

THE FOUNDER'S GUIDE

The Fractional CRO Playbook

Senior revenue leadership without the full-time hire. What a fractional CRO actually does, when you need one, and what to expect in the first 90 days.

By Sachin Shah, SS Consultancy Group | 2026 Edition

3x

Average pipeline growth within 12 months

40%

Typical reduction in customer churn

90 days

When meaningful results should be visible

INTRODUCTION

The problem with hiring a full-time CRO too early

A full-time Chief Revenue Officer costs between £150,000 and £250,000 per year before bonuses, equity, and on-costs. For most businesses at Seed through Series B, that budget does not exist. And even if it did, hiring a full-time CRO before the revenue function is properly defined is one of the most expensive mistakes a founder can make.

A fractional CRO changes the maths entirely. You get senior experience, immediate impact, and the flexibility to scale the engagement as the business grows — without the overhead of a permanent hire.

The right time to hire a full-time CRO is when the function is already working. A fractional CRO helps you get there.

PART ONE

What a fractional CRO actually does

The role varies by business stage and need, but a fractional CRO typically operates across five areas:

1. Revenue strategy

Setting the direction — which markets, which customer segments, which channels, and at what pace. This is not an annual exercise. It is a living document that responds to what the data is showing. A good fractional CRO connects the revenue strategy directly to the financial model and the investment story.

2. Sales leadership

Managing the sales team, setting quotas, running pipeline reviews, coaching individuals, and holding the team accountable to the number. For many early-stage companies, this is the most immediate value — providing the day-to-day leadership that turns a group of salespeople into a functioning team.

3. Go-to-market alignment

Making sure sales, marketing, and customer success are pointing in the same direction. Misalignment between these functions is one of the most common causes of pipeline quality problems and churn. A fractional CRO sits across all three and removes the friction between them.

4. Process and infrastructure

Installing the CRM discipline, forecasting cadence, and reporting that gives leadership visibility into the revenue function. This is often the foundation everything else depends on, and it is frequently missing in early-stage companies.

5. Hiring and onboarding

Building the team where there are gaps, and onboarding new hires into a clear playbook. A fractional CRO who has built sales teams before will significantly accelerate the ramp time of new hires and dramatically reduce the risk of a bad hire.

PART TWO

When do you need a fractional CRO?

You are preparing to raise

Investors want to see a functioning revenue operation. If your forecasts are based on intuition rather than data, and your pipeline is managed in a spreadsheet, a fractional CRO can transform the quality of the conversation you are able to have in the room.

Revenue has flatlined

When growth stops and nobody can clearly explain why, it is almost always a symptom of disconnected teams, weak pipeline discipline, or a sales process that worked at ten customers but breaks at fifty. A fractional CRO diagnoses this quickly and rebuilds.

You have a sales team but no real sales leadership

A team without direction and coaching will underperform relative to their potential, and they will tell you with their feet eventually. A fractional CRO provides the structure the team needs without the overhead of a permanent hire.

You are entering a new market

Expansion requires a different playbook. A fractional CRO who has done this before can build it faster than an internal team working it out from scratch.

The question is not whether you need senior revenue leadership. The question is whether you need it full-time yet. Usually, the answer is no.

PART THREE

What to expect in the first 90 days

Days 1 to 30: Listen and diagnose

A good fractional CRO does not arrive with a playbook already written. The first month is diagnostic. Conversations with the sales team, review of the pipeline data, analysis of won and lost deals, and an honest assessment of where the function is strong and where it is weak. The output is a clear view of the two or three highest-impact changes.

Days 31 to 60: Build and install

The first interventions go in. This might be a revised qualification framework, a restructured pipeline review process, a new forecasting model, or a rebuilt ICP. These are not permanent — they are starting points that will be refined based on what the data shows.

Days 61 to 90: Measure and adjust

By 90 days, the first results should be visible. Pipeline quality should be improving. The team should have more clarity. The forecasting should be more reliable. Based on what is working, the next phase of the engagement is defined.

What does not happen in 90 days

A fractional CRO will not transform a business in three months. They will identify the highest-impact changes, start implementing them, and create the conditions for the results that emerge over the following 12 months. The businesses that see 3x pipeline growth are the ones that commit to the process for a full year, not the ones that expect results in a quarter.

CLOSING

Is a fractional CRO right for you?

If your ARR is below £5M and growing, a fractional CRO almost certainly delivers better value than a full-time hire. The experience level you can access fractionally is typically higher than what you could afford permanently at this stage. And the flexibility to scale up or down as the business changes is worth considerably more than most founders realise.

If you are above £5M ARR and the revenue function is well established, you may be ready for a full-time hire. A fractional CRO can help you define exactly what you need before you go to market, and can often help you find the right person.

***We work as fractional CRO with Founders and CEOs at Seed through Series B.
If you want to understand whether a fractional engagement is right for your
business, get in touch.***

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Statistics referenced from SS Consultancy Group proprietary client data spanning 10+ years of revenue advisory engagements across AI and SaaS businesses.