JM SEARCH

CEO Compensation & Insights Study

Executive Summary | 2026



Compensation benchmarks and leadership insights from 350 CEOs and Presidents, with a focus on investor-backed and growth-oriented companies.

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About the Study

JM Search is proud to share its **2026 CEO Compensation & Insights Study**.

Building on our recent CFO compensation and insights research, this report extends JM Search's research-backed approach to the most senior leadership seat. It examines how CEOs and Presidents are compensated, what they prioritize in a package, and how expectations for the role are changing.

The realities of the role are shaped by what leaders manage every day: board and investor alignment, value creation expectations, leadership team dynamics, compensation and equity outcomes, and changing ways of working. To provide an inside look at the role today, JM Search surveyed 350 current and recent CEOs and Presidents across the U.S., spanning industries including consumer, diversified industrials and services, education and social impact, financial services, healthcare and life sciences, media and communications, professional services, and technology.

The study explores compensation structures, equity, severance, pay perception, board engagement, founder transitions, career path, and the pressures that may prompt leaders to consider new opportunities.

The findings offer practical context for boards, sponsors, and executives – supporting more informed decisions about competitive pay, incentive design, and alignment as companies scale and leaders navigate growth, pressure, and value creation.

We hope you find the insights valuable.



John Marshall
Chief Executive Officer

Methodology

From March to May 2026, JM Search conducted an anonymous online survey of CEOs and Presidents, with a particular focus on leaders of investor-backed and growth-oriented businesses.

More than 3,000 executives were invited to participate, and 350 completed the survey. Of those, 297 were serving as CEOs or Presidents at the time of the survey, while 53 had held the role within the prior six months and were in transition.

To support accurate interpretation of the data, equity findings are based on PE- and VC-backed respondents, with sample sizes varying by question depending on eligibility and response. Compensation, pay perception, and “considered leaving” findings reflect the 297 current CEOs and Presidents.

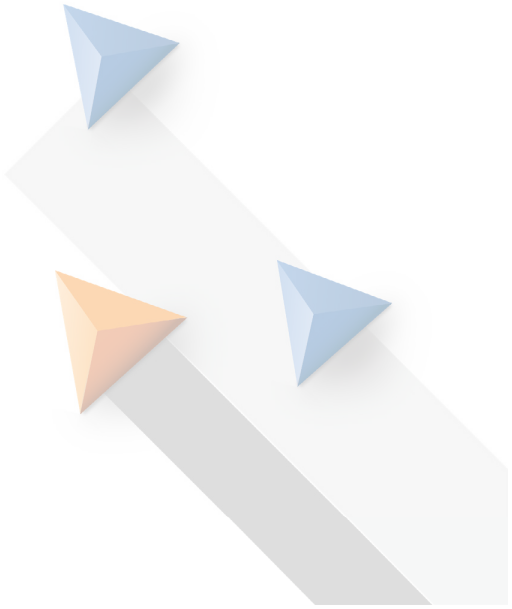
Broader findings on leadership experience, founder transitions, ways of working, and role dynamics may draw from the full respondent base, where applicable. Sample sizes and applicable notes are provided at the exhibit or page level throughout the report.

Confidentiality

The study was conducted anonymously. All data has been aggregated to protect our participants’ privacy.

Acknowledgments

JM Search thanks every CEO and President who participated.



Executive Summary

Who we surveyed

- 350 respondents: 297 current CEOs or Presidents and 53 who recently held the role and were in transition.
- 67% represent private equity-backed companies; nearly 75% are sponsor-backed.
- 54% represent companies under $100M in revenue and 78% under $250M.
- 73% have 25 or more years of professional experience, and 67% are repeat CEOs.

Overall, the respondent base reflects JM Search's core client and candidate market: seasoned executives in sponsor-backed and growth-oriented businesses.

The findings at-a-glance

1 The most significant compensation step-up occurs at $250M in revenue.

While base salary and target bonus generally increase with company size, the clearest shift appears once companies reach $250M in annual revenue. At that level, a base salary of more than $500k and a target bonus exceeding 75% of base salary become the most common compensation levels.

2 Exit value defines how CEOs and Presidents evaluate equity.

Eighty-five percent of current CEOs selected equity value / long-term upside as one of the two most important elements of a competitive compensation package. Among PE- and VC-backed CEOs, 79% selected potential value at exit as one of the two factors that make equity most attractive.

3 CEO track record is linked to larger equity stakes and higher target values.

Among PE- and VC-backed CEOs whose equity is expressed in ownership points, 78% of repeat CEOs hold at least three points, compared with 52% of first-time CEOs. Repeat CEOs are also nearly twice as likely to report a target equity value greater than $10M.

4 Below market pay perception is associated with considering another role.

Forty percent of current CEOs and Presidents said they feel paid below market. Among those executives, 59% had considered leaving their role in the prior six months, compared with 37% of those who said they feel paid at or above market value.

5 Founder transition challenges are driven more by people and alignment than by the founder's continued involvement.

Challenge rates were similar whether the founder exited the business or stayed on in a new role (47% vs. 52%). Among those who experienced challenges, 78% cited people, team, and change-management issues, followed by unclear governance and stakeholder misalignment.

Meet the CEOs & Presidents

JM Search's 2026 CEO Compensation & Insights Study reflects input from 350 executives with current or recent CEO and President experience across industries, geographies, ownership structures, and company sizes. The respondent base is heavily weighted toward investor-backed companies, while also including leaders from privately held, publicly traded, VC-backed, and not-for-profit organizations.

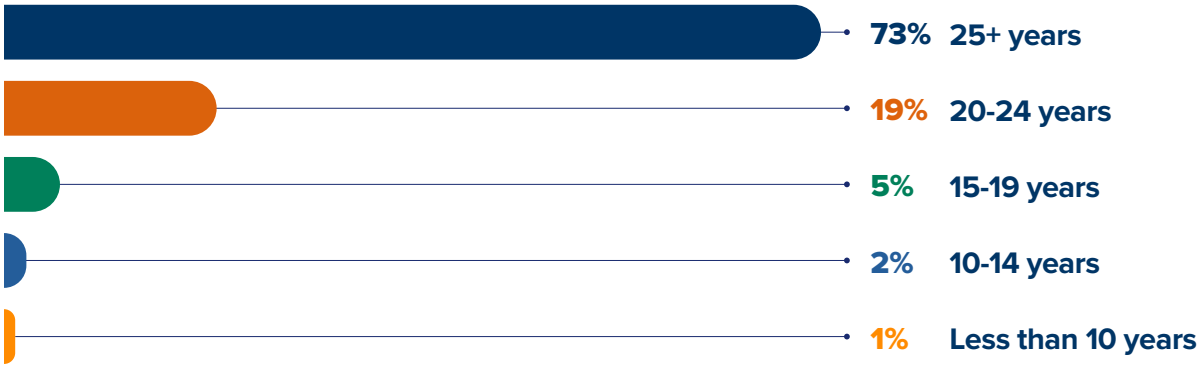
What emerges is a clear profile: these are highly experienced executives with deep operating, P&L, and commercial leadership backgrounds, with nearly three-quarters reporting 25 or more years of professional experience. Many have already led through transactions or exits, and most bring prior experience in the top seat. A meaningful share are in the first few years of their current mandate.

The breakdowns below provide details on the leaders behind the data, including their tenure, transaction experience, and path to the CEO seat, followed by an overview of the companies they lead or most recently led.

The CEOs

Total Years of Professional Experience

How many total years of professional experience do you have?



Tenure in Current CEO Seat

How many years have you served as CEO or President at your current company?



Base for all charts on this page: Total respondents (n=350). Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

First-Time vs. Repeat CEOs

Is this your first time serving as a CEO or President?

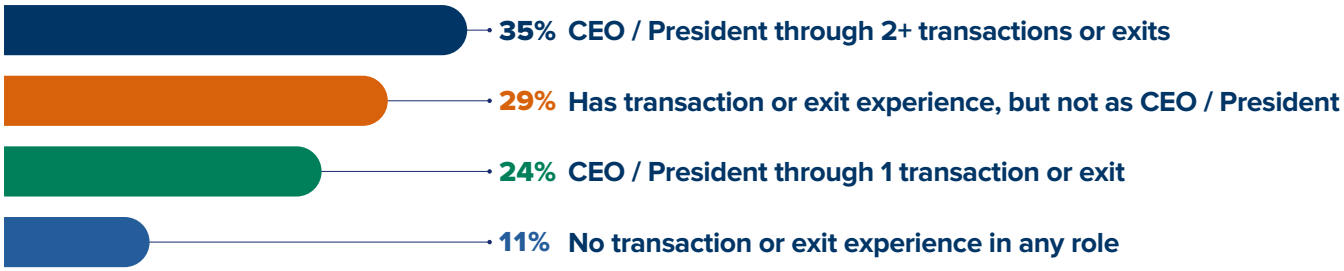


67% No, I have previously served as a CEO or President

33% Yes, this is my first CEO or President role

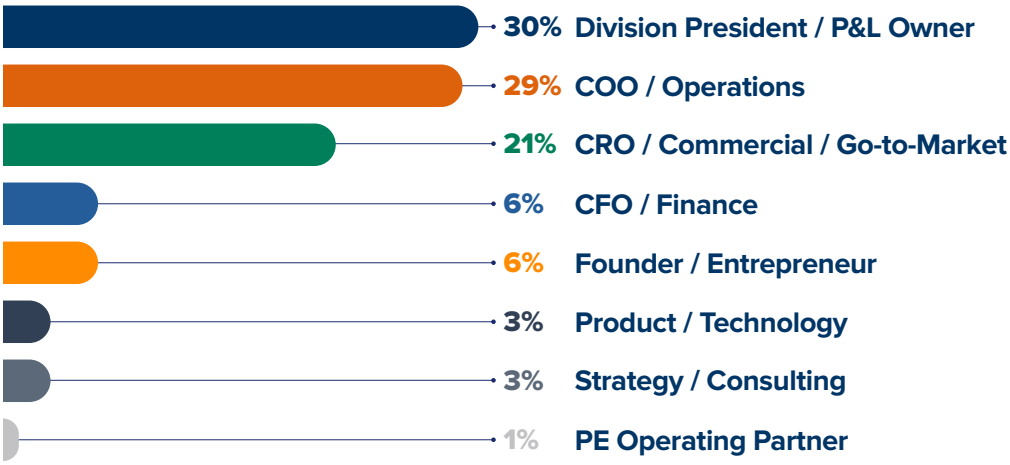
Transaction Experience

How would you describe your transaction or exit experience? For this question, "transaction or exit" includes major liquidity events such as a company sale, IPO, or recapitalization.



Role Immediately Before First CEO Role

Which of the following best describes your role immediately before becoming a CEO or President for the first time?

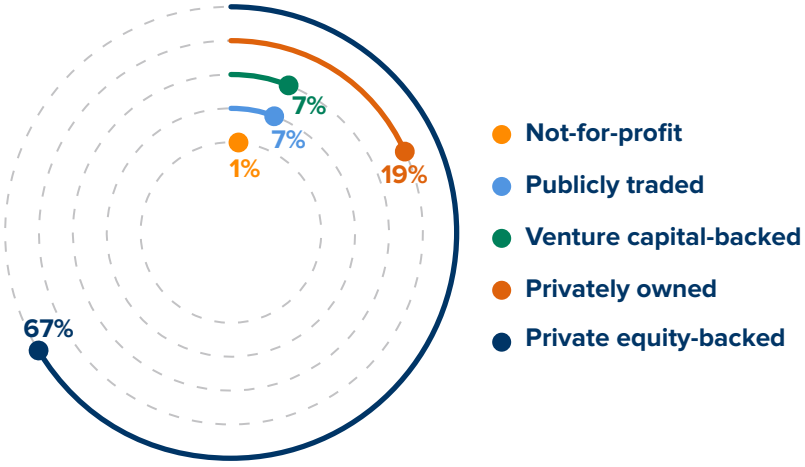


Base for all charts on this page: Total respondents (n=350). Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Their Companies

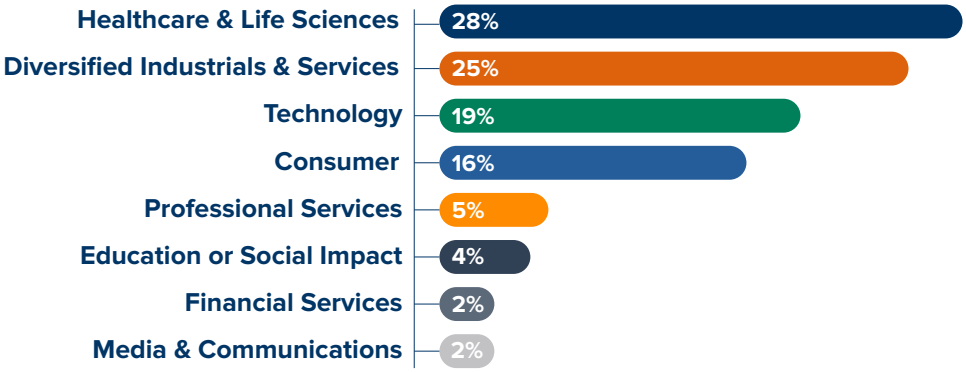
Ownership Structure

What is the current ownership status of your company?



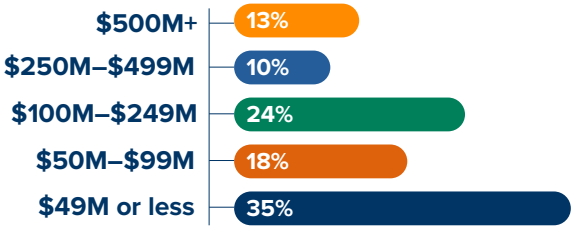
Industry

Which industry best describes your current business?



Company Revenue

What is your company's annual revenue?



Base for all charts on this page: Total respondents (n=350). Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Compensation

Understanding what constitutes competitive CEO and President compensation is essential for sponsors and boards seeking to attract and retain top leadership. The data shows clear company size-based patterns across base salary, bonus, severance, and sign-on compensation.

For this report, lower mid-market companies are defined as those with $100M–$249M in annual revenue, while upper mid-market companies are defined as those with $250M–$499M in annual revenue.

Base Salary

Base salary increases with company size, with the clearest shift occurring among companies with $250M or more in annual revenue **(Exhibit 1)**. At companies with $49M or less in revenue, $350k–$399k is the most commonly reported base salary range, selected by 27% of respondents, closely followed by $300k–$349k reported by 25% of CEOs. Among executives at companies with $50M–$99M in revenue, $400k–$449k is the most common base salary range, reported by 28%.

At companies with $100M–$249M in revenue, $400k–$449k and $450k–$499k are tied as the most common salary ranges, each reported by 24% of respondents. At larger companies, $550k or more is the clear leading range, reported by 42% of respondents at companies with $250M–$499M in revenue and 46% at companies with $500M or more.

▶ Exhibit 1: Base Salary by Company Size

What is your current annual base salary (in USD)?

Base Salary	Company Size		Middle Market		
	≤$49M	$50M–$99M	$100M–$249M	$250M–$499M	$500M+
Less than $300k	23%	11%	4%	4%	6%
$300k–$349k	25%	16%	12%	4%	6%
$350k–$399k	**27%**	19%	9%	15%	6%
$400k–$449k	14%	**28%**	**24%**	4%	14%
$450k–$499k	5%	9%	**24%**	15%	14%
$500k–$549k	1%	11%	13%	12%	9%
$550k or more	4%	4%	13%	**42%**	**46%**

Base: Current CEOs and Presidents by company size: $49M or less (n=101); $50M–$99M (n=57); $100M–$249M (n=78); $250M–$499M (n=26); $500M+ (n=35). "Prefer not to say" responses are not shown. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Bonus Structure

Bonus targets also rise with company size, though the pattern differs somewhat from base salary **(Exhibit 2)**. At companies under $50M, bonus structures are mixed: 32% of executives report target bonuses below 40% of base salary, while 31% report target bonuses in the 50%–59% range. At companies between $50M and $99M, the 50%–59% bonus range is the leading response, reported by 51% of current CEOs and Presidents. A similar pattern appears in the lower mid-market, where 36% of respondents at $100M–$249M companies report target bonuses of 50%–59% of base salary.

The most visible shift again occurs in the upper mid-market: Among executives at companies with $250M–$499M in annual revenue, 54% report target bonuses greater than 75% of base salary.

At companies with $500M or more in annual revenue, premium bonus structures are common, with 46% reporting target bonuses above 75% and another 26% reporting targets between 60%–75%.

▶ Exhibit 2: Target Bonus by Company Size

What is your target annual bonus as a percentage of your base salary?

Target Bonus	Company Size		Middle Market		
	≤$49M	$50M–$99M	$100M–$249M	$250M–$499M	$500M+
Less than 40%	**32%**	16%	9%	4%	3%
40%–49%	16%	7%	14%	8%	9%
50%–59%	31%	**51%**	**36%**	23%	17%
60%–75%	11%	11%	17%	12%	26%
More than 75%	8%	12%	23%	**54%**	**46%**

Base: Current CEOs and Presidents by company size: $49M or less (n=101); $50M–$99M (n=57); $100M–$249M (n=78); $250M–$499M (n=26); $500M+ (n=35). "Prefer not to say" responses are not shown. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Severance

Across all current CEOs and Presidents, 81% report at least six months of severance, and 47% report 12 months or more. Meaningful severance becomes consistent as companies scale **(Exhibit 3)**. For those under $50M, the most common severance range is six to 11 months, reported by 45% of current CEOs and Presidents at the smallest companies. Once companies reach $50M in annual revenue, 12 to 17 months becomes the leading severance range across every company-size band.

▶ Exhibit 3: Severance by Company Size

What severance (base salary equivalent) are you eligible for?

Severance	Company Size: ≤$49M	$50M–$99M	$100M–$249M	$250M–$499M	$500M+
Less than 6 months	11%	7%	4%	0%	6%
6–11 months	45%	35%	31%	19%	23%
12–17 months	27%	47%	51%	50%	51%
18+ months	5%	2%	3%	12%	9%
None/unknown	13%	9%	12%	19%	12%

Base: Current CEOs and Presidents by company size: $49M or less (n=101); $50M–$99M (n=57); $100M–$249M (n=78); $250M–$499M (n=26); $500M+ (n=35). "18–24 months" and "24+ months" are combined as "18+ months"; "None" and "Unknown" are combined as "None / unknown." Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Sign-on Compensation

The data shows that sign-on compensation is not a standard feature of most CEO and President packages today **(Exhibit 4)**. Just over half of current CEOs and Presidents (52%) report receiving no sign-on compensation when they accepted their current role. Thirty-seven percent selected a sign-on equity grant, while 22% selected a cash sign-on bonus, including make-whole payments for forfeited compensation.

▶ Exhibit 4: Sign-on Compensation

Did you receive any sign-on compensation when you accepted your current CEO or President role? (Select all that apply)



Base: Current CEOs and Presidents (n=297). "Prefer not to say" responses are not shown. Respondents could select all that apply, so figures exceed 100%. Note: The survey did not further define 'sign-on equity grant' to distinguish incremental sign-on equity from equity granted as part of the initial compensation package

KEY TAKEAWAY

CEO and President compensation scales clearly with company size, with the most visible step-up in the upper middle market ($250M-$499M in annual revenue). At that level, base pay moves into $500k or more for a majority of respondents, and bonus targets greater than 75% of base become the leading response.

Severance is more consistent across company sizes, with 12 to 17 months emerging as the most common range once companies reach $50M in revenue, while sign-on compensation is not a standard feature of most packages.

Equity

Equity is a defining element of a competitive compensation package in investor-backed companies. For PE- and VC-backed CEOs, the question is how the equity is structured, how much ownership is offered, what the expected value could be at exit, and which features increase the likelihood of realized value. Our analysis in this section focuses specifically on PE- and VC-backed leaders.

Equity Structure

Equity is nearly universal among PE- and VC-backed CEOs, with only 2% of executives in that segment reporting no equity stake **(Exhibit 5)**. Profits interests are the most common structure, followed by options and RSUs / restricted shares.

▶ Exhibit 5: Equity Structure Among PE- and VC-Backed CEOs

How is your equity structured? (Select all that apply)



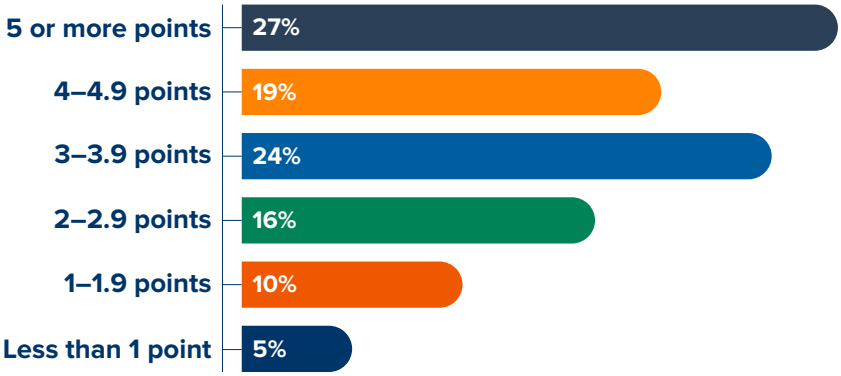
Base: PE- and VC-backed CEOs and Presidents (n=219). Respondents could select all that apply, so figures exceed 100%.

Equity Ownership Points

Among PE- and VC-backed CEOs whose equity is expressed as a fully-diluted percentage ownership via options, units, or profits interests, which we will refer to as "points," 70% hold three or more points **(Exhibit 6)**.

▶ Exhibit 6: Equity Ownership Points

If your equity is expressed as company ownership points, how much did you hold at the time of accepting your role? (One point equals 1% of fully diluted equity at grant.)



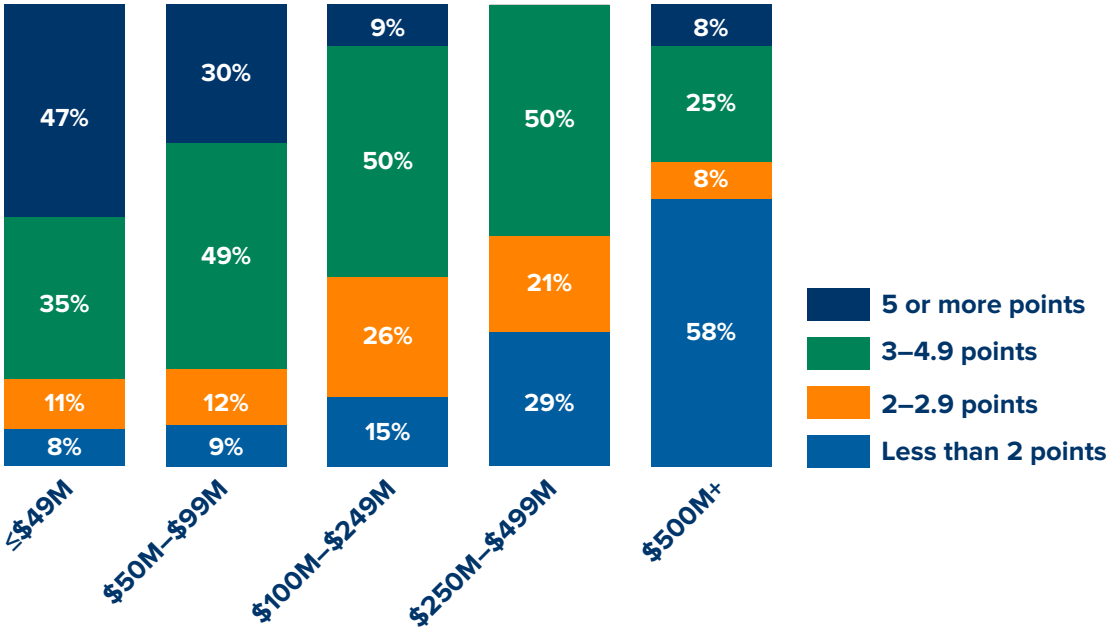
Base: PE- and VC-backed CEOs and Presidents whose equity is expressed as ownership points (n=189). Excludes respondents whose equity is not expressed in ownership points and those who selected "Prefer not to say." Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Ownership stakes decline as companies scale: At companies with less than $50M in annual revenue, 47% of CEOs hold five or more points, and more than 80% hold at least three points **(Exhibit 7)**. The $50M–$99M segment also remains elevated, with nearly 80% of respondents holding at least three points.

Within the middle market, ownership percentages narrow. Among CEOs at lower mid-market companies with $100M–$249M in revenue, 59% hold at least three points. At upper mid-market companies with $250M–$499M in revenue, that share falls to 50%, and no respondents in that company-size band report holding five or more points. At $500M and above, CEOs are more concentrated in the lower ownership bands.

▶ Exhibit 7: Equity Ownership Points by Company Size

If your equity is expressed as company ownership points, how much did you hold at the time of accepting your role? (One point equals 1% of fully diluted equity at grant.)

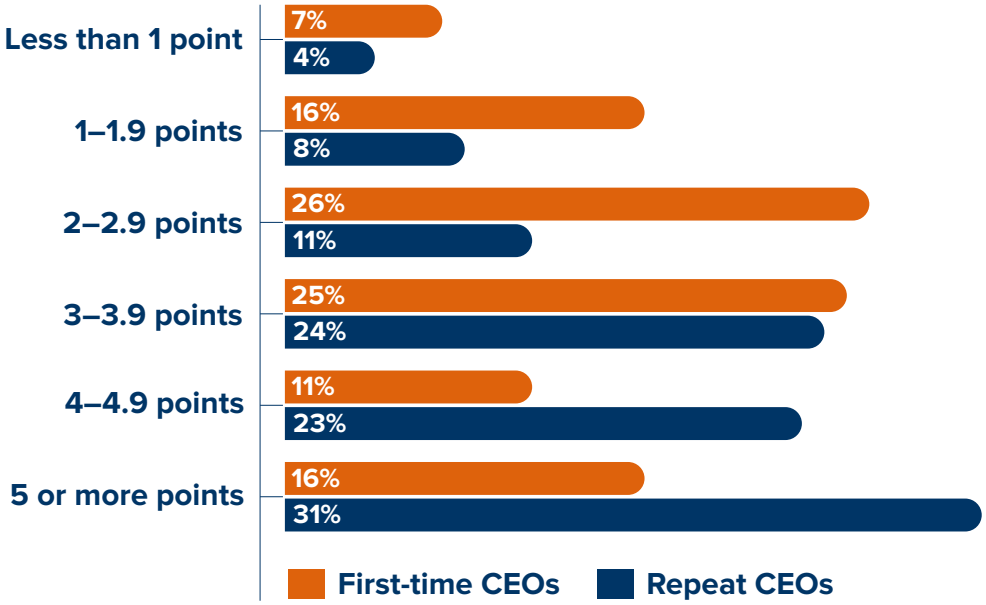


Base: PE- and VC-backed CEOs and Presidents whose equity is expressed as ownership points: $49M or less (n=66); $50M–$99M (n=43); $100M–$249M (n=54); $250M–$499M (n=14); $500M+ (n=12). Excludes respondents whose equity is not expressed in ownership points and those who selected "Prefer not to say." The 3–3.9 and 4–4.9 ownership-point categories were combined due to small sample sizes when results were segmented by company size. Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Experience and transaction exposure matter: Among CEOs whose equity is expressed in points, repeat CEOs are more likely than first-time CEOs to hold larger stakes **(Exhibit 8)**. More than three-quarters of repeat CEOs hold three or more points, compared with about half of first-time CEOs. The difference is especially visible at the top end, where repeat CEOs are nearly twice as likely to hold five or more points. A similar pattern appears by transaction experience. CEOs who have led two or more transactions from the CEO or President seat are more likely to report holding three or more points than those with no transaction experience **(Exhibit 9)**.

▶ Exhibit 8: Equity Ownership Points: First-Time vs. Repeat CEO

If your equity is expressed as company ownership points, how much did you hold at the time of accepting your role? (One point equals 1% of fully diluted equity at grant.)



Base: PE- and VC-backed CEOs and Presidents whose equity is expressed as ownership points: first-time CEOs (n=57); repeat CEOs (n=132). Excludes respondents whose equity is not expressed in ownership points and those who selected "Prefer not to say." Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

▶ Exhibit 9: Equity Ownership Points by Transaction Experience

If your equity is expressed as company ownership points, how much did you hold at the time of accepting your role? (One point equals 1% of fully diluted equity at grant.)

Ownership Points	Transaction Experience: No transaction experience	Experience, not as CEO	1 transaction as CEO	2+ transactions as CEO
Less than 1 point	11%	9%	2%	1%
1–1.9 points	**28%**	11%	11%	4%
2–2.9 points	17%	21%	16%	12%
3–3.9 points	**28%**	**25%**	18%	26%
4–4.9 points	6%	12%	24%	25%
5 or more points	11%	23%	**29%**	**32%**

Base: PE- and VC-backed CEOs and Presidents whose equity is expressed as ownership points: no transaction experience (n=18); experience, not as CEO or President (n=57); one transaction as CEO or President (n=45); two or more transactions as CEO or President (n=69). Excludes respondents whose equity is not expressed in ownership points and those who selected "Prefer not to say." Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

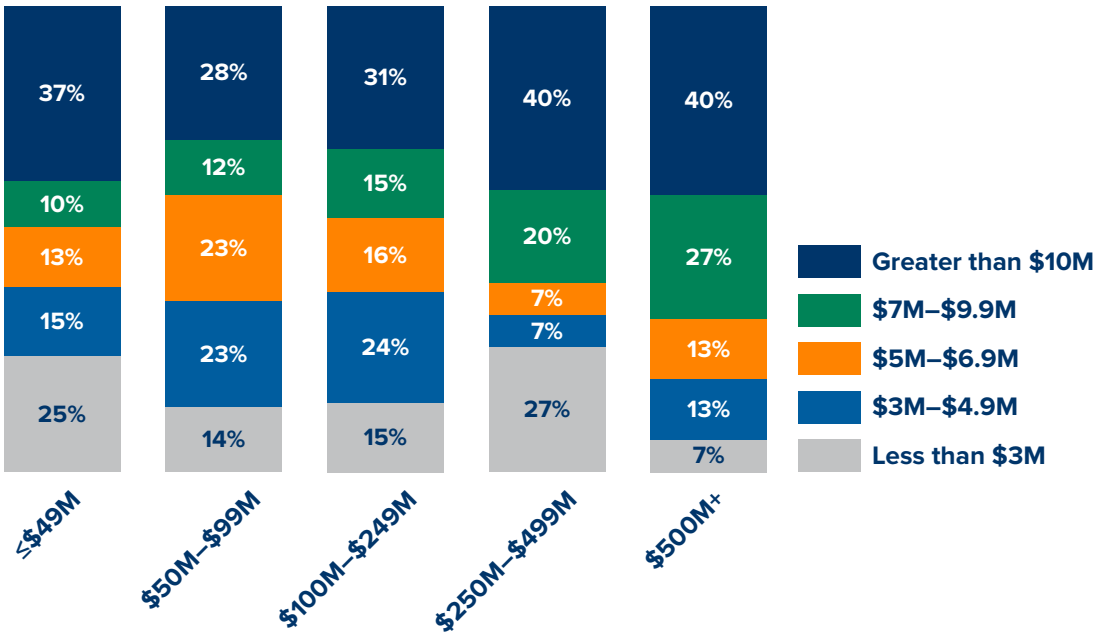
Target Equity Value

Ownership percentages decline as companies scale, but target equity value does not follow the same linear pattern. A target value greater than $10M is the most frequently reported category in every revenue band **(Exhibit 10)**. At companies with $49M or less in revenue, 37% report a target value of greater than $10M; this same group also reports the largest ownership stakes, with 47% holding five or more points.

Among lower mid-market CEOs at companies with $100M–$249M in revenue, 31% report a target equity value greater than $10M. Among upper mid-market CEOs at companies with $250M–$499M in revenue, 40% report a target equity value greater than $10M, and 60% report a target equity value of $7M or more.

▶ Exhibit 10: Target Equity Value by Company Size

At the time you accepted your role, what was the target valuation of your equity expressed as a dollarized value at plan outcome?



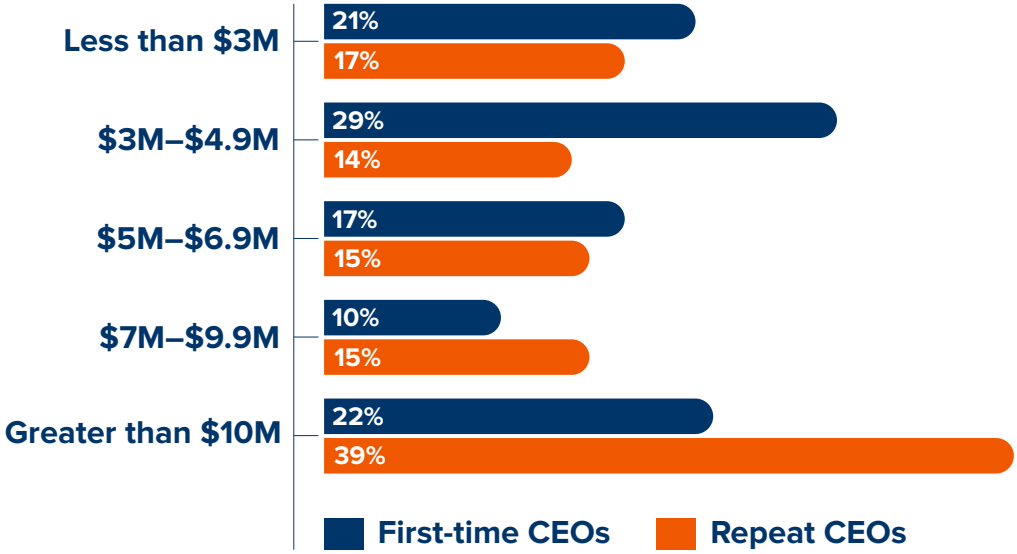
Base: PE- and VC-backed CEOs and Presidents whose equity is expressed as a dollar value at plan outcome: $49M or less (n=60); $50M–$99M (n=43); $100M–$249M (n=55); $250M–$499M (n=15); $500M+ (n=15). Excludes respondents whose equity is not expressed as a dollar value and those who selected "Prefer not to say." Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Repeat CEOs and executives with CEO-level transaction experience report higher target equity values than first-time CEOs and those without CEO-level transaction experience **(Exhibit 11)**. More than half of repeat CEOs report a target equity value of $7M or more, compared with about one-third of first-time CEOs. Repeat CEOs are also more likely to report target values greater than $10M, 39% versus 22% of first-time CEOs.

A similar pattern appears in transaction experience. The clearest dividing line is whether the executive has led a transaction from the CEO or President seat. Fifty-seven percent of executives who have led at least one transaction as CEO or President report a target equity value of $7M or more, compared with 32% of those without CEO-level transaction experience.

▶ Exhibit 11: Target Equity Value by Experience Level

At the time you accepted your role, what was the target valuation of your equity expressed as a dollarized value at plan outcome?



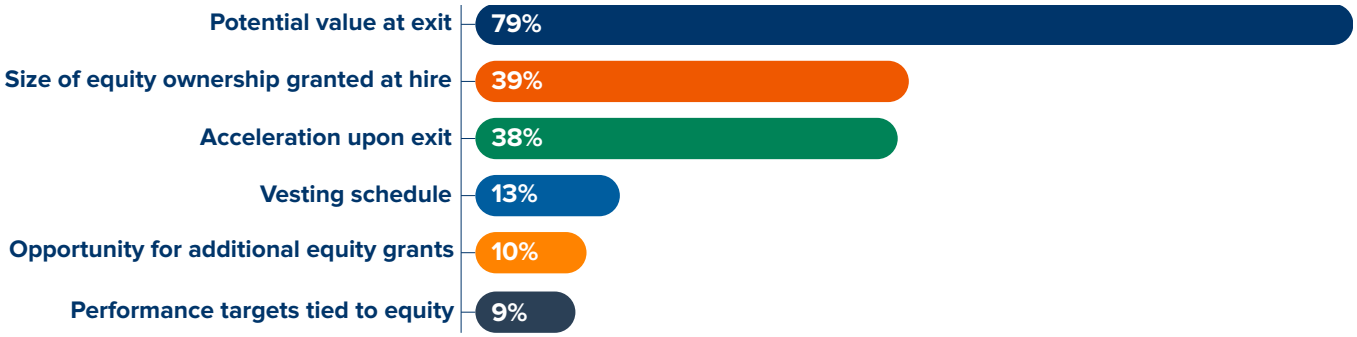
Base: PE- and VC-backed CEOs and Presidents whose equity is expressed as a dollar value at plan outcome: first-time CEOs (n=58); repeat CEOs (n=130). Excludes respondents whose equity is not expressed as a dollar value and those who selected "Prefer not to say." Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

What Makes Equity Most Attractive

When asked to select up to two elements that make an equity package most attractive, 79% of PE- and VC-backed CEOs selected potential value at exit **(Exhibit 12)**. Size of ownership granted at hire and acceleration upon exit were the next most frequently selected elements.

▶ Exhibit 12: What Makes Equity Attractive Across All PE/VC-Backed CEOs

Which elements of an equity package make it most attractive to you? (Select top two)



Base: PE- and VC-backed CEOs and Presidents who answered the equity attractiveness question (n=188). Respondents could select their top two, so figures exceed 100%.

Experience shapes what CEOs value beyond exit potential: Potential value at exit was selected by 79% of both first-time and repeat CEOs. Their preferences differ after that. First-time CEOs selected the size of the equity stake granted at hire most frequently after exit value, while repeat CEOs selected acceleration upon exit more often, at 45% compared with 24% of first-time CEOs. First-time CEOs were also somewhat more likely to select vesting schedules, additional grants, and performance targets as the most compelling elements of an equity package.

KEY TAKEAWAY

For PE- and VC-backed CEOs, equity competitiveness is shaped by both the ownership opportunity and the probability of the potential outcome. Ownership points generally correlate inversely with company size, while target equity value remains consistent across company sizes. Repeat CEOs and those with CEO-level transaction experience report larger ownership stakes and higher target equity values. Repeat CEOs are also more likely to focus on equity features, such as acceleration upon exit, which improve the probability of realization.

Compensation Perception

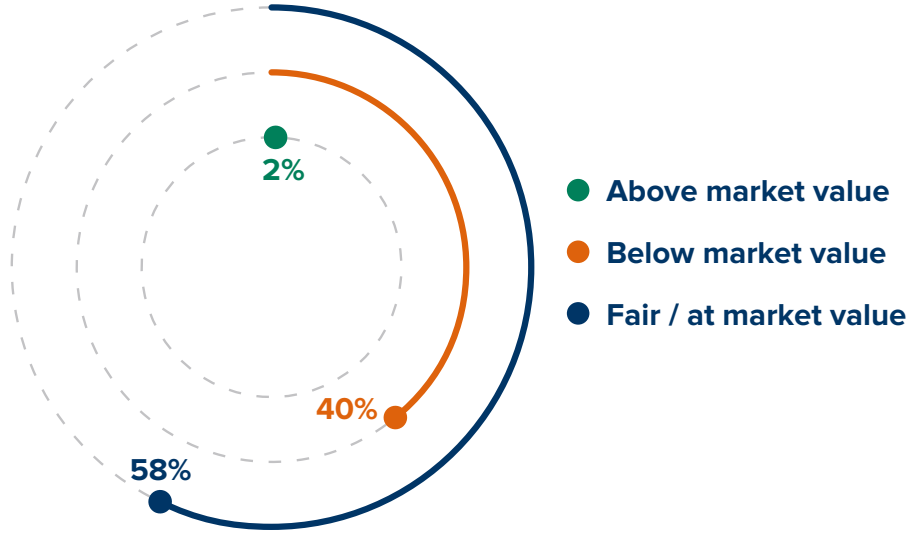
For sponsors and boards, how CEOs perceive their compensation can reveal whether pay remains aligned with the scope of the role, the value-creation opportunity, and the market for executive talent. For CEOs and Presidents, that perception shapes whether the package feels competitive after they are in the seat, not only at the time of hire. This section explores how executives assess their compensation relative to market, which elements most influence competitiveness, and how the timing and frequency of compensation reviews affect those views.

Pay Perception

The majority of current CEOs and Presidents view their pay as fair or at market, but 40% believe they are paid below market **(Exhibit 13)**.

▶ Exhibit 13: Compensation Perception

Do you believe your current compensation is competitive in today's market?



Base: Current CEOs and Presidents (n=297)

The perception of being paid below market is most concentrated in smaller companies **(Exhibit 14)**. Fifty-four percent of CEOs at companies with less than $50M in annual revenue say they feel paid below market. That share declines as company size increases.

▶ Exhibit 14: Compensation Perception by Company Size

Do you believe your current compensation is competitive in today's market?

Perception	≤$49M	$50M–$99M	$100M–$249M	$250M–$499M	$500M+
Fair / at market	47%	61%	65%	69%	63%
Below market	54%	37%	32%	31%	29%
Above market	0%	2%	3%	0%	9%

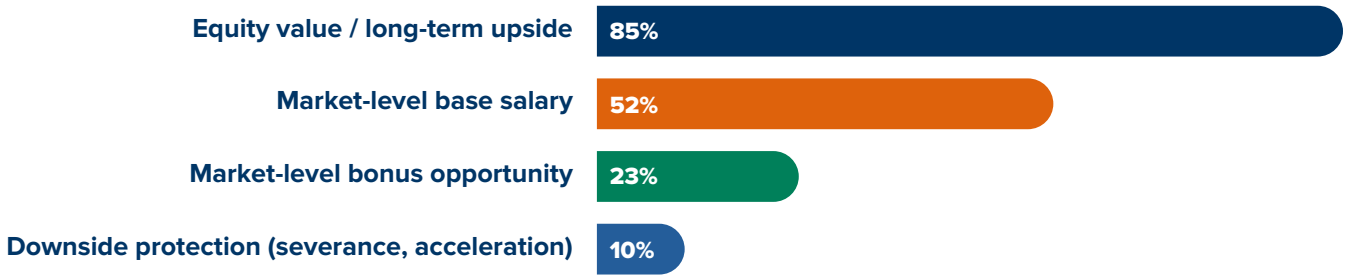
Base: Current CEOs and Presidents by company size: $49M or less (n=101); $50M–$99M (n=57); $100M–$249M (n=78); $250M–$499M (n=26); $500M+ (n=35). Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

What Makes Pay Feel Competitive

Equity value / long-term upside was the most frequently selected element of a competitive compensation package, chosen by 85% of CEOs and Presidents **(Exhibit 15)**. Market-level base salary ranked second at 52%, followed by market-level bonus opportunity at 23%. The message is consistent across experience levels: CEOs primarily define compensation competitiveness by long-term equity value, not cash compensation alone.

▶ Exhibit 15: Most Important Elements of a Competitive Package

What do you believe is most important for a CEO compensation package to feel competitive today? (Select top two)

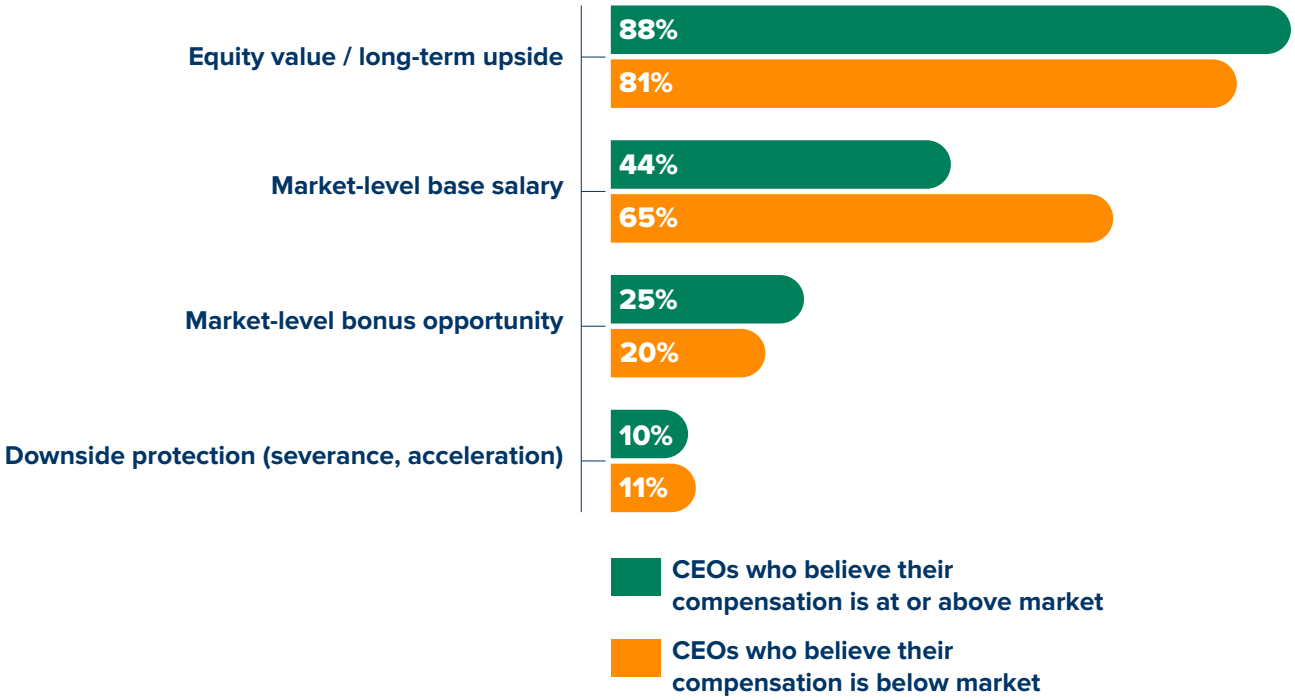


Base: Current CEOs and Presidents (n=297). "Other" responses are not shown. Respondents could select their top two, so figures exceed 100%.

When examined by compensation perception, equity remained the most frequently selected element among both groups **(Exhibit 16)**. However, executives who said they feel paid below market placed more emphasis on base salary: 65% included market-level base salary among their top two choices, compared with 44% of those who feel paid at or above market. Bonus opportunity was selected slightly less often by executives who feel underpaid: 20% compared with 25%.

▶ Exhibit 16: Most Important Elements by Compensation Perception

What do you believe is most important for a CEO compensation package to feel competitive today? (Select top two)



Base: Current CEOs and Presidents: at or above market (n=179); under market (n=118). "Other" responses are not shown. Respondents could select their top two, so figures exceed 100%.

Raises and Compensation Review Cadence

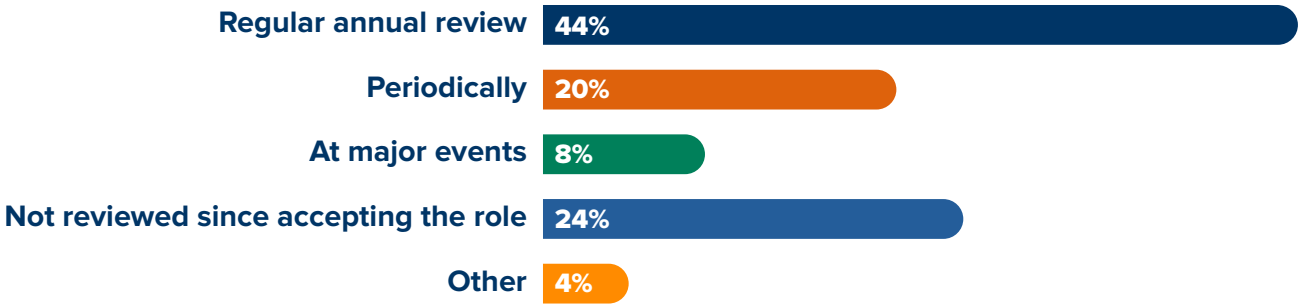
Fifty-seven percent of current CEOs and Presidents report receiving a base-pay increase since taking their role. Yet a raise does not necessarily translate to a sense of competitive pay: 59% of those who feel paid below market have received an increase.

How often compensation gets revisited varies widely. A regular annual review is the most common arrangement, reported by 44% of current CEOs and Presidents, while 20% are reviewed periodically and 8% are only reviewed at major events. Nearly a quarter, 24%, report their compensation has not been reviewed since accepting the role **(Exhibit 17)**.

Compensation-review cadence shows a clear relationship with pay perception. Thirty-two percent of executives whose compensation is reviewed annually feel paid below market, compared with 42% of those reviewed periodically or at major events and 52% of those whose compensation has never been revisited **(Exhibit 18)**. While the findings do not establish causation, CEOs with a regular annual review are substantially less likely to feel paid below market than those whose compensation has never been revisited, 32% versus 52%.

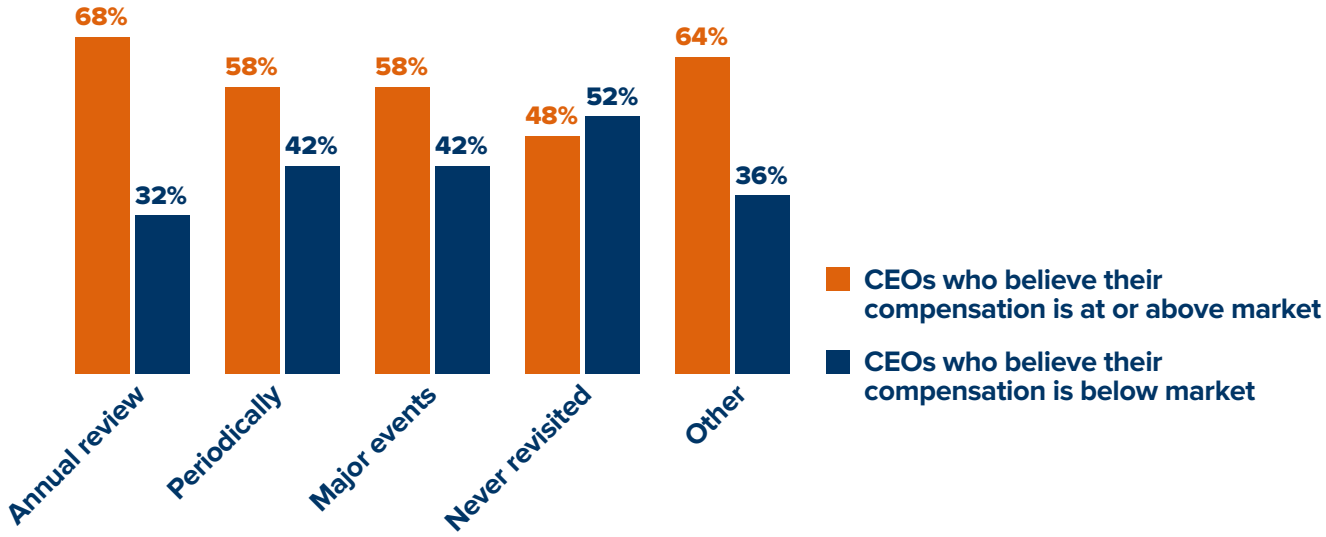
▶ Exhibit 17: Compensation Review Cadence

When does your board typically revisit or adjust your compensation?



▶ Exhibit 18: Compensation Review Cadence by Compensation Perception

When does your board typically revisit or adjust your compensation?



Base for all charts on this page: Current CEOs and Presidents who answered the compensation review question (n=296). Review-cadence subgroup bases: annual review (n=130); periodically (n=60); major events (n=24); never revisited (n=71); other (n=11). Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Competitive CEO compensation is shaped by both long-term upside and how consistently the package is revisited. Equity value or long-term upside is the most frequently selected element of a competitive package. CEOs who feel paid below market place greater emphasis on base salary, while those whose compensation is reviewed annually are substantially less likely to feel below market than those whose compensation has never been revisited.

Role Pressures and Why CEOs Consider Another Role

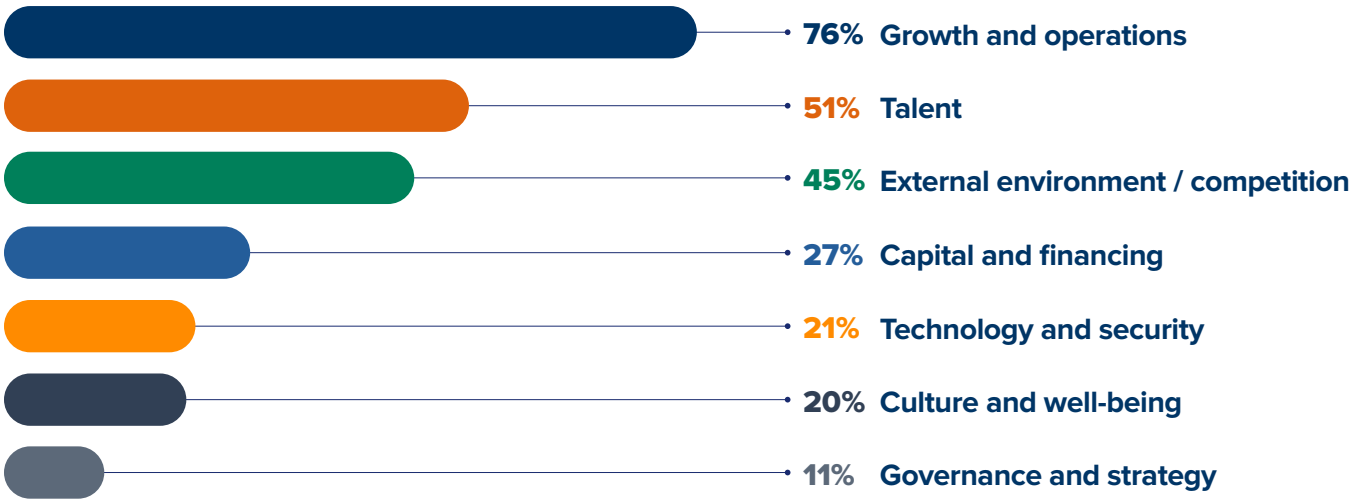
The top role is defined by pressure, but not all pressures show up equally. This section looks first at the pressures CEOs and Presidents are managing today, then turns to whether they have considered leaving their current role and, if so, the reasons they selected for doing so.

What Keeps CEOs Up at Night

When asked what keeps the top executive up at night, current CEOs most often cited growth and operations. This category, which includes go-to-market capability, cost control, and operational efficiency, was selected by 76% of respondents **(Exhibit 19)**. Talent ranked second, selected by 51% of current CEOs and Presidents, followed by the external environment and competition at 45%.

▶ Exhibit 19: Top Challenges Keeping CEOs Up at Night

What are the top challenges in your role that keep you up at night? (Select top three)

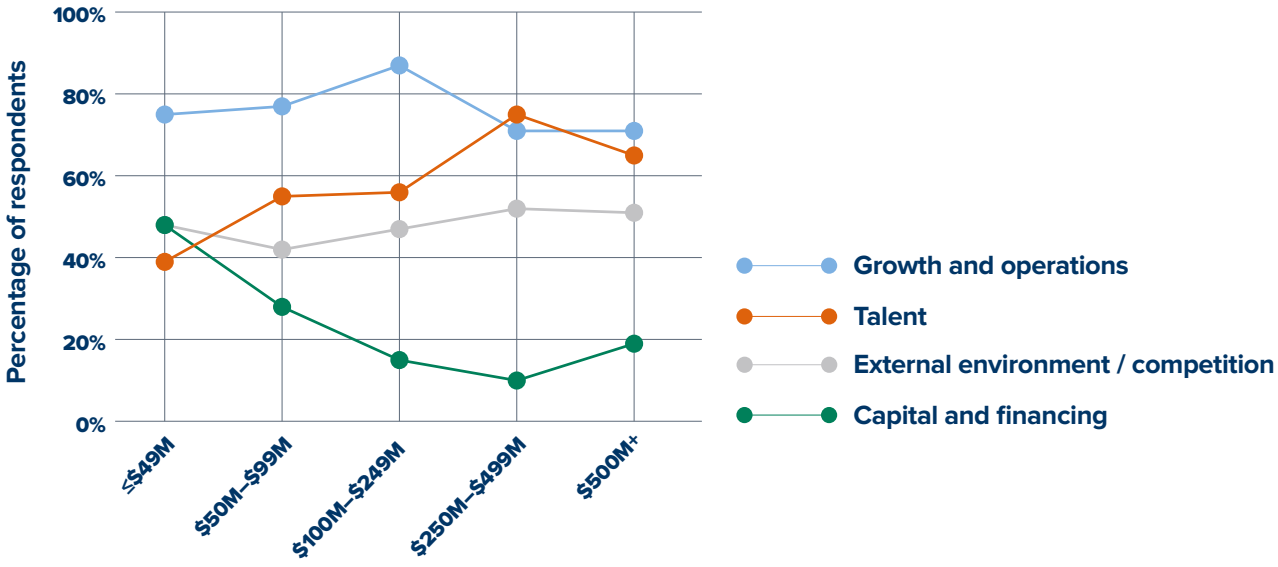


Base: Current CEOs and Presidents (n=297). Respondents could select their top three, so figures exceed 100%.

Across company sizes, growth and operations is consistently ranked highly, but secondary pressures shift with scale **(Exhibit 20)**. Smaller-company CEOs are more likely to cite capital and financing, while larger-company CEOs are more likely to point to talent as a top challenge.

▶ Exhibit 20: Top Challenges by Company Size

What are the top challenges in your role that keep you up at night? (Select top three)



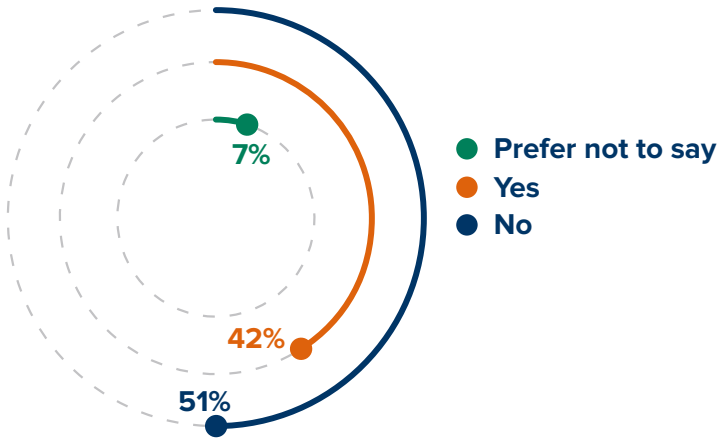
Base: Current CEOs and Presidents (n=297). Respondents could select their top three, so figures exceed 100%.

Why CEOs Consider Another Role

Among current CEOs and Presidents, 42% said they had considered leaving their role within the previous six months, while 51% had not **(Exhibit 21)**.

▶ Exhibit 21: Considered Leaving in the Prior Six Months

Have you considered leaving your CEO or President role in the last six months?

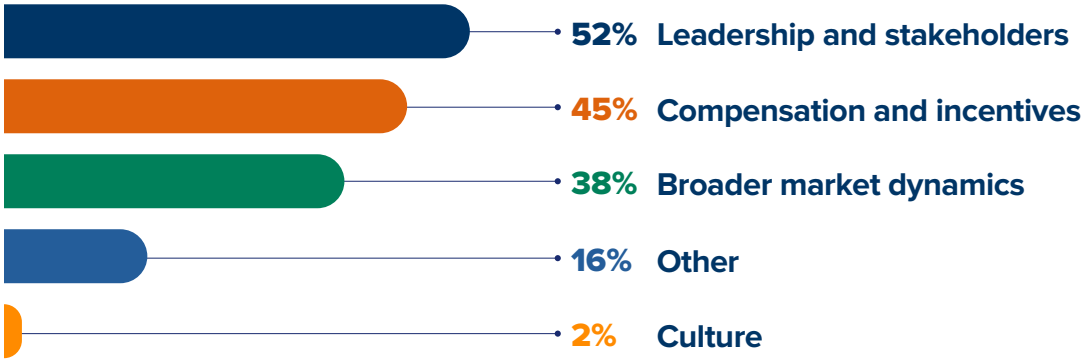


Base: Current CEOs and Presidents (n=297). Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Among those who considered leaving, the most commonly cited reason was leadership and stakeholder challenges, followed by compensation and incentives and broader market dynamics **(Exhibit 22)**.

▶ Exhibit 22: Top Reasons for Considering a Move

What is the description that best matches your reason for considering another role in the past six months? (Select top two reasons)

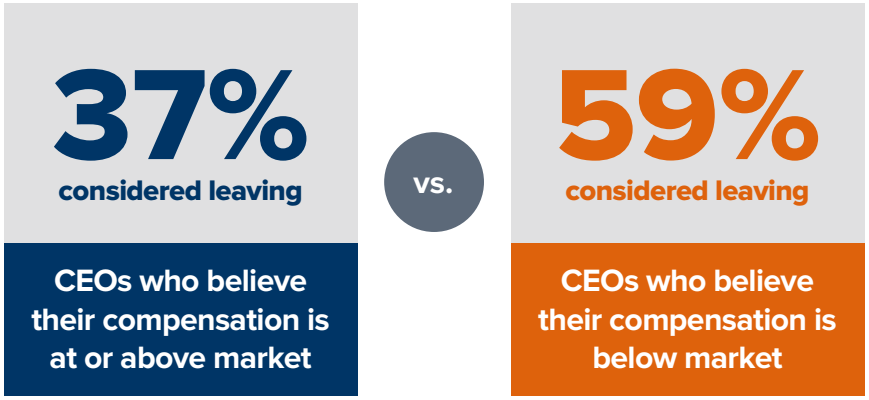


Base: Current CEOs and Presidents who considered leaving their role in the prior six months (n=125). Respondents could select their top two, so figures exceed 100%.

Below-market pay perception correlates with a greater likelihood of considering a move: CEOs who feel paid below market were more likely to have considered leaving than those who feel paid at or above market, 59% versus 37% **(Exhibit 23)**.

▶ Exhibit 23: Considered Leaving by Compensation Perception

Have you considered leaving your CEO or President role in the last six months?



Base: Current CEOs and Presidents who answered "Yes" or "No" to whether they considered leaving their role in the prior six months: at or above market (n=168); below market (n=107). Excludes respondents who selected "Prefer not to say." Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

CEOs who had considered leaving reported a somewhat different mix of role pressures. They were more likely than those who had not considered leaving to cite capital and financing, 34% versus 22%, governance and strategy, 15% versus 7%; and the external environment and competition, 51% versus 41% **(Exhibit 24)**.

Those who had not considered leaving were more likely to cite talent, 56% versus 43%, and technology and security, 25% versus 14%. Growth and operations remained the most frequently cited pressure in both groups.

▶ Exhibit 24: Role Pressures by Considered Leaving

What are the top challenges in your role that keep you up at night? (Select top three)



Base: Current CEOs and Presidents who selected their top challenges: considered leaving in the prior six months (n=125); did not consider leaving (n=150). Excludes respondents who selected "Prefer not to say." Respondents could select their top three, so figures exceed 100%.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Growth and operational execution are the dominant pressures facing CEOs and Presidents, but the broader pressure mix varies by company stage and by whether executives had considered leaving their role. Smaller-company CEOs more often cite capital and financing, while larger-company CEOs more often cite talent. Those who had considered leaving were also more likely to cite external conditions, capital and financing, and governance and strategy. Among this group, leadership and stakeholder challenges, compensation and incentives, and broader market dynamics were the most frequently selected reasons for considering another role.

CEO Ways of Working and Board Engagement

This section examines how CEOs structure the role day-to-day and how often they engage with the board.

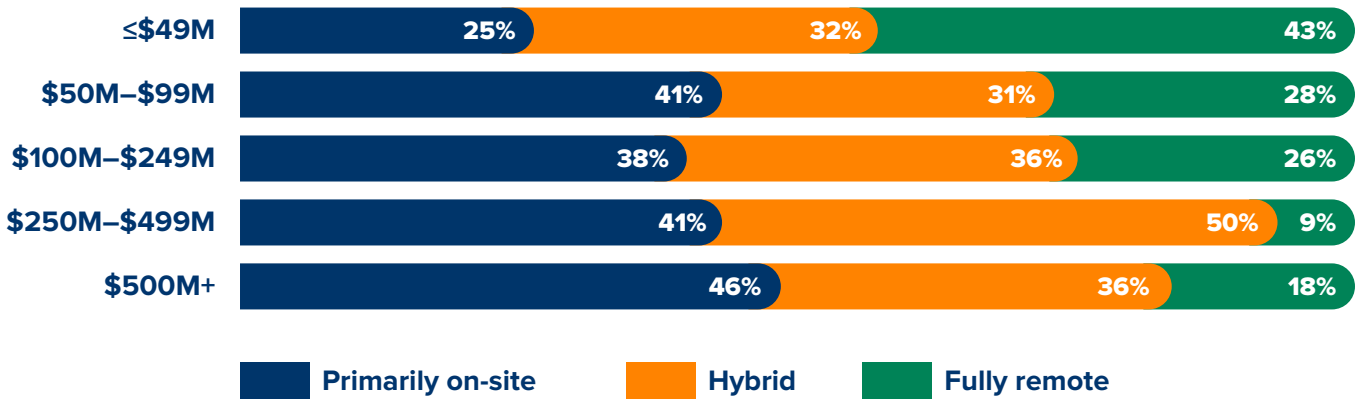
Work Model

CEO work models are split across on-site (four to five days a week on-site), hybrid (one to three days a week on-site), and fully remote. On-site and hybrid are the most common models, tied at 35% each, and fully remote follows close behind at 30%.

Work models differ by company size **(Exhibit 25)**. Fully remote work is most common among CEOs at companies with less than $50M in revenue and considerably less common among those at companies with $250M or more, where on-site and hybrid arrangements predominate.

▶ Exhibit 25: Work Model by Company Size

Which best describes your current work model?



Base: Total respondents: $49M or less (n=124); $50M–$99M (n=64); $100M–$249M (n=84); $250M–$499M (n=34); $500M+ (n=44). Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding

Culture drives the decision to be on-site, while access to talent drives remote work: Among primarily on-site CEOs, culture is the most commonly selected reason, at 80%, followed by speed of execution at 50% **(Exhibit 26)**. Culture also leads among hybrid CEOs, at 59%, with access to talent selected by 33%. For fully remote CEOs, access to talent is the most commonly selected reason, at 57%, followed by cost efficiency at 31%. Culture was selected by 26% of fully remote CEOs.

▶ Exhibit 26: Reasons for Work Model

Why do you follow that working model? (Select top two)

Reason	Work Model: Primarily on-site	Work Model: Hybrid	Work Model: Fully remote
Company policy or investor / board expectation	28%	18%	13%
Culture (engagement, retention)	**80%**	**59%**	26%
Customer or market proximity	6%	15%	12%
Access to talent	7%	33%	**57%**
Speed of execution	50%	26%	15%
Cost efficiency	1%	8%	31%

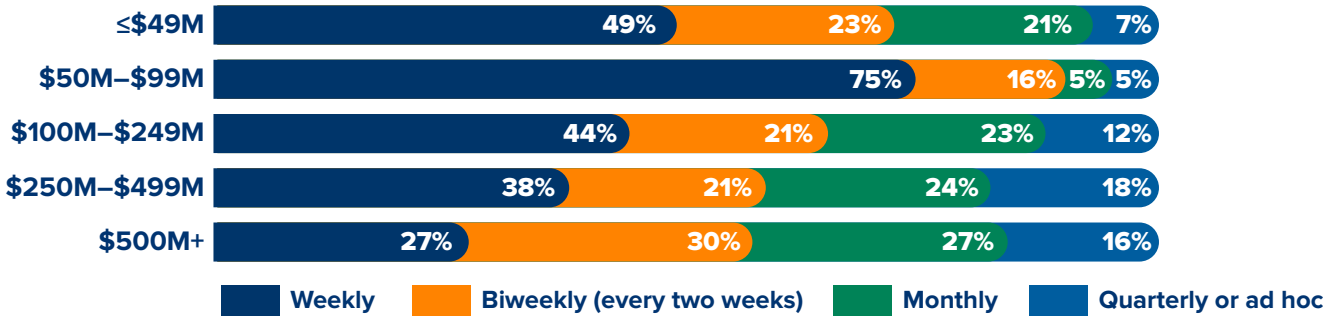
Base: CEOs and Presidents who are primarily on-site (n=123), hybrid (n=123), or fully remote (n=104). "Other" responses are not shown. Respondents could select up to two reasons, so percentages within each column exceed 100%.

Board Engagement

While work models vary, board engagement is a consistent part of the top executive operating rhythm. Overall, 71% of CEOs and Presidents engage with their board at least every two weeks, including 49% who engage weekly and 22% who engage biweekly (every two weeks). Weekly engagement is the most common cadence across most company-size bands, particularly among companies below $500M in revenue **(Exhibit 27)**. At the largest companies, the cadence appears somewhat more distributed, with biweekly engagement slightly more common than weekly or monthly engagement.

▶ Exhibit 27: Board Engagement by Company Size

How often do you engage with your board on company matters (including interactions with individual board members)?



Base: Total respondents: $49M or less (n=124); $50M–$99M (n=64); $100M–$249M (n=84); $250M–$499M (n=34); $500M+ (n=44). "Quarterly" and "As needed / ad hoc" are combined as "Quarterly or ad hoc." Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

KEY TAKEAWAY

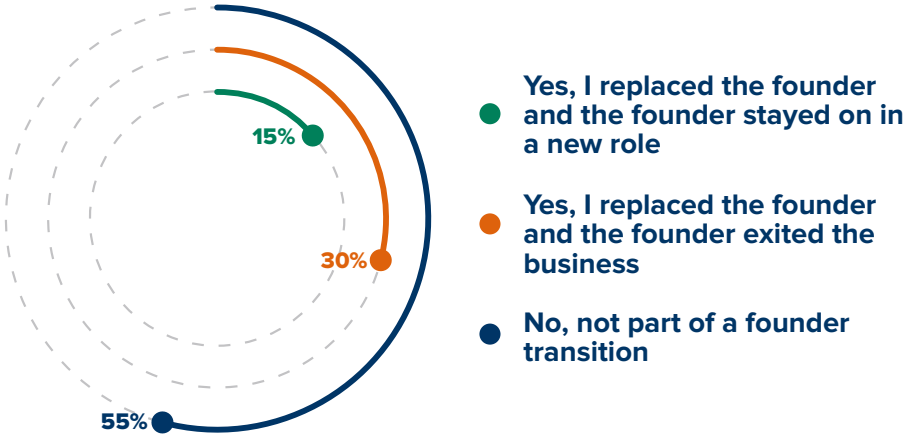
There is no single CEO work model. Smaller-company CEOs are more likely to operate fully remotely, while on-site and hybrid models become more common as companies scale. What is more consistent is the board relationship: more than seven in ten CEOs and Presidents engage with their board at least every two weeks.

Founder Transitions

Founder transitions are a meaningful part of the CEO landscape. In this study, 45% of respondents stepped into a founder-led business, either replacing a founder who exited the company or succeeding a founder who stayed involved in a new role **(Exhibit 28)**. Thirty percent replaced a founder who exited the business, while 15% succeeded a founder who stayed involved in a new role.

▶ Exhibit 28: Founder Transitions

Was your appointment to your current CEO or President role part of a founder transition?



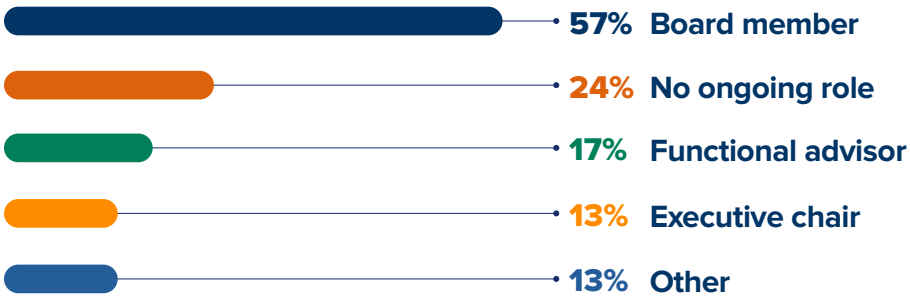
Base: Total respondents (n=350). Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

The Founder's Role After the Handoff

Founder involvement after the CEO or President handoff took several forms **(Exhibit 29)**. Among respondents who entered through a founder transition, 57% reported that the founder served as a board member. Others said the founder became a functional advisor, served as executive chair, or took another role, primarily in an operating capacity. Twenty-four percent reported that the founder had no ongoing role in the business.

▶ Exhibit 29: The Founder's Role After the Transition

What role did the founder take after you became CEO or President? (Select all that apply)



Base: CEOs and Presidents who entered through a founder transition (n=157). Respondents could select all that apply, so figures exceed 100%.

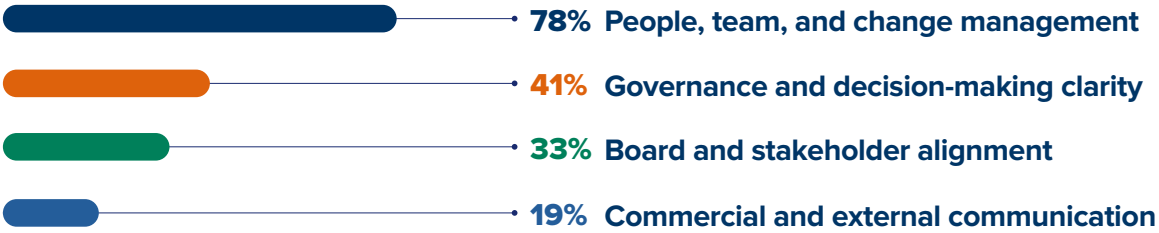
Founder Transition Challenges

Founder transitions do not always create challenges, according to the findings, but when challenges did arise, they most often centered on people and alignment **(Exhibit 30)**.

Among the 73 respondents who experienced challenges during a founder transition, 78% cited people, team, and change management. Governance and decision-making clarity followed at 41%, and board and stakeholder alignment at 33%. Commercial and external communication ranked lower, selected by 19%.

▶ Exhibit 30: Founder Transition Challenges

Which challenges did you experience during the founder transition? (Select top two)

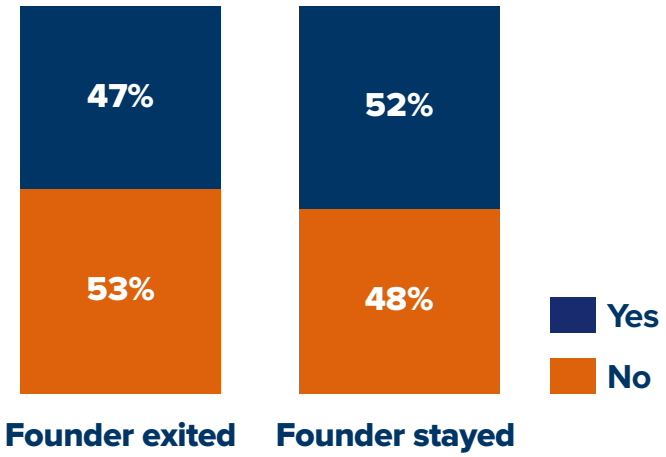


Base: CEOs and Presidents who experienced challenges during a founder transition (n=73). "Other" responses are not shown. Respondents could select their top two, so figures exceed 100%.

Challenge rates were relatively similar whether the founder exited or stayed in a new role **(Exhibit 31)**. Among respondents whose founder exited, 47% reported experiencing challenges. Among those whose founder stayed, 52% reported challenges.

▶ Exhibit 31: Challenges When Founder Stayed vs. Exited

Did you experience challenges during the founder transition?



Base: CEOs and Presidents who entered through a founder transition and answered "Yes" or "No" to whether they experienced challenges during the transition: founder exited (n=103); founder stayed (n=48). Excludes respondents who selected "Prefer not to say." Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

Turning Insights into Action

Company size sets the compensation package, experience shapes the upside, and alignment shapes engagement.

Compensation is only one part of the CEO equation. Leadership and stakeholder alignment also play an important role in whether executives remain engaged in the role. The research points to several opportunities to strengthen CEO selection, alignment, and success.

For sponsors and boards

- **A raise doesn't necessarily fix pay perception, but a process might**. Among CEOs who feel paid below market, 59% have received an increase since taking the role.
- **Compensation isn't the top reason CEOs consider leaving.** Leadership and stakeholder challenges rank first at 52%, ahead of compensation at 45%.
- **The equity conversation is about the exit, not the grant.** Seventy-nine percent of PE- and VC-backed CEOs selected potential value at exit as what makes equity attractive.
- **Ownership points shrink as companies grow.** Expected value doesn't. Points decline steadily by company size, yet a target value above $10M is the most common answer in every revenue band.
- **Focus beyond whether the founder stays or goes.** Challenge rates were nearly identical whether the founder exited or remained involved, 47% versus 52%. When challenges arose, 78% involved people, team, and change management, suggesting that successful transitions depend less on the founder's continued involvement and more on how the organization navigates the change.

For CEOs and CEO candidates

- **Benchmark expectations to the revenue band.** The package steps up meaningfully above $250M in revenue, in both base salary and bonus target.
- **Experienced CEOs negotiate beyond the size of the grant.** Repeat CEOs selected acceleration upon exit at nearly twice the rate of first-time CEOs, 45% versus 24%, while first-time CEOs placed greater emphasis on the size of the equity grant.
- **Understand severance terms before entering the role.** 12 to 17 months is the leading severance range at every company size above $50M in revenue.
- **Review cadence is a term of the package, not an afterthought.** Twenty-four percent of current CEOs report their compensation has not been revisited since accepting the role, and CEOs on an annual review are the least likely to feel paid below market, 32% versus 52%.
- **Sign-on compensation is the exception, not the rule.** Just over half of current CEOs and Presidents, 52%, report receiving no sign-on compensation when they accepted their current role. Thirty-seven percent selected a sign-on equity grant, while 22% selected a cash sign-on bonus, including make-whole payments for forfeited compensation.

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