



You Don't Find Champions. You Build Them.

Why the most important skill in complex sales is one most teams never develop



— Introduction

The Work Starts After the Diagnosis

Do Your Teams Have a Champion, or Just a Friend? established an uncomfortable truth: most revenue teams believe they have a Champion in their key deals. Most do not. They have a friend, or at best a coach. Someone helpful and responsive, but without the power, access, or personal stake to shape what happens inside the customer's organisation when the real decision is being made.

The instinct, once a team accepts they may not have a genuine Champion, is to go and find one. That instinct miss frames the problem. Champions are rarely waiting to be discovered. In most complex deals, you first need to identify their potential, and then you need to convert them. That is a different skill entirely, and one most sales teams have never been trained to develop.



— The Problem

Three Reasons Teams Get This Wrong

The Sequence Error

There is a pattern that runs through most enterprise sales. A seller meets a contact, senses interest, and within a few conversations begins positioning their solution to address their issues and share case studies, ROI framework and competitive differentiation. The contact engages. The relationship feels strong. The seller names them as Champion.

But the contact has not yet been given a reason to put their credibility on the line. They like the solution. They have not yet decided whether the problem it solves is worth fighting for internally. They have not yet connected your answer to their own stake in the outcome.

Without that foundation, you have an interested party, not a Champion. Interested parties do not show up to internal budget meetings armed with your business case. They wait to be called. Champions lead this proactively.

The sequence error is this: most sellers reach for “why us” before they have properly established “why this problem, why now.” A Champion cannot advocate for your solution if they are not first convinced the problem deserves to be on the agenda. That conviction has to come before the commercial conversation begins.

— The Problem

The Person of First Contact Problem

Most sellers develop their relationships where their relationships already are. In a new account, that is typically whoever responded to the initial outreach or was assigned to explore options. In an existing account, it is the contact they already know.

Neither of these is necessarily a Champion candidate. The person tasked with evaluating vendors is often a coach at best. They have access, they share information, and they are helpful. But they rarely have the standing or the personal stake to drive an internal decision. They are managing a process, not shaping an outcome.

In existing accounts the risk is subtler. A trusted relationship feels like coverage. It is not, unless that contact has power, access to the Economic Buyer, and a genuine reason to go to bat for you. Many long-standing account relationships are friendships in commercial clothing. Comfortable, but not commercially decisive.

The challenge in both cases is the same: the seller has optimised for the relationship that was easiest to build, not the relationship that will win the deal.



— The Problem

Multi-threading: When, How, and With Whom

The answer is not to abandon the contact you have. It is to use them as a starting point and build outward deliberately. Multi-threading, developing relationships with multiple stakeholders across the buying organisation, is one of the most important and most avoided disciplines in enterprise sales.

8%

The close rate on single-threaded deals. Engaging multiple stakeholders lifts win rates to 30% or higher. (Ebsta x Pavilion)

130%

Increase in win rates for deals over £50k where sellers actively multi-thread. (Ebsta x Pavilion)

Most sellers single-thread because it is more comfortable. One relationship to manage, one view of the deal, one person who returns their calls. The problem is that a single-threaded deal is one stakeholder departure, one shift in priorities, or one internal political move away from collapse.

Multi-threading needs to start earlier than most teams attempt it. By the time a formal evaluation is underway, key stakeholders have often already formed views, and the evaluation criteria are already being shaped. The seller who only broadens their network at late stage is playing catch-up in conversations they should have been part of weeks earlier.

The question is not whether to multi-thread but how to do it without undermining the relationships you have. The right approach is transparent. Work with your existing contact to identify who else has a stake in this problem. Frame it as helping them build internal support, not as going around them. A genuine Champion will welcome that framing. A friend or coach will be uncomfortable with it. That reaction tells you something important about what you actually have.

— The Problem

Enterprise Selling Is a Team Sport

Sellers rarely build Champions alone, and in complex accounts they should not try to. One of the most underused levers in enterprise sales is the broader team around the deal: leadership, subject matter experts, delivery leads, executive sponsors. Each of these can open doors, build credibility with different stakeholders, and accelerate the development of a genuine Champion where a solo seller cannot.

A leader who engages peer-to-peer with a potential Champion's leadership creates a different kind of relationship than anything an individual seller can build. A delivery expert who speaks directly to a technical stakeholders concerns removes an objection that might otherwise travel internally and quietly undermine the deal.

The discipline is deliberate deployment. Who on your team can most credibly engage with each stakeholder you need to reach? What is the purpose of each interaction? How does it contribute to building the Champion's internal confidence and standing?

When this is done well, the Champion is not just advocating for your solution. They are supported by a network of relationships that reinforce their credibility and reduce the internal risk of standing behind you.

— Part One: Identify

Not Every Contact Is a Candidate

The identification work is not about finding the most helpful contact. It is about finding the person most likely to become a genuine internal advocate. Four things to look for.

41%

Of B2B buyers already have a preferred vendor before formal evaluation begins. By the time a structured process starts, the game is often already in motion. (Forrester, State of Business Buying)

This is why identification has to happen early. Waiting until the formal evaluation process begins is waiting until decisions have already started to calcify. The Champion who shapes the problem definition, influences who sits on the evaluation committee, and pre-frames the decision criteria does so long before the RFP is issued.

Engagement Quality, Not Just Engagement Level

A potential Champion asks questions that go beyond the product. They want to understand how the problem is being solved, what has been tried before, what success looks like for their organisation. They are building a picture, not just evaluating a vendor.

A contact who attends every call, agrees with everything, and never challenges anything is not a potential Champion. They are being polite.

Influence Inside The Organisation

A Champion needs standing. That means colleagues take their view seriously, and they have a track record of getting things approved or moved forward. You are looking for someone who, when they speak in internal meetings, shapes the direction of the conversation.

This does not always mean seniority. Some of the most effective Champions are mid-level operators with deep credibility and strong informal networks. What matters is whether people listen to them.

— Part One: Identify

Access To The People Who Matter

The most valuable thing a Champion can do early in a deal is open doors you cannot open yourself. A potential Champion should be able to get you in front of the Economic Buyer and other key stakeholders. If they cannot, or will not, they cannot perform the function you need.

Access is a test as much as a criterion. Ask early. Watch what happens.

A Personal Stake In The Outcome

This is the most important criterion and the most commonly overlooked. A Champion will only put their credibility on the line if they stand to gain personally from this initiative succeeding. That gain might be professional, reputational, or strategic. Whatever the motivation, it must be real and it must be theirs.

If you cannot clearly articulate why your contact benefits personally from a yes, you do not know them well enough to call them a Champion.

"A Champion is not a title we give someone because they like us. It is a verb they perform. If they are not actively getting you access, sharing intelligence you could not get yourself, and amplifying your case in rooms you are not in, then you have a coach or a friend."

— Part Two: Convert

Build the Case for the Problem Before You Build the Case for You

Identification is not conversion. Finding someone with the right profile is the start of the work, not the end. The conversion process has a specific sequence, and most teams get that sequence wrong.

Start With the Problem, Not the Solution

The single most common mistake in Champion development is moving to solution positioning too early. A seller senses a receptive contact and immediately begins building the case for their product. The contact is engaged, the conversation feels productive, and the seller interprets that as advocacy in progress.

It is not. A contact who likes your solution has not yet decided whether the problem it solves deserves their internal capital. Those are two separate decisions, and the second one comes first.

Before a potential Champion can advocate for you, they need to be convinced of three things, in this order:

1.

This problem is real, it is costing the organisation something meaningful, and it is not going away on its own.

2.

Solving it is worth prioritising over everything else competing for attention and budget right now.

3.

This is the right answer, and this team is the right one to deliver it.

Most sellers spend their time on point three. Champions are built in points one and two.

— Part Two: Convert

Help Them Quantify the Cost of Inaction

One of the most practical things a seller can do for a potential Champion is help them build the internal case for the problem. What does it cost the organisation to leave this unsolved? Not in abstract terms, but in the specific language that resonates with the people who control budget.

This is not about giving your Champion a script. It is about working through the numbers and the narrative together, so that when they are in a room without you, they can make the case with confidence and in their own voice.

A potential Champion who cannot articulate the cost of inaction is not ready to advocate. Help them get there before you ask them to go anywhere near your solution.

Make the Personal Stake Explicit

At some point, the conversation needs to surface what is personally at stake for your contact. This does not mean asking them directly, though in strong relationships that directness is often appropriate. It means understanding what success looks like for them and making sure that picture is clearly connected to the outcome you are working toward together.

A potential Champion who can see their own win in this initiative does not need to be persuaded to advocate. They advocate because it serves them. That is the difference between a contact who supports you and one who fights for you.

— Part Three: Enable

Arming Them for the Rooms You Cannot Be In

Once a Champion is committed, the seller's job changes. The question is no longer how to persuade them. It is how to make them as effective as possible in the conversations you will never have visibility of.

Most teams underinvest here. They treat Champion enablement as information transfer: share a deck, send a case study, forward the proposal. That is not enablement. It is delegation.

80%

Of B2B deals fail not because of the external sales process, but because of internal consensus failure. Your Champion's ability to build that consensus is more decisive than anything you do externally. (Gartner, B2B Buying Behaviour Research)

#1

Internal complexity, not vendor performance, is the primary reason B2B deals stall. Enabling your Champion to navigate that complexity is the most important commercial task in the deal. (Forrester, State of Business Buying)

A Champion can only be as effective as what they are equipped to do. What they need to do is carry three distinct conversations, often with different audiences, without you present.

The Business Case Conversation

The first conversation is about the problem. Your Champion needs to be able to stand in front of colleagues, including those who are sceptical or indifferent, and make a compelling case for why this issue deserves to be on the agenda and why now.

This means more than talking points. It means working through the framing together: what does this cost the organisation, who does it affect, what has already been tried, and why the status quo is not sustainable. The business case your Champion carries internally needs to feel like theirs, not like something handed to them by a vendor.

— Part Three: Enable

The Stakeholder Alignment Conversation

Different stakeholders care about different things. Finance needs to see a return. Operations needs to understand the impact on their team. IT needs to be clear on integration and risk. Your Champion will face all of these, often in formats you cannot anticipate.

The most effective preparation is to map the key stakeholders together and help your Champion understand what each one needs to hear. Not with a generic message, but with a view that is relevant, specific, and credible to each person. Your Champion should be able to hold each of those conversations without coming back to you first.

The Differentiation Conversation

This is the last piece, not the first. Once the business case is established and internal alignment is building, your Champion needs to be able to explain not just why a solution is needed, but why your solution specifically.

That case needs to be simple to carry. Complex differentiators do not travel well inside organisations. Help your Champion distil it to its sharpest form: what makes you genuinely better, what that means in practice for this organisation, and what the risk of the alternatives looks like.

Social proof is critical here. A Champion who can point to a specific comparable organisation solving the same problem in the same way is in a fundamentally stronger position than one making the case from first principles. Make sure they have it, and make sure it is relevant enough to be credible to the people they are speaking to.

"Your Champion's ability to win internally is a direct function of what you have given them to work with."

— Implications for Revenue Leaders

Champion Development Is a Team Discipline

Champion development is a skill. Left to their own instincts, most sellers will gravitate toward product conversations because they are easier to prepare and more comfortable to have. The discipline of building a Champion, going deep on the problem before the solution, mapping personal stakes, enabling internal advocacy, requires a different kind of preparation and a different kind of patience.

The right question in a deal review is not just “who is our Champion?” It is “what has our team done in the last two weeks to make that Champion more effective?”

If the answer is nothing, the Champion is not being built. They are being assumed. And as *Do Your Teams Have a Champion, or Just a Friend?* established, assumed Champions are the single most common reason complex deals are lost.



— Closing Thought

The Central Commercial Work of the Deal

You do not find Champions. You build them, and you keep building them through every stage of the deal.

The sellers who do this well share a common discipline: they resist the pull of the product conversation until the problem conversation is complete. They invest time in understanding what their Champion needs to win internally, not just what they need to hear from a vendor. And they treat Champion enablement not as a support task but as the central commercial work of the deal.

Enterprise deals are not won in front of buying committees. They are won in the internal meetings that happen before the committee forms, in the conversations between stakeholders you will never be part of, and by the advocate who shows up to those conversations prepared, credible, and committed.

Your job is to make sure that person exists. Then to make sure they are as effective as possible.

Sources & Further Reading

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Ebsta x Pavilion — GTM Benchmarks R

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Gartner — Sales Survey: 74% of B2B Buyer Teams Demonstrate Unhealthy Conflict, May 2025

MEDDIC Academy — Champion Qualification Framework (Darius Lahoutifard)

HubSpot — 2024 Sales Trends Report

— Who We Are

Tekweni Revenue Performance

Tekweni is a B2B revenue performance consultancy. We work with CROs and CEOs in businesses where the sales cycle is complex, the deals are large, and the cost of getting it wrong is high.

We don't try to improve everything at once. Our approach is to identify the vital few commercial priorities that will actually move the needle, and build the discipline to execute them consistently.

Our work spans pipeline quality, deal execution, GTM strategy, and the leadership habits that separate high-performing revenue organisations from those that rely on heroics.

Ready to find your vital few?

We work with revenue leaders across B2B to identify the two or three things that will actually move the needle. Book a complimentary revenue conversation and let's take a look.



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