COMMERCIAL EXCELLENCE CONSORTIUM™

BEST PRACTICES FOR BUILDING OWNERSHIP

How leaders build the conditions for ownership

Six practices and three tools to use with your own team this week, from 46 executives, Dr. Paul Stoltz and Jesse Hopps.

Source: the executive roundtable “Cultivating Ownership with Dr. Paul Stoltz,” November 24, 2026.



49	6	3	THE SCIENCE	THE CONDITIONS
People from 18 countries	Practices that build ownership	Tools to run with your team	Dr. Paul Stoltz, creator of AQ®	Jesse Hopps, founder, Commercial Excellence Consortium™

WHO THE PRACTICES COME FROM

Executives from these 37 companies took part in the roundtable



Logos show where the executives who took part work today. Taking part is personal: it is not a company endorsement or a client relationship.

THE EXPERTS BEHIND THIS

Ownership has two sides, and an expert on each

THE RESPONSE PEOPLE BRING



Dr. Paul Stoltz

Creator of AQ® · Founder and CEO of PEAK Learning

One of the world's leading scientists and experts studying ownership in human beings, and how the CORE response, part of AQ®, predicts and improves it in adversity, in uncertainty and through change.

5 million+
People measured for AQ® across 137 countries

17
Languages for his five international bestsellers

✓ Harvard Business School adopted his AQ® tools

THE CONDITIONS LEADERS SET



Jesse Hopps

Founder, Philosopher, Author, Coach

His work is **how large enterprises build the conditions in which people take ownership**. The point of view in this piece is his: conditions before people, pull before push.

6,589
Companies in 108 countries use Demand Metric, founded in 2006

Nearly 500
Senior executives in the Consortium he founded

✓ Architect of TransformationOS™; writing *The Transformation Architect*

AQ®, GRIT™ and CORE are frameworks and IP from PEAK Learning.

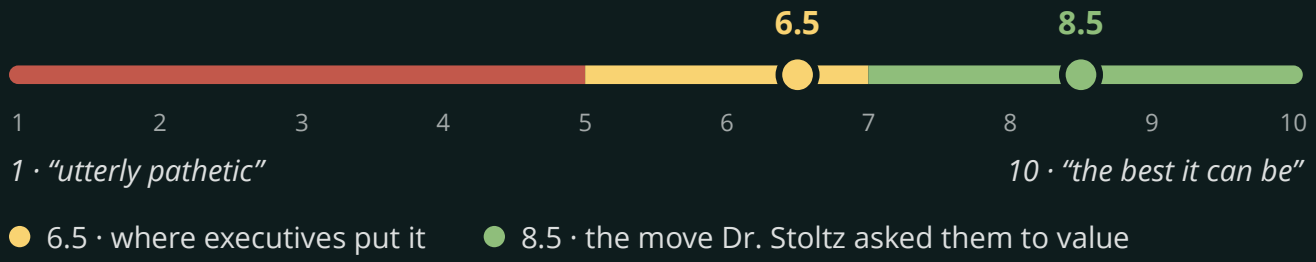
THE STAKES

Ownership is worth a great deal. Executives rated it at about 6.5 out of 10.

6.5

out of 10

How executives rated their people's overall daily ownership toward what they are trying to do.



The ends of the scale are Dr. Stoltz's words.

Asked what moving it from 6.5 to 8.5 out of 10 would be worth to their enterprise, executives answered from hundreds of millions to billions of dollars. The percentages Dr. Stoltz read out ran from 20 to 70.

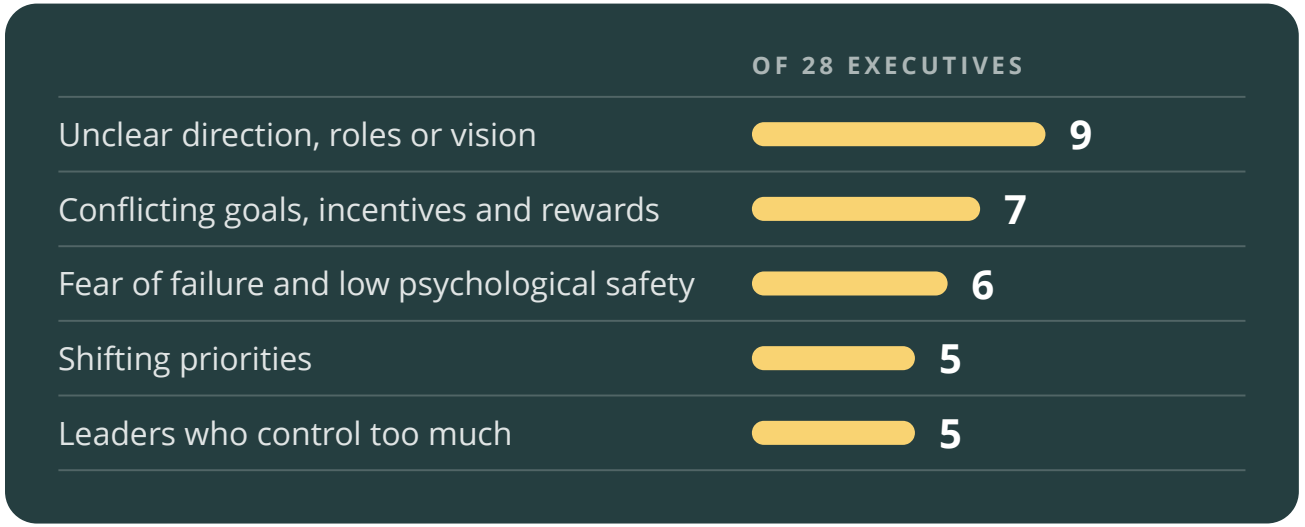
> ***"We know that cumulatively on this call right now, this meeting right now, hundreds of billions of dollars are at stake in moving that needle."***
>
> Dr. Stoltz

Ask your own leadership team for the number. Then ask what two more points would be worth.

WHERE TO LOOK FIRST

Before you ask people to own more, look at the conditions around them

Asked why their people hold back, executives named the conditions around them more often than the people.



The question: **“Why are they not demonstrating full ownership?”**

THE OTHER SIDE

Conditions are not the whole answer. One executive argued that part of it sits with the people:

“I think it’s maybe a lack of looking at themselves, take ownership and feel the ownership and act on it.”

Former P&L owner, engineering thermoplastics · plastics

An honest diagnosis can conclude that individual behavior needs to change.

Almost every item on the list is something leaders set up.
It is where to look first.

How people respond to adversity predicts how much ownership they take

Dr. Stoltz measures that response in four dimensions, known as CORE. They are the four parts of AQ® (Adversity Quotient®).

C	**Control**	How much you believe you can influence what happens next.
O	**Ownership**	**How likely you are to step up and make it better.** THE PART THIS PIECE IS ABOUT
R	**Reach**	How far a setback spreads into everything else.
E	**Endurance**	How long you expect it to last.

"High AQ® people naturally step up. And lower AQ® people tend to step back."

Dr. Stoltz

Control and ownership feed each other, Dr. Stoltz says: the more people believe they can influence, the more they step up. Leaders set the conditions. The CORE response is the human side of the same question.

IT PREDICTS OWNERSHIP

In Dr. Stoltz's research, the CORE response predicts people's ownership in adversity, in uncertainty and through change.

PEOPLE CAN STRENGTHEN IT

Leaders can measure it, and people can strengthen it at any age.

AQ®, GRIT™ and CORE are frameworks and IP from PEAK Learning.

PRACTICE 1 OF 6

Involve people in the why. Set the targets with the team.

WHY IT WORKS

People who helped shape the why have a reason to follow it. Dr. Stoltz's point is the gap in practice: leaders spend much of their energy on rewards and incentives, and far less on growing motivation from the inside. Jesse Hopps's words for it: "We usually do the opposite - carrots and sticks."

WHAT EXECUTIVES SAID

"I think it works extremely well when people are involved in the why."

Senior Director, Customer and Commercial Excellence · medical technology

27 of 27 executives said intrinsic motivation matters more than extrinsic for the ownership they want

01

TRY THIS WEEK

Take one goal that leadership handed you. Ask the team what it means for their work, and set the target together.

PRACTICE 2 OF 6

Hold the outcome steady. Hand over the how.

WHY IT WORKS

Control over method is what most people want back. In Dr. Stoltz's research, the more people believe they can influence what happens next, the more they step up. Shifting priorities and KPIs take that belief away.

WHAT EXECUTIVES SAID

"What they like to control is how to achieve."

Global Head of Commercial Excellence · chemicals distribution

16 of 26 executives want people to own outcomes, results or impact, not tasks

02

TRY THIS WEEK

Pick one team. State the outcome you need and let them own how to reach it. Keep the priorities few. One executive's rule: "better to do 3 things well than 7 things badly."

PRACTICE 3 OF 6

Set the size of the playground with context and guardrails

WHY IT WORKS

A clear limit lets people act inside it without asking permission. Jesse Hopps's view is that structure and freedom work together: leaders define the direction and the boundaries, and people get real room to find the way inside them.

WHAT EXECUTIVES SAID

"...guardrails that give people clarity on ... how their playground looks like, and what the size of that is."

Business transformation leader · pharma

5 of 28 executives named leaders who control too much as a reason people hold back

03

TRY THIS WEEK

Tell one team three things: what they can decide, how far it reaches and what is off limits.

PRACTICE 4 OF 6

Show people their work matters and that someone is paying attention

WHY IT WORKS

Dr. Stoltz calls it mattering: “We have to believe that who we are and what we do makes a difference in some way.” People who can see what their work changed have a reason to step up again.

WHAT EXECUTIVES SAID

“If you also show that what they do matters and there is someone paying attention, that also creates engagement and ownership.”

Senior Director, Commercial Planning · medical devices

Another executive said a vision can be clear and engaging while people still lack the view of how they personally affect it.

04

TRY THIS WEEK

Recognize one good idea, practice or experiment this week, where it happened. Say what it changed.

PRACTICE 5 OF 6

Make it safe to try and to fail. Safe is not the same as comfortable.

WHY IT WORKS

Freedom to try something new has to come with freedom to fail. Dr. Stoltz adds the other half: comfort wears ownership down. In a sealed biosphere with perfect soil and a controlled climate, many of the trees died. They had no wind. So make the stretch safe, and keep the stretch.

WHAT EXECUTIVES SAID

"AI simulations and coaching has proved to be a great safe place for our leaders to try, fail and learn"

Group Vice President, Business Transformation · industrial technology

6 of 28 executives named fear of failure and low psychological safety as a reason people hold back

05

TRY THIS WEEK

Say the rule out loud: fail fast, learn fast, correct course. Then give one team a low-stakes place to practice.

PRACTICE 6 OF 6

Go first as the leader.
Then clear what is in the way.

WHY IT WORKS

Dr. Stoltz asks leaders to meet the standard they set: **“How dare we expect any greater ownership of our people than we demonstrate ourselves?”** Permission alone leaves the obstacles in place. The organization has to make ownership easy, not only ask for more effort.

WHAT EXECUTIVES SAID

“as a leader it starts with you - if you show ownership, you encourage others to follow”

Senior Director, growth platform · chemicals

The same executive added that giving a team permission is not enough. The support you give matters as much.

06

TRY THIS WEEK

Ask your team what sits between them and action: a technology, a process or an outside constraint. Remove one this week.

Rate the why, then rate the try. Act on the gap between them.

HOW TO RUN IT

01 Ask each person: **"On a scale of one to ten, how strong is your why?"**

02 Then ask for the try: "Ten's like the hardest you've ever tried at anything."

03 A try above the why ends in burnout. A why above the try gives no progress.

Both scales are Dr. Stoltz's wording. Ask for people's own answer, not the leader's.

"Without the why, there is no try."

Dr. Stoltz

His example: a nonprofit team protecting the Grand Canyon rated its why at 10, 12 and 13, off the top of the scale, and its try at about 2.5 out of 10.

THE BENCHMARK



- 6.0 · Their people's try, out of 10
- 7.0 · Their people's why, out of 10

17 of 25

executives who rated both put the try below the why

The why and try rating is Dr. Stoltz's and PEAK Learning's tool.

Ask what your people do first when something goes wrong

"What is your people's first response when something goes wrong?"



Turn the adversity into fuel that takes you somewhere you would not have reached without it.	0	of 18
Apply a problem-solving method. Most change management sits here.	4	of 18
Keep your head above water, again and again.	13	of 18
The setback hits and you are still here. Then: **now what?**		
Do not answer the email. Say yes and mean no.	0	of 18

One executive said both cope and manage.

"We know we can't cope our way to greatness."

Dr. Stoltz

Ask about the moment something goes wrong, not what people do eventually. Then track the answer the way you track any capability. Dr. Stoltz on the top level: "At the top, people don't do it better. They do something different."

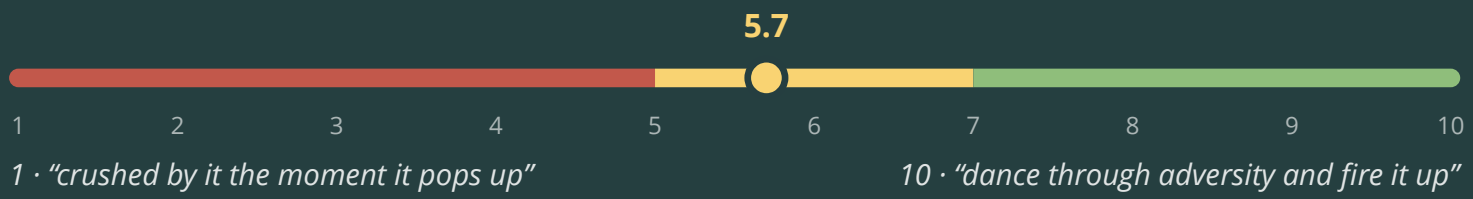
The adversity pyramid is Dr. Stoltz's and PEAK Learning's.

Ask the four CORE questions to see where a team may get stuck

C	**Control**	**How much do we believe we can influence what happens next?**
O	**Ownership**	**How likely are we to step up and make it better?**
R	**Reach**	**How far does a setback spread into everything else?**
E	**Endurance**	**How long do we expect it to last?**

5.7 **out of 10**

How executives rated their people's overall AQ® in the moment adversity hits



The ends of the scale are Dr. Stoltz's words. The AQ® assessment itself uses a 200-point scale.

HOW TO USE IT

Ask a team which of the four is strongest, which is weakest, and why. One executive named control and ownership as the strongest pair. Another named control and reach as the weakest. To measure it, start with the AQ® profile.

"The question is, can we shift the curve? How quickly can we get medium AQ® people to medium high and medium high to high?"

Jesse Hopps

AQ®, GRIT™ and CORE are frameworks and IP from PEAK Learning.

THE PLAYBOOK ON ONE PAGE

Ask one question, then build six conditions

ASK FIRST

What may be getting in the way?

Ask the people doing the work before you ask them to own more. The answer may be the conditions around them, or what is theirs to change.

PRACTICE 1

Involve people in the why

Set the targets with the team, not above it.

PRACTICE 2

Hold the outcome, hand over the how

Name the outcome and let people choose the method.

PRACTICE 3

Set the size of the playground

Say what people can decide, how far it reaches and what is off limits.

PRACTICE 4

Show that the work matters

Recognize what people did and say what it changed.

PRACTICE 5

Make it safe to try and fail

Fail fast, learn fast, correct course. Give people a place to practice.

PRACTICE 6

Go first, then clear the way

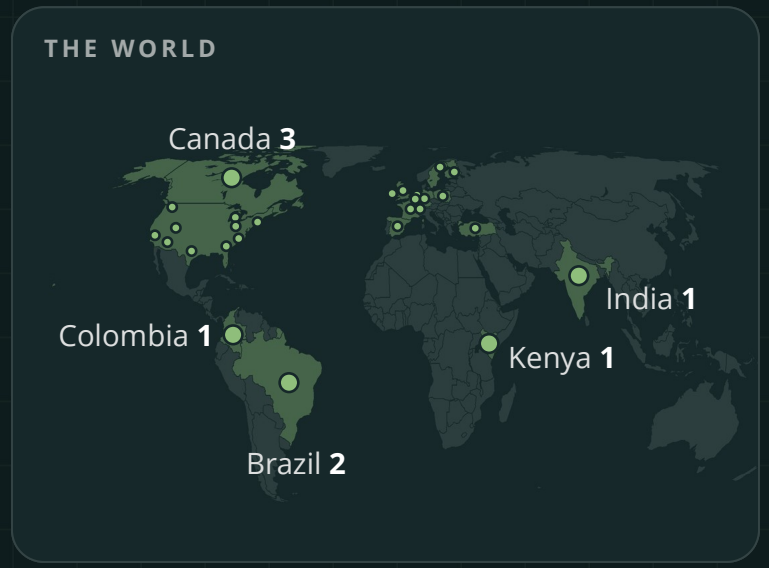
Show ownership yourself, then remove what blocks it.

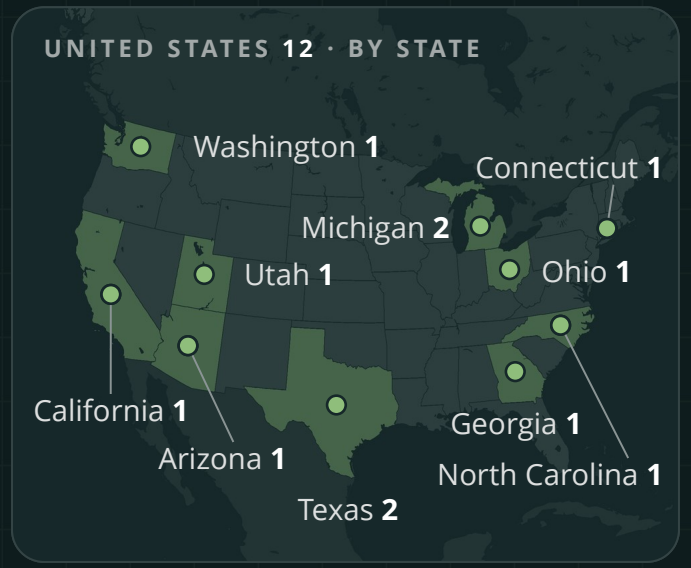
Then check progress with Dr. Stoltz's three tools: why and try, first response, the CORE questions.

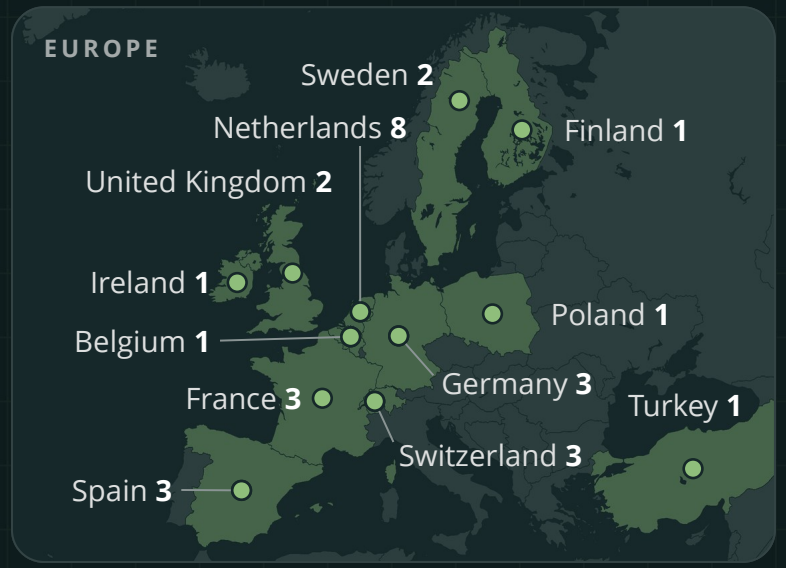
WHERE THE PRACTICES COME FROM

The practices come from executives around the world and across industries

49 people joined from 18 countries: 46 executives, the host, the guest expert and the operator coach.







INDUSTRIES

Medical technology and diagnostics **10** · Chemicals and materials **9** · Pharma **7** · Consumer goods and food **7**
Industrial technology and manufacturing **7** · Food ingredients **2** · Logistics **2** · Services and technology **2**

FUNCTIONS

Commercial and sales excellence **15** · Transformation **8** · Strategy **5** · Sales leadership **4** · Pricing **3** · Marketing **3** · General management **3**
Data, AI and IT **2** · Other **3**

Pins show everyone on the call by country, and by state in the United States.

ACROSS A LARGE ENTERPRISE

TransformationOS™

Build these conditions across the whole enterprise

The practices in this piece are conditions one leader can set for one team. A large enterprise has to build them across many teams, and keep them.

Thousands of people have to willingly change how they think and work while the business keeps running.
TransformationOS™ is the system we built for that problem.

The model: three levers, three outcomes, nine accelerators and the mechanism behind each. Its architect is Jesse Hopps.

On the page the map is interactive: tap or hover any lever, outcome, accelerator or mechanism for a short explanation.

See the interactive map →

commercialexcellenceconsortium.com/transformation-os



AQ®, GRIT™ and CORE are frameworks and IP from PEAK Learning.

ABOUT THE CONSORTIUM

The Consortium is a peer community of nearly 500 senior executives

The Commercial Excellence Consortium™ is an invite-only peer community of nearly 500 senior executives at large global enterprises responsible for enterprise transformation and organic growth. The Consortium hosts monthly executive roundtables and convenes practitioners who believe that operators, not consultants, are best positioned to solve the hardest problems in commercial excellence.

For Commercial Excellence leaders ready to accelerate transformation and prove measurable impact, the Commercial Excellence Consortium's Executive Fellowship Program is the next step. It is an eight-week program in which you build a Transformation Acceleration Blueprint for your own organization, with TransformationOS™, Dr. Paul Stoltz's science and private coaching from operators.

WHERE YOU START

Commercial Excellence Consortium™

Peer roundtables, Growth Platform™ access, AQ® assessments.

Request to Join →

Free
membership is the peer community

WHERE YOU BUILD

Fellowship™

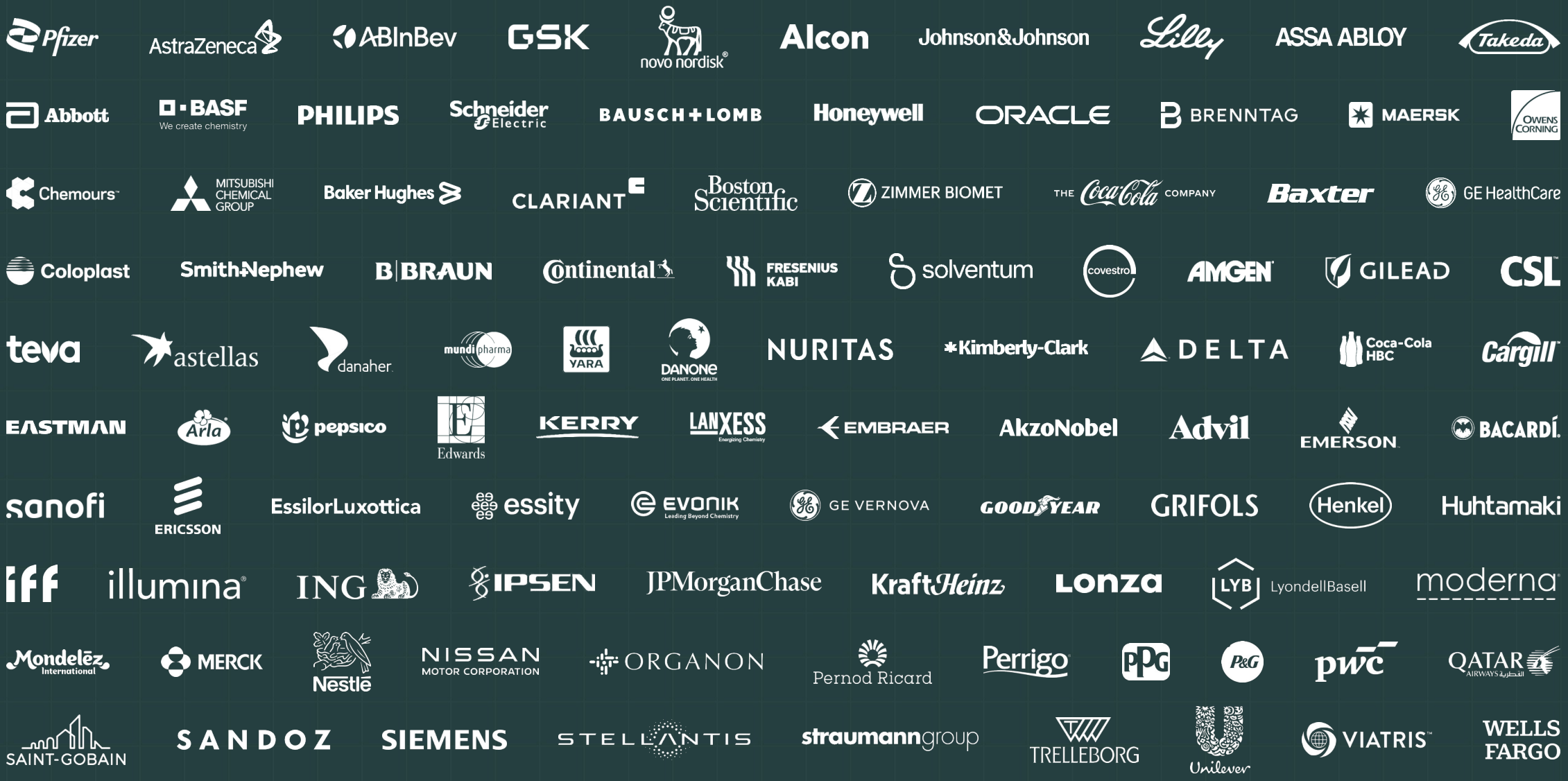
The first cohort starts in January 2027. Applications close December 31, 2026.

Apply to join →

8 weeks
in a cohort of 20 senior leaders

The Commercial Excellence Consortium™ is where you start. Fellowship™ is where you build.

Our members lead at companies including



Logos are of companies whose leaders are members of the Commercial Excellence Consortium™. Membership is not a client relationship.

COMMERCIAL EXCELLENCE CONSORTIUM™



THE NEXT STEP

Apply to join the Fellowship

The Fellowship is where you build the plan to do this in your own organization: eight weeks, in a cohort of 20 senior leaders.

Apply to join the Fellowship →

commercialexcellenceconsortium.com/executive-fellowship

The first cohort starts in January 2027. Applications close December 31, 2026.

WATCH

The recording and the recap

commercialexcellenceconsortium.com/roundtables

MEASURE

AQ® profile and GRIT™ gauge

Members: use your assessment link

OPERATIONALIZE

The TransformationOS™ map

commercialexcellenceconsortium.com/transformation-os