



Strive Sessions: B2B Roundtable San Francisco

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Created by:

Strive

Powering Hypergrowth™

Executive Summary

In November 2023, **Strive** hosted their fifth ‘Strive Sessions’ Roundtable event.

The aim of the event was to bring together Investment and VC Partners, as well as Sales Leaders and Founders from the Go-To-Market community, to share best practices, discuss current challenges, network, and generally have some fun!

The dinner was led by Strive, with hosts on the day being **John Hitchen**, **Dylan Hoyle** and **Naomi Walsh**.

Our special guest speaker at this event, was **Chris Finan**, who shared his experience and learnings from his impressive career in the SaaS space, spanning across President, CRO and COO roles.

With the headline topic of the evening being ‘Building the Foundations for Scale’, some of the core areas covered over dinner, which will be discussed throughout this Key Takeaways document, were:

- Making the change from a business operating with Founder led Management to a Management led business.
- The right type of profile for the stage of your business.
- When to start building out Marketing and become more Product v Sales led.



Guest Speaker



Chris Finan is an entrepreneur with a passion for creating and scaling world-changing companies, products and policies.

Chris has founded, advised and served in executive leadership positions in a variety of early-stage and growth-stage cybersecurity companies, including Shape Security (acquired by F5 Networks), ActZero (backed by Point72), and Impermium

(acquired by Google). He also founded Manifold Technology, a venture-backed company that delivered blockchain-based secure transaction infrastructure to the Global 500.

Prior to his time in Silicon Valley, he was the Product Director for Plan X, a Department of Defense cyber warfare research and development program at DARPA. Chris also previously served in the Obama administration as the Director for Cybersecurity Legislation and Policy on the National Security Council in the White House. During his time in the NSC, Chris led the administration's legislative reform efforts, played a key role in the data privacy debate, and spearheaded the

Executive Order that directed the development of the NIST cybersecurity framework.

Chris began his career in the U.S. Air Force as a pilot and intelligence officer, including a tour in Iraq where he led an intelligence team and served as a liaison to the Iraqi government.

Chris is a non-resident scholar with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and a senior fellow with Technology for Global Security. He has been a regular contributor on Bloomberg News and MSNBC, and his writing has been featured in the New York Times, Politico, Time, and Wired. He lives in the San Francisco Bay area with his wife and two daughters.

"The Strive team put together a wonderful dinner with a tasty menu and thoughtful conversation.

We had a great mix of operators and investors around the table willing to share their experiences about overcoming the challenges of scaling; and a few stories about not overcoming them as well.

It was authentic and insightful. I'm grateful to Strive for bringing us together - I've continued the conversation with many of the people I met that evening."

Chris Finan



We asked our attendees for their feedback on the overall event as well as the content, post event:

Overall rating of the evening

5 out of 5

Overall content rating

4.9 out of 5

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Testimonials



“Thanks to the Strive team for pulling together such a valuable and informative networking event!

I really enjoyed the curated discussion on the evening, and the topic of choice wasn’t easy or fluffy, but addressed the hard topics of being Founder led and transitioning to a Team led model – and the mixture of both early and late-stage investors, plus GTM Leaders ensured a diverse and valuable range of experiences and opinions.

I would definitely recommend attending a Strive event!”

Halyna Vasylevska
Munich Re Ventures



“I am so glad I attended the Strive Sessions event! The event was clearly very carefully organised by Strive. I saw this through the smaller things like the regular contact before the event as well as the carefully considered location; and also, through the more important things, such as the carefully considered conversation topics and attendees list.

There was a super interesting combination of GTM leaders and Investors, leading to a diverse conversation, and the topics were great. What surprised me was that no one was trying to sell anything, it was all around giving value and supporting the group.”

Tammy Schuring
Longbow



“I was referred to the Strive event by a contact, so was not entirely sure what to expect from the evening – however, the event was much cooler than I even anticipated and was a really interesting balance of VCs, Operators and Sales.

For me, it was a great opportunity to mix with other VC Investors and learn how they invest - which was different to my approach so was a great insight.

I made some really meaningful connections on the evening and would definitely recommend a Strive event to others!”

Operating Partner at a VC

Making the change from a founder-led to management-led business

A large part of the evening focussed on making the change from operating at a Founder Led level to a Management Led business.

Some key considerations discussed were:

- How this move can differ dependent on VC relationships.
- What the Investors expect / want at different stages.
- What processes will need to change and how equipped the business is for this.
- What knowledge share there needs to be in this transfer and how this will be managed.

A part of this discussion was around when the ICP is identified and therefore when repeatable processes should come in. Consensus on the evening was for a Company to get to 15 customers and then start to zone in on ICP.

Identified 'Sticking points' in a Founder Led company and its growth, that were discussed during the evening, were:

- The Founder holding onto the sales process for too long – as they have been responsible for creating the first sales, it can be hard to handover.
- Not bringing in the right Management level individual(s).



Hiring the right type of profile for the stage of your business

The different type of Rep profile required for a Pre-Series A business versus Series A plus, was discussed.

The analogy of the ‘Artist versus Athlete’ hiring profile was highlighted.

Pre-Series A Companies should be looking for an ‘Artist’. Typical traits here would be:

- Entrepreneurial.
- Doesn’t really sell with a logo behind them.
- Does all their own pipeline generation.
- Focused on evangelism.
- Someone with a strong network already.
- Strong internal collaboration skills (almost like a Project Manager).
- Self-reliant.

Companies that are Series A plus, would typically be looking for an ‘Athlete’. At this stage:

- Playbooks are made – there is a good, repeatable sales process.
- The company is starting to know who their ICP is.
- Territory Management to map out the market is being undertaken.
- Being more strategic with patches / geographies.

Some attendees discussed the benefit of hiring mature Reps who have worked in a sub \$1m ARR business and therefore have the ‘battle scars’ of a start-up world, but also have the balance of a strong network to discuss the product with.

We also discussed hiring the right type of individual and a topic point was around understanding the candidate’s story.

- Can they tell their story directly and authentically?
- Do they share the challenges everybody else has faced?
- Can they talk about where they have succeeded and also where they have failed?

Ensure the interview process isn’t just a tick box exercise – hear their story (their wins, failures, where they’ve come from, why they do what they do). Maintain an emotional side to the interview.

Click For Further Info

When to Hire Sales Leaders Document

Objectives at each Funding Round: Discover how to prepare for each different funding level, from Pre-Seed through to Series B.

Interview Questions and Quick Tips Guide



When to start building out marketing: Becoming more Product v Sales-led

The main discussions were around:

- When should a company start to build out Marketing?
- Should they be Product or Sales led?
- How should you approach these two different paths?

Defining which category your product fits into, will point you to which Marketing hire you require first:

- Open-Source products are usually PLG, whereas Closed-source are typically SLG.
- In a SLG environment you are less likely to need a Product Marketing Manager as the priority, you are more likely to look for a Demand Generation / Content Creation Specialist.

Typically, a Product Marketing Manager will be brought in as a high-priority hire. Product Marketing is important to help define:

- Messaging and Product Market Fit.
- The Product Roadmap.
- The Product narrative and the story of the Product.
- Home in on the ICP.

It was agreed that it is now more important than ever to scale Marketing earlier, due to changes in market conditions.



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Founded in 2017, Strive is a specialist go-to-market talent partner whose network spans the globe.

With offices in the UK and US and a headcount of 30, Strive has the size to offer talent acquisition services at scale, whilst also the capability to deliver on strategic hires.

Working with leading VC's, Strive has helped scale their portfolio of B2B SaaS companies, placing key hires within the go-to-market function.

Scaling go-to-market teams for the world's leading, VC-backed SaaS companies.



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