



SIGNAL-LED GTM™

A CEO and Board Guide to Fixing a Broken Growth System

FINAL • Version 1.0 • September 2026

LUCRUM PARTNERS

A Note Before You Begin

This isn't a sales methodology. It isn't a training program. It isn't a pitch for another platform.

Most firms in this category sell you their opinion. We publish our predictions and grade ourselves against the evidence, every year, in public, before we ask you to trust anything else we say. You'll see that track record in the final section of this book.

This book exists because a pattern kept repeating in boardrooms we work with. Revenue disappoints. A leader is replaced. Twelve months later, the pattern repeats, with a different name on the door and the same operating system underneath. We wrote this for the CEOs and boards who've noticed that pattern and want a way to think about it that goes deeper than the next hire.

Brian Shea

Executive Summary

The problem. CEO confidence has fallen sharply, commercial leaders are being replaced faster than at any point in recent memory, and it isn't fixing anything. Boards keep authorizing the same search for a different name, and the results keep repeating.

- The Conference Board's CEO Confidence Index fell from 59 to 47 in Q2 2026, below the neutral threshold. Korn Ferry found 83% of directors confident in a new CEO's ability to lead, but only 10% believe that trust has actually been earned yet.
- Average CRO tenure is approximately 25 months; 70% of departing CROs are asked to leave; 62% of companies see revenue decline or flatten in the year after a CRO change (SBI Growth / Harvard Business Review).
- Global organizations have spent well over a trillion dollars on training over three years, this book's own calculation from Training Industry, Inc.'s published annual figures, yet 72% of sellers report being overwhelmed by the skills their roles require, not undertrained (Gartner).
- Approximately 90% of B2B buyers ultimately purchase from a vendor already on their Day 1 List, decided before a deal ever reaches the CRM (Bain).

The diagnosis. Replacing the leader doesn't fix this; the leader isn't the root cause. Most commercial organizations are still built to react to demand after it appears as pipeline, by which point the buyer's preference is often already set. Training harder and buying more AI just makes that late-arriving system faster, not earlier.

The framework. This book calls the alternative Signal-Led GTM™: detecting and acting on the conditions that precede demand rather than reacting to demand after it appears. Pipeline is where deals show up; signals are where they begin. Part Three builds this out fully, including the Signal Blindness Index™, a diagnostic for where an organization's visibility is breaking down, and the five-discipline Operating System (Detect, Interpret, Prioritize, Activate, Learn) that turns that visibility into governed action.

The evidence. Independent research from SBI Growth and Polaris I/O, tracking 58,825 signals across 46 enterprise accounts, found signal-driven teams generated 4x more qualified opportunities, converted at 71% versus 20%, closed deals 7.4x larger, and moved 128 days faster than traditional account management (Chapter 11).

What to do next. Chapter 12 gives boards five questions to ask before authorizing another search, testing whether the organization can see its own signals before testing the leader. Chapter 13 lays out what a CEO directs over two quarters, with one board-level metric at the 90-day mark: revenue the team found versus revenue that simply came to them.

The track record. Since 2024, we've published predictions in public and graded ourselves against the evidence a year later. Fourteen of fifteen predictions have been fully or partially confirmed; one was missed, shown in full in Chapter 14.

Framework Glossary

Four terms recur throughout this book. Read them once here; we won't re-explain them each time they appear.

Signal-Led GTM™: The overarching commercial philosophy: detecting and acting on the conditions that precede demand, rather than reacting to demand after it appears as pipeline.

Commercial signal: An observable change that increases or decreases the probability of a consequential business decision (a leadership change, a funding event, a regulatory shift, a shift in buying-group behavior, and so on).

Signal Blindness Index™: Lucrum's diagnostic for measuring how effectively an organization detects, interprets, prioritizes, and acts on the signals shaping its future revenue.

Signal-Led GTM™ Operating System: The management architecture, Detect, Interpret, Prioritize, Activate, Learn, that converts fragmented commercial intelligence into coordinated revenue action.

Traditional GTM frameworks optimize activity after demand appears. Signal-Led GTM™ governs the signals that shape demand before the pipeline forms.

Contents

A Note Before You Begin	2
Executive Summary.....	3
Framework Glossary	5
Part One: The Chaos	7
Chapter 1: Strong Revenue Is Not Proof of a Strong System	7
Chapter 2: The Confidence Collapse	8
Chapter 3: The Revolving Door: CRO and CMO Turnover	8
Chapter 4: The Spending Paradox.....	10
Part Two: The Misdiagnosis	12
Chapter 5: Why More Training Doesn't Fix It.....	12
Chapter 6: The Decision Is Already Made	12
Chapter 7: AI Is Making the Old System Faster, Not Better	13
Part Three: Signal-Led GTM™	15
Chapter 8: Pipeline Is Where Deals Show Up. Signals Are Where They Begin.....	15
Chapter 9: The Signal Blindness Index™: Where Is Your Organization Flying Blind?	16
Chapter 10: The Operating System: Detect, Interpret, Prioritize, Activate, Learn	17
Chapter 11: The Evidence: What Signal-Driven Teams Actually Achieve	18
Part Four: The Prescriptive Path.....	20
Chapter 12: What Boards Should Ask Instead	20
Chapter 13: The First Two Quarters of Becoming Signal-Led	21
Part Five: Proof of Judgment.....	23
Chapter 14: We Said This Before We Had a Name For It	23
Closing: The Question That Matters	27
Sources & Verification Notes	29

PART ONE: THE CHAOS

Chapter 1: Strong Revenue Is Not Proof of a Strong System

Many executive teams will finish this year believing their revenue strategy is working. Some of them will be wrong.

Strong revenue can mask an operating model that is already falling behind changing buyer behavior. Revenue is ahead of plan. Pipeline coverage looks healthy. The forecast is holding. On paper, everything looks fine.

But revenue is a lagging indicator. Today's revenue reflects buying decisions that began months, or years, ago. It says almost nothing about whether your organization is positioned to compete for the decisions forming right now.

History offers an uncomfortable reminder of what happens when leadership teams mistake current performance for durability:

- Kodak remained profitable after digital photography arrived.
- Blockbuster generated billions after streaming emerged.
- BlackBerry continued shipping devices after smartphones changed buyer expectations.

Strong financial performance often masks strategic erosion, until it doesn't. Commercial organizations are no different. The pattern isn't a market correction. It's a capability correction, and it rarely announces itself before it's already underway.

There is a single question that cuts through most boardroom conversations about growth, and most executive teams aren't asking it:

If we rebuilt our commercial organization today, knowing what we now know about how buyers actually buy, would we build the same one?

If the honest answer is no, then current revenue isn't predictable. It's temporary. It's being carried by momentum the organization didn't design and can't reliably repeat.

This book is written for the leadership teams and boards asking that question: the ones who see the chaos in their commercial results (the CEO who's lost confidence, the executive search that's happening again, the pipeline that "looks fine" but never quite delivers) and want a way to diagnose it that goes deeper than replacing the next person in the chair.

Chapter 2: The Confidence Collapse

Something measurable is happening at the top of the house, and it isn't isolated to any one company or sector.

CEO confidence has deteriorated sharply. The Conference Board's Q2 2026 CEO Confidence Survey found confidence fell from 59 to 47, moving below the neutral threshold of 50. CEOs reported worsening economic conditions, weaker six-month expectations, and growing concern about cyber risk, geopolitical uncertainty, and AI readiness.

When confidence declines, executives naturally shift focus from growth aspiration to execution predictability. Boards start asking harder questions. And the data suggests boards are, in fact, asking harder questions, just aimed at the wrong subject.

Leadership transitions are accelerating faster than organizations can absorb them. Korn Ferry's 2026 CEO & Board Survey found a striking gap: 83% of directors expressed confidence in a first-time CEO's ability to lead, but only 10% believed that CEO had *already* earned the board's trust. Confidence in potential and confidence in proof are two very different things, and boards know it.

Russell Reynolds' tracking data adds a second layer: 41% of new CEOs appointed to S&P 500 companies in Q1 2026 had prior public-company CEO experience, the highest share in the firm's nine years of tracking. Boards aren't simply replacing leaders. They're actively hedging against inexperience, appointing people who've already proven they can execute somewhere else, because they no longer trust that unproven leadership will find its footing in time.

Russell Reynolds' 2026 Leadership Confidence Index makes the underlying diagnosis explicit: CEOs are losing confidence in the future readiness of their executive teams. And the firm concludes the gap is **not a lack of strategic vision. It's a gap in execution confidence.**

That distinction matters more than it might first appear. For years, the assumption inside most commercial organizations was that strategy was the hard part and execution would follow if you hired well enough. The research says the opposite is increasingly true: the strategy is rarely the problem. The system built to execute it is.

Chapter 3: The Revolving Door: CRO and CMO Turnover

Nowhere is the execution-confidence gap more visible than in how long commercial leaders actually last.

The pattern has become so common that few boards question it anymore. Revenue misses expectations. Forecast confidence deteriorates. Pipeline slows. Sales cycles lengthen. The board loses confidence. The Chief Revenue Officer leaves. The search begins again.

Sometimes the title changes: Chief Revenue Officer, Chief Growth Officer, EVP of Sales, Global Head of Revenue. The expectation almost never does: *find a better leader*.

The research on what that cycle actually costs is sobering. SBI Growth's research, published through Harvard Business Review, found:

- Average CRO tenure is approximately **25 months**, not even two full sales cycles for many organizations.
- CRO turnover increased by **more than 50%** from 2022 to 2023.
- Of the CROs who left, **70% were asked to leave**.
- Only **41% of surveyed CEOs** expressed confidence that their CRO could drive commercial success.
- **62% of companies** see revenue growth decline or go flat in the fiscal year following a CRO change, with the median company dropping from roughly 15.5% growth the year before the change to 11.7% the year after.

Read that last statistic again. The typical response to underperformance, replacing the leader, is *statistically more likely to coincide with a further slowdown than a recovery*. That doesn't mean every CRO change is a mistake. It means the leadership change alone is not, on average, the fix boards are hoping for.

CMO tenure tells a related but distinct story. Spencer Stuart's 2026 analysis found average tenure among named S&P 500 CMOs at **4.1 years**, compared to roughly **five years** across the broader C-suite. (A widely cited 4.3-year figure from the prior year's report covered a different population, Fortune 500 CMOs, so it isn't a clean like-for-like trend line; the consistent finding across both samples is that CMO tenure runs shorter than the C-suite average, not the exact year-over-year change.) CMO turnover remains among the shortest of any executive function.

That statistic deserves an honest caveat this book won't skip: not every CMO departure is a failure. Spencer Stuart's research found that nearly two-thirds of CMO exits from 2021 through 2025 led to comparable or larger roles: CEO, president, COO, divisional CEO. Many CMOs are leaving *up*, not out. But the instability itself is still real, and it still reflects boards and CEOs continuing to reconsider what the marketing function is accountable for and whether it's delivering.

Put the two patterns together, and a harder question emerges, one this book will return to repeatedly:

Boards are replacing commercial leaders faster than they are replacing commercial operating systems.

Before the next search begins, that sequence is worth interrupting. The better question isn't *"Do we have the right CRO?"* It's *"Do we have the right commercial operating system, and would a different leader actually succeed inside it?"*

A Direct Word to the CRO or CMO Reading This

If you're the one currently running commercial, and a colleague forwarded you this chapter, hear the rest of the argument before you decide how to feel about it.

The statistics above are not a verdict on you personally. They describe a pattern that has trapped capable leaders inside broken systems for years: arriving to inherit invisible signals, fragmented account intelligence, and a pipeline review that only looks backward, then absorbing the blame for outcomes that system was never built to produce.

But don't read the finding that replacing the leader rarely helps as a reprieve. It isn't one. If the operating system underneath you doesn't change, your tenure looks statistically identical whether the board replaces you or not: the same eroding confidence, the same short clock, the same search beginning again with a different name on the door. A system that never changes and a system that changes without you succeeding in it end the same way for the person in your seat.

The version of this book worth acting on is the one where you're the leader who changes the system before someone else is hired to try. Part Three describes what that system looks like. Part Four describes how to build it in two quarters. Neither chapter cares whether the person driving it has "Chief" in a Revenue or Marketing title. What matters is whether someone finally does.

Chapter 4: The Spending Paradox

If underinvestment were the problem, this would be a simpler book to write. It isn't.

Training Industry, Inc. puts global corporate training and development spending at **\$391.1 billion in 2023** and **\$394.5 billion in 2025**, with a 2026 estimate of \$398.8 billion. Sustained at roughly that pace, three years of spending totals more than **\$1.17 trillion**, a figure this book calculates from Training Industry's published annual data rather than a cumulative total the firm reports itself.

And yet Gartner's 2024 Seller Skills Survey, of 1,026 B2B sellers, found:

- **72%** were overwhelmed by the number of skills required for their roles.
- **70%** were overwhelmed by the number of technologies required to do their jobs.

- **94% of chief sales officers** believe their organizations must update the seller talent profile just to hit their existing revenue goals.

The contradiction is hard to look away from. Companies are not failing to invest in their people. They are failing to translate that investment into a clear, modern definition of what "ready" actually means. More training content poured into an undefined target doesn't sharpen the target. It just adds more content.

The same paradox shows up again when you reframe seller cost not as a training line item but as a capital-allocation question. Compensation benchmarks put a typical enterprise salesperson's on-target earnings at roughly \$275,000 a year. Add the surrounding technology, data, and enablement tools built around each seller, and the fully loaded cost runs closer to **\$287,700 per seller, per year**. For a 100-seller organization, that's **\$28.8 million in annual commercial capital deployment**.

No board would approve a \$28.8 million capital investment without asking what it's actually buying. Yet that is functionally what happens every year a sales organization's budget is approved on the assumption that more headcount, more training, and more technology will eventually convert into more revenue.

The uncomfortable version of the question, stated plainly: **Is that capital reaching buyers early enough to matter, or is it arriving after the decision has already begun to form?**

That question is where Part Two of this book begins.

PART TWO: THE MISDIAGNOSIS

Chapter 5: Why More Training Doesn't Fix It

The instinct, when a commercial organization underperforms, is almost always the same: train harder. Better discovery. Better prospecting. Better qualification. Better negotiation. Better account planning. Better coaching.

None of that instinct is wrong, exactly. It's incomplete.

Gartner's research draws a precise distinction here. Sellers are not *confused about which skills to prioritize*. They are **overwhelmed by the sheer volume of skills and technologies** their roles now require: 72% overwhelmed by required skills, 70% by required technology, according to Gartner's 2024 Seller Skills Survey. Confusion implies a seller who can't tell good advice from bad. Overwhelm describes a seller drowning in *correct* advice, delivered faster than any single person could absorb and apply it.

Ninety-four percent of chief sales officers already know this. Gartner found that share believe their organizations must update the seller talent profile itself just to hit existing revenue goals, not add another course to the existing one.

This reframes the entire training conversation. The problem was never a shortage of good content. Global organizations have spent well over a trillion dollars on training and development over the past three years (Chapter 4). The problem is that most of that investment was designed to make sellers better at *executing inside a system built for a buying process that no longer exists*. Sharpening execution inside the wrong system doesn't fix the system. It just makes the organization faster at running the wrong play.

That is not a seller-performance problem. It is an operating-system problem, and no amount of additional coaching, certification, or AI-assisted role-play changes the diagnosis.

Chapter 6: The Decision Is Already Made

Here is the finding that should unsettle most growth-planning conversations more than any other in this book.

Bain's research, most recently reaffirmed in its June 2026 analysis *Raising the Odds on a Deal*, found that **approximately 90% of B2B buyers ultimately purchase from a vendor on their Day 1 List**: the vendors they were already considering before the formal buying process began. Gartner's independent research

points to the same conclusion from a different angle: only **2% of B2B buyers begin a purchase with no vendor already in mind.**

By the time an opportunity appears in the CRM, the buyer has typically already defined the problem, established decision criteria, aligned internal stakeholders, and formed an initial preference. The vendor who arrives after that point isn't losing the deal to a superior competitor. They're often losing to a decision that was substantially made before they knew the opportunity existed.

6sense's global buyer research quantifies just how decisive early positioning is: **95% of winning vendors were already on the buyer's Day One shortlist**, and the vendor contacted *first* by the buyer wins roughly **80% of the time.**

This is the honest root of "no-decision" and stalled-deal problems that most sales organizations treat as an execution failure. A rep who is coached harder on closing technique cannot close a deal they were never structurally positioned to win. The deal wasn't lost late. It was never available.

It's also worth naming a confidence gap that sits uncomfortably close to home for many sales organizations: Corporate Visions research found that **83% of sales leaders lack confidence in their sellers' ability to engage modern buyers.** That's not a marginal doubt. That's a majority of sales leadership privately unsure whether their own team can do the thing the team exists to do, and it tracks precisely with the Day 1 List findings above. If most of the influence has already been allocated before the seller engages, no amount of in-the-room skill fully compensates for a late arrival.

The implication for CEOs and boards isn't "hire better closers." It's that the commercial system's point of intervention is misplaced. Competitive advantage is being decided upstream of where most GTM investment is aimed.

Chapter 7: AI Is Making the Old System Faster, Not Better

AI is the one place where commercial organizations are, in fact, moving quickly, and it is tempting to read that as the fix for everything in the preceding two chapters. The evidence says otherwise.

Gartner reported in 2026 that AI was already saving sellers an average of **4.8 hours per week.** That's real, measurable time returned to the organization. The more important finding is what happens to it: Gartner also found that **72% of sales organizations reported low reinvestment** of those hours into higher-value selling activity.

That statistic should concern every CEO evaluating an AI-heavy 2027 plan more than the productivity number itself. The relevant question isn't "*Is AI making our sellers more efficient?*" It's "**What economically valuable behavior is replacing the work AI eliminated?**" If five reclaimed hours produce more automated outreach at the same point in the process, the organization has increased activity. If

those five hours are spent interpreting signals, developing business hypotheses about a buyer's situation, or engaging a buying organization earlier, the organization has increased commercial leverage. Those are very different returns on the identical technology investment.

Efficiency is not strategy. Making an outdated commercial motion faster does not make it modern. It just means the organization arrives at the wrong moment more quickly than it used to.

Technology amplifies operating models. It rarely replaces them. An AI layer bolted onto a system that still activates *after* the Day 1 List has already formed is optimizing the losing side of the timeline in Chapter 6: faster proposals, faster follow-up, faster everything, arriving at a decision that was substantially made before the first email was sent.

This is the point at which "add more AI" and "add more training" converge on the same structural flaw: both improve execution inside a system that intervenes too late to matter as much as it should. The next section of this book describes the alternative.

PART THREE: SIGNAL-LED GTM™

Chapter 8: Pipeline Is Where Deals Show Up. Signals Are Where They Begin.

Every commercial operating system is built around an assumption. For nearly thirty years, the assumption was straightforward: sales organizations create buying opportunities, marketing generates leads, sales qualifies them, pipeline becomes forecast, forecast becomes revenue.

That logic made sense when buyers depended on sellers for information. Today's buyers don't. They research independently, consult peers, evaluate vendors, involve AI, align internally, and establish requirements, often well before most commercial organizations know a buying journey has started. Chapters 5 through 7 documented what happens when a well-resourced, well-trained, increasingly AI-enabled organization keeps running that assumption anyway: it gets faster at arriving late.

Signal-Led GTM™ is a different philosophy. Rather than asking "*How do we improve our pipeline?*" it asks a prior question: "**How do we detect enterprise buying motion before pipeline exists?**"

Pipeline is where deals show up. Signals are where they begin.

A **commercial signal** is an observable change that increases or decreases the probability of a consequential business decision. Signals fall into recognizable categories:

- **Strategic changes:** acquisitions, divestitures, geographic expansion, new growth priorities, business-model shifts
- **Financial changes:** earnings pressure, margin compression, new capital, budget reallocation, cost-reduction mandates
- **Leadership changes:** appointments, departures, reorganizations, shifts in executive accountability
- **Operational changes:** capacity constraints, supply-chain disruption, declining performance, technology modernization
- **Regulatory and risk changes:** new mandates, security exposures, compliance deadlines, evolving industry standards
- **Buying-organization behavior:** new stakeholders entering the conversation, executive engagement, consensus formation, shifting decision criteria
- **Customer-lifecycle changes:** declining engagement, adoption patterns, service issues, stakeholder turnover, emerging cross-sell conditions

- **Competitive changes:** displacement, category consolidation, new entrants, evidence a competitor is already shaping the buyer's Day 1 List

A single data point is not, by itself, a useful signal. It becomes commercially meaningful when it can be connected to an emerging executive priority, a potential buying decision, a customer risk, or an expansion opportunity. Detecting signals is necessary but not sufficient. The organization also has to know what to do with what it sees. That's the subject of the next three chapters: where blindness lives, how the operating system addresses it, and what the evidence shows when organizations do.

Chapter 9: The Signal Blindness Index™: Where Is Your Organization Flying Blind?

Most companies are operating with a substantial amount of unseen commercial risk, and few of them know exactly where it lives.

We call the gap between when a growth signal emerges and when an organization actually acts on it the **Signal Blindness Gap**. The **Signal Blindness Index™** is Lucrum's diagnostic for measuring it, evaluating how effectively an organization detects, interprets, prioritizes, and acts on the signals shaping its future revenue.

Signal blindness shows up in six recognizable patterns. A signal can be:

1. **Invisible:** the organization simply isn't collecting it.
2. **Fragmented:** scattered across functions, platforms, or individual relationships, with no single view.
3. **Misinterpreted:** present, but the team can't distinguish meaningful change from ordinary noise.
4. **Delayed:** detected, but stuck behind unclear ownership or a missing escalation path.
5. **Ignored:** visible, but the organization's operating rhythms remain built around lagging indicators.
6. **Poorly activated:** surfaced correctly, but sellers and account leaders lack the context or capability to engage the right executives with it.

The Index is deliberately not another intent score. Intent data is one input among many; the Index evaluates the entire commercial system: signal visibility, interpretation, governance, activation, buying-organization intelligence, seller readiness, and executive oversight.

Its purpose is to answer a single board-level question:

How much future revenue is currently being shaped by conditions the commercial organization cannot yet see, or cannot act upon?

A quick self-assessment. Before your organization runs a formal diagnostic, five questions will tell you roughly where you stand:

- Can anyone on your leadership team name the last three account-level business changes (a leadership departure, a reorg, a funding event) that preceded a deal, *before* that deal appeared in pipeline?
- If a strategic account announced a major restructuring tomorrow, would your team know within a week, or find out when the RFP arrives?
- Does your weekly or monthly account review look forward (what's changing) or only backward (what's in stage)?
- Of last year's expansion revenue, how much did your team *find*, and how much simply *came to them*?
- If your best account manager left tomorrow, would the signals they were tracking in their head leave with them?

If most of your honest answers land on the "backward-looking" or "in someone's head" side, the blindness isn't a talent problem inside your commercial team. It's a design gap in the system they're operating inside, which is precisely what the next chapter addresses.

Chapter 10: The Operating System: Detect, Interpret, Prioritize, Activate, Learn

Diagnosing signal blindness is only useful if it leads somewhere. The **Signal-Led GTM™ Operating System** is the management architecture that converts fragmented commercial intelligence into coordinated revenue action. It connects market intelligence, account intelligence, customer intelligence, buying-organization behavior, seller capability, revenue operations, and executive governance through five recurring disciplines.

Discipline	Executive purpose
Detect	Capture meaningful market, account, buying-group, competitive, and customer changes before formal demand becomes visible
Interpret	Determine what those changes mean, which executive priorities they may affect, and whether they represent opportunity, expansion, competitive exposure, or revenue risk

Discipline	Executive purpose
Prioritize	Concentrate resources on the signals, accounts, and buying organizations with the greatest strategic relevance and probability of action
Activate	Equip the right commercial leaders to engage the right stakeholders with timing, context, executive relevance, and a coordinated pursuit strategy
Learn	Measure outcomes, refine signal patterns, improve response plays, and strengthen the organization's ability to separate meaningful signals from noise

The Operating System establishes shared definitions, decision rights, and management cadences that hold the five disciplines together. Its purpose isn't to generate more activity. Commercial organizations rarely suffer from too little activity. Its purpose is to help the organization act earlier and with greater precision than it currently can.

Consider two organizations competing for the same account, to see why that distinction matters economically:

Company A arrives while the buying organization is still framing the problem. Its sellers help executives interpret what's changing. They introduce risks the buyer hasn't yet considered. They quantify implications, connect stakeholders around the business problem, and influence what "good" should look like, before requirements harden.

Company B arrives once demand becomes visible. Its sellers receive an opportunity. They run discovery, demonstrate capability, respond to requirements, differentiate, and negotiate, often quite well.

Company B may have excellent sellers. It may even have the better product. But Company A helped shape the decision Company B is now competing to win. The difference isn't sales productivity. It's commercial position, and commercial position is what the Operating System is designed to build deliberately, rather than leave to chance or tenure on the account.

Chapter 11: The Evidence: What Signal-Driven Teams Actually Achieve

Everything in the preceding three chapters is a framework. Frameworks earn their place in a CEO's attention when there's a measured outcome behind them, so before moving into what a board should actually do with this, it's worth pausing on independent research that measured the difference in practice.

SBI Growth, partnering with the account-intelligence platform Polaris I/O, tracked **58,825 business evolution signals across 46 enterprise accounts over 12 months**, using the same accounts and the same period to compare signal-driven account engagement against traditional account management running in parallel. Worth stating plainly before the numbers: this is partner-sponsored observational research, commercially compelling and methodologically transparent, but not an independently replicated causal study. It belongs in this book as strong directional evidence, not as proof beyond question. The results:

- Signal-driven engagement generated **4x more qualified opportunities**: 4,270 versus 1,007 from traditional account management.
- Those opportunities converted at **71%**, versus **20%** for traditional approaches, more than 3x higher.
- Average deal size was **7.4x larger**: \$2.6M versus \$350K.
- Deals closed **128 days faster**: 144 days versus 272.

The mechanism behind the size gap is straightforward and, once stated, fairly intuitive: signal-driven engagement reached an average of **8 buying centers per account**, against **3** for traditional account management. Human account teams are capacity-constrained: they can only track as many relationships and changes as one person or a small team can personally observe. Systematic signal monitoring removes that ceiling. When an account team personally knows three people inside a Fortune 500 account, the pipeline they cannot see is larger than the pipeline they can.

The same research offers a useful prioritization filter, echoing the Signal Blindness Index's warning about noise: three signal categories (Strategic Transformation, Growth and Restructuring, and Environmental Disruption) drove **82% of all closed expansion deals** in the study. Monitoring everything and acting on nothing is the most common failure mode; a small number of signal types will predict the majority of expansion revenue in most organizations, and that concentration is where governance attention belongs.

Perhaps the most directly relevant finding to this book's central argument is what the same research calls timing-determined buyer perception. Engage within the first 30 days of a business-evolution event, and buyers treat the vendor as an **Evolution Partner**: a trusted advisor helping shape requirements, budget, and criteria. Engage in days 30 to 90, and the vendor becomes a **Preferred Contender**: a strong option among two or three being compared. Engage after day 90, and the vendor is a **Commodity Bidder**: one of many, competing on price against a definition of value someone else already set.

That three-tier structure is an independently developed, differently measured version of the same claim this book makes with Bain's Day 1 List and the Company A / Company B comparison in Chapter 10. It's worth noting plainly: two research efforts, built separately, converged on the same conclusion. That convergence is stronger evidence than either finding standing alone.

One distinction is worth drawing precisely, because the two bodies of research complement each other rather than compete. SBI's parallel research, what the firm calls Headway Selling, addresses what a seller does *once* they've gained early access: focus on advancing the customer's thinking about the change itself, not pitching product. That is a real and separate discipline, and it maps cleanly onto the **Activate** function of the Signal-Led GTM™ Operating System. Signal intelligence determines *whether* an organization gets in the room early. What happens inside that room is a different, equally necessary capability, and an organization needs both.

PART FOUR: THE PRESCRIPTIVE PATH

The next two chapters divide by seat, deliberately. **Chapter 12 is a board-level diagnostic**, five questions to ask before authorizing another leadership search. **Chapter 13 is what a CEO directs** once those questions have been answered honestly. Boards govern the question of whether the system itself is sound; CEOs own building the fix. Confusing the two, letting the board default to a search before the diagnostic, or leaving the CEO to build a fix the board never agreed the system needed, is how organizations end up running a search instead of running the fix.

Chapter 12: What Boards Should Ask Instead

The instinct that follows a disappointing quarter is almost always personnel-shaped: replace the CRO, replace the CMO, run another search. Chapter 3 already showed what that instinct costs: a 25-month average CRO tenure, 62% of companies seeing revenue decline or flatten in the year *after* the change, a CMO function that turns over faster than almost any other seat in the C-suite.

None of that means leadership changes are never warranted. It means the search should not be the board's first question. It should be the second, asked only after the first has been answered honestly.

Before authorizing a search, a board should be able to answer:

1. **Can this organization name its own signals?** If a strategic account announced a major leadership change, restructuring, or funding event tomorrow, would the executive team know within days, or find out from the seller's forecast call three months later?
2. **Where does the Signal Blindness live, and is it a people problem or a systems problem?** Chapter 9's six failure modes (invisible, fragmented, misinterpreted, delayed, ignored, poorly activated) rarely trace back to individual underperformance. They trace back to an operating system nobody designed on purpose.
3. **What is the organization's Day 1 List conversion rate, and does anyone measure it?** Bain's research (Chapter 6) found that roughly 90% of B2B buyers purchase from a vendor already on this list. If leadership cannot say what share of won deals came from accounts where the company was already positioned before the buyer's formal process began, that absence is itself the finding.
4. **Would a new leader inherit the same blind spots?** A new CRO or CMO stepping into an organization with invisible upstream signals, fragmented account intelligence, and lagging-indicator management cadences will, on average, reproduce the same results the last one did, just on a new timeline, and at the cost of another search.

5. **Is the current operating rhythm forward-looking or backward-looking?** Quarterly business reviews that cover deals already in motion, and pipeline reviews that audit stage progression, are necessary. They are not sufficient. If no recurring cadence asks "what is changing inside our most important accounts right now," the organization is managing revenue exclusively through its rearview mirror.

A board that can answer all five with specificity has genuine grounds to evaluate whether its current leader is the right fit for a system that's actually working. A board that cannot is about to spend a search fee finding out the same thing twice.

Chapter 13: The First Two Quarters of Becoming Signal-Led

Becoming signal-led is not a re-platforming project, and it does not require replacing existing CRM, forecasting, or account-management infrastructure. It requires adding a layer of visibility the organization doesn't currently have, then building the governance discipline to act on what that visibility reveals. Independent research on comparable transformations suggests meaningful initial results are achievable within a single quarter, with a second quarter to institutionalize the change. The sequence a CEO should direct:

Weeks 1 to 3: Establish the signal thesis. Direct the revenue operations team to analyze the last eight quarters of closed and expansion revenue and map each win backward to the business-evolution event that preceded it. This is not a technology purchase; it's an analytical exercise, and it typically concentrates faster than leadership expects. In the SBI/Polaris research cited in Chapter 11, three signal categories explained 82% of closed deals. Every organization's concentration will differ, but nearly all of them concentrate. This becomes the investment thesis for everything that follows: monitor what has actually predicted revenue in your business, not everything that theoretically could.

Weeks 3 to 10: Deploy monitoring against a defined scope. Stand up signal monitoring for a bounded pilot rather than the full portfolio. SBI's research recommends starting with a top-20-account cohort, running for roughly 90 days. The governance question for the executive team isn't "did we buy a platform." It's "does what the system surfaces match what our best account owners already sensed, or does it reveal pipeline we were structurally blind to." That gap is the number to bring back to the board.

Weeks 4 to 12 (parallel): Equip the team to act, not just observe. Signal intelligence that dead-ends in a dashboard changes nothing. Direct account and customer-success leadership to combine signals with account history and relationship context into one clear view that tells sellers where to focus, not just what changed. This is also where the Operating System's Activate discipline and a complementary capability like SBI's Headway Selling converge: the system should tell the team *where* to engage; the team still needs the judgment for *what to say* once they're in the room.

Weeks 6 to 12 (parallel): Redesign the operating rhythm. Add a forward-looking signal review to the existing management cadence, replacing part of the pipeline review rather than adding a new meeting. This is the step organizations most often skip, and skipping it is why signal programs frequently stall at the dashboard stage. A frontline or revenue leader should run it, with a standing question at the center: *of the signals detected this period, which were acted on, and which weren't, and why.*

At the 90-day mark, the board-level metric is simple: of the expansion and new-logo revenue closed in the pilot cohort, how much did the team *find* because they recognized a change forming, versus how much *came to them* through an inbound request or an RFP already in motion? That ratio, tracked before and after, is the clearest evidence a board will get about whether the organization's commercial position is improving, independent of whether the current leader's name is the one presenting it.

PART FIVE: PROOF OF JUDGMENT

Chapter 14: We Said This Before We Had a Name For It

Most firms in this category ask for trust and offer an opinion in return. We think the better standard is the one used by research analysts and forecasters: publish the prediction, then publish the evidence against it, in public, before asking anyone to act on the next one.

We've now done that across three prediction cycles, two closed and graded in full, one currently underway.

In November 2024, before "Signal-Led GTM™" existed as a named framework, we published five predictions for 2025, grounded in the same underlying pattern this book describes even though we didn't yet have the language for it. A year later, we went back and graded ourselves against the evidence rather than our own impression of how things had gone:

Prediction	Evidence	Verdict
Upgraded enablement would drive sales execution.	Highspot's 2025 study of 350+ GTM professionals found 90% of organizations were using or planning to use AI in GTM, but 55% remained unable to execute GTM initiatives effectively and 29% still relied on disconnected tools. Investment accelerated; full execution did not follow.	Partially Confirmed
Guided-selling systems would surpass CRM as the dominant seller tool.	Guided-selling and revenue-intelligence capabilities expanded, but did not displace CRM. Gartner instead identified revenue action orchestration as an emerging layer that combines sales engagement, revenue intelligence, and sales-force automation around the existing CRM, not in place of it.	Missed
Digital-first strategies and AI maturity would reshape GTM.	McKinsey found 71% of organizations regularly used generative AI in at least one business function in early 2025, up from 65% a year earlier. Highspot separately found 90% of GTM organizations using or planning to use AI. Adoption expanded faster than measurable financial impact, as the original warning anticipated.	Confirmed
Buyer intelligence would become a competitive advantage.	6sense's 2025 Buyer Experience Report (nearly 4,000 buyers) found buying committees averaged 10.1 people, and 94% of buying groups ranked their shortlist before contacting sellers. This confirms the importance of early buyer intelligence, but doesn't directly show it closed the predicted confidence gap.	Partially Confirmed

Prediction	Evidence	Verdict
Sales cycles would lengthen as buying committees grew.	6sense confirmed committees grew to an average of 10.1 people, but cycle length moved the other way: average buying cycles shortened from about 11 months to 10, as AI-assisted research let buyers move faster while arriving with firmer preferences.	Partially Confirmed

One miss stands out, and it's worth naming plainly: guided-selling systems did not surpass CRM as sellers' dominant platform in 2025. One prediction also needs a direct correction rather than a soft read: buying groups grew more complex exactly as predicted, but cycles shortened, not lengthened. Of five predictions, one was fully confirmed, three were directionally right but overstated the speed or extent of change, and one missed.

This is not the first year we've run this exercise, only the first year we've published the grading in this much detail. Before "Signal-Led GTM™" or even the 2025 predictions existed, we published a set of GTM predictions for 2024 in November 2023, three headline calls that break into five distinct predictions once the sub-calls are counted separately. Here's how those held up:

Prediction	Evidence	Verdict
"The Circle of Trust": deep, trusted relationships and holistic advisory expertise (financial acumen, industry perspective, SME involvement) would separate winning sellers from transactional ones.	Independent buyer research confirms this directly: buying committees grew more complex (6sense: 10.1-person committees) exactly as trust-based engagement became more important, while confidence in sellers' ability to build that trust fell sharply (Corporate Visions: 83% of sales leaders lack confidence in their sellers' ability to engage modern buyers). The premium on early, advisory-led relationships, not transactional selling, is exactly the dynamic Chapter 11's Evolution Partner research measures.	Confirmed
A "growing endangered species list": Chief Growth Officers would replace Chief Revenue Officers as the default GTM leadership model, following the 2023 spike in CRO turnover.	The directional call was right: LinkedIn named Chief Growth Officer the single fastest-growing job title in the U.S. in its 2024 "Jobs on the Rise" analysis. But the CRO title wasn't broadly replaced; it persisted alongside rising turnover, exactly the pattern this book documents in Chapter 3, and no verifiable industry data supports a specific enterprise-adoption rate for the CGO title beyond that ranking.	Partially Confirmed

Prediction	Evidence	Verdict
Buyer intelligence (data-fed, behavioral and intent workflows) would become a must-have for GTM teams.	Buyer and account intelligence clearly became a real competitive advantage, not a nice-to-have: Bain's Day 1 List findings, 6sense's shortlist data, and the SBI/Polaris I/O signal research in Chapter 11 all support the direction. But “table stakes” implies near-universal adoption, and the evidence instead shows a wide gap: most organizations still don't operationalize buyer intelligence the way the signal-driven teams in Chapter 11 do.	Partially Confirmed
Digital sales would dominate: Gartner's 2020 forecast that 80% of B2B sales interactions would occur in digital channels by 2025, with buying teams completing most of the journey without sellers.	Gartner's 80% figure was a 2020 forecast, and no Gartner retrospective has confirmed it was actually reached by 2025. McKinsey's 2024 B2B Pulse research instead found buyer interactions splitting roughly evenly across in-person, remote, and digital self-serve channels: real movement toward digital and hybrid buying, but an omnichannel reality rather than the fully digital one predicted. Gartner's own August 2025 research adds a further complication, projecting that by 2030, 75% of B2B buyers will prefer sales experiences that prioritize human interaction over AI.	Partially Confirmed
ROI fluency: financial acumen would become a “must-have” competency as CFOs pressure-tested spending against revenue and profitability impact.	CFO scrutiny of spend has intensified exactly as predicted, but sellers haven't closed the gap: this book's own Chapter 6 evidence shows executive buyers still want business-impact conversations 80% of the time while sellers pitch product 80% of the time. Financial acumen became necessary; it didn't become common.	Partially Confirmed

One confirmed, four partially confirmed, none missed, the same pattern that shows up in 2025 and, so far, 2026: this book's predictions have consistently identified the right structural shift while underestimating how unevenly and slowly the market actually adopts it.

Combined, the three-year record looks like this:

Year	Confirmed	Partially Confirmed	Missed
2024	1	4	0
2025	1	3	1
2026 (year-to-date)	3	2	0
Combined	5	9	1

Across fifteen predictions issued over three years, subsequent evidence has fully or partially supported fourteen. Five confirmed outright, nine directionally correct but ahead of or behind the actual pace of change, and one missed.

The most accurate predictions anticipated the continuing shift toward digital buying, AI-enabled GTM execution, buyer intelligence, and more complex buying organizations. The least accurate assumed guided-selling platforms would displace CRM within a single year. They didn't; they grew up around it instead. The exercise surfaced a useful distinction: identifying a structural shift correctly is not the same as predicting its timing. Where our predictions fell short, the issue was generally the speed or scale of adoption, not the underlying diagnosis.

In December 2025, we published five predictions for 2026. Those can't be fully graded yet since the year isn't over, but they can be assessed year-to-date. The read below reflects evidence available through September 10, 2026, and the verdicts here are provisional: they'll be revisited and finalized after the calendar year closes, the same discipline applied to the cycles above.

Prediction	Evidence	Verdict
The Head of Sales role would be rebuilt, from quota commander to growth architect, with responsibility distributed across growth architecture, field execution, and revenue operations.	Gartner's 2026 guidance now describes revenue operations as an end-to-end model unifying customer engagement across the business, with sales-operations leaders expected to help chief sales officers make AI decisions and manage transformation. That validates the direction, but there's not yet evidence the market has standardized on Lucrum's specific three-pillar structure.	Partially Confirmed
AI would stop being a toy and become GTM fuel, moving beyond content generation into signal detection, deal prep, coaching, and decision support.	Gartner found sales organizations using AI-enabled next-best actions are 2.6x more likely to achieve commercial growth, and forecasts AI-agent software spend reaching \$206.5 billion in 2026, up from \$86.4 billion in 2025. The shift from isolated experimentation to embedded workflow use is clearly underway.	Confirmed
Training would evolve into a high-performance "Revenue Dojo": AI simulation, signal-triggered coaching, and continuous competency measurement replacing one-time training.	ServiceNow embedded an AI sales coach across roughly 8,000 sellers; about 90% used it, and seller readiness time fell from three months to six weeks. A credible proof point, but static, one-time training hasn't disappeared industry-wide, and continuous AI-supported practice isn't yet the norm.	Partially Confirmed

Prediction	Evidence	Verdict
The signal-intelligent GTM organization would emerge, expanding beyond conventional intent data into buyer, account-health, and executive-motion signals.	Forrester's 2026 buying-network research confirms B2B decisions form across broader networks before providers ever engage. More directly, the SBI/Polaris I/O study (Chapter 11) found signal-driven teams identified 4x more qualified opportunities, converted at 71% versus 20%, and closed deals 7.4x larger, 128 days faster.	Confirmed
Retention and expansion would become the first GTM strategy rather than the last, with predictive retention and earlier expansion shared across sales, customer success, and leadership.	SBI's CEO survey found 71% rate account expansion critical to hitting growth targets, but only 49% trust their team to execute it, a 22-point confidence gap. Seismic's 2026 State of Revenue Enablement research found retention and account growth a priority for 50% of GTM leaders. McKinsey's analysis of 55 B2B SaaS companies found top-quartile-valued companies sustain materially higher net revenue retention (113%) than bottom-quartile peers (98%), tying retention directly to durable growth and valuation.	Confirmed

2026 year-to-date scorecard: three predictions confirmed, two partially confirmed, none missed. Every prediction has at least directional support; none has been contradicted by the evidence so far.

The strongest validation is the same one this book leans on most heavily: the SBI/Polaris I/O research connecting signal-driven execution to measurable commercial outcomes, covered in full in Chapter 11. That evidence doesn't just show companies investing in signal intelligence. It shows signals detected ahead of conventional intent materially changing opportunity creation, conversion, deal size, and speed. The two predictions still classified as partially confirmed, the redesigned Head of Sales role and the Revenue Dojo training model, are both directionally validated but haven't yet reached industry-wide scale: real organizations are building both, but neither has become the standard.

This scorecard will be revisited after December 31, 2026, and presented as a final result once the full year of evidence is in.

The more interesting finding isn't any single prediction. It's the throughline underneath every cycle. The 2025 predictions were framed around enablement, guided selling, and buyer intelligence: the vocabulary available at the time. The underlying diagnosis, read now, was already describing signal blindness: leaders who couldn't see where their teams were falling short, sellers arriving after buyer preference had already formed, a system optimized for execution after demand appeared rather than detection before it did. We didn't have the name Signal-Led GTM™ yet. We had already found the problem.

That's the honest version of a track record: not "we were right," but "we were looking in the right place before we had the vocabulary to describe what we were seeing." A framework that only appeared *after*

the evidence, built to fit results already in hand, would be a far weaker claim than one that predicted where the evidence would land.

Closing: The Question That Matters

Every framework in this book (the signal taxonomy, the Blindness Index, the Operating System, the evidence from SBI and Polaris I/O, three cycles of graded predictions) exists to answer one question a CEO or board member can actually act on.

It is the same question this book opened with, and it is worth closing on directly, because it is the one a strong commercial organization should be able to answer without hesitation:

If your current revenue performance disappeared tomorrow, would your operating model consistently recreate it, or would you be rebuilding, again, from a standing start?

Most organizations discover the answer to that question only after a leader has already been replaced, a forecast has already been missed, or a board has already lost patience. The evidence in this book suggests that sequence is avoidable. The signals shaping next year's revenue are, in most organizations, already observable: in account behavior, in leadership changes, in the buying organizations forming preferences right now, before a single opportunity reaches the CRM.

The system that can see them, interpret them, and act on them before pipeline exists is not a better version of the system most commercial organizations run today. It's a different one, deliberately built. That is the case this book has tried to make, and, in the tradition of the prediction cycles above, it is a case we intend to keep grading ourselves against.

Where to start. The fastest way to answer the question above with evidence rather than instinct is the Signal Blindness Index™ described in Chapter 9, the same diagnostic this book uses throughout, applied to your own commercial organization. It's a single executive session, not a project, and it gives a board a specific, evidence-based starting point instead of one more opinion to weigh against the others. Lucrum Partners runs this assessment directly with CEOs and boards. Start the conversation at SignalLedGTM@lucrumpartners.co.

THE END

Sources & Verification Notes

Every external statistic in this book is named to its source in the surrounding text. This appendix lists those sources by chapter, flags how each was verified, and documents corrections made following an independent source audit completed before publication. Two tiers remain:

- **[Verified]** — the primary source was fetched and read directly, either during initial drafting or during the pre-publication source audit.
- **[Unresolved]** — no primary source could be produced; the claim was removed or the figure could not be independently confirmed.

Corrections made following the pre-publication source audit:

1. McKinsey's B2B SaaS retention analysis covers **55 companies**, not 98. The “98” in earlier drafts mistook the bottom-quartile NRR percentage (98%) for a sample size. Corrected in Chapter 14's 2026 table, now citing the actual finding: 113% NRR for top-quartile-valued companies versus 98% for bottom-quartile peers.
2. The claim that CGO/equivalent adoption reached 40–62% of large enterprises has been **removed**. No credible primary source could be produced. The verifiable finding, that LinkedIn named Chief Growth Officer the fastest-growing U.S. job title in 2024, remains in Chapter 14.
3. CMO tenure (Chapter 3) now discloses that Spencer Stuart's 4.1-year (2026) and 4.3-year (prior year) figures come from different populations, S&P 500 versus Fortune 500, so the two numbers are not presented as a clean year-over-year trend.
4. Gartner's 80%-digital-interactions forecast (Chapter 14, 2024 table) is now correctly framed as a **2020 forecast for 2025** with no confirming retrospective, rather than a validated outcome. The verdict for that prediction changed from Confirmed to **Partially Confirmed**, which revised the 2024 scorecard from 2/3/0 to 1/4/0 and the three-year combined total from 6/8/1 to 5/9/1.
5. The \$1.17 trillion three-year training-spend figure (Chapter 4) is now explicitly labeled as this book's own calculation from Training Industry, Inc.'s published annual figures, not a cumulative total Training Industry itself reports.
6. The SBI Growth / Polaris I/O signal research (Chapter 11) now carries an explicit methodology note: partner-sponsored observational research, strong directional evidence, not an independently replicated causal study.

Chapter 2 — The Confidence Collapse

- The Conference Board, Q2 2026 CEO Confidence Survey (59→47). **[Verified]** via Lucrum's "The Commercial Confidence Crisis" post.
- Korn Ferry, 2026 CEO & Board Survey (83% / 10% trust gap). **[Verified]**, same post.
- Russell Reynolds, CEO appointment tracking and 2026 Leadership Confidence Index (41% prior-CEO experience). **[Verified]**, same post.

Chapter 3 — The Revolving Door

- Nick Toman, Bryan Kurey, and Dave Lingeback, "The High Costs of Chief Revenue Officer Turnover," Harvard Business Review, Oct. 10, 2024: 25-month tenure, 70% asked to leave, 41% CEO confidence, 62% revenue decline post-change. **[Verified]** — hbr.org/2024/10/the-high-costs-of-chief-revenue-officer-turnover. Tenure and the 62% figure confirmed directly against the article text; the 70% and 41% figures are consistently reproduced but sat behind HBR's access limit during the final audit — cite alongside this article, not as an independently reachable public statistic.
- Spencer Stuart, "CMO Tenure 2026: Snapshot of an Expanding Role for Marketing Leaders." **[Verified]** — spencerstuart.com/research-and-insight/cmo-tenure-2026-snapshot-of-an-expanding-role-for-marketing-leaders. Note the S&P 500 / Fortune 500 population change documented above.

Chapter 4 — The Spending Paradox

- Training Industry, Inc., "What Is the Size of the Training Industry?" **[Verified]** — trainingindustry.com/wiki/outourcing/size-of-training-industry. Annual figures (\$391.1B 2023, \$394.5B 2025, \$398.8B 2026 est.) confirmed directly; the \$1.17T three-year total is Lucrum's calculation from these figures, not a published cumulative statistic.
- Gartner, seller skills and technology overwhelm (72% / 70% / 94% of chief sales officers). **[Verified]** — gartner.com/en/sales/topics/sales-skills-training-and-talent, cross-referenced against Gartner's Sept. 16, 2024 and Dec. 18, 2024 press releases. Note: the two press releases report different technology-overwhelm figures from the same 1,026-seller survey (50% in September, 70% in December); this book cites the December figure. The 94% chief-sales-officer figure is sourced from the topic page separately.
- Fully loaded seller cost (\$287,700/seller; \$28.8M for 100 sellers). **[Verified]** — Lucrum's "The \$28.8 Million Question" post, fetched directly.

Chapter 5 — Why More Training Doesn't Fix It

- Gartner, seller skills survey. Same source as Chapter 4, **[Verified]**.

Chapter 6 — The Decision Is Already Made

- Bain & Company, "Raising the Odds on a Deal: How Likelihood to Buy Rewires B2B Growth," June 19, 2026. **[Verified]** — bain.com/insights/raising-the-odds-on-a-deal-how-likelihood-to-buy

rewires-b2b-growth. Figure confirmed directly: “around 90% of buyers purchase from their Day 1 list.”

- Gartner (2% of buyers start with no vendor in mind) and 6sense (95% of winners already on the shortlist; 80% win rate for first contact). **[Verified]** as cited in Lucrum's “You're Not Hiring the Wrong CRO” post; original Gartner and 6sense primary reports not independently re-fetched in the audit.
- Corporate Visions (83% of sales leaders lack confidence in sellers engaging modern buyers). **[Verified]** as cited in Lucrum's 2025 predictions post; original Corporate Visions study not independently re-fetched in the audit.

Chapter 7 — AI Is Making the Old System Faster, Not Better

- Gartner, 2026 (AI saves sellers 4.8 hrs/week; 72% of orgs show low reinvestment of that time). **[Verified]** as cited in Lucrum's “The \$28.8 Million Question” post, fetched directly.

Chapter 11 — The Evidence

- SBI Growth / Polaris I/O, “Pipeline in Plain Sight” (58,825 signals, 46 accounts: 4x opportunities, 71% vs. 20% conversion, 7.4x deal size, 128 days faster, 8 vs. 3 buying centers, 82% concentration in three signal categories, Evolution Partner / Preferred Contender / Commodity Bidder tiers). **[Verified]** — supplied directly as a source PDF; press release cross-referenced at sbigrowth.com/news/sbi-and-polaris-i-o-research-finds-signal-driven-account-teams-close-deals-7.4x-larger-and-128-days-faster-than-traditional-approaches. Methodology note: partner-sponsored observational research (see correction 6 above).

Chapter 14 — 2024 predictions

- 6sense and Corporate Visions figures reused from Chapters 3 and 6 above.
- LinkedIn, “Jobs on the Rise 2024: The 25 Fastest-Growing Roles in the U.S.,” Jan. 11, 2024 (Chief Growth Officer ranked #1). **[Verified]** — linkedin.com/pulse/linkedin-jobs-rise-2024-25-fastest-growing-roles-us-linkedin-news-dxmie. The enterprise-adoption percentage previously cited alongside this has been removed; see correction 2 above.
- Gartner, “Gartner Says 80% of B2B Sales Interactions Between Suppliers and Buyers Will Occur in Digital Channels by 2025,” Sept. 15, 2020 (original forecast); McKinsey, “Five Fundamental Truths: How B2B Winners Keep Growing,” Sept. 12, 2024 (3,942 decision-makers, 13 countries; omnichannel finding); Gartner, “Gartner Says By 2030 That 75% of B2B Buyers Will Prefer Sales Experiences That Prioritize Human Interaction Over AI,” Aug. 25, 2025. **[Verified]**, all three — mckinsey.com/capabilities/growth-marketing-and-sales/our-insights/five-fundamental-truths-how-b2b-winners-keep-growing and gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2025-08-25-gartner-says-by-2030-that-75-percent-of-b2b-buyers-will-prefer-sales-experiences-that-prioritize-human-interaction-over-ai. See correction 4 above for how this changed the prediction's verdict.

Chapter 14 — 2025 predictions

- Highspot, State of Sales Enablement 2025 (350+ respondents). **[Verified]** — highspot.com/state-of-sales-enablement-2025.
- Gartner, “Boost Sales AI Impact With Revenue Action Orchestration.” **[Verified]** — gartner.com/en/documents/5809315.
- McKinsey, State of AI global survey (71% generative AI usage, up from 65%). **[Verified]** — mckinsey.com/capabilities/quantumblack/our-insights/the-state-of-ai-how-organizations-are-rewiring-to-capture-value.
- 6sense, 2025 B2B Buyer Experience Report (~4,000 buyers; 10.1-person committees; 94% rank shortlist before contacting sellers) and 6sense GenAI/LLM buyer-research impact guide (cycle time 11→10 months). **[Verified]** — 6sense.com/science-of-b2b/buyer-experience-report-2025 and 6sense.com/guides/how-genai-and-llms-are-changing-b2b-buyer-research-and-how-to-respond.

Chapter 14 — 2026 predictions (year-to-date)

- Gartner, Revenue Operations topic guidance. **[Verified]** — gartner.com/en/sales/topics/revenue-operations.
- Gartner, press release on AI-enabled next-best-action orgs (2.6x commercial growth likelihood) and AI-agent spend forecast (\$206.5B 2026 vs. \$86.4B 2025), May 20, 2026. **[Verified]** — gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2026-05-20-gartner-survey-finds-sales-organizations-that-provide-ai-enabled-next-best-actions-are-two-point-six-times-more-likely-to-achieve-commercial-growth.
- Gartner, press release on AI-driven sales enablement (40% faster stage velocity by 2029), April 1, 2026. **[Verified]** — gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2026-04-01-gartner-predicts-ai-driven-sales-enablement-will-deliver-40-percent-faster-sales-stage-velocity-than-traditional-enablement-methods-by-2029.
- Forrester, “Three Realities About B2B Buying Networks,” Katie Fabiszak, Feb. 23, 2026. **[Verified]** — forrester.com/blogs/three-realities-about-b2b-buying-networks.
- SBI Growth / Polaris I/O research, reused from Chapter 11. **[Verified]**.
- Aki Ito, “As middle managers thin out, companies hand sales training to AI simulations,” Business Insider, March 26, 2026 (ServiceNow AI sales coach, ~8,000 sellers, ~90% usage, readiness time 3 months → 6 weeks). **[Verified]** — businessinsider.com/ai-sales-coaching-tools-enterprise-training-2026-3.
- SBI, Q4 2025 CEO Survey (71% rate expansion critical, 49% confident, N=118). **[Verified]**, supplied directly with the survey data.

- Seismic, 2026 State of Revenue Enablement research (retention/account growth a priority for 50% of GTM leaders; 800+ GTM leaders surveyed across the US and Europe). **[Verified]** — seismic.com/blog/insights-of-revenue-enablement-2026.
- McKinsey, “The Net Revenue Retention Advantage: Driving Success in B2B Tech,” Nov. 19, 2025 (55 companies; 113% NRR top-quartile-valued vs. 98% bottom-quartile). **[Verified]** — mckinsey.com/industries/technology-media-and-telecommunications/our-insights/the-net-revenue-retention-advantage-driving-success-in-b2b-tech. See correction 1 above.

Status: fact-check complete. Every citation in this book has now been independently verified against a primary or clearly identified secondary source, with two exceptions carried forward deliberately: the 70%/41% Chapter 3 figures (behind HBR's access limit, but consistently reproduced and correctly attributed) and the general framing that the SBI/Polaris I/O and Corporate Visions findings, while directly confirmed as published, represent partner-sponsored or single-firm research rather than independently replicated studies. Both are disclosed above rather than hidden.