Five signs of enthusiastic CEO buy-in

A guide to understanding
and getting the most out of
your CEO's involvement.

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Active CEO participation is essential when developing foundational frameworks and driving toward a company's reimagined future. Sounds obvious, right? Still, we sometimes encounter CEOs who focus on areas they feel most comfortable with (sales, tech, innovation) while delegating foundational leadership. Suffice it to say that approach undermines the short- and long-term success of our alignment and positioning engagements.

Here's how to know whether your CEO is interested, engaged, and invested in laying a bombproof strategic foundation. Along the way, we'll share our perspective and tips to help you drive the process forward.

01 Your CEO wants to be a part of the selection process.

It's common for marketing or brand leaders to spearhead new agency partnerships. And, for companies that aren't at critical inflection points, it might be appropriate for a CEO to keep the process at arm's length. But if your organization is going through—or seeking—a significant transformation, your CEO should engage with the agencies on your shortlist before you're in proposal-signing mode. Chemistry and philosophical alignment are important because, as you see in the following indicators, your CEO needs to be an active part of the engagement.

Our policy

> If your CEO isn't a part of our initial communication, we'll want to meet them before diving into any signable paperwork. If Parliament's approach isn't compatible with theirs—or if the chemistry is off—Parliament likely isn't the best fit.

Tip

> Once you have an agency shortlist, loop your CEO into the process. Remember, managing a critical inflection point isn't a marketing endeavor. It's foundational. After alignment and positioning are on lockdown, your CEO can drop off as you dive into identity and messaging systems.

The second sign of enthusiastic CEO buy-in

02 Your CEO is open to direct, confidential interactions with agency leadership.

Trust and chemistry are necessary for client/agency relationships to be deeper and more effective. Trust should be established at the deepest level for companies at critical inflection points. Your CEO must be comfortable sharing confidential information with their agency counterpart—even when nobody else in their business is privy. In our experience, CEOs that are excited about the process want to have a direct relationship with folks on the agency side. And those who are willing to share confidential information are more successful than those who hold their cards close.

Our policy

> Before our kick-off (ideally in-person), one of our Principals will have a summit with your CEO. It's the perfect time to swap war stories and have a nuanced, confidential conversation. Private details won't be shared with either team, but they will be used to guide the engagement. Then, throughout the initial alignment process, our Principal and your CEO will connect one-on-one as needed.

Tip

> Get reservations at one of your CEO's favorite restaurants for the evening before kick-off—the type of place they feel comfortable at. Bonus points for post-dinner drinks as well. If they are the type that feels like they need to prepare, ask us for a topical cheat sheet.

03

Your CEO is committed to participating in every directional meeting.

Your Chief Executive is being pulled in every direction and stretched for time. If they aren't already working 16-hour days, they certainly could be. CEOs should aggressively defend their time, focusing on the small handful of things nobody else can do. Directional strategy is one of those things, and calendars don't lie. The most successful engagements feature CEOs who make the process a priority.

Our policy

> We'll require your CEO to attend every meeting throughout the alignment phase.
>
> We'll schedule weekly meetings before or during kick-off to drive the process forward.

Tip

> Avoiding reschedules or multiple-week gaps between meetings is the most effective way to minimize the timeline. Work with your admins to schedule meetings 6+ weeks out.
>
> Map out everybody's vacations. They are timeline blower-uppers.
>
> Make sure everybody is on the same page before the engagement commences. If somebody can't commit to every meeting, they might not be the right person for the process.

The fourth sign of enthusiastic CEO buy-in

04 Your CEO leads and listens through the tough stuff.

As we're working through directional engagements, CEOs often tell us, "This is the stuff that keeps me up at night." Passive CEOs focus on the bits that interest them while dismissing challenges they don't feel comfortable with. But functionally-engaged CEOs lead teams through hairy challenges with a blend of confidence, humility, and patience.

Our policy

> We tend to go through issues, not around them. When we begin working with a company that's in transition, we'll undoubtedly have more questions than answers. And we'll likely focus on anxiety-inducing topics rather than the feel-good parts of your business. We ask CEOs to lean into—not away—from questions they don't have answers to and to avoid the temptation of providing quick, simplistic, or popular solutions.

Tip

> We've had countless conversations with VPs/Directors tasked with finding an agency to spearhead executional creative (e.g. rebranding, new website, campaign), only to discover that their boss or CEO was simultaneously wrestling with the company's directional strategy. You probably aren't alone if you feel like your foundational strategy is shaky or incomplete. It might be scary, but take the initiative and let leadership know that you'd like to hit pause and focus on the underlying strategy. If your leader is willing to engage with the tough stuff, they'll be pleased you aren't blindly moving forward. Always remember to approach this with an appropriate amount of privacy and diplomacy.

05 Your CEO believes the engagement will be foundational to your entire business.

This indicator is likely the most important because your CEO won't interview consultants, confide in them, attend every meeting, and trust them with the tough stuff if they think it is just a marketing platform. Ultimately, complete buy-in is evident when they can't wait to roll the results out across the business.

Our policy

> We decline potential engagements when we believe the prospective partner views it as a purely brand or marketing exercise. Transformation isn't skin deep. It isn't a sticker. It takes place in the core of the organization.

Tip

> Proactive CEOs love thinking about things from 10k feet. The more they understand how foundational frameworks pave the way for a clearer, brighter future, the more they'll buy in. Lead with the big picture, even if your title begins with marketing or brand.

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at critical inflection points

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