

# 12

## Tips for Selling to the C-Suite



CHORUS

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# The New Normal: C-Level Decision-Makers in Your Sales Meeting

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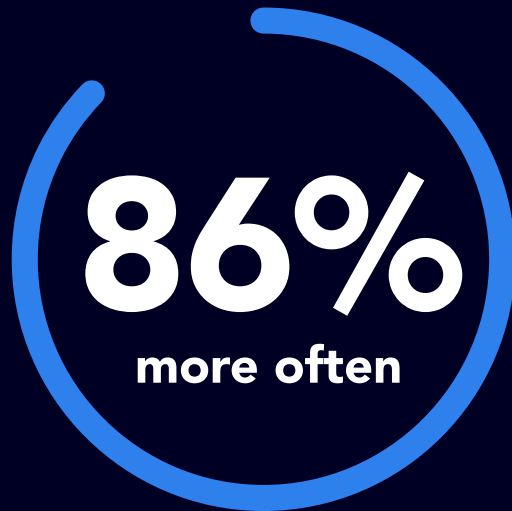
We all know the residents of the C-suite hold the real power in their organizations. They're the key decision-makers when it comes to making major investments in their businesses. That's why every salesperson's goal is to make their pitch directly to a senior executive — ideally, sooner than later.

Yet, historically, getting the CEO, CFO, or even the Chief Technology Officer (CTO) to engage early in the sales process (or at all) has been a long shot. Most CXOs let their internal staff do the homework and vetting, and only step in toward the end of the deal-making to verify a recommendation.

But the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted that status quo and made the path to connecting with a C-level



## On Average, CXOs are participating in buying decisions



**than before  
the pandemic.**



Source: Chorus.ai

decision-maker much shorter for sales pros. The proof? Chorus.ai's analysis of more than 500,000 recent sales meetings conducted by more than 100 of our clients in 10 major industries.

Since April, when the COVID-19 crisis really began to take hold, and many companies were shutting down offices to comply with local lockdown regulations, participation by C-suite executives in the buying process shot up dramatically. In fact, on average, CXOs have participated in buying decisions 86% more since April, compared to their participation in January and February of 2020.

The question for sales pros is this: Are you ready for the challenge, and opportunity, of selling to the C-suite? The following 12 tips can help ensure that you and your team are.



## Tip #1: Do Your Homework. And Then, Do Some More.

So, the first tip may seem obvious, even mundane, but it can't be emphasized enough how much you need to prepare for a sales meeting to ensure you're ready to engage with a CXO.

Sales professionals like to think they've done their homework in discovery calls before embarking on early sales meetings. You identify a champion within the organization and talk to them about their needs. But when gearing up to talk to members of the C-suite, you

must take your sales prep to the next level to ensure you can have a constructive discussion about their needs.

Find out what's important to the C-level executives at the company you're targeting and design your pitch to make clear why your product or service is an essential solution for the company right now. If you can talk, specifically, about how your offering solves a critical business problem and delivers bottom-line benefits, you'll have a much better chance of getting a C-level exec to greenlight the deal.



*When gearing up to talk to members of the C-suite, you must take your sales prep to the next level.*



## Tip #2: Be Ready to Underscore ROI From Day One

Speaking of the bottom-line, your preparation for selling to the C-suite should include lining up all your data points about the economic impact of the buying decision and the expected ROI. CXOs will want to hear about these details as soon as possible — like, in your first sales meeting.

Chorus.ai's analysis of sales meeting data shows that in the second quarter of 2020 — when the COVID-19 crisis in the U.S. had greatly intensified — 71% of participation in sales meetings by C-level executives was economic in nature, not technical. It's a sure bet this is still the case now, as the pandemic persists.

So, forget the conventional wisdom about using early meetings and calls to have technical discussions that will appeal to CTOs, chief information officers (CIOs) or chief information security officers (CISOs). Whether or not your product or service fits the company's tech stack or has all the desired bells and whistles, is secondary to the economic benefits it can provide. With economic decision-making taking place much earlier in the sales process, it's all about ROI.

For CFOs especially, there's perhaps no better bell and whistle you can offer right now than the ability to quickly deliver significant ROI. (What is significant? Think 5-10x, at least).



**71%** of participation in sales meetings by C-level executives is economic in nature, not technical.



# Tip #3: Deal Size: It Matters

Having a CFO participate in a sales meeting can be nerve-wracking, even for a seasoned sales pro. Now, how about getting the ultimate business decision-maker — the CEO — on the line?

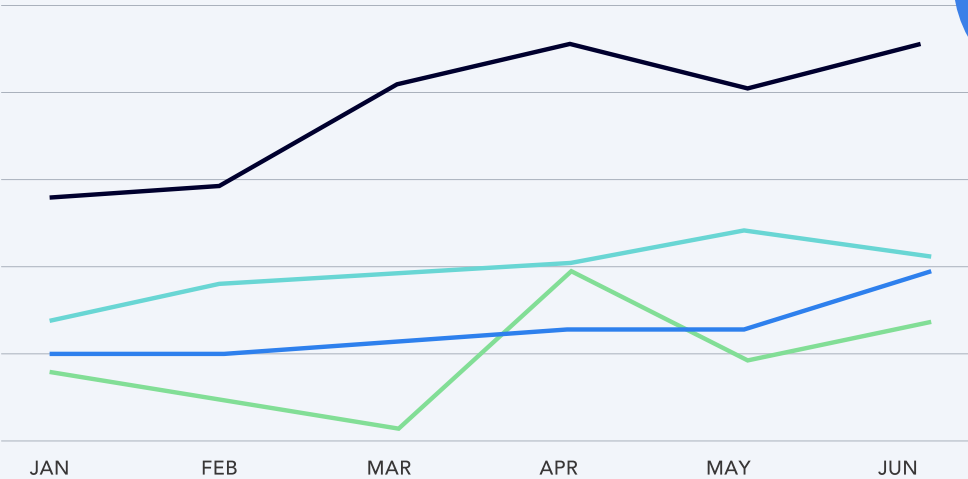
It happens, and the chance is higher when you're pitching a small or midsize business (SMB). That was true before the pandemic as well, but the likelihood of the CEO's presence in a sales meeting has increased in recent months, according to our analysis of sales calls. And CEOs at SMBs are three times more likely to

join a buying decision meeting than the CEO at a mid-market or enterprise business.

This trend tells us that, especially in down-market businesses, buying decisions must be made much quicker in the sales process. CEOs are being brought into the process far earlier and more often. So, sales pros, especially those who are selling to SMBs, need to be ready from the outset to communicate the value of their product or service clearly and concisely to the CEO.

CEO Participation By Segment

— SMB  
— SMB+  
— MM  
— ENT



3X

higher chance  
of joining  
SMB calls



## Tip #4: Embrace C-suite Involvement: It Improves Win Rates



If the thought of selling to the C-suite still rattles you, consider this: Chorus.ai's recent analysis of 500,000+ sales meetings shows that win rates increase by nearly 40% when members of the C-Suite are directly involved in the buying process.

Our analysis also suggests this is a trend we'll probably see continue in the post-COVID business environment. So, don't shy away from early involvement by a CXO, embrace it. And know that if you can demonstrate a solid business case and realistic ROI early in the sales process, then your deal will be more likely to close.



Win rates can improve by more than

# 38%

when CXOs are directly involved in the buying process





## Tip #5: Maximize CXO Impact with a Clear Meeting Agenda

C-suite executives are busy people and thanks to COVID-19, they have even more on their minds than usual. So, if you want to have their attention during your sales meeting, and not just their presence, then you need to set a clear agenda and send it along with your call invite.

Also, to be frank, if you don't take this simple step, you increase the risk of having the C-level executive opt to not attend your meeting. Why would they join a call if they don't know what it's about? And you definitely don't want to make them dig around in email threads to find out.

A clear agenda for the meeting not only helps set expectations, but also gives C-level executives the

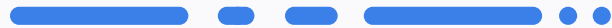
opportunity to review and provide input on that agenda before you meet. That gives you a critical advantage: When you know in advance what's top of mind for the decision-maker, the better you can prepare to address those needs in the short time window you have for your sales meeting. (It also helps to reduce guesswork in your preparation process.)

Here's an additional incentive to make sending an agenda a consistently applied best practice: including an agenda with an invitation to a meeting that a C-suite decision-maker is expected to attend contributes to a small but measurable improvement to stage conversion: a 3% lift.





## Tip #6: Anticipate the Surprise Appearance of a CXO.



Funny thing about C-level executives: They can show up when you least expect it.

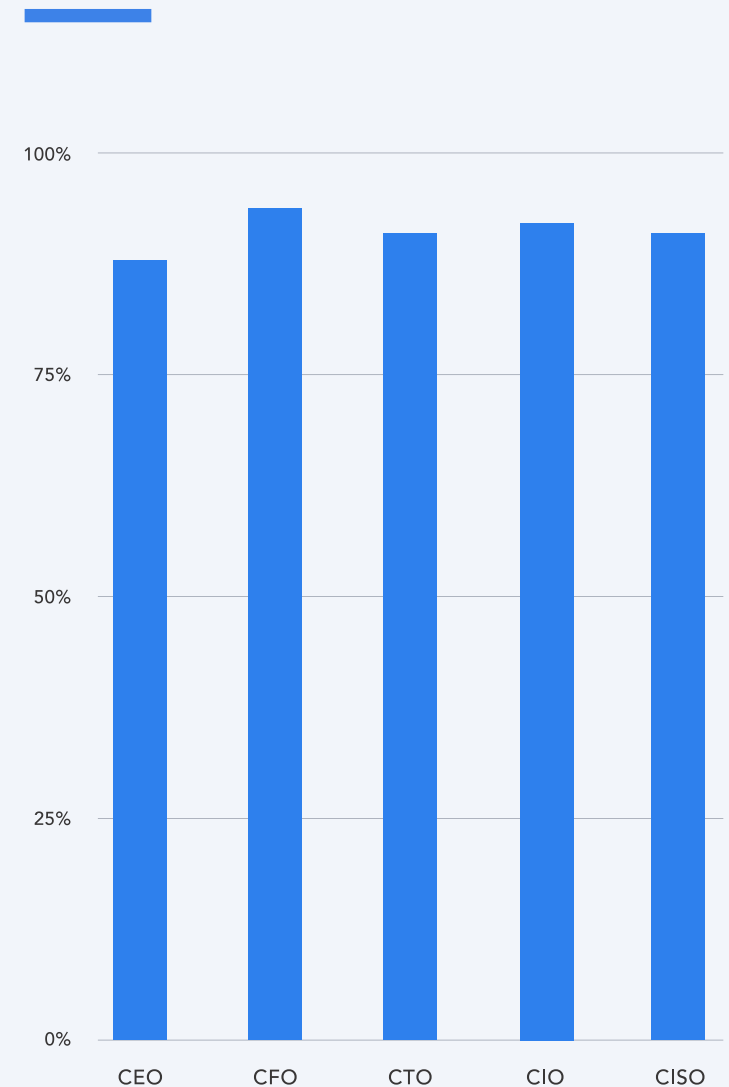
Chorus.ai's recent analysis of sales meeting data shows that a CXO will turn up to a sales meeting they haven't been invited to about 10% of the time. Surprise!

For sales pros, the challenge in this scenario is to come across like you had always anticipated the CXO's participation in your meeting. To make sure you aren't caught off guard, discuss the objectives of executive-level stakeholders with your champion early in the relationship so that you will always be prepared for the C-suite discussion, whenever it takes place. (And, of course, apply Tips #1-5, too.)

10%

CXOs attend while not on the invite

### CXOs Who Attend Identified on the Invite



Source: Chorus.ai



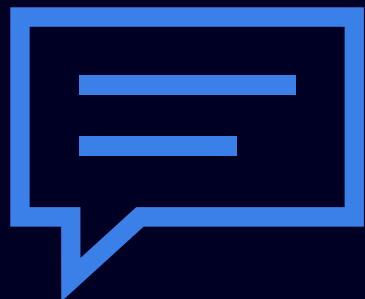
## Tip #7: Get C-Suite Executives Talking...

Chorus.ai's research shows that in closed won deals, CXOs talk 8.5% more. This makes sense. If C-level decision-makers are talking more, that means they are likely more engaged and responsive to the pitch.

So, your objective in a sales meeting where a member of the C-suite is present is to get that executive talking so you can progress the deal to the next stage. How? With open-ended, engaging questions that keep them talking, like, "What worked best with your previous solutions?"

or "If the problem you're facing was solved immediately, what would be the impact on your business?"

Try to work in at least five open-ended questions that will keep the C-level decision-maker talking for at least 30 seconds at a time. Through this approach, you'll learn valuable information about the CXO's objectives and decision criteria, and that will help you tailor the rest of the sales conversation.



**In closed  
won deals,  
CXOs talk**

**8.5% MORE**



Source: Chorus.ai



## Tip #8: ... But Don't Fail to Engage the Rest of Your Audience.

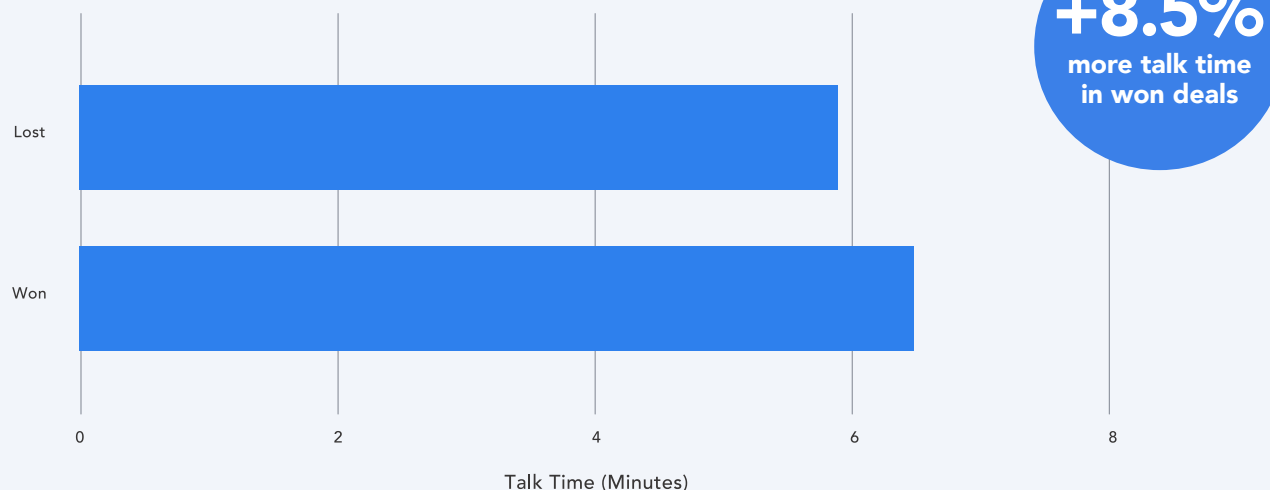
While you want CXOs to talk more in your sales meeting, Chorus.ai's research shows that the average talk time for these executives is less than 6 minutes during a 30-minute call. That's only about 20% of your total meeting time.

Sales pros should use only about 40-60% of the talk time on sales calls — or about 18 minutes. How should

you use the remaining 20% or so of meeting time? By allowing others on the buying side to talk.

In that six-minute time window (or possibly longer), actively engage with other stakeholders in the buying decision. You can enlist their help in getting the CXO to see the value of what you are selling —and critically, they can do that from their organization's point of view.

### CXO Talk Time (Minutes)





## Tip #9: Use Presentation Materials and Time with the CXO Wisely

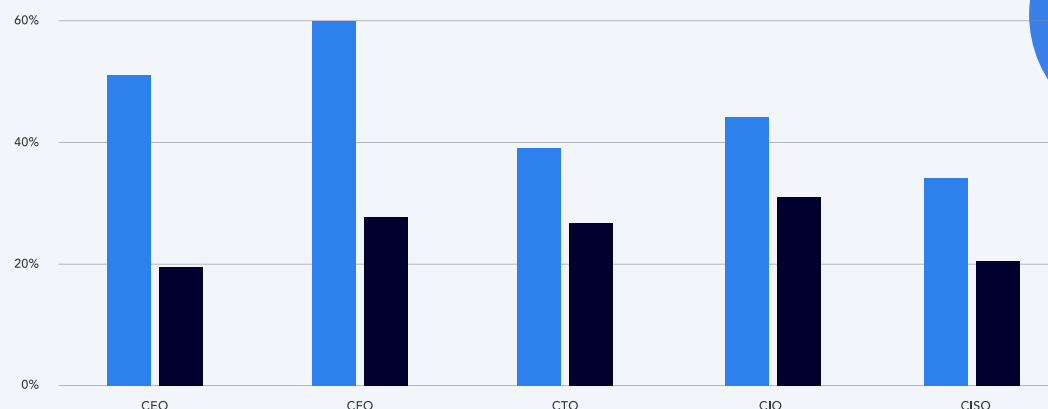
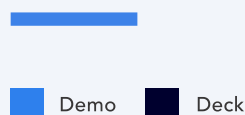
CXOs, depending on their role, have different objectives when viewing decks and demos, according to Chorus.ai's research. So, be sure to tailor the presentation to the personas in the room. Note that:

- CEOs and CFOs are primarily interested in how their teams will save money, be more productive and drive more revenue.
- CTOs, CIOs and CISOs are more focused on reliability, adaptability, security and compliance.

Our analysis of sales meetings also shows that CEOs and CFOs — the economic decision-makers — spend 42% more time than their technical counterparts in the C-suite participating in actual demos rather than viewing presentation decks. CFOs are also the CXOs most interested in viewing demos during sales meetings, compared to CEOs, CTOs, CIOs and CISOs.

Also, while CXOs devote about six minutes or less to reviewing the material in decks during a live sales

### % of Meetings with Demos & Decks Shown



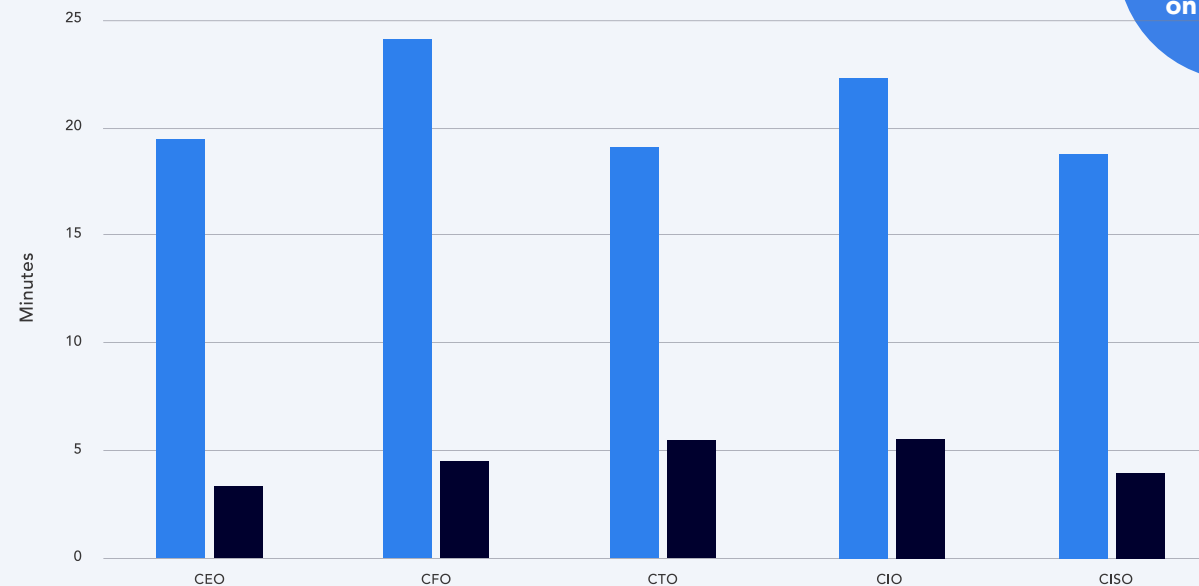
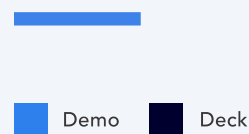
**+42%**  
economic DMs  
more likely to  
see a demo  
than deck

call, they will spend up to 24 minutes viewing a demo. That's 4.5X more time.

So, know your audience — and use their preferences to your advantage. Consider sending your deck in advance and assume they've reviewed it before the

call. And don't be afraid to go off script to respond to what the CXO wants to discuss or see. Know that in many cases, given the data from Chorus.ai's sales meeting analysis, the CXO will likely request to see your product in action.

## Time Spent on Demos & Decks with CXOs



**4.5X**  
minutes spent  
on demo vs.  
deck



## Tip #10: Give CXOs the Gift of Time

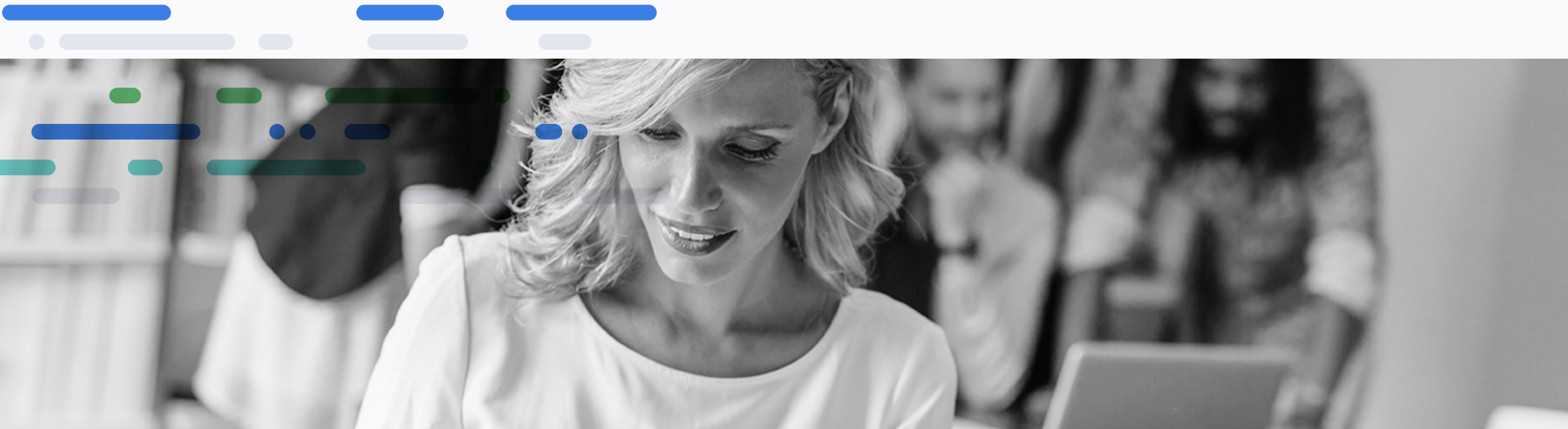
Here's another time tip: Just because you've booked an hour for a sales meeting where a CXO is in attendance, it doesn't mean you have to use the whole hour.

C-suite executives get pulled into many business-critical meetings during the course of the day, and that trend has only amplified during the COVID-19 crisis. Unable to travel to meetings, CXOs can fill more meetings into the 12-hour "global day" that most of them keep.

So, make an effort to give C-level decision-makers some time back at the end of the call. They will

appreciate this, as it gives them a short time window before their next meeting to grab a cup of coffee, check email, or check in with a loved one.

It also gives all the participants on the buying side a chance to discuss the output of the meeting in real time. When that happens, they will be more likely to remember the key points of your presentation, leave the meeting with positive feelings, and perhaps, move toward a decision



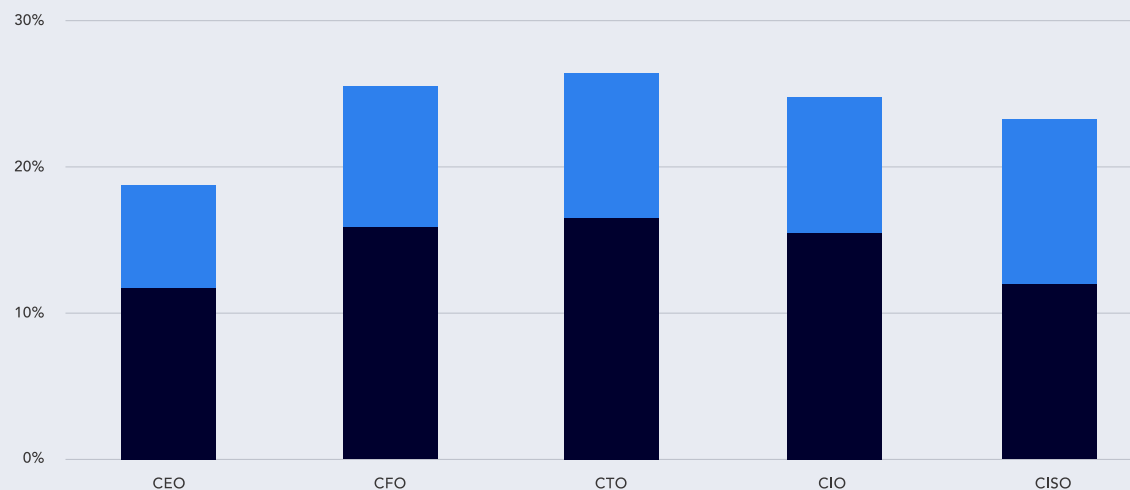


## Tip #11: Never Assume the Meaning of a CXO's Presence in a Sales Meeting

Chorus.ai's research finds that members of the C-suite, especially CTOs, CIOs and CISOs, attend two or more meetings in a single sales cycle about 24% of the time. However, don't assume that means they are taking the lead on the decision-making for a purchase. They may simply want to be in the loop.

To gauge what the CXO's role actually is in the buying decision, ask them how informed and involved in the entire process they would like to be. The benefits of getting an answer to this direct question include making the most of the CXO's time when they are on the call and ensuring that you tailor most of your communication about the value of your product or service to the core decision-makers in the room.

### CXO Participation in Multiple Meetings



**24%**  
of the time  
CXOs join 2+  
meetings





## Tip #12: Don't Neglect Your Champion

While it can be exciting to have a CXO engaged in the sales process, it can also be distracting. So much so, in fact, that you risk neglecting your champion — the person who has a lot to do with getting you in front of a C-level decision-maker in the first place.

Your champion will likely be a central figure throughout the entire sales process. It's a smart move from the outset to give them guidance on why C-suite involvement can be a good thing for you — and them.

Also, it's never a bad idea to make your champion a hero in the eyes of the C-suite. Keep them in the loop

on all communications you have with the CXO and sing their praises whenever possible.

In the selling environment of the new normal, be assured that you and your team will interact with CXOs more often than ever before. You need to understand their role in the buying process. You must make the most of their time. You need to be prepared to engage with them at any time (including when you least expect it). And you need to be ready to present the information that matters to them most. These 12 tips can help you do all of the above and set you on the path to winning over CXOs in sales meetings — and winning more deals.



# CHORUS

Chorus is a Conversation Intelligence Platform that records, transcribes, and analyzes business conversations in real-time to coach reps on how to become top performers. With Chorus more reps meet quota, you ramp new hires faster, coach the existing team effectively, and everyone in the organization can collaborate over the actual voice of the customer.

Chorus is funded by Georgian Partners, Emergence Capital and Redpoint Ventures and is headquartered in San Francisco, US.

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