Closing Foundry.

What practical commercial support founders need when markets tighten

A note for accelerators, venture platforms, economic-development programmes, and other founder-support partners.

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Key Points

- In a looser market, a programme can get away with broad encouragement and general GTM content. In a tighter one, founders need help turning an uncertain pipeline into a more governable commercial system.
- The first thing founders need is diagnosis, not curriculum. They improve when someone can show, quickly and concretely, whether the cause is ICP sprawl, weak qualification, poor deal control, or founder bottleneck.
- The second thing they need is help repositioning the product from interesting to necessary: explaining what risk it removes, what cost it avoids, or what revenue it protects.
- The third thing they need is a repeatable answer set for scrutiny on data ownership, AI dependencies, and security. If those answers only live in the founder's head, every important deal slows down.
- In easier markets, founder heroics can rescue late deals. In tighter markets, heroics become a bottleneck. Founders need lighter-weight sales infrastructure before they need a full sales team.
- A useful founder-support model leaves behind outputs the programme can track: a commercial score, a ranked list of bottlenecks, a tightened ICP, a qualification rubric, and a 30-60-90 day action plan.

A note for accelerators, venture platforms, economic-development programmes, and other founder-support partners.

If you run a founder programme, the commercial environment your cohort is selling into has changed faster than most support models have. The IMF and World Bank both warned that the Middle East conflict and disruption around the Strait of Hormuz would mean slower growth and higher inflation even if it ended quickly. That shock is already showing up in company behaviour: weaker demand, postponed investment decisions, tighter credit, and harder procurement.

For founders, that doesn't simply mean less demand. It means demand is judged differently. Budget holders become more cautious, buyer committees widen, procurement gets sharper, and the tolerance for forecast error falls. In a looser market, a programme can get away with broad encouragement and general GTM content. In a tighter one, founders need help turning an uncertain pipeline into a more governable commercial system.

AI is raising the commercial bar at the same time. Software categories are being repriced and destabilised as AI agent capabilities move into tasks that traditional software has long handled. The same Reuters reporting that captured the software stock selloff pointed to the main defence investors now recognise: proprietary data and deep workflow embed. Where data is standardised and processes are easier to reproduce, the category looks more exposed. Founders have to answer why their product remains defensible if the model layer improves again next month.

What useful support now looks like

The first thing founders need is diagnosis, not curriculum. In a pressure market, they don't improve because they sat through more content. They improve when someone can show, quickly and concretely, whether the cause is ICP sprawl, weak qualification, unclear economic value, poor deal control, diligence gaps, or founder bottleneck. That is why scored diagnostics matter more than generic workshops. A useful intervention starts with a baseline, names the specific limitation, and turns it into an action plan.

The second thing they need is help repositioning the product from interesting to necessary. In tighter markets, buyers don't want more possibility. They want a reason to act. Founders have to explain what risk the product removes, what cost it avoids, what process it shortens, or what revenue it protects. When AI is reshaping categories, they also have to explain why the product remains defensible if the model layer improves again next month. That isn't a branding exercise. It's a sales and diligence exercise.

The third thing they need is a repeatable answer set for scrutiny. Founders are now being asked harder questions by customers and by investors: what data do you own, what part of the workflow are you embedded in, what third-party AI dependencies do you rely on, what happens to customer inputs, how do you manage privacy and security, and who is accountable for output quality? If those answers only live in the founder’s head, every important deal slows down and every diligence process becomes bespoke. Useful programme support helps founders make those answers standard, credible, and reusable.

The fourth thing they need is lighter-weight sales infrastructure before they need a full sales team. Most programme founders can't absorb a large transformation project, but they can benefit from a tighter minimum system: clearer ICP boundaries, sharper qualification, stage definitions based on buyer evidence, next-step discipline, and a simple forecast rhythm. In easier markets, founder heroics can rescue late deals. In tighter markets, heroics become a bottleneck.

The fifth thing they need is support the programme can defend to its own stakeholders. A useful founder-support model should leave behind outputs a programme can track without turning into a consultancy: a baseline and follow-up commercial score, a ranked list of bottlenecks, a tightened value proposition, a defined ICP, a qualification rubric, and a 30-60-90 day action plan. Those outputs are more meaningful than attendance numbers because they show whether founders left with something they can use in a live sales cycle.

When markets tighten, commercial support stops being a nice extra and becomes one of the few interventions founders will still remember using six months later. The useful programme isn't the one with the most thought leadership. It's the one that helps founders remove commercial ambiguity, tighten execution, and give investors and buyers fewer reasons to slow down.

Further Reading

- Hiring Your First Salespeople: The Transition From Founder-Led Selling
- MEDDPICC, Explained: A Practical Guide for Founders & Sales Leaders
- How B2B Sales Really Works: The 10 Core Principles You Need to Know

Related terms

- ICP (Ideal Customer Profile): A detailed description of the company most likely to buy and retain your product.
- Buyer Evidence: Proof points and documentation that validate a buyer's decision to purchase.
- Deal Control: The ability to drive deal momentum and keep the buyer aligned to your process.
- Sales Cycle: The total time from first contact to signed contract for a B2B deal.
- Pipeline: The aggregate of all active deals being worked at any given time.
- Commit: A rep's forecast category indicating high confidence a deal will close in the period.

Related: The Founder-Led Sales Guide.

Related service: 5 Days to Scale

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