



# **Assess the Scene**

**by Curtis N. Bingham**

**CHIEF CUSTOMER OFFICER  
COUNCIL**

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## Assess the Scene

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*Curtis Bingham is the recognized authority on chief customer officers and the first to promote this role as a catalyst for competitive advantage. He is the creator of the CCO Roadmap, a groundbreaking work containing 100+ critical strategies essential for customer centricity. As an international speaker, author, and consultant, Curtis is passionate about creating customer strategy to sustainably grow revenue, profit, and loyalty.*

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Over the past number of years I've taken my wife and three teenage children on extended backpacking trips. We've hiked deep into the interior of Yellowstone, the Tetons, the Wind River mountains in Wyoming, and most recently, the 100 Mile Wilderness in Maine. Recognizing the risk of injury in the wilderness, I attended a wilderness first aid course. One key principle was drilled into me over and over again: Assess the scene. Often, those first on the scene of an accident rush in to help, jeopardizing their own safety or worse, causing greater harm to any victims. Similarly, customer executives and especially chief customer officers need to "assess the scene" before pushing their agenda to create a customer-centric culture.

Although we as customer executives might be tempted to argue that creating a customer-centric culture should come first and foremost, in situations of high stress, it is inevitably shoved to the back burner. A physician can't help you with your diet when you are in a diabetic coma any more than the fire department can teach safe driving habits while they are extricating you from a wrecked car. Just as the time for preventive measures is long before the accident, attention to culture must take place before the crisis.

However, when a crisis does arise, effective CCOs will choose their battles carefully, sometimes pausing the long game and helping to put out the fires. The first thing they will do is assess the scene to determine where in the company assistance is most needed and how best to provide it. Successful customer executives will:

1. Identify the most dissatisfied customers at risk of churn through whatever means possible (engagement measures, account team reports, escalations, surveys, social media, etc.).
2. Prioritize and connect with the highest priority customers to discover issues and needs, be they urgent or latent.

3. Gather a cross-functional team to understand, assess, prioritize, and resolve issues. Most importantly, the team must close the loop with customers, either indicating that the issues will not be addressed or providing a time frame for their resolution and ultimately delivering on that promise.

During a sales crisis, such as when revenue targets are in jeopardy, a chief customer officer might join sales calls to lend credence and credibility to sales efforts, or use customer analytics to determine customers most likely to upgrade or repurchase. As well, the CCO could use deep customer relationships to help account teams reach further into accounts. Even more valuably, the CCO can use significant customer relationships to engage customers in an effort to smooth the acquisition of other customers, perhaps leveraging customer references and referrals or customer participation in other marketing activities. A PR crisis might be addressed similarly, with the CCO leveraging relationships to enlist customers in smoothing over conflicts and restoring trust in the company.

Aside from the obvious benefits to the customer and the business, CCOs who use their in-depth customer knowledge to help other executives resolve crises also gain valuable [Earned Authority](#) that will help their efforts long after a crisis has passed.

As is said in political arenas, “Never waste a good crisis.” A crisis is hardly the time to focus on creating a customer-centric culture. However, by understanding and leveraging customers to weather a crisis, customer executives foster goodwill and lay the groundwork for an increased focus on customers after the crisis has passed. Once in the clear, CCOs are in a much stronger position to enlist the larger organization in preventing future crises.\*

**Key Takeaways:**

- Culture won't change in the face of crisis
- Choose battles carefully
- Lay the framework for change
- Help put out the fires first

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## About CURTIS N. BINGHAM

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## About THE CHIEF CUSTOMER OFFICER COUNCIL

The CCO Council is a powerful and intimate gathering of the world's leading customer executives from widely diverse industries. The Council helps executives achieve objectives faster and more easily by leveraging best practices. It helps validate and refine strategies and initiatives to avoid experimenting at customer expense. Membership is by invitation only, and purposefully cross-pollinated with the most forward-thinking companies, large and small, so as to help customer executives deliver solid, customer-centric business results. For more information, email [info@ccocouncil.org](mailto:info@ccocouncil.org) or call 978-226-8675.



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