AllianceMind · The Coalition Selling Company

The Coalition Selling™ Playbook

How Sales Teams Recognize, Align, and Activate the Invisible Coalition

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EXECUTIVE OPENING

Enterprise Buying Changed. Sales Didn't.

A big enterprise deal used to run through a handful of people inside one company. Now it runs through a set of outside players who shape access, trust, and terms before a contract is ever drafted. A hyperscaler shapes the architecture and, more and more, owns the path the deal transacts through. A systems integrator already inside the account holds credibility the seller has to earn. An advisory firm the customer trusts can back a direction or quietly kill it. None of these players sits inside the buyer's organization, and most never appear in the seller's CRM.

Sales has not kept up. The pipeline still tracks one company, a set of internal contacts, and a forecast category. It tells you who the buyer is. It tells you nothing about the players around the buyer who decide whether you get a fair hearing. That is where good deals stall for reasons the deal review does not surface, because the deal review is looking at the wrong map.

This playbook is about closing that gap. It treats the players around an enterprise deal as a coalition the seller does not fully control, and it gives sellers a repeatable way to see that coalition, judge who matters, and decide what to do next. It is written for revenue leaders who are tired of losing deals to influences they never saw and could not name in a pipeline review.

One point up front. This is not a case for doing more with partners. Adding partners to a deal without judgment is how sellers lose control and confuse customers. The work here is the opposite of volume. It is figuring out which outside influences actually matter on a given deal, understanding how they change it, and acting on that with restraint.

THE PROBLEM

The Invisible Coalition

Every enterprise deal sits inside a set of outside players who can push it forward or hold it back. Call it the invisible coalition. Invisible, because most of it never reaches the CRM. A coalition, because these players are already connected to the account whether the seller has engaged them or not.

Coalition does not mean everyone is on the same side or working in the seller's interest. It means the outside players whose relationships, incentives, and actions all bear on the same deal. Some help the seller, some get in the way, and some stay unknown until the seller goes looking. An incumbent fighting to keep the account and an advisor quietly steering the buyer elsewhere are both part of the coalition, because both are shaping the outcome.

The members change from deal to deal, but they come from a consistent set. Hyperscalers and cloud providers shape architecture decisions and increasingly own the path a deal transacts through by way of their marketplaces. Systems integrators sit inside the account on adjacent programs and hold relationships the seller cannot manufacture. Independent software vendors and complementary technology providers touch the same buyer with overlapping or reinforcing agendas. Advisors and consultants the customer already trusts can confirm a direction or cast doubt on it. Incumbent vendors being displaced have every reason to make trouble. External security, compliance, and audit firms the customer brings in can gate a deal on terms the seller never saw coming. And marketplaces and transaction partners increasingly shape the transaction path, approval process, and timing.

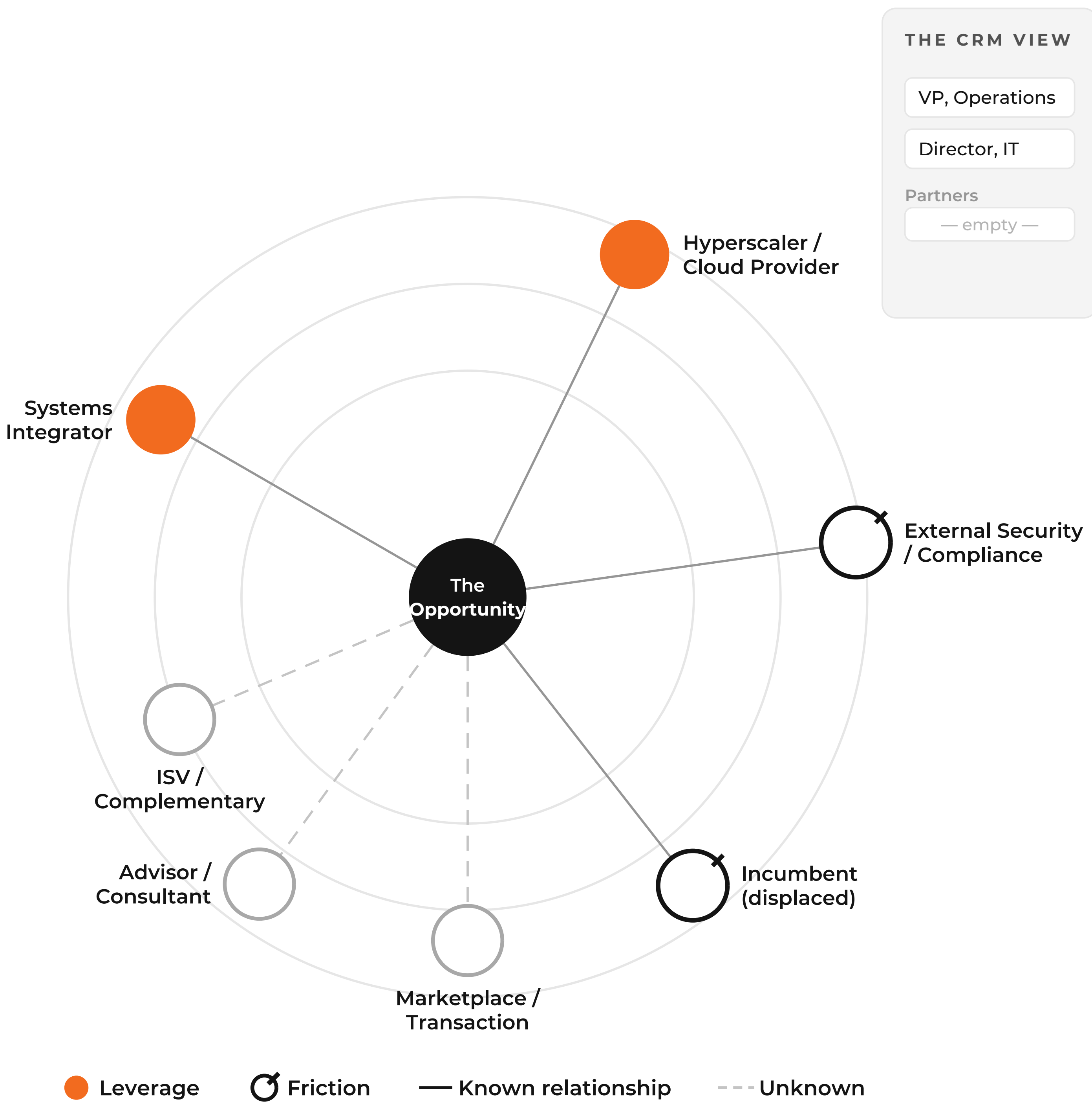
What these players have in common is that the seller controls none of them, and any one of them can help or hurt a deal in ways the internal buying process will not show.

One boundary matters, and it runs through the rest of this playbook. The people inside the customer, meaning procurement, finance, security, IT, and legal, are not the coalition. They are the buying environment. They decide the purchase. The coalition is the set of outside players who shape whether and how the seller reaches, earns trust with, and reassures that internal environment. Keeping those two straight is what separates this from stakeholder mapping, and it is the first thing a seller has to get right.

FIGURE 1

The Invisible Coalition

Important influences on an enterprise deal often sit outside the CRM record.



THE DEFINITION

What Coalition Selling Is

Coalition Selling™ is the practice of recognizing the external players and influences surrounding an enterprise deal, aligning the participants who can help, and activating the relationships that matter, all within an environment the seller does not fully control.

Each word earns its place. Recognize, because most of the coalition stays invisible until someone looks, and looking includes the harder call of deciding which players actually matter on this deal. Align, because the participants who can help have to reinforce one story instead of pulling in different directions. Activate, because knowing a player matters is worth nothing until the seller does something about it. All of it stays on the outside players a seller cannot command, since the moment the definition drifts inward to the customer's own people, it stops being its own thing and turns into work sales already has a name for.

One test governs all of it. The coalition earns a place in the deal only when it helps the customer make a better-supported decision, reduces execution risk, or strengthens the path to the intended business outcome, not merely when it advances the seller's position.

It helps to say what this is not. It is not ecosystem strategy, which decides at the company level which partners to build with. It is not partner or channel management, which runs the ongoing relationship with those partners. It is not co-selling, which is two vendors working a deal together once they have already agreed to. And it is not account mapping, which finds overlap between two companies' relationships. Coalition Selling uses the output of all of these, but it works one level down, on a single live deal, answering the question none of them answer: given everyone circling this specific opportunity, what should the seller do next.

The line with MEDDPICC deserves its own sentence, because sales leaders will ask. MEDDPICC helps the seller qualify and run the internal buying process, the metrics, the economic buyer, the decision criteria, the champion. Coalition Selling helps the seller see and act on the external players around that process. The two do not compete. A seller runs MEDDPICC on the people inside the account and Coalition Selling on the players outside it, and a good deal review now wants both.

THE COST

Why Enterprise Deals Stall

Some important enterprise deals stall for reasons that have nothing to do with product. They stall on influences the seller never accounted for, and they tend to fail in a few recognizable ways.

Hidden influence. A player outside the deal, an advisor, an incumbent, a cloud architect, moves the buyer's thinking in a direction the seller never sees, and the seller keeps selling to a room that has already made up its mind.

Thin coverage. The seller has one strong relationship inside the account and assumes it speaks for the building. The parts of the buying environment the seller has not reached, and often does not know are there, are exactly where the deal quietly dies.

Conflicting stories. When several vendors touch the same buyer with their own version of events, the customer does not hear a team. The customer hears noise, and noise reads as risk.

Relationships left on the table. The relationship that could have opened the door already exists inside the account, sitting with a partner the seller never thought to ask. It goes unused because no one looked.

Transaction uncertainty. The deal is agreed in principle and then stalls on how it actually gets bought, through which marketplace, on whose paper, against which approval chain. The selling was finished and the buying was not.

Late surprises. Security raises an objection in week ten that a known outside auditor could have surfaced in week two. The surprise was there to be caught early by anyone watching the coalition. No one was.

None of these is necessarily a product problem, and none of them shows up cleanly in a pipeline report. They show up as slipped quarters with vague explanations.

THE METHOD

The Coalition Selling Methodology

Coalition Selling runs as a repeatable method, not a personality trait. Good sellers already do some of this by feel on their best deals; writing it down makes it consistent across every deal and every seller, so a deal does not live or die on whether the rep happened to think of it. The method moves through six steps.

1. **Recognize the coalition.** Before anything else, find the outside players already circling the deal. This is deliberate work, not a guess, and it includes the players the seller would rather ignore, the incumbent being pushed out and the advisor who has the buyer's ear.
2. **Evaluate leverage and friction.** Being present is not the same as mattering. For each player the seller decides one thing: on this deal, can this player help me or hurt me. Most are neither, and those get set aside without ceremony.
3. **Establish trust.** Where a player carries credibility the seller has not earned, the job is to connect to it rather than compete with it. A trusted integrator or advisor backing a direction can carry more weight than the seller making the same point alone.
4. **Align the players who matter.** For the few players who carry real weight, the seller makes sure they reinforce one story instead of fragmenting it. Alignment also requires mutual value: the seller has to understand why each participant would engage, what they contribute, and what legitimate interest they have in the outcome. A coalition built only around the seller's needs will not hold. Three coordinated voices beat eight competing ones.
5. **Close the gaps that matter.** Some of what surfaces is a hole: a part of the buying environment no one has reached, a transaction path no one has checked, an objection no one has answered. The seller closes the gaps that can actually change the result and lets the rest go.
6. **Pick the next move.** Every pass ends the same way, with one decision about what to do next on this deal. Not a list. One move, chosen because it is the best-supported action given what the seller currently knows.

THE SELLER'S OBJECTION

The Seller Remains in Control

The first objection to Coalition Selling never comes from the customer. It comes from the seller, and it is worth taking seriously, because it usually means a good rep is protecting a deal.

The reasoning runs like this. I own this account. I know these people. Why would I pull an outside player into my deal who does not know my customer, might get off message, could slow me down, and might steer budget somewhere I cannot follow. Left alone, every one of those is a reason to keep the coalition at arm's length, and the seller who does that is the one most exposed to the influences they refused to look at. The concerns deserve straight answers.

The seller's concern	What Coalition Selling actually does
"I'll lose control of my deal."	The seller stays the owner. Seeing the players who were going to affect the deal anyway is more control, not less.
"This party doesn't know my customer."	Only players with real credibility on this deal earn a place. The rest are set aside. Nobody is forced in.
"They'll go off message."	Preparation is part of the method. A player is aligned before reaching the customer, or does not reach the customer.
"They'll slow me down."	A player the buyer already trusts can carry a point the seller cannot make credibly on their own.
"They'll take my budget."	A well-chosen player may help the seller identify or reach an adjacent budget rather than compete for the one already in play.
"They don't know my product."	A coalition player does not need to be a product expert. They need to be credible with this customer.

On the off-message worry specifically: before any participant reaches the customer, the seller confirms the participant's role, their relevance to this customer, their reason for engaging, and the one point they are there to reinforce. If those are unclear, the participant does not enter the customer conversation.

The honest version is not that partners are always good. It is that the coalition already exists around the deal, and the seller's only real choice is whether to see it and work it or get surprised by it.

What the Seller Sees

Everything that follows is fictional. The company, the people, and the situation are invented to show how the method changes what a seller does, not to describe a real account.

Northwind Systems, a fictional enterprise software vendor, is working a $1.2 million platform deal at Vantage Manufacturing, a fictional industrial manufacturer with about six billion dollars in revenue. Northwind would replace an aging planning tool with its own platform across three of Vantage's plants, with room to grow.

Here is what the Northwind account executive sees in her CRM. A named economic buyer, a VP of Operations. A supportive director who has championed the platform since a strong demo. A decision timeline of about two quarters. A competitor she thinks she is ahead of. Two internal contacts, both friendly. On paper it is a healthy deal, forecast for the current half, and she is running a clean MEDDPICC on it: metrics quantified, economic buyer identified, decision criteria documented, champion engaged.

What the CRM does not show is everyone else already circling the deal. The cloud provider whose marketplace Vantage prefers to buy through has an account executive who has been inside the account for a year on infrastructure. A global systems integrator is midway through a multi-year plant-modernization program at Vantage and has the operations team's trust. The incumbent planning vendor Northwind would displace is not gone; it has a renewal of its own to protect and a quiet interest in raising doubt. And Vantage retains an outside security and compliance firm that reviews every new platform before it reaches procurement.

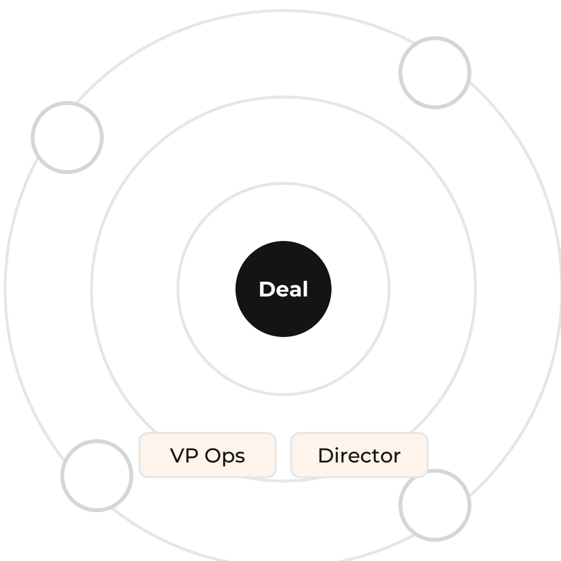
None of those four players sits inside Vantage's organization or shows up in Northwind's pipeline. All four can move this deal. Her forecast is built on the two contacts she can see. The deal will be decided partly by the four she cannot.

The Same Deal, Before and After

A fictional $1.2M platform deal. The best-supported move ran through a party the CRM never showed.

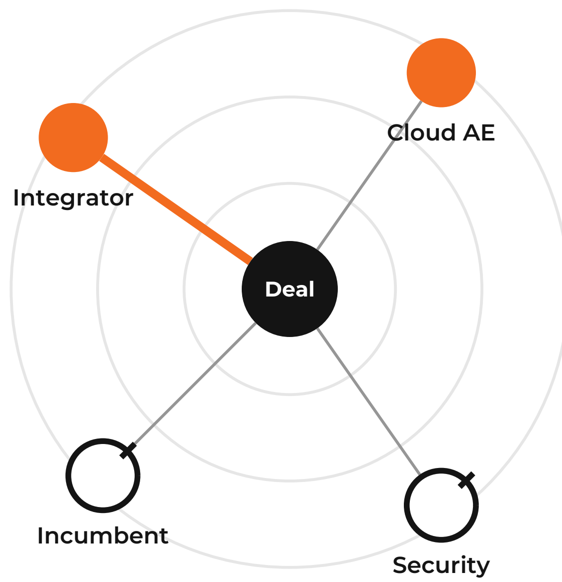
What the seller saw

FICTIONAL ILLUSTRATION



What Coalition Selling revealed

FICTIONAL ILLUSTRATION



BEST-SUPPORTED NEXT MOVE

Engage the integrator to validate fit and open the security path early.

Leverage   Friction   Unseen by the seller

The same deal, before and after. What the seller saw versus what the coalition revealed.

The Next Move

So what should the AE actually do next? One thing, not a list.

Before she books another meeting with the buyer, she goes to the systems integrator. She asks it to confirm that Northwind's platform fits the modernization program the integrator is already delivering, and, if it agrees, to sponsor an early technical-alignment conversation that brings in the right security review path. One ask designed to create two useful outcomes. If the integrator agrees, it puts a party the operations team already trusts on record about fit, which the AE cannot do for herself, and it gets the security review started early and through the right door instead of arriving cold during procurement.

None of this is guaranteed. The integrator may decline, want something in return, or hedge, because its own standing with Vantage is the asset it protects first. The security review is independent and stays that way. Getting it going early does not soften it; it just means the questions come up while there is still time to answer them. The incumbent will not go quietly. The AE is working with incomplete information, the way sellers always are. What the move does is put her next step where it counts, on the party who can actually move fit and access, instead of another meeting with the two contacts who were already going to say yes.

Here is the difference. The AE was going to spend the next two weeks somewhere. Without this, she spends them shoring up a champion she already has and walking into a security review she did not see coming. With it, she spends them getting a trusted integrator on record and the security path opened early. Same seller, same deal, better use of two weeks.

From Individual Judgment to Something a Team Can Run

Everything so far could read as a description of what a great seller does on instinct. That is the problem worth solving. Instinct is fine until you try to run a team on it. It does not transfer to new hires, it walks out the door when a good rep leaves, and it never shows up in a forecast a manager can inspect. What turns one seller's instinct into something a whole team can run comes down to three things.

Shared language. When recognize, help, hurt, and next move mean the same thing to every seller and every manager, coalition work becomes something a team can talk about plainly instead of a private habit. A deal review can ask who is around this deal and get a real answer.

Reviews that reach past the account's edge. Most deal reviews inspect the internal buying process and stop there. Building the coalition into the standing review is what turns the method from a private habit into something the team runs every week, and it surfaces the outside influences while the seller can still act on them.

Enablement sellers will actually use. The method has to be light enough to run on a live deal under quota pressure. A seller forced to choose between the method and making calls will make the calls. The version that scales is the one that fits inside the work a seller is already doing.

None of this needs a reorganization or a new title. It needs shared language, a review that asks the outside question, and, as the next page argues, a leader who keeps asking it.

THE SOFTWARE

How CAPTAIN Operationalizes Coalition Selling

Doing this by hand works, and on one important deal it is worth the time. Do it across a full pipeline and the recognizing and sorting becomes real work, and that is the work CAPTAIN is built to carry.

AllianceMind is the creator of Coalition Selling and the developer of CAPTAIN. CAPTAIN is software built on Big Picture Selling and the Coalition Selling methodology. Where the methodology is what a seller does, CAPTAIN is the software that helps the seller do it in a structured, repeatable form across a live pipeline.

It does three things, and they line up with the method. It helps the seller bring the relevant external players and opportunity information into one structured view, instead of holding them in memory and scattered notes. It helps sort that view, separating the players that carry real weight on a given deal from the ones that do not. And it proposes a next move, an action intended to create the most useful progress given what is currently known.

One principle governs all of it. The seller decides; CAPTAIN recommends. The software brings the players together, sorts them, and proposes a move. It does not qualify the deal, choose the strategy, or act for the seller. The judgment stays with the person who owns the account, which is the only place enterprise judgment belongs.

Big Picture Selling	PHILOSOPHY
Coalition Selling	METHODOLOGY
CAPTAIN	SOFTWARE

Big Picture Selling is the philosophy, Coalition Selling is the methodology, CAPTAIN is the software.

FOR THE REVENUE LEADER

The CRO Leadership Implication

For a revenue leader, the question is not whether the invisible coalition exists. It is what to inspect differently on Monday.

The change is smaller than it sounds, and it starts in the deal review. Most reviews inspect the internal buying process well. They stop at the account's edge. A CRO who adds one standing question to every enterprise review, who are the outside players on this deal and what is the seller doing about them, will start hearing answers that were always relevant and never asked for. The first few times, the honest answer will be I do not know, and that is the finding. The players a seller cannot name are the ones most able to surprise the forecast.

A CRO can inspect and measure three things over time. Whether slipped deals come with clearer explanations of the outside influence that stalled them. Whether sellers are identifying the external players before the review rather than during it. And whether pipeline discussions have started to include the broader environment around each deal, not just the internal contacts. These are things to watch for, not outcomes to assume.

There is a forecasting reason to care beyond any single deal. A forecast is a stack of judgments, and when those judgments account only for the players inside the account, the forecast reflects only part of the opportunity environment. Inspecting external influence does not eliminate forecast uncertainty. It gives the CRO a more complete explanation of the assumptions and risks behind the number.

None of this asks a CRO to run the method personally. It asks the CRO to inspect for it, because in sales what leadership inspects is what the field does.

CLOSING

Start With One Deal

Enterprise buying became a coalition problem, and many sales processes still stop at the account's edge. Until that changes, deals will keep stalling on influences the pipeline did not capture, and the explanations in the review will keep being vague.

Coalition Selling is a way to close that gap on purpose. It gives sellers a way to see the players around a deal, judge which ones matter, and act with restraint, and it gives leaders something to inspect that the current deal review misses. It does not replace the qualification a team already runs. It covers ground that qualification was never built to cover.

The place to start is small. Take one important deal that has stalled and work it through. Name the external players around it. Decide which ones help and which ones create risk. Find the best-supported move given what the team currently knows. The exercise is designed to surface influences the pipeline may have missed, and it is a fast way to see whether this belongs in your sales motion.

Book an Executive Briefing.

Book an Executive Briefing to explore how Coalition Selling applies to the opportunities your team is pursuing. We can walk it through on a fictional or appropriately sanitized deal. AllianceMind is the creator of Coalition Selling™ and the developer of CAPTAIN.

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ABOUT

About AllianceMind

AllianceMind is the creator of Coalition Selling™ and the developer of CAPTAIN.

Coalition Selling is the methodology for recognizing, aligning, and activating the external players that surround an enterprise deal. CAPTAIN is software built on Big Picture Selling and the Coalition Selling methodology that helps sellers bring the relevant players and deal information into one structured view, sort it, and propose the next move.

The seller decides; CAPTAIN recommends.

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