



**CONVERSATIONS
WITH THE CCO:
*Earning Authority***

Hosted by Curtis N. Bingham

Featuring Jay Topper

Former SVP, Customer Success

Rosetta Stone

**CHIEF CUSTOMER OFFICER
COUNCIL**



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**Hosted by Curtis N. Bingham
Founder and Executive Director
Chief Customer Officer Council
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Conversations with the CCO is a web-based, live Q&A series hosted by the Chief Customer Officer Council that features some of the most forward-thinking and successful CCOs in the world speaking candidly about best practices and challenges in driving customer centricity. To learn more and to view past Conversations, visit www.ccocouncil.org

There are three types of authority: positional authority granted by virtue of the organizational chart; borrowed authority derived as a result of someone above you (e.g., the CEO) championing your cause; and earned authority that comes from repeated success in delivering against the goals and objectives of top management. Because positional authority is static and borrowed authority can sometimes wane, earned authority is the most reliable of the three. The secret is to ensure that your earned authority increases over time, so that you're not left without any ability to influence the organization on behalf of the customers. In this conversation I spoke with Jay Topper – SVP of Customer Success at Rosetta Stone at the time of our interview. Jay was particularly successful in leveraging transparency and peer collaboration to grow his earned authority.

PORTRAIT OF A CCO

Company Profile: Leading provider of language-learning software based in Arlington, VA.

Title: SVP Customer Success

Tenure: 2009 - 2012

Accountabilities: Customer Success organization including the support departments, language-learning coaches and the customer success team.

Curtis Bingham: You've been SVP Customer Success for two years. Where are you on the CCO continuum of authority?

JT: From day one I had borrowed and positional authority from the CEO, who said, "Our former CIO is now SVP of Customer

Success. It's a lateral move. He's going to manage the customers; some directly and some by metrics. Have at it." And then, it all



dropped down to zero because, at that point, I had to go get what I believed fits. I didn't have the language coaches, a social media arm, or global and institutional account managers but we had a vision to get there. Three months later, the product development group thought I should manage the coaches. It wasn't a *fait accompli*; I had to work it out. Then the

and everyone else understood the vision of where it was going. We're a very collaborative company; eventually, the right ideas went out; sometimes very quickly. I'm energetic, work long hours and push things, so probably made it go faster just because I knew what to do as a result of being in the organization and understanding the culture. Business change

sales, call centers, in-service, etc. The new president of Global Consumer believed they should be focused much more on sales and marketing; that we had this expertise built up whereas it wasn't their core. Once I heard that, it was like, 'All right, how do we do this prudently without bringing morale down?' I borrow authority from my peers, and I loan to my peers as well. We are not a top-down company; my peers are not pushing their own individual agendas. We're not compensated like that nor is our behavior like that. I'm just in a really cool place. We have a lot of problems and challenges, but within this realm, it feels really right.

"If you can find something that works and scale it, success will beget success. The voice of the customer is really powerful."

account managers from the B2B group came over and more recently the international offices have come under my direct control. I'm probably in the five to six range on the continuum, although sometimes it feels like I'm in the three to four. But going forward, the vast majority of authority in my department is earned, which is not uncommon throughout the rest of our organization.

CB: Is the fact that the high amount of borrowed authority quickly went to zero a function of being in a small company with lots of competing priorities?

JT: I think there is a lot of trust. I was amazed that I was given the role and took it. The CEO

happens because it's supposed to and the person that owns it needs to work the organization. I sell ideas all the time; sometimes they're right, sometimes they're not. But that's really the way it works here.

CB: Can you give an example of something you have you done to go about earning authority?

JT: I've been really fortunate that a lot of it is earned. Frankly, my department and I can't be sitting at the table offering opinions and raising conflicts when it's necessary to get the right agenda pushed through while achieving that balance between customer and business. For example, we recently took direct line responsibility for European

CB: So you increased your positional authority by figuring out what made sense to own, and in one form or another campaigning to collect those resources most appropriate to be under your oversight.

JT: The funny thing about it is when I was CIO doing this big CRM thing I believed that everything post-sales should be under one roof. I was not designing it for myself. Later, when I was interested in the role I met with the CFO, chief product officer and head of sales and said, 'Look, I



really think that everything after the sales should be in it. I'm not saying we do that on day one, but are you open to that if this vision that I have materializes and I can convince you?' They all agreed. Had everyone said, 'Over my dead body, there's no way I'm going to go talk to the CEO,' I might not have taken the role. I didn't say I had to have all this to start. I simply asked if they were open to it, because that is where I saw it going a year or two down the road with renewals, social media and global and all of that. I also kept CRM systems with me. I refused to give it up to the new CIO because it is core and part of who I am. He's a great guy and great replacement; I love the guy. Last November during the budget cycle I said, 'You know what, it's time for you to take it back. You're doing a great job.' The first thing we did is a massive implementation of Salesforce—in 90 days. So it's the same thing in reverse; as long as people are open you don't have to force it or raise it to the CEO. Every once in a while something has to be brought to the CEO, but generally speaking, things happen by natural course.

CB: That's a fantastic position to be in, one that many CCOs would be very envious of because,

so often, people are entrenched in position and resist the perceived loss of power or influence and will not divide up the pieces of their organization without the CEO's intervention.

JT: It is fantastic, but it doesn't mean I have less business anxiety or pressure. Now I have to optimize relationships and influence my peers and vice versa to continue moving forward. All of a sudden I have responsibilities for

"Our CEO is really good at getting us all in the room often and setting strategy where we clearly understand it. Each of us has the responsibility to come back with how our strategy and tactics fit into that."

revenue. If I need their help, it's not just being noisy. It's now saying, "Look, if you do this, we can get three more million dollars with the revenue. Here's the case." The pressures are more sophisticated than just putting an organization together, answering the phone and having high satisfaction.

CB: What role does tracking metrics and creating these business cases play in earning greater authority in the organization?

JT: It's huge. If you can find something that works and scale it,

success will beget success. The voice of the customer is really powerful. I cannot get over the fact that if you think more deeply about what customers literally say, i.e., "I want one-on-one studio sessions," and actually build and market those, what that means to efficacy, usage, renewal, satisfaction, and sales. It's taking it to a different level. Each one of those now requires some kind of a business case. We're not too wound up around being exactly

right within ten percent, but there does have to be validation that you're either going to save money, make money, or create more innovation around efficacy.

CB: People often end up trying to take the organization in a direction that it's not quite ready to go yet, or they haven't laid the groundwork to convince top management that change needs to happen immediately. It sounds like it's critically important to make sure that your goals are aligned with theirs.



JT: Absolutely. Our CEO is really good at getting us all in the room often and setting that strategy where we all clearly understand it. Each of us has the responsibility to come back with how our strategy and tactics fit into that. I feel that there's transparency across our groups, and that we have to bend and be creative, especially someone like me because I'm subject to the product, marketing and IT organizations. I pass that right on down to my direct reports and they create their goals.

CB: **Interestingly, at one of our recent council meetings some people suggested that borrowed authority might actually raise earned authority. As you gain more credibility in the organization, it becomes easier for the CEO and other top management teams to highlight your successes. Would you agree?**

JT: Absolutely. There's no question. It's funny because if you were to ask me today what group or additional responsibility or positional authority I would like to have, at this point in time I wouldn't have an answer. It's been

a long time since I felt that way. I'm not saying that a year from now I wouldn't take on more responsibilities, but right now I'm in the lull of, 'Take what you've got, scale it, make it better because more responsibilities will end up coming.' When you have a revenue number to hit, that changes things a little. What area of organizational maturity are you in? That lull that you need to, now, bolster up? My department is set for a while; maybe a while is six months. But now, it's time to optimize and get those trains running.



About CURTIS N. BINGHAM

As Executive Director of the Chief Customer Officer Council™, 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.



About Jay Topper

Jay Topper joined Rosetta Stone in 2007 as CIO and held that position through the company's April 2009 IPO, when he became SVP, Customer Success. Prior to joining Rosetta Stone, Jay was CIO and SVP of India Operations for Seven Worldwide, a global pre-media company. In August 2012, Jay joined Vitacost.com as CTO & CIO. Jay holds a B.S. in Mathematics from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy and an M.S. in Telecommunications and Information Management from the Polytechnic Institute of NYU.

About THE CHIEF CUSTOMER OFFICER COUNCIL

The Chief Customer Officer Council is the first of its kind; a member-led peer-advisory network offering unparalleled insight into the critical issues facing CCOs. It was created to provide a safe environment where CCOs can share ideas, concerns, and build best practices that will help them, their companies, and especially their customers succeed. The Council includes CCOs from diverse industries, purposefully cross-pollinated with the most forward-thinking companies, large and small. For more information, visit www.ccocouncil.org, email info@ccocouncil.org or call 978-226-8675.



Conversations with the CCO: Influencing to Action with Peter Quinn - In this article by Curtis N. Bingham, featuring Peter Quinn, CCO of Infor, you'll learn critical first year strategies for ensuring the success of your customers and consequently, the impact of their success upon your sales.

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