THE RESULT

# "Six reps close the gap"? At recent hires' pace, about $8M next year, not $36M. And three approved seats have been empty since September.

A VP Sales in a pumps and valves division decides whether six more reps will close next year's gap, with any AI chat her company allows.

**THE RESULT** Grace's page for the CRO and CFO on December 11. Fictional company.

VARROW FLUID SYSTEMS · SALES · NORTH AMERICA

## Six more reps? Recommendation

For: Peter Haines, CRO, and Ruth Ellison, CFO
From: Grace Okafor · Friday, December 11

### MY RECOMMENDATION

Don't approve six new reps on the current evidence; keep the request open. Approved now, they'd start around mid-April and, at our recent hires' first-year pace, add about $8M or less in FY27. Counting filled seats only, the gap is about $50M, if FY26 productivity holds. · Inputs 2, 3, 4, 5

### THE REQUEST, CHECKED

| Six reps add | The gap | Empty seats | Uncovered accounts |
|---|---|---|---|
| **About $8M** | **About $50M** | **3** | **310** |
| Not $36M: 4 months to hire, $1.8M first year | Not $35M: 3 seats are empty | Approved; no candidates since September | $22M in FY25, $9M in FY26 |

### WHAT TO DO FIRST

**BY DEC 18** — **A recruiting fix for the 3 approved backfills**
Six more seats would face the same hiring problem as the three we can't fill now. · Input 4

**BY JAN 4** — **Owners for the 310 uncovered accounts, if reps have room**
Sales ops first confirms who booked their $9M in FY26 and which reps can take them. How much comes back is unknown. · Input 4

**BY MAR 31** — **Why bookings per rep fell from $6.0M to $5.1M**
· Input 3

### CAUGHT ON REVIEW

1. "$6.0M each" is **FY25's figure**; FY26 was $5.1M
2. New reps booked **$1.8M in their first year**, and hiring takes 4 months
3. Capacity counts **3 empty seats**; on filled seats the gap is about $50M

| UC-006 · SC-04 · REV A | |
|---|---|
| FOR<br>**VP Sales, North America (Fluid Systems division)** | SECTOR<br>**Diversified industrial (pumps and valves division)** |
| COMPANY<br>**110,000 people · 5 divisions · 30 countries** | TASK<br>**Decide whether six more reps will close next year's gap** |
| WRITTEN FOR<br>**ChatGPT · Claude · Gemini · Copilot** | |
| AI TEST<br>**Claude, Nov 14, 2026 · 7 of 7 found** | |

STEP 0 · THE MESS

# What landed on Grace's desk

A one-line question from the CRO, a confident hiring request from two regional directors, two short notes from sales operations and one from finance. The request adds up neatly. The data underneath points somewhere else.

EMAIL · CRO [1]

**Six more reps**

"Is hiring the answer?"

1 **The real question.**

HIRING REQUEST [2]

**Regional directors**

"Six more reps at a $6.0M quota each adds $36M. Gap closed."

2 **Which year's $6.0M?**

SALES OPS [3]

**Productivity and ramp**

"The 11 reps hired in FY25 and FY26 booked an average of $1.8M each in their first 12 months."

3 **Ramp.**

SALES OPS [4]

**Seats and accounts**

3 empty seats since September ... 310 accounts with no assigned rep.

4 **The option nobody proposed.**

FINANCE [5]

**Capacity and cost**

"Capacity = 48 seats x $5.1M = $245M."

5 **48 or 45?**

YOU'RE NOT ALONE

## 6.2 months

was the average time for a new account executive to reach full productivity in the Bridge Group's 2026 study, the longest in its history.

The Bridge Group, AE Models, Motions & Metrics 2026, 158 B2B companies. Source

STEPS 1–3 · HOW IT WORKS

# Three steps, one chat

Here the AI tests a request before you weigh it. The prompt asks whether the proposed fix matches what's actually limiting results.

### 1 Open a new chat

Use the AI tool your company approves: ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini or Copilot.

### 2 Paste the prompt and the inputs

Copy the prompt and the five fictional inputs from the appendix into one message.

### 3 Work out one figure yourself

Multiply six reps by the first-year bookings of recent hires, and compare it with $36M. Then decide what to do first.

THE PROMPT, PART BY PART

COPY-READY VERSION IN THE APPENDIX

I'm VP Sales for North America in an industrial equipment division. Two regional directors have asked for six more sales reps to close the gap to next year's bookings plan. Our CRO and CFO want my recommendation on Friday, December 11. Today is Wednesday, December 9. Our fiscal year is the calendar year. Below are the CRO's email, the hiring request, sales operations data and a finance note.

**1 Who you are, who decides, the meeting date, today's date and the fiscal year.**

Please help me work through the decision:

1. **The request's arithmetic**: check each number and where it comes from.
2. **What six new reps would really add in FY27**, given the hiring time and ramp in the data.
3. **What's actually limiting bookings**, from the data. Is headcount the real limit?
4. **The options**, including any nobody has proposed, each with what it would add, what it costs and what's uncertain.
5. **My recommendation** to the CRO and CFO, with the conditions that would change it.

**2 The request's arithmetic, what six reps would really add, what's limiting bookings, the options including ones nobody proposed, and a recommendation with what would change it.**

Check whether the proposed solution fits the real problem before you compare options. Check the arithmetic and the dates. Don't add facts that aren't in the inputs; if you assume something, say so.

**3 The heavy lifting: check whether the proposed solution fits the real problem before comparing options. It found all seven planted problems.**

WHERE TO PASTE

Every tool has one message box. Paste the prompt, add a blank line, paste the inputs, send. Capacity models can be attached as files if your tool allows it.

SAFE TO TRY

Practise with the fictional inputs first. Real headcount plans and productivity data are confidential: use only your company's approved tool.

THE AI'S FIRST ANSWER

# What Claude actually wrote

Exactly as it came back, not edited. Read it the way Grace did: check each point against the source it cites.

UNEDITED  Claude · fresh session, no other context · Nov 14, 2026 · one run

Here is how I'd work through the decision. Assumptions are marked as assumptions. Every number comes from your five inputs or from simple arithmetic on them.

### 1. The request's arithmetic

| Claim in the request | What the inputs show | Verdict |
|---|---|---|
| Capacity $245M | Finance: 48 seats x $5.1M = $244.8M, rounded to $245M [5]. But only 45 seats are filled, and the 3 empty ones have had no candidates since September [4]. 45 x $5.1M = **$229.5M**. | Overstated by about $15M. It counts 3 seats nobody is sitting in. found |
| Gap $35M | $280M plan - $245M = $35M. On 45 filled seats: $280M - $229.5M = **$50.5M**. | The real gap is about $50M, if FY26 productivity holds in FY27 (assumption). |
| $6.0M per new rep | $6.0M is the FY25 figure, and it's quota, not bookings. FY26 bookings per rep were $5.1M [3]. Finance's capacity uses $5.1M. | The request uses one rate for the gap and a different, higher one for the fix. found |
| Six reps add $36M | Even six fully productive reps at $5.1M would be $30.6M. New hires actually booked $1.8M each in their first 12 months [3]. | $36M is not supported by any figure in the data (see section 2). found |
| "Gap closed" | Even at $36M it doesn't close a $50.5M gap. | No. |

Two other points:

- The CRO's email names Grace, Dan and Kim. The hiring request is signed only by Dan and Kim. Grace's position is unknown. A: misread
- I'm assuming Ruth is the CFO, since Peter says "Ruth and I need your recommendation."

### 2. What six new reps would really add in FY27

- **Start date:** approval on Fri Dec 11, 2026 plus the 4-month average [3] gives a start around **mid-April 2027**. That leaves about 8.5 months of FY27. (I checked: Dec 9, 2026 is a Wednesday and Dec 11 is a Friday.) found
- **Bookings:** new reps averaged $1.8M in their first 12 months. Spread evenly over about 8.5 months, that is roughly **$1.3M each, or about $7.7M for six**. This is an upper estimate. Ramp usually starts slowly, so the first 8 to 9 months likely book less than a straight share of $1.8M (assumption; the data gives no monthly split).
- **Hiring risk:** the 4 months is an average. The 3 approved backfills have been open since September with no candidates, so it has already taken more than 3 months without a single candidate. Starts could easily slip past April, which would reduce FY27 bookings further. found
- **Cost:** 6 x $260K = $1.56M a year fully loaded. That is about $1.1M in FY27 if costs start on the start date (assumption; recruiting costs are not in the data). There is no FY27 budget for this unless Ruth approves it [5].
- **Bottom line:** roughly $8M or less in FY27, against a claimed $36M. Six hires approved now are mostly FY28 capacity.

### 3. What's actually limiting bookings

Headcount is not the clearest limit. The data points to four other things:

1. **Productivity fell 15%,** from $6.0M to $5.1M per rep [3]. Across 45 reps, recovering to $6.0M would be worth about $40.5M (45 x $0.9M), more than any hiring option. The cause is **unknown**. One possibility (assumption): the 11 recent hires, who booked only $1.8M in their first year, pull the FY26 average down. If so, the average may recover on its own as they ramp. That needs checking, not assuming.
2. **310 accounts have no assigned rep** [4]. They booked $22M in FY25 and $9M in FY26, a $13M drop, while uncovered since early FY26. This looks like a coverage problem, not a seat problem. found
3. **The company can't fill seats it already has.** 3 approved backfills have had no candidates for about 3 months. Adding 6 more seats doesn't fix recruiting. It could pull candidates and recruiters away from the backfills.
4. **The plan itself.** $280M against $229.5M of realistic capacity is a 22% stretch. The inputs don't show anything that closes all of it in FY27.

Things I can't tell from the inputs:

- Whether the 310 accounts' FY26 $9M is already counted inside the $5.1M per rep.
- Who booked that $9M with no assigned rep.

- Whether the reps who left those accounts "early in FY26" are the same as the 3 seats open "since September." The timing doesn't obviously match, so I haven't treated them as the same group.

### 4. The options

| Option | Possible FY27 add | Cost | What's uncertain |
|---|---|---|---|
| **A. Hire six as requested** | About $7.7M at most, likely less | About $1.1M in FY27, $1.56M a year after | Time to hire (backfills stalled), ramp shape, budget not approved |
| **B. Fill the 3 backfills first** (not proposed by anyone) | About $3.9M at most if they start by April (3 x about $1.3M); more if sooner | Seats are already approved. Whether they're budgeted is not stated (assumption that they are). | No candidates since September. Needs a recruiting fix (agency, referral bonus, revised profile). None of those costs are in the data. |
| **C. Assign the 310 accounts to named owners in January** (not proposed by anyone) | Unknown. If bookings returned even part way from $9M toward FY25's $22M, it could be worth several million. Needs owners for the full year. | Little new cost (assumption). Possible comp or territory changes. | Why the accounts declined. Whether current reps have room. Effect on reps' existing accounts. |
| **D. Find and fix the productivity drop** (not proposed by anyone) | Each $0.1M per rep across 45 reps = $4.5M. Back to $6.0M = $40.5M (not realistic in one year, illustrative only). | Unknown until the cause is known | Cause unknown. Could be ramp mix, territory, market, or process. |
| **E. Restate the plan or the gap to the CRO and CFO** | No bookings added | None | Whether the plan can move |
| **F. Staged hiring** (not proposed by anyone) | Little in FY27, mostly FY28 | Spend only when conditions are met | Depends on the recruiting fix working |

Even B, C and D together are not shown by the data to close $50.5M in FY27. That needs saying plainly on Friday.

### 5. Recommendation to the CRO and CFO

**Don't approve six new reps on the current evidence. Keep the request open until the issues below are tested.** `found`

What to say:

1. The gap is about $50M, not $35M, once the 3 empty seats are removed and FY26 productivity is held (assumption). Six new reps would add about $8M or less in FY27, not $36M, because of the 4-month hiring time and $1.8M first-year ramp.
2. Do now: make filling the 3 approved backfills the hiring priority, with a recruiting fix. Put the 310 uncovered accounts under named owners from January. `B: make it conditional`
3. Diagnose the $6.0M to $5.1M drop by the end of Q1. In particular, how much of it comes from ramping new hires versus ramped reps. `C: dates`
4. Be honest with Ruth and Peter that the inputs don't show a path to $280M in FY27. Either the plan is reset, or the remaining gap is named as unfunded risk.

What would change this recommendation:

- **Recruiting can deliver starts well inside 4 months**, with real candidates in hand. FY27 value per hire would rise, and a smaller, staged approval (2 to 3 reps) would make sense.
- **The productivity drop is mostly ramp mix.** Ramped reps would still be at about $6.0M, so hires pay back well and building FY28 capacity now is more attractive.
- **Existing reps can't absorb the 310 accounts.** Coverage is then a real capacity limit, and hires aimed specifically at those accounts would be justified.
- **Ruth is willing to fund FY28 capacity now,** knowing it adds little in FY27. Then approve some hires on those terms, not as a fix for the FY27 gap.
- **The $9M from the uncovered accounts is already in the $5.1M per-rep figure.** The recovery opportunity then needs re-estimating before it's counted.

Data to bring Friday, or to ask Sales Ops for:

- FY26 total bookings
- Monthly ramp for the 11 recent hires
- Who booked the uncovered accounts' $9M
- Recruiting pipeline status for the 3 backfills
- Whether the backfills are already in the FY27 budget

`found` caught a planted problem `A–C` Grace changes it; see the next section

THE HUMAN PART

# What Grace changed, and why

Claude found every planted problem and didn't swap one quick fix for another. It also misread one line. Grace's edits correct that, keep one action conditional, and put dates on the rest.

WHAT CLAUDE FOUND: 7 OF 7 PLANTED PROBLEMS — One run

- ✓ $6.0M is last year's figure
- ✓ Ramp ignored
- ✓ Four months to hire
- ✓ Capacity counts empty seats
- ✓ Uncovered accounts
- ✓ Seats already unfilled
- ✓ Fix doesn't fit the problem

THREE EDITS, ONE CATCH AND TWO JUDGMENT CALLS

| | CLAUDE WROTE | GRACE'S VERSION | WHY · ACCURACY |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | "The CRO's email names Grace, Dan and Kim. The hiring request is signed only by Dan and Kim. Grace's position is unknown." | **Grace drops the line. Peter's email is addressed to her: "Grace, Dan and Kim want six more reps." She's the one deciding, not one of the people asking.** | A small misreading, but left in, it would have put a question about Grace's own position on the page she sends. |

| | CLAUDE WROTE | GRACE'S VERSION | WHY · DECISION |
|---|---|---|---|
| B | "Do now: … Put the 310 uncovered accounts under named owners from January." | **Owners are named by Monday, January 4, if sales ops confirms by December 18 who booked the $9M in FY26 and which reps have room. How much comes back stays unknown.** | The AI said itself that it doesn't know whether reps have room or whether that $9M is already in the per-rep figure. A do-now should rest on what's known. |

| | CLAUDE WROTE | GRACE'S VERSION | WHY · DATE |
|---|---|---|---|
| C | "Diagnose the $6.0M to $5.1M drop by the end of Q1." The recruiting fix has no date. | **The recruiting fix for the three backfills is agreed by Friday, December 18. The productivity review is done by Wednesday, March 31.** | Without dates, the request stays open and nothing behind it moves. |

**What only you can do** — Read the email for who's asking, keep each first move as firm as its evidence, and put a date on it. The AI found the real limits. You decide what happens first.

YOUR TURN

# Make it yours

Use it whenever someone asks for more of something to close a gap: more reps, more engineers, more budget, more stores, more shifts.

### YOUR PROMPT: FILL IN THE BRACKETS

I'm **[your role]** in **[your company or division]**. **[Who]** has asked for **[the request]** to close **[the gap]**. **[Who]** wants my recommendation on **[date]**. Today is **[date]**. Our fiscal year is **[the fiscal year]**. Below are **[the request, the data on productivity, ramp, hiring time, seats and coverage, and the cost]**.

Please help me work through the decision: **1. The request's arithmetic**: check each number and where it comes from. **2. What [the request] would really add** in **[the year]**, given **[the hiring time and ramp]** in the data. **3. What's actually limiting [results]**, from the data. Is **[headcount]** the real limit? **4. The options**, including any nobody has proposed, each with what it would add, what it costs and what's uncertain. **5. My recommendation**, with the conditions that would change it.

Check whether the proposed solution fits the real problem before you compare options. Check the arithmetic and the dates. Don't add facts that aren't in the inputs; if you assume something, say so.

### FIVE CHECKS BEFORE YOU APPROVE HEADCOUNT

1. Productivity per person comes from the latest year.
2. New people are counted at first-year pace from their start date.
3. Capacity counts filled seats, not approved ones.
4. Work nobody covers today is on the list of options.
5. Every first move has an owner and a date.

### MAKE IT REPEATABLE (OPTIONAL)

Save the prompt once and reuse it for every headcount request: a custom GPT in ChatGPT, a project in Claude, a Gem in Gemini, or an agent in Copilot. Some companies switch these off; copy and paste always works.

### WITH REAL DATA

Headcount plans and productivity data are confidential and may identify people. Use only the AI tool your company approves, and follow its rules.

### WHAT THIS EXAMPLE SHOWS

One run of this prompt in Claude found all seven problems planted in fictional inputs and named options nobody had proposed. It also misread one line of the CRO's email.

### WHAT IT DOESN'T SHOW

That every tool, setting or run will do the same, how much time it saves you, or how many reps a real sales team needs. Varrow Holdings and its people are fictional.

APPENDIX

# Copy-ready: the prompt and the five inputs

Copy the prompt, then all five inputs, into one message in a new chat. Everything here is fictional and safe to paste.

### THE PROMPT

I'm VP Sales for North America in an industrial equipment division. Two regional directors have asked for six more sales reps to close the gap to next year's bookings plan. Our CRO and CFO want my recommendation on Friday, December 11. Today is Wednesday, December 9. Our fiscal year is the calendar year. Below are the CRO's email, the hiring request, sales operations data and a finance note.

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4. **The options**, including any nobody has proposed, each with what it would add, what it costs and what's uncertain.
5. **My recommendation** to the CRO and CFO, with the conditions that would change it.

Check whether the proposed solution fits the real problem before you compare options. Check the arithmetic and the dates. Don't add facts that aren't in the inputs; if you assume something, say so.

### [1] EMAIL FROM PETER HAINES, CRO

Grace, Dan and Kim want six more reps to close the FY27 gap. Ruth and I need your recommendation on Friday. Is hiring the answer?

### [2] HIRING REQUEST (DAN MORETTI AND KIM SATO, REGIONAL DIRECTORS)

FY27 bookings plan: $280M. Our capacity: $245M. Gap: $35M. Six more reps at a $6.0M quota each adds $36M. Gap closed. We'd like approval this week so we can start recruiting.

### [3] SALES OPERATIONS: PRODUCTIVITY AND RAMP

- Bookings per rep: FY25 $6.0M, FY26 $5.1M.
- The 11 reps hired in FY25 and FY26 booked an average of $1.8M each in their first 12 months.
- Average time from hiring approval to a new rep's start date: 4 months.

### [4] SALES OPERATIONS: SEATS AND ACCOUNTS

- 48 approved rep seats; 45 are filled. The 3 empty seats are backfills for reps who left. They've been open since September, with no candidates yet.
- 310 accounts have had no assigned rep since their reps left early in FY26. Those accounts booked $22M in FY25 and $9M in FY26.

### [5] FINANCE NOTE

Capacity = 48 seats x $5.1M = $245M. A new rep costs $260K a year, fully loaded. There is no FY27 budget for new headcount unless Ruth approves it.