

Sequencing Decision Tree

For founder-led consulting, fractional, and learning-agency firms who know they're embedded in the operation, have ruled out hiring as the next move, and are stuck on what to fix first.

You've worked the diagnostic. You've sat with the cost. You've run the readiness check and concluded the next move isn't a hire. Now you're in the harder question, which is: of the four or five things that look load-bearing, which one do you fix first? This is the gate that catches most founders. The diagnostic told you where you're embedded. The scorecard told you the hire isn't yet the right shape. Neither one tells you what to actually do on Monday morning.

Answer each decision honestly. The first NO ends the path and names what to fix first. The point of the sequencing isn't that the other things don't get fixed; the order you fix them in determines whether each fix compounds with the next or undoes it.

- 1 **Is the operating workflow documented enough that someone other than you could run it without daily founder input?**
NO -> Fix workflow first. Two to four weeks of focused documentation. YES -> Move to decision 2.
- 2 **Could a peer who runs a similar firm read your workflow doc and tell you which step is the bottleneck without you in the room?**
NO -> Fix workflow second pass. Two more weeks, one peer pressure-test. YES -> Move to decision 3.
- 3 **Is the bottleneck step concentrated in a single workflow node?**
NO (distributed) -> Fix workflow architecture, not the hire. 4 to 6 weeks. YES (one node) -> Move to decision 4.
- 4 **Is the work at the bottlenecked node stable enough that the rules could be written for someone else to apply them?**
NO (too variable) -> Fix positioning before hire. Narrow the engagement shape. YES -> Move to decision 5.
- 5 **Have you written down the specific rules a senior person would apply at the bottlenecked node, in a doc someone else could read?**
NO -> Write the decision-rules document first. Two weeks. YES -> Move to decision 6.
- 6 **Does the firm have a 30-day stretch in the next quarter where the founder could clear 10 hours a week to onboard a senior hire?**
NO -> Fix calendar capacity. Two to four weeks of calendar surgery. YES -> Move to decision 7.
- 7 **Is the firm's pricing aligned with the value the workflow is currently producing?**
NO (under-priced) -> Reprice before hire. 30 to 60 day renewal cycle. YES -> Move to decision 8.
- 8 **Are the firm's positioning, workflow, decision rules, calendar, and pricing all aligned, with the bottleneck still concentrated in a single node where rule-application is the constraint rather than rule-writing?**
NO -> Loop to first NO above. The order matters. YES -> Hire is the next move. Run the search.

How to Read the Tree

Path 1: Workflow documentation first

Decisions 1, 2. The doc doesn't exist or doesn't read cleanly. Two to four weeks of focused documentation work, ideally with a peer pressure-test in week two. Most founders end the path here, even when they expected the answer to be the hire.

Path 2: Workflow architecture before hire

Decision 3. The doc exists, the doc is legible, but the bottleneck is distributed across multiple nodes. The fix is rewiring the routing between nodes. Usually a 4 to 6 week piece of work.

Path 3: Positioning before hire

Decision 4. The bottleneck node resists rule-codification because the engagement shape is too broad. The fix is narrowing the positioning, which is uncomfortable because it means saying no to current revenue. Usually a one-quarter horizon.

Path 4: Decision-rules document before hire

Decision 5. The doc exists, the architecture is sound, the positioning is right, the rules just haven't been written for the bottleneck node yet. Two-week artifact, exactly the work last week's post walked through.

Path 5: Calendar surgery, or repricing, before hire

Decisions 6, 7. The operational layer is in good shape and the gating constraint is either founder calendar capacity or current pricing being below current value. Both are 30 to 60 day fixes.

Path 6: Hire is the next move

Decision 8. All eight gates pass. Run the search. You're in the small fraction of founder-led firms that approach the hire decision with operational sequencing already done.

• If your first NO surfaced something you hadn't sequenced this way, the Blueprint is the next step.

- A Blueprint is a fixed-scope engagement that delivers five things: a Bottleneck Diagnosis of what is actually causing the problem, an Operating Roadmap of what to fix and in what order, a Decision Framework for the calls you make inconsistently today, an Expert Deployment Brief if you choose to bring in an execution resource, and a Recommended Path Forward with every option laid out. It diagnoses and roadmaps. It does not write your workflow or decision-rules document for you.

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