is no structured cadence for post-contract engagement.	Every contract must specify: success criteria, a 30-day check-in, and the condition for renewal. If the first paid customer goes quiet, it means the adoption milestone was never tracked. Apply the E2 weekly health check protocol to Customer Zero accounts.
Conversion rates are not being tracked systematically	The team is running outreach and calls but not logging outcomes in a way that can be used to build funnel benchmarks	Set up a simple CRM or pipeline tracker from Day 1 of Stage 1 outreach. Track: outreach sent, reply rate, meeting rate, pilot commit rate, paid conversion rate. By Customer 10, these numbers are the benchmarks for the first sales hire.

7

VALIDATION STEPS

Confirm each of the following before declaring the Customer Zero acquisition phase complete:

- ICP v1.0 written with equal rigor for both best-fit and bad-fit profiles, grounded in F2 pilot evidence
- Buying Center mapped for each target company type — entry point role, Decision Maker, Gatekeeper all identified
- Three-stage acquisition plan executed sequentially — Stage 1 learnings informed Stage 2 ICP refinement
- Funnel conversion rates tracked and documented from Stage 1 outreach
- All 1–10 customers acquired match the ICP — customers outside the ICP are excluded from the playbook benchmarks
- At least Milestone 1 (first LOI or pilot agreement) and Milestone 2 (first paid contract) achieved and documented
- Customer Zero Playbook v1.0 complete — all six sections, written for a growth operator with no prior context
- Objection library synthesized to top five to seven items with tested Pause-Probe-Provide-Prove responses
- At least one case study with a quantified outcome produced
- Funnel conversion benchmarks documented — ready to set targets for the first sales hire

NEXT STEPS

Upon completing this guide with Customer 10 acquired and the Customer Zero Playbook v1.0 complete, proceed to:

- **GUIDE H1** — How to Execute CVC Investment and Onboard a Venture into the Portfolio (if CVC track — Milestones 1–3 are the primary evidence)
- **GUIDE H3** — How to Prepare and Deliver Quarterly Board Reporting Materials (Commercial milestones 1–3 anchor the Tranche 2 capital request)

The Customer Zero Playbook is a living document. Update it quarterly: ICP refinement based on win/loss data, outreach sequence performance by channel, new objection patterns and tested responses. The playbook handed to the first sales hire is version 1.0. The first sales hire's job is to test it, break it where it does not work, and improve it to version 2.0 based on their first 20 conversations.

MASTER CHECKLIST

A. ICP AND BUYING CENTER

☐ ICP v1.0 written with: role, company size, industry, specific pain, buying trigger, and budget authority confirmation

☐ Bad-fit profile written with equal detail — based on non-converting F2 pilot participants and Stage 1 calls

☐ Buying Center mapped for each target company type: Initiator, Decision Maker, Approver, Gatekeeper, User, Wildcard

☐ For each Buying Center role: what they care about, objection they will raise, evidence they need, and how to engage them

☐ Customer Zero Plan updated from C3 — 5 named target companies with the specific Buying Center entry point and Decision Maker identified for each

B. THREE-STAGE ACQUISITION PLAN

☐ Stage 1 (customers 1–3): prospect list built from personal network and corporate internal teams

☐ Stage 2 (customers 4–7): warm outreach list built from 2nd-degree introductions and F2 pilot non-converts

☐ Stage 3 (customers 8–10): ICP-filtered cold prospect list built from Stage 1–2 learnings

☐ 4-step outreach sequence written for each stage with specific personalized language

☐ Outreach sprint active: 30–45 days, tracked daily, reviewed at weekly stand-up

☐ CRM or pipeline tracker active from Day 1 of Stage 1 outreach

Funnel conversion rates tracked: reply rate, meeting rate, pilot commit rate, paid conversion rate

C. DISCOVERY CALL AND MICRO-COMMITMENT LADDER

☐ 5-question discovery call script written for this specific ICP

☐ Micro-commitment ladder confirmed: interest → exploration → validation → conditional commitment → paid pilot → contract

☐ 3–4 micro-commitment moments identified in the demo or walkthrough

☐ Same-day call recap template written and used after every discovery call

☐ No more than 5 business days allowed between any two touchpoints in an active deal

D. CONTRACT STRUCTURES

☐ Free committed pilot terms confirmed: scope, usage floor, success criteria, decision commitment at end

☐ Paid discounted pilot structure confirmed: 20–50% of target price, conversion clause into first-year discount

☐ LOI template reviewed by Legal — includes price level, success condition, and named signatory

☐ Full commercial contract template reviewed by Legal — SLA, renewal terms, expansion path

☐ E3 procurement fast-lane applied to all pilot agreements — standard template used, not bespoke for each deal

☐ Internal Customer Zero shadow pricing structure confirmed in writing with BU head

☐ Every contract specifies the commercial next step before it is signed

E. OBJECTION LIBRARY

☐ Objection log started from the first discovery call — objections logged same day
☐ Pause-Probe-Provide-Prove framework applied to every objection response
☐ 3F (Feel-Felt-Found) versions written for emotionally charged objections
☐ Library synthesized by Customer 7 — top 5–7 objections with one tested response each
☐ Prove evidence confirmed for each top objection — unresolved evidence gaps flagged as research tasks

F. CUSTOMER ZERO PLAYBOOK V1.0

☐ Section 1: ICP v1.0 — best fit and bad fit profiles
☐ Section 2: Problem and value narrative — 2 core problem stories, 2 proof points, customer language from discovery calls
☐ Section 3: Outreach and funnel — email and LinkedIn templates, sequence with timing, conversion benchmarks by stage
☐ Section 4: Call structure — discovery script, demo flow with micro-commitment moments, recap template
☐ Section 5: Offer and contract package — standard pilot package, LOI template, full contract template
☐ Section 6: Objection and risk library — top objections with tested responses, procurement checklist
☐ Metrics and benchmarks section: conversion rates, sales cycle duration, average deal size by stage
☐ At least one case study with quantified outcome produced
☐ At least two to three testimonials with specific, quantified outcomes collected

G. COMMERCIAL MILESTONES

☐ Milestone 1: First LOI or pilot agreement signed — documented with named organization, signatory, and success criteria
☐ Milestone 2: First paid contract signed — specific price, duration, and renewal term on file
☐ Milestone 3: Customer 10 acquired — repeatable sales motion confirmed, Customer Zero Playbook v1.0 complete
☐ Milestone 4: First customer renewal — tracked and reported at monthly milestone review
☐ Commercial milestone tracker included in the E2 board pack and quarterly Venture Board reporting
☐ For CVC tracks: Milestones 1–3 reported to CVC Portfolio Manager as primary investment thesis validation evidence