

# You bought everything but the system

*Why sellers, managers, and tools underperform without Commercial Operations*

Troy Bunting, Principal · July 2026

---

## The problem

Every commercial organization invests in three things: sellers, sales managers, and the technology that supports both. Most invest substantially. A large share of them are disappointed in the return.

The cause is rarely the quality of the sellers, the talent of the managers, or the capability of the tools. It is the absence or underutilization of the function that connects them – the data, the processes, the operating discipline, and the enablement that puts consistent messaging and selling materials in sellers' hands – that allows a commercial organization to convert investment into compounding performance.

Some companies call this RevOps. Some call it SalesOps. Tioga calls it Commercial Operations, though the label matters less than whether the function is doing the work. In most organizations, it isn't. The work falls into one of three failure patterns:

- **No formal function.** Operational responsibilities are scattered across sellers, sales leaders, finance, and administrators. No one owns the system.
- **A function exists but is under-resourced.** One or two people divide their time across multiple distinct roles, invariably spending most of their time on basic reporting and administration, leaving no capacity for the work that creates real leverage.
- **A function exists but lacks critical capabilities.** Over time, market share accrues to firms that evolve into modern, data-driven selling organizations – an evolution that is nearly impossible for an organization whose Commercial Operations function is limited to basic operational support. That function cannot meaningfully address the underlying drivers of performance: sales enablement, CRM optimization, advanced analytics, and AI integration.

The rest of this paper does five things. It describes the work a properly constructed Commercial Operations function performs. It explains why the function is genuinely hard to build internally. It unpacks the consequences of getting it wrong — an error that compounds over time. And it describes a cost-effective alternative — a fractional, embedded operating partner working inside a proven selling system — that fixes the problem faster than most internal builds can. And it points to the moments and triggering events that often make building the function urgent.

## What Commercial Operations does

Across its assorted labels – Sales Operations, Revenue Operations, or Tioga's preferred Commercial Operations – a consistent picture emerges of what organizations need from this function: to coordinate

the system that supports direct sales activity, so that sellers, managers, and sales technology produce more than they would working independently. Whichever label a company prefers, much of the underlying work is the same, and it clusters into nine essential activities:

- **Planning & design** — Territory design, quota setting, capacity and coverage planning; translating growth strategy into a deployable go-to-market plan.
- **Process architecture** — Pipeline stage definitions, qualification criteria, lead routing, cross-team handoffs, and approval workflows; designed once, applied consistently.
- **Data ownership & governance** — A single trustworthy version of pipeline, activity, and customer truth; field standards, entry requirements, deduplication, and audits.
- **Analytics & forecasting** — Forecast models, performance reporting, dashboards, and pipeline analytics that convert raw data into decisions leadership can trust.
- **Technology governance** — CRM administration and the full stack lifecycle: procurement, integration, adoption, rationalization, retirement, and AI integration.
- **Enablement & onboarding** — Training, messaging, content, and methodology adoption that get sellers productive faster and keep execution consistent.
- **Compensation & incentives** — Commission plan design and administration that align seller behavior with company objectives.
- **Deal & transaction support** — Deal desk, proposal generation, contracts, and the administrative absorption that returns selling time to sellers.
- **Operating cadence** — The weekly rhythm of forecast calls, pipeline reviews, and scorecards that turns all of the above into continuous, compounding improvement.

## Why this is hard to build

If you have tried to build a Commercial Operations function internally and struggled, you are not alone. The function is genuinely difficult to develop, for reasons that are structural rather than individual.

### It is rarely seen as a discrete need

Most commercial leaders see specific problems — slow ramp, weak forecasts, unused tools — without recognizing them as symptoms of a single underlying gap. Each problem gets handed to a different owner: enablement to a sales leader, analytics to finance, CRM cleanup to whoever has bandwidth. Without an integrating owner, each piece improves locally while the system keeps running at a fraction of its capacity. No part of the organization is optimizing for the only outcome that matters: more high-quality sales conversations with the right customers.

### There is no shared view of where the function should create value

Even when companies stand up a Commercial Operations team, most lack a clear sense of which problems it exists to solve. The function becomes reactive — reports, CRM upkeep, comp adjustments — without addressing the issues that move performance. Sales leaders begin routing around it, and a function meant to drive growth is experienced as another layer of bureaucracy.

## **The function requires a non-sales skill set inside a sales organization**

Commercial Operations roles are analytical, systems-oriented, and process driven: forecasting, CRM management, analytics, enablement, operational execution. But the technical skill is only half the job. The work pays off only when the person doing it also understands the sales role from three vantage points – how the process looks to the buyer, what the day feels like from the seller’s seat, and what a manager needs to run and coach a team. The skills are non-sales; the judgment behind them has to be grounded in selling. That is what makes the hire hard: sales leaders are asked to find, in one person, an operational skill profile that looks nothing like their own and a real feel for how selling works.

Breadth makes it worse. A complete function may span enablement, territory design, pipeline inspection, performance analytics, CRM governance, tech stack management, AI integration, and compensation administration. Few individuals have depth across all of it, and most mid-sized organizations cannot justify the headcount to cover it all. So they hire one or two generalists, accept the gaps, and live with the consequences.

## **The barriers are highest where the need is greatest**

For small and mid-sized companies, building a team with that breadth is often prohibitively expensive. So they settle for partial solutions or defer entirely – absorbing the cost in lower seller productivity, weaker management, and underused technology. Many believe they need greater scale before they can justify a real build. The harder truth is that the missing operational foundation is often one of the primary reasons they aren’t scaling.

## **The compounding cost of getting it wrong**

The return on getting the function right is not marginal. Gartner research finds that organizations with a mature operations function are twice as likely to exceed revenue goals and 2.3 times as likely to exceed profit goals as firms whose function is less developed.<sup>1</sup>

## **An under-resourced function can make things worse**

The most counterintuitive cost comes from doing the job halfway. A Commercial Operations team resourced only to react does exactly that: it fields requests, produces one-off reports, and stands up tools for whoever asks loudest. Each response meets a spot need. Together, they accumulate into bloat — tool bloat, report bloat, dashboard bloat — with no one governing what has been deployed to the sales team or asking whether any of it still earns its keep. The organization pays for a function and receives more complexity.

## **Symptoms get treated while causes persist**

Problems that show up at the operational layer — soft forecasts, slipping ramp times, weak adoption, missed quota — often originate further upstream, in how roles and coverage are designed or in where the business has chosen to compete. A capable Commercial Operations function can zoom out: it distinguishes the problems it can fix directly from the ones it can only surface for resolution higher up. A

---

<sup>1</sup>Gartner, “Revenue Operations: The What, Best Practices & RevOps Guide,” <https://www.gartner.com/en/sales/topics/revenue-operations> (accessed July 2026).

purely reactive one cannot and spends years treating downstream symptoms of upstream causes — conscientiously, expensively, and without lasting effect.

### **The gap widens while you wait**

Deferring the investment entirely feels financially prudent in the moment. In practice it shifts cost rather than avoiding it. As the organization grows, onboarding becomes more difficult, managers stretch across larger teams, institutional knowledge spreads more thinly, and the technology stack accretes faster than it consolidates. The cost shows up as lower seller productivity, weaker management effectiveness, slower ramp, unreliable forecasts, and underused technology — all of which are harder to remediate later than they would have been to prevent. Six months from now, the gap is wider and closing it costs more.

## **The Tioga model**

Tioga GTM was built for organizations that cannot afford to spend months searching for, hiring, and onboarding the right Commercial Operations talent — but also cannot justify a fully staffed internal function. Whether the starting point is no function at all, one that is under-resourced, or one that lacks critical capabilities, the model meets it where it is: fractional, embedded, and designed to provide four advantages over a single-hire approach.

### **Speed**

Our approach is prescriptive, not bespoke — it is shaped by experience across commercial organizations facing comparable challenges. The first week is calibration: understanding the business, mapping our framework to your operational realities, identifying the early targets. Execution begins in week two. There is no 60-day discovery phase. Tioga's view of discovery phases, generally, is that they produce decks rather than results. The same time spent doing produces much more learning.

### **Flexibility**

Your needs change. Today the focus may be onboarding and enablement; six months from now it may be territory redesign or AI integration. A single internal hire is fixed in their skill set, or at best learns the next discipline on the job. A fractional engagement adjusts as priorities do, drawing on whichever capability is needed at the moment.

### **Knowing what good looks like**

Most early Commercial Operations mistakes are predictable. CRM structures that create administrative burden instead of management leverage. Compensation programs that quietly reward the wrong behaviors. Enablement programs that launch with enthusiasm and disappear four months later. These patterns feel new internally; to experienced operators they are familiar. Tioga's work across many similarly situated organizations lets us recognize and route around them early.

### **Scalability**

Engagements expand when you need depth and contract when you don't. You avoid carrying unnecessary fixed cost during slower stretches while keeping meaningful operational support available during periods of growth, integration, or organizational change.

## Where the model fits

Whatever the starting point, we meet it where it is. For an organization with no formal function, we build the operational foundation while the business keeps running. For a small or overloaded team, we absorb operational pressure and free internal people for higher-leverage work. For a function with specific expertise gaps, we provide specialist depth on demand. In every case the model is the same: experienced operators embedded inside the commercial organization, practical improvements implemented quickly, monthly work plans that evolve as priorities shift—and crucially operators working inside the Tioga GTM system. A fractional Commercial Operations resource without a system underneath is, in practice, an expensive consultant. The system is what turns fractional support into leverage.

## Why now?

The need for Commercial Operations is always present, but certain moments make it urgent: an acquisition, new leadership, a change in strategy, a step-change in scale, or a decision to make AI a real part of how the organization sells. Each puts weight on an operational foundation that is already stretched – and turns a slow-burning drag into an immediate problem.

A strong product and generous sales budget improve the odds of growth, but they are not what separate market leaders from the pack over time. The organizations that outperform are the ones whose sellers are well-supported, whose managers are actively coaching, and whose operational infrastructure quietly reinforces both.

If any of this is recognizable – the scattered responsibilities, the reactive reporting, the stack nobody governs – Tioga GTM would welcome the conversation.

---

## ABOUT TIOGA GTM

Tioga GTM helps B2B companies grow by improving go-to-market strategy, sales management and commercial operations. We work alongside executives, managers and sales teams to put practical systems in place and build the capability to run them.

tiogagtm.com · jerry@tiogagtm.com

© 2026 Tioga GTM LLC. All rights reserved.