Gong’s CRO combines win-loss analysis and revenue intelligence to drive change management

SHANE EVANS
Chief Revenue Officer

Shane and Clozd co-founder Spencer Dent dive into how Gong uses win-loss analysis to widen their lens and capture better data. By providing broad access to win-loss insights, teams throughout Gong’s organization—from sales to product—are empowered to drive meaningful, customer-centric change.

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Q&A

Spencer: Today I have the pleasure of speaking with the CRO of Gong, Shane Evans. We're going to talk about how Gong and Shane, in his role, combine win-loss with the conversational intelligence and revenue intelligence they capture within Gong to drive value for their organization. Excited to jump into this. Shane, how are we doing?

Shane: Doing great, Spencer, and thanks for having me. Really excited to talk to y'all about what we've been doing to help give us more insight into win-loss information, so I’m looking forward to the conversation. Thanks for having me.

Thanks for doing it. Here we go. So, tell us a little bit about your background and your role at Gong.

You bet. So, background for me—it's super simple. I've been in revenue pretty much my whole career, and I've been in a lot of different leadership roles. Today, at Gong, I have the opportunity to work globally with our go-to-market teams.

I think a lot of organizations have been on this journey, driving significant transformation within their companies. Revenue has really expanded the conversation beyond what historically was just sales as a siloed team. In this market, we’re facing macroeconomic challenges, new competitive threats as growth becomes more scarce and challenging, and a lot of claims being made. Internally, customers don’t want to navigate through multiple departments and teams.

My job leading revenue has become much more complex. I need to be connected across all departments and teams and ensure I have my finger on the pulse of what’s happening with customers in real time. It used to be that we could wait a quarter or two to gather insights and drive more collaboration, but the pace of change has accelerated dramatically.

In this role, the average tenure is about 18 months, which means we need to have a big impact very quickly and work cross-functionally at a high level. So that's a little bit about my role today.

At a high level, Gong operates in the revenue intelligence or revenue orchestration category. We help companies reimagine what the entire process I just described could and should look like. With the introduction of artificial intelligence, teams now have the ability to use data and insights to make their work simpler and more productive.

There’s a lot of change happening, and we’re helping companies redesign, rethink, and reimagine how they can go to market and succeed. Gong is at the forefront, working with organizations to make that vision a reality and deliver great outcomes from these opportunities.

That's awesome. So in your role as CRO, when you say you own revenue, you own new logos, existing customers, renewals—the whole gamut?

Yeah, basically. This is a great question because when you hear the term Chief Revenue Officer or Head of Sales, it means different things to different companies. For Gong, what it means today is that my direct team handles everything except for marketing. This includes pre-sales, sales, implementation, post-sales, support, partnerships, and the ecosystem. So, it's about 600 people today. We work very closely with our counterparts in marketing to drive the top of the funnel, but for us, it's everything outside of that. It's interesting because every company defines these roles a little differently, but for today, I think it’s helpful to understand the scope I oversee as we dive in.

I love it, and frankly, given the topic that we're going to talk about, it's awesome to see how ... sometimes when people think about win-loss, they think very much around product marketing or competitive

intelligence, but obviously it's much broader than that.

Ok, so you step into this new role, it's obviously a very big role. Tell me the story of bringing win-loss into Gong. You're coming into this role, it's a turbulent economy, right? The last 24 months have not been easy for anybody in software. You're trying to understand why you win or lose. Obviously you have all the contextual data that Gong is collecting, but there must have been a gap for you to think we should go do win-loss. So maybe give me that kind of background of what made you realize the 'Aha, we needed to go do win-loss, and we needed to go do it in a new or maybe different way'?

Yeah, great question. So one of the things I'll say about Gong, if you haven't worked with the company before and don't know the culture, is that it has an incredibly strong and very unique culture. One of the operating principles is to create raving fans. And what that means is we want to deliver great outcomes for our customers. Yet, in this market we're in, there's been a lot of confusion. I mentioned earlier that it's very competitive, and a lot of companies claim to do everything. When I got here, I realized that we had some opportunities to help our customers better understand what we're trying to deliver and how we're trying to help them win on their end.

I've seen a lot of win-loss solutions and tools in the market and have used a number of them in the past. What I realized very quickly is that we needed to go deeper on the win-loss process than just a survey. We needed to understand more holistically what was happening out in the market. We also needed to do this in a comprehensive way. By comprehensive, I mean all of our stakeholders inside Gong—including our product and engineering teams—needed not only access to the information, but for it to be front and center. They needed to be the ones conducting some of these interviews to truly understand what was happening from the customer's perspective.

One of the powerful parts of conversational intelligence is that our product and engineering teams are plugged into what customers are saying every single day. But what they didn't have was the ability to really go deeper in those interviews and inspect the areas they wanted to explore further, to fully understand the customer's perspective. So instead of treating this as a one-time project, like a short-term initiative, we needed to make this part of our culture and part of our fabric. One of the great things about partnering with Clozd is that we now have the ability to set up different product leaders inside our company, and they're the ones conducting some of the interviews, in addition to the work the Clozd team is doing for us. Now we're able to compare the two side by side.

This brings me to the third area: we needed to scale. We had to gather surveys and ongoing input and feedback, but in addition to that, we needed much more of the qualitative information that we could dive into deeply. Spencer, I've worked with your team at previous companies, and when this challenge surfaced, I reached out to you and said, 'Hey, I think we have an opportunity here. Let's go test this out.' **What I didn't expect was how much our co-founder and a product leader would embrace this process. I shouldn't have been surprised by that, but I just hadn't experienced it in the past. Now, he's living in the tool, going through it, doing his own interviews. Every time we get an interview, he's tagging it, and we're gathering all the themes that come along with it.**

When I talk about collaboration and scale, I just wanted to provide a little more context about what needed to happen so we could get the information we need and respond very quickly.

That's awesome. It's really cool to hear about all the different ways people are engaging. I'm going to ask you more about how the product team is getting value, because that's a really cool, unique way I've seen win-loss used. When you think about running this win-loss program, you're getting different sources of value. What are some of the biggest sources of value you're seeing in the win-loss program?

So, I point to a couple of areas. The first one I mentioned already: it's the amount of feedback we're able to get from different individuals. It's more like a real-time focus group in a way. It makes it more expansive, and **we're able to be very surgical in how we dive in. It's now become a part of how we operate and do business. When we get to some of these decision points as a company, we're no longer flying blind. We feel like we have a better data set, a more comprehensive data set, to look at.**

What's been really fun is allowing some of our leaders to embrace the idea that they now own this. In the past, we've had people look at feedback and results from a win-loss perspective, but when they're the ones conducting interviews and seeing the tags come up, it creates a different level of engagement. Now, they are the ones who have to take ownership of it.

It's interesting because it sounds like a simple thing—having your product leaders actually conduct those interviews—but it changes the dynamic. They feel a lot more invested in what we're trying to create for our customers as we work toward building raving fans.

Let me ask you this—so people can understand how your program works.

So, Gong is integrated with Salesforce. As opportunities come through with Clozd, we get that data into Clozd. From there, the Clozd team conducts a sizable portion of the interviews, and the data is then shared broadly. On top of that, this uncovers certain pockets—especially within areas of product that are interesting to the product team. The product team then does additional follow-up interviews with different folks around those topics, so you're expanding. You're basically using the Clozd platform in a DIY fashion to collect more feedback than what they would get from their core program. This allows them to answer those third- and fourth-level questions that product teams have, which is awesome. It's such a cool application of our platform and, frankly, one that I love seeing happen.

When you think about this rallying cry, the product team being engaged, and having other folks involved, what tips would you give to others about driving that top-down sponsorship? Why were you successful? Because obviously, Gong had done some form of win-loss analysis in the past, like you mentioned. They've tried other vendors—it felt kind of siloed, kind of isolated to certain teams. What's been the key to getting that cross-functional engagement?

So there are a couple of really simple things here that were actually a little surprising to me. The first one is that we're leveraging Gong today. We have a feature called Smart Tracker, where anytime there's a conversation occurring, if a certain competitor is mentioned or a specific product gap is referenced, there's an automatic trigger sent to different folks. They can then get engaged and go deeper.

We're actually using some of this not just for win-loss. The biggest reason we don't win deals today is still 'no decision.' It's not necessarily a loss to a competitor. Yet, that's an opportunity where we're not able to engage with these prospects in a way that creates value. In those situations, it's really hard. Most of the time with a survey, if you're on the other end and it's 'no decision,' you're not willing to give feedback. There could be any number of reasons why the opportunity goes to 'no decision.'

However, when you have a product leader reaching out from a company you decided not to engage with and they're saying, 'Hey, I'd love to spend some time and chat with you to get some feedback,' it's different than just receiving a blind survey or a random email saying, 'Hey, give us some feedback.' That leads to a discussion. And so ...

... It feels way more intentional, right? It feels so much more personal, like I genuinely care about why you're making your decision and how I can make it more valuable for you.

Exactly, and so the response rate is much higher because of the mechanism we're leveraging with your solution. What's been interesting is that it actually leads to more dialogue. In cases where things potentially went to no decision, it gives us an opportunity to not only get good feedback but also keep the conversation rolling. Even if they don't end up purchasing or partnering with us now, it sets the tone for how we want to build the relationship. To your point, it's more personalized, it's more value-add, and we get a great amount of feedback to know how to take that information and push it back into the revenue intelligence cycles. This allows current team members working with customers to have a better chance of creating another raving fan.

Sometimes we talk about insights, but there's a lot of actionable opportunities here when you look at the full lifecycle and how win-loss fits within revenue intelligence, playing out day in and day out. Totally, totally. I always think of revenue intelligence as an end-to-end workflow—or a sales process. The final step is the feedback loop: What happened and why? It's so powerful to feed everything you're learning back into the process.

I want to touch on something interesting, because you're talking about giving. You actually have people using the platform to help collect data. We've hit on this a little, but now you have all this insight—how do you share it and get it broadly out to folks? What have you done, in terms of giving access to the feedback very tactically, that you feel has driven the most value for Gong?

There's one thing we didn't talk about before we get to how we've driven action: executive sponsorship is one of the keys. I have to give credit again to our co-founder and product leader here. He's living in the tool, and every time he does an interview—or one of his teams does an interview—he's tagging other folks in those calls to say, 'Hey, not sure if you saw this, but this is something we need to act on.' That level of engagement from his role sets a different tone. It shows the level of importance from someone who is building the product every day and designing the experience our customers are going to have.

I can't emphasize enough that if you're going to do win-loss—and do it right—you've got to have a champion, and it needs to be someone who matters. It needs to be someone others look up to and think, 'If this is important to them, it's probably something I need to pay attention to.' That's one big aha we stumbled into. I can't take credit for it—I know you like to take credit for stuff all the time, but I can't for this one!

I agree with you. I actually think it's one of those things that we see time after time across our clients. It's not so important who manages the day-to-day administration of the program as much as it's important that you have the right folks in the organization engaging with it and driving action from it. Having a person who's a co-founder responsible for a product as a core stakeholder engaging and driving action is obviously incredible for getting value out of it. It's one thing if you hear from that person saying, 'Hey, we're losing because of these things, and we need to go change it.' That's a little different than hearing from the junior product marketer. Not that the insight is any different; it's just the nature of humans and how we interact within organizational structures.

One of the ways we've driven action out of that is by having a weekly huddle with our team. As we work with larger organizations, you can imagine their complexity is much higher, and they have all sorts of customer requests that come up. We now have the ability in those meetings to pull up the feedback and even link right back to what the customer was saying within the revenue intelligence cycle. Hearing their words again—like, this is exactly what they're asking for—allows us to make decisions in a totally new way that feels much more real-time with the actual voice of the customer, as opposed to it being a survey in writing or a canned question we had asked with a quantitative score. With one person, a sample size of one, now we feel like we have all of those responses aggregated by doing a quick query: 'Hey, when this comes up, who else is mentioning this, and how are they describing it?'

And so, that's a way we've driven action into our weekly operating rhythm around how we prioritize what features we look to build in our roadmap based on customer requests that are coming in. It's been kind of fun to now have the information at the ready, as opposed to saying, 'Hey, we need to go and actually do a deep dive in this area.' It's allowed us to be much more intentional about how we're prioritizing different requests coming from customers.

Yeah, it's a funny thing. It's like you and I can harken back 10 years ago when you would get feedback from a rep saying, 'I have to have this feature in order to win this deal.' Then you'd go build that feature, and you'd still lose the deal. But you didn't know how often that feedback was coming up across other people. So, a roadmap was kind of a guess of what you should build. Versus now, I'm hearing these things over and over, and I'm able to stitch together the value of actually going and working and putting engineering resources against them, which is super awesome.

By the way, I want to mention here—what hasn't changed is I still, on a weekly basis, get a sales rep or a customer success representative working on either a new deal or a renewal come in and say, 'I have to have this feature, or else this customer is going to not sign or is going to potentially churn from Gong.' What's been beautiful is that now I can do a quick query and say, 'Is this real?' I can even hear it from the customer—whether it actually came up or not. And I think that's where I'm empowered in a whole new way with information. Within seconds, I can ask the platform, I can ask across all sorts of different opportunities, 'What's the reality here?' So, I feel like I'm in the know, as opposed to being in a situation where I have to guess. I can actually trust and verify to make sure it's legitimate, as opposed to just operating based on very limited information. This makes my ability to be effective much higher and allows me to be a partner with the team, instead of just someone sitting in a tower somewhere with a few bits and pieces coming up—sometimes being held hostage by a specific deal. That's not the case anymore.

Trying to make a decision off of one data point instead of 1,000 data points... That's kind of one of the interesting things about having conversational intelligence alongside the win-loss data. There will be times when something isn't coming up in the sales cycle but is mentioned in the win-loss. Or it is coming up in the sales cycle, but the buyer's holding back their cards a little, so they're not fully expressing how important or unimportant that thing is to them. You get that in the win-loss. But also, if it's coming up over and over and then ends up being the punchline in the win-loss, you learn that too. Having that full story stitched together is like watching the game and then watching the post-game interview. To your point, you can go back and see, 'Wait, is this really a thing? How big of a thing is it? How much do I see it within deals and in the cherry-on-top feedback we're getting at the end?'

All right. This has been super awesome. You're super busy, and I know you have a lot going on. Maybe just give me a rapid-fire—what are some of the coolest insights the program has uncovered for you?

So, what's been really interesting is the idea that a lot of competitors or other companies in the market are claiming to do what we do. As we dove into the data, we learned a couple of things. As a company, Gong has followed a philosophy where we don't necessarily talk much about what's forthcoming; we focus more on what we've already done. When we have a new feature or product rollout, we've not been great about signaling to the market what's coming. Instead, we release it, and then six months after it's been in the market, we start talking about it. Think of it as messaging after the fact, once we know it's working.

There's a lot of merit to that approach, but we also found that a lot of our customers made decisions to leave Gong because they didn't realize that certain functionality not only was coming—it was already in the platform.

Yes, it was already in the platform.

In several win-loss situations, we spoke with customers who had left Gong, and during the loss interviews, we realized that we already had the functionality they needed. This was a valuable insight that was validated over many deals. From this, we understood the need to work with both our product marketing and product engineering teams to ensure we were signaling to the market what's coming, the timeline, and how it would be delivered. We've since seen great opportunities in driving these discussions proactively, rather than reacting to them. This is a good example of insight, action, and outcome, and it's had a big impact on our churn and retention numbers as a company from that one simple insight.

The other key learning through this process was about the personas engaging with our solution. We didn't realize how broadly Gong was being used. For example, personas in product marketing and customer success were spending significant time in our platform. When companies decided to switch to an alternative provider, those personas lost the opportunities and insights they were getting from our platform as well.

These are two powerful learnings that feel like low-hanging fruit because we didn't need to make significant changes. Instead, we needed to refine how we roll out new features, enable personas on our platform, and improve how we onboard new customers. During check-ins, we've also started incorporating a clear roadmap so customers know where we're heading. These changes have made a significant difference.

Yeah, again, make sure everybody is involved and make sure that the key people in the organization know who's involved. That's super awesome.

Okay, we've covered a ton. I really appreciate you taking the time. What haven't I asked you about that I should have asked you about? If you were advising one of your peers to get a win-loss program up and running, what would you tell them?

So, we've actually talked about this, but I think it's worth mentioning again. The main thing is making sure that you have executive sponsorship. If you're going to do win-loss and really try to understand from a competitive standpoint what you need to be doing differently, it's got to be... And when I say tops-down, it's not just about one persona; it's about making sure, across the board, that the company understands why this is important and what you want to do about it. So, number one is executive sponsorship.

The second piece is, I would say, you need to make this a company-wide initiative as much as possible. When we get into having our quarterly business review at the company level or we're doing our board review, these insights are one of the key areas we dive into to talk about what's happening out in the market. We've always had a metric around competitive win rate and tracking how we're doing. What we haven't had is the 'why'—the reason those things are happening. If you can get cross-functional visibility and adoption, it's going to allow you to move at a different speed. So, that would be the second area.

And then the third piece I'll give you—and again, these are things that we've talked about, so I'm not offering anything new—is simple: Just make sure you're doing it well. It's finding ways to drive action and have an impact early. If people start to see that you had this insight, but you don't act on it, they're going to lose confidence that this is important and will have a big impact. But if you have that insight and act on it fairly quickly, it can actually have a real, meaningful impact.

So, those are the three things that I would say. If you're going to do win-loss, make sure you've got executive sponsorship, make sure that it's cross-departmental and broad, and ensure you can get early wins and drive action. That will allow you to build on it as you move forward and work to have a big impact on the overall company.

I love it. The punchline for me is that those three things all come down to being able to quickly make decisions and move faster. You have the right people across the board engaged and ready to make decisions so you can move quicker. What I don't think people understand is how much that quarter of indecisiveness—or those two quarters of indecisiveness—costs them in terms of go-to-market efficiency, product development, and across the board in the organization. If I were to write an essay on how to get the most out of win-loss, I'd hit those three things. This is super helpful. Appreciate the time, Shane. Thanks for everything. Wish you the best.

Hey, listen, we really appreciate the partnership. Thank you for what you and your team are doing and building. We love working with Clozd and the insights we're getting. Thanks for driving and challenging us on this journey. A lot of what we've discovered is thanks to the way you and your team showed up as we made this a priority. We started by dipping our toe in the water, and we've been able to get wins and build on that. So, appreciate the partnership, and thanks for what your team is building.

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