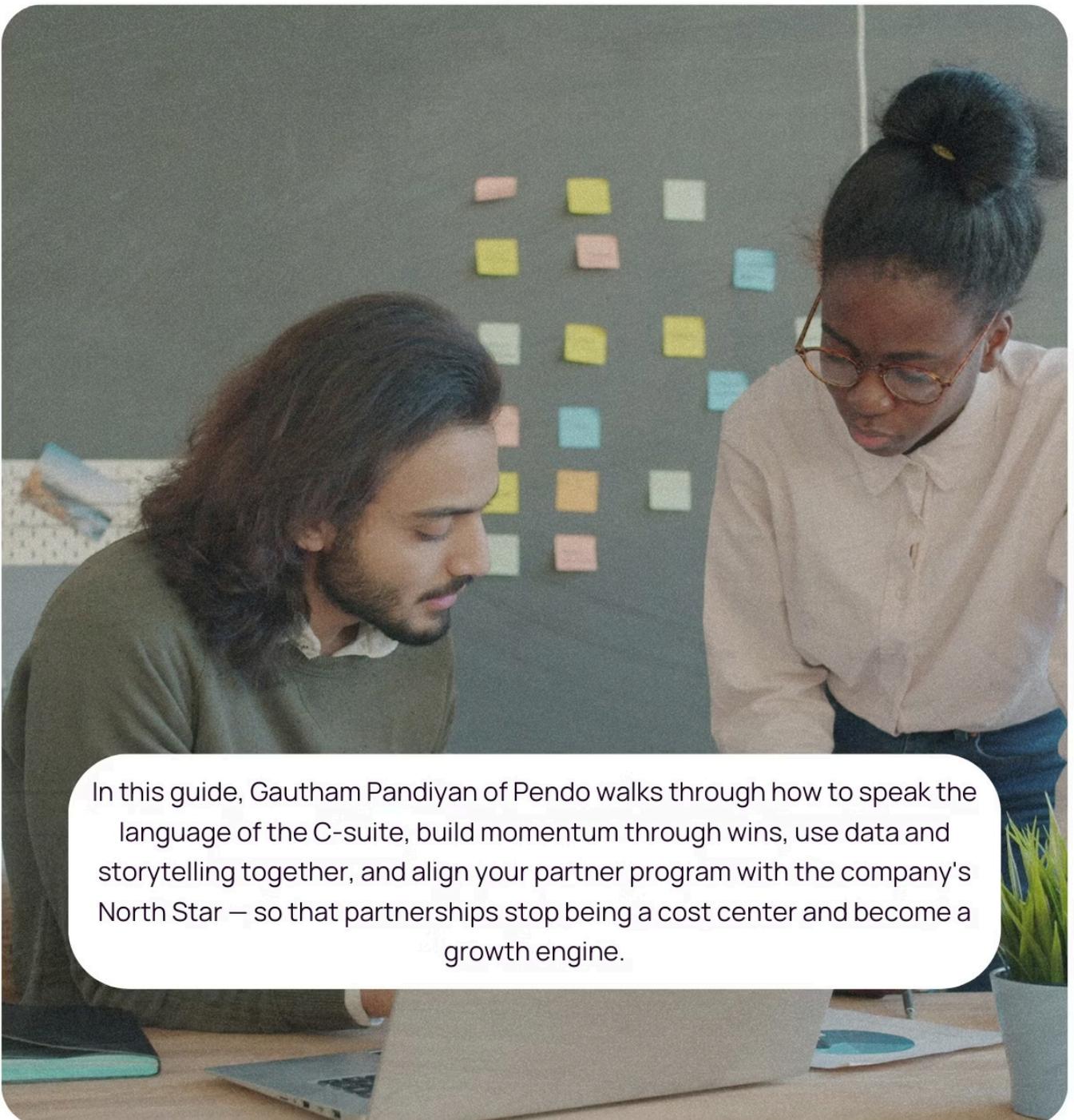




Cracking the C-Suite: Securing Executive Buy-In for Your Partner Program



In this guide, Gautham Pandiyan of Pendo walks through how to speak the language of the C-suite, build momentum through wins, use data and storytelling together, and align your partner program with the company's North Star – so that partnerships stop being a cost center and become a growth engine.

What's Inside This Guide

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What You Will Learn

This guide gives partnership leaders practical ways to secure executive buy-in and position their programs as a true revenue engine.

- Understand why partnership impact often falls short at the executive level—and how to reframe it
- Learn how to translate partner activity into financial metrics like CAC, LTV, retention, and growth efficiency
- Use influenced revenue as early proof to build credibility and unlock larger investments
- Combine data with storytelling to move from approval on paper to real executive advocacy
- Align your partner program with your company's North Star so it directly drives strategic outcomes
- Shift from “asking for resources” to demonstrating clear business value

These insights will help you strengthen your position at the executive table and build a partner program that earns long-term investment and trust.

Meet Your Expert Guide

Gautham Pandiyan

Global Head of Cloud, SI & Affiliate Partnerships at Pendo

With a background as a scientist turned software strategist, Gautham has built a career at the intersection of partnerships and revenue growth. He has driven over \$500M in partner-influenced revenue, designing ecosystems that create mutual value and scale sustainably.

His experience spans both enterprise and high-growth environments—from building partner ecosystems at companies like Qualtrics (an SAP company) to accelerating growth in MarTech and mobile app startups. Gautham is known for his ability to simplify complex partnership dynamics and translate them into clear, actionable strategies that resonate with executive teams.



25+ Years Impact

Driving over \$500M in partner revenue and leading teams to 3X growth

Ecosystem Strategy

Building win-win partnerships that scale sustainably across enterprise and startup environments

Data-driven Leadership

Combining analytical rigor with clear execution and executive alignment

Gautham recently joined us for a live Q&A where he shared practical insights on securing executive buy-in and positioning partnerships as a true revenue engine. His structured yet approachable style helps partnership leaders turn complexity into clarity—and strategy into measurable impact.

Watch the Complete Session



YouTube

Q&A Live:Cracking the C–Suite: How to Secure Executive...

In this live Q&A session, we sit down with Gautham Pandian — Global Head of Cloud, SI & Affiliate Partnerships at Pendo and a...

Speaking the Language of the C-Suite

One of the most important mindset shifts Gautham recommends is this: **"We're all in sales."** Whether you're selling ideas, projects, campaigns, or code – everyone is selling something to someone. Partnership professionals who resist this framing often struggle to communicate upward effectively. Embracing it is the first step to speaking executive language.

What does a CEO care about above all else? Growth. Most CEOs and boards are charged with driving growth, which ties directly to revenue, which is most easily affected by sales. But there are other levers too – product, engineering, cost efficiencies, profitability. The key question every partnership professional must be able to answer is: **do you know your executive team's KPIs?** If not, that's where you start.

The goal of a partner program should be to act as a **force multiplier** for the business. When you can demonstrate that trajectory with data, budget follows naturally. The problem is that partner pros often get stuck in the weeds of partner-specific metrics – partner-sourced revenue, partner tiers, number of partners – without connecting those metrics to the company's top KPIs like NRR, overall revenue growth percentages, CAC (customer acquisition cost), or EBITDA.



Top-Line Revenue

Connect partner activity directly to overall revenue growth percentages. Quarter-over-quarter momentum tells a story that executives respond to.



CAC & Cost of Sale

Partners can significantly lower customer acquisition costs. Quantifying this impact speaks directly to the CFO and board-level metrics.



Retention & NRR

Tech partners add integrations; service partners drive value delivery. Both directly impact retention – a metric on every executive's mind.

If you're facing competing priorities from other departments, flip the script: figure out how partners can help *those* departments meet their KPIs. Customer success cares about retention? Partners can help. Marketing needs pipeline? Partners can help. This reframe transforms partnerships from a competing priority into a shared resource.

Prioritization: Follow the Money

One of the biggest challenges in partnerships is prioritization – the world of possible partners is effectively infinite, and things keep mushrooming. Gautham's core advice: **follow the money. Follow the metrics that matter. Follow the company's priorities.**

Your company may be focused on a specific industry, geography, or customer segment – enterprise, SMB, commercial. Your partner prioritization should mirror that focus, because the same partners don't play in the same places. GSIs may be critical for enterprise but largely irrelevant for SMB. Matching partner types to company priorities is the foundation of an effective prioritization matrix.

In terms of tracking outcomes, the ideal is to follow the full funnel: activities and enablement → pipeline → revenue at a given win rate. If you can track that entire progression, you can make data-driven decisions about which partners are driving the highest win rates, largest deal sizes, and most pipeline. If you can't yet, that's the work to prioritize – and it requires a strong relationship with your RevOps or partner ops team.

"Operations is one of the unsung heroes that is so, so important. Buy those people coffee. Say thank you. That's where the key lies in getting the data you need to prove impact." – Gautham Pandilan

Gautham is also a firm believer in **quality over quantity**. Large ecosystems with thousands of partners carry enormous operational overhead. Vanity metrics – like raw partner count – can obscure the fact that a focused, well-enabled set of partners often outperforms a sprawling, under-resourced one. Use data, judgment, and cultural fit together to prioritize. Don't accumulate logos – focus on the partners that will actually drive revenue.

The Power of Wins: Anatomy of a Partner Victory

Wins are the gold currency of partnerships. But it's not just the win itself that matters – it's the **win story**. Gautham calls this the "anatomy of a win": how did it actually happen? Who was involved? How did it start, move through the process, and land? That narrative is what makes a win replicable and compelling to an internal audience.

When a partner collaborates with your direct sales team to close a significant deal, call it out loudly. Name the sales rep, name the partner, describe what they did together. Then publish the customer impact story publicly – and involve the partner in that too. This builds a partner-forward culture and reinforces the idea that your company and your partners exist to serve mutual customers.



One critical and often overlooked point: **a partner leader should spend roughly half their time evangelizing internally**. If you're spending all your energy externally but lack internal support, you'll constantly hit obstacles. Sales team alignment is non-negotiable – they need to feel ownership over partner wins too. Partner marketing amplifies those wins further. It truly takes a village to raise a partner ecosystem.

Data + Storytelling: The Two Levers You Must Pull Together

Humans make decisions based on both emotion and data. The world hasn't yet been taken over by AI agents – we're still humans, driven largely by perception and feeling as much as by logic. That means you need both levers to secure executive buy-in: the data to back up your case, and the story to make it land emotionally.

The storytelling and win narratives handle the emotional element. The data you collect through ops, attribution, and measurement handles the analytical element. Your job is to **put those two things together into a coherent narrative** – because data alone can be interpreted many ways. As Gautham notes from his days as a scientist: *"The data can be interpreted to come to lots of conclusions. What's the conclusion from your data? And what example backs it up?"*

The Data Layer

Win rates with partners attached vs. without. Deal size comparisons. Pipeline by partner category. CAC reduction. NRR impact. These numbers tell executives what's working and why it scales.

The Story Layer

Pick your single best example of a partner win – one that's replicable. Frame it as: "Here's what the data shows. Here's one example. There are 100 more like this if we had X to support it." That argument is hard to turn down.

The key word is **replicability**. Partnerships are full of one-off wins that don't scale. Part of your job is identifying what's repeatable – what can you do 10 or 20 times with the right ingredients? Articulate those ingredients, then go build internal and external support around them. Collect wins, celebrate them loudly, amplify them broadly, and success will follow.

Aligning to the Company's North Star

If your partner program isn't aligned to the company's strategic priorities, it will always be at risk – of being defunded, deprioritized, or dissolved. Gautham's starting point is deceptively simple: **can you clearly articulate your company's strategy and key priorities?** If not, that's the first thing to fix.

Once you can, use that understanding as a filter for everything: which partners to recruit, which to sunset, which to invest in, and which programmatic elements to build. Your company's North Star will dictate the target industries, geographies, customer segments, and ICP – and your ideal partner profile should map directly to that ICP. Things change constantly in tech, but if you have solid grounding in the annual plan, you can navigate turbulence by returning to that anchor.

"Is what you're doing going to help the company accomplish what it's trying to accomplish? If not, that's worth deprioritizing in favor of something that actually can." – Gautham Pandilan

A practical warning: relationships can override the filter. As humans, we sometimes favor partners we know over partners that are strategically correct. Acknowledge this bias, revisit your prioritization quarterly (or monthly if needed), and practice **prioritization by subtraction** – what can you prune to go deeper on what matters most?

Finally, co-create your plan with other departments. A plan built with input from customer success, marketing, finance, and sales is a plan those teams feel ownership over. It stops being "your" partner plan and becomes the company's plan – which is exactly the kind of broad internal support that makes executive buy-in sustainable.



Inside Pendo: Building a Partner-First Culture in 10 Months

Gautham joined Pendo about 10 months ago and has been actively executing the transformation to a partner-first, partner-centric organization. While he can't share all details, the journey offers a powerful real-world case study in everything discussed throughout.

The first challenge was the classic chicken-and-egg problem: you need results to show, but you need to build infrastructure before results are possible. His solution was to **celebrate micro wins relentlessly**. Signing a new partner? Announce it internally. Enabling a partner? Mark the milestone. Closing a partner-influenced deal? Tell the story everywhere. Each milestone ladders up to a long-range vision — a 3-year direction with quarterly markers so stakeholders can see whether the program is on track.



Pendo's current focus areas — transitioning from a PLG motion to a sales-led enterprise approach, and investing heavily in AI — are both running significantly through partners. The SMB and mid-market segments, where internal resources are being redirected toward enterprise, are creating natural lanes for partners to step in and serve those customers. The result: significant year-over-year partner growth and company-wide commitment to partners as a strategic priority.

AI, the Future of Partnerships, and Final Thoughts

It's a great time to be in tech, and an even better time to be in partnerships. More and more leadership teams are recognizing that the partner lever — the one that helps you scale more efficiently and profitably — is exactly what's needed right now. AI is accelerating that realization by opening new opportunities while simultaneously disrupting existing motions.

Gautham's perspective on AI in partnerships: master the tools, understand the mentality, and then figure out what it means for the growth levers you're trying to pull. Data is becoming more democratized — with MCP servers and AI interfaces like ChatGPT and Gemini, data assets are showing up in new places. Partnership professionals need to think carefully about where their company's data and value proposition appear in that landscape.

Follow Customer Demand Signals

From early gen AI PLGs to agentic AI in production — the market is shifting fast. Let customer demand, not hype, guide your partner bets.

Understand Your Value Chain

Where do you play? What levers do you own? Use that clarity to drive company objectives as a leader for exponential growth.

The Basics Still Apply

Speak the C-suite language. Build data + story. Align to the North Star. Celebrate wins. Evangelize internally. These fundamentals don't change.



Key Takeaway: Partner programs that speak the language of growth, prove impact with data, and align to company priorities don't have to fight for budget — they attract it. The path from "nice to have" to "strategic priority" is built one win story, one data point, and one internal champion at a time.

Optimize Your Partner Program with Kiflo

You've read all the tips & tricks on how to secure buy-in for your partner program.

Now, see how Kiflo helps partner teams **measure, scale, and optimize** that impact across every motion: from onboarding to revenue.

What You'll See in our Demo



Track and Measure Revenue

Gain full visibility into partner-sourced and influenced deals to understand your ecosystem's true impact.



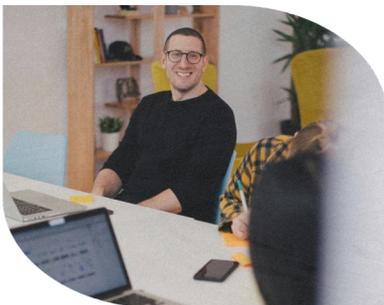
Empower and Engage Partners

Collaborate seamlessly through partner portals, deal registration, and real-time performance dashboards.



Automate and Integrate Everything

Sync partner data with your CRM and streamline enablement, payouts, and reporting, all from one platform.



Ready to build stronger partnerships?

Book a demo and experience how Kiflo can scale your partner program.

[Book Your Demo →](#)

