ICE CHANNEL PARTNER SELF-ASSESSMENT

Real-world scenarios to stress-test your partner strategy

Book a strategy review:
https://app.bookm.ai/boscx/s/183

BOS Consulting
MAXIMIZE YOUR BUSINESS POTENTIAL

Built on Integrity. Driven by Execution. Trusted for Results.

Table Of Contents

Introduction to ICE

Imagine this: your partner is working with a customer who needs a solution. The partner has options. They can choose to go with a competitor or with you. The partner isn't selecting you solely based on price. They prefer your program because the deal will move faster, support will be reliable, and the long-term value is clear — for them and their customer. You've built something that helps them close more business and serve their clients better. A well-run program makes you the obvious choice, even in a competitive landscape.

A strong partner program makes selling your product the easiest decision a partner makes all week. It helps them win new business and expand within existing accounts. It simplifies how they sell, quote, and get help. It becomes part of their day-to-day because it helps them hit their numbers. That's why they lead with you.

When a partner program is successful, it becomes an integral part of how your partners operate. They rely on it. They bring you into more deals. They build around you. However, if your program makes things more complicated or less predictable, they tend to go quiet. They stop leading with you. And often, they won't tell you why. You'll feel it in slower deals and fading engagement. By the time you notice, the damage is done.

At BOS Consulting, this isn't just theory — it's what we've lived for more than 30 years. We've built programs from the earliest days of two-tier distribution, when technology channels were starting, to today's complex ecosystems. We've seen what works, what fails, and what matters to our partners. ICE — Integrity, Consistency, and Execution — isn't a framework to us. It's the foundation of everything we do. It's our operating system.

These principles are how we build programs that partners stick with. ICE creates long-term confidence for both you and your partners. When it works, they build around it. They invest more. They sell more. And they stop looking for alternatives. ICE keeps programs from slipping because it provides structure that remains consistent, unaffected by every quarter's priority. It becomes the backbone of how your channel operates.

This isn't theory. It's a system we've refined across dozens of companies. From early-stage startups to mature firms, the result is the same — fewer surprises, better alignment, and stronger performance. When you commit to these three areas, you become the steady partner everyone wants. That's when the channel starts to scale without drama.

Integrity is what partners remember when deals go sideways. I've seen it firsthand. A rep tried to cut a partner out of a deal. Leadership backed the partner. The deal still closed, and that partner sent three more opportunities in the next two quarters. Integrity pays off — not in slogans, but in follow-through.

Consistency is what gives partners confidence to build around you. If the rules change every year, they hold back. But when your program holds steady, they commit. They invest in training. They build internal processes around your tools. They talk to customers, knowing what to expect. Consistency doesn't just make things easier — it makes growth possible. It shows partners they can plan around you without fear of sudden changes. They want a program they can count on.

Execution is the part everyone sees. In one engagement, a company with strong brand recognition struggled to approve deal registration within a week. That delay drove partners to shift deals to more responsive competitors. Once we cleared the backlog and established a single point of contact, the program regained traction. Execution determines whether your strategy shows up where it matters — in the day-to-day experience of your partners.

ICE isn't theory. It's a flywheel. One part strengthens the next. Back a partner when it's hard? That builds trust. Trust leads to repeated engagement. Repeat engagement shows up in results. Results create momentum. And momentum is what makes your program scale without constant firefighting.

The situations in this assessment reflect the real-world dilemmas channel leaders face every week. Do you make an exception for a top partner? Do you let sales override your rules? Do you respond the same way under pressure as you do when things are smooth? These aren't trick questions or hypotheticals. They're the choices that quietly shape how your program is viewed — and whether partners want to bet their business on it.

This isn't about getting a score. It's about looking at how you think, how your team behaves, and how your channel operates when no one's watching. The patterns you see will show you where you're building strength — and where things might be breaking down.

You don't need to be perfect. But you do need to be honest. If a few scenarios make you pause, that's a good sign. It means you're seeing the system for what it is, not what it was supposed to be. That's where better decisions start.

Use this tool to check your foundation. Please share it with your team. Talk through the responses. It's not a quiz. It's a mirror.

A good mirror shows you what needs attention before it becomes a problem.

Let's take a look.

ICE Channel Partner
Self-Assessment

This self-assessment is designed to help you evaluate how your current partner strategy compares. It focuses on three core areas that matter in every program: Integrity, Consistency, and Execution.

These scenarios reflect real channel decisions. There is no perfect answer. The value lies in recognizing your patterns: where your approach fosters trust, where it remains consistent, and where it may be creating risk.

These scenarios reflect the kinds of decisions that shape every channel program — territory conflicts, policy enforcement, sales pressure, and partner expectations. Each one ties back to one of the three core areas of the ICE framework: Integrity, Consistency, or Execution. Your responses will surface how your current instincts align with building something that works at scale.

INTEGRITY

Integrity is the foundation of any real channel strategy. It’s about honoring your word, your commitments, and your model, even when it costs you. Partners don’t just listen to what you say. They watch what you do. This section looks at how you handle moments where fairness and trust are on the line.

Question 1

A Fortune 500 company wants to buy, but only if it can go directly and get a better price. The problem? One of your most loyal partners sourced the lead and did the early legwork. Your VP of Sales is pressuring you to make an exception and close it directly. It's a big win on paper, but it completely cuts the partner out. What do you do?

A Stand firm and refuse to cut out your partner. You insist the deal goes through the partner as per your model, perhaps by helping the partner offer a more competitive price, because you will not trade long-term channel trust for a quick win.

B Agree to go directly and inform the partner. You explain the situation and let them know the deal will not go through them. There is no compensation, and the partner is left out altogether. It is a deliberate decision to prioritize the customer and close the deal directly.

C Offer to take the deal directly but include the partner in a meaningful post-sale role, such as services or support, so they still benefit. It is not ideal, but you see it as a practical middle ground.

D Agree to the direct deal and keep it quiet. You close the revenue and deal with the fallout later.

Question 2

One of your top revenue-producing partners has been caught breaking the rules. They have been quietly selling outside their assigned territory and undercutting your published pricing to win deals. It has worked. They are delivering substantial numbers, and leadership is happy with the revenue.

However, other partners are now starting to notice and complain. They are playing by the rules and expect a level playing field. If you let this slide, it sends a message. If you crack down too hard, you risk upsetting a high-performing employee and possibly losing business.

Do you enforce the rules or protect the numbers?

A Enforce the rules evenly, no matter who it is. You meet with the partner's executive team, cite the violations, and outline the consequences based on your program. You make it clear that this protects long-term trust across your ecosystem, including with this partner. If they want to stay in the program, they must adhere to the same standards as everyone else.

B Address it directly but with flexibility. You meet privately with the partner, acknowledge their performance, and explain the impact of their actions. You stop short of penalties, but make it clear the behavior must change. You offer support or coaching, hoping to keep them engaged without weakening the program.

C Focus on the numbers and wait. You know the behavior is a problem, but this partner is delivering. You decide to keep an eye on the situation, avoid confrontation, and quietly reinforce policies elsewhere. You figure it is better to keep revenue flowing while planning how to deal with it later.

D Make the call based on instinct. You decide not to intervene and trust that the partner's results speak for themselves. You do not document anything or revisit the rules. If questions come up, you will figure it out then. For now, you move on to the next priority.

CONSISTENCY

Consistency is what turns a channel strategy into a system. It means sticking to your program's core rules so partners know where they stand — and what it takes to succeed. When the model keeps shifting or exceptions pile up, confidence erodes.

Consistency is not about rigidity. It's about being transparent, fair, and repeatable — especially when things get messy. When partners know what to expect, they invest more, trust more, and perform better.

Question 3

Your channel program has clear tier criteria based on revenue targets, certifications, and performance benchmarks. One of your long-time Gold partners missed the mark this year. Not just barely — their results fell well short of the Gold threshold.

By the rules, they should be downgraded to Silver. But now they are pushing back. They have been Gold for years, and their status has become part of their identity. The regional sales team is also voicing concern, worried that a demotion might damage the relationship or lead to lost deals.

How do you handle it?

A Follow the program as written. You meet with the partner, explain the missed criteria, and let them know they will move to Silver next period. You offer support to help them work back to Gold. You make it clear that you apply the exact expectations across the board, and the program only works when it stays consistent.

B Offer a one-time extension. You inform the partner that they can maintain Gold status for now, but with clear milestones they must meet to retain it. You acknowledge that this is an exception based on history, but the expectation is improvement, not a free pass.

C Let it slide. You keep the partner at Gold despite the shortfall. You do not announce it and hope it avoids attention. You figure the relationship matters more right now and that calling out the miss might do more harm than good.

D Change the program to fit the situation. You adjust the performance criteria, so this partner still qualifies, even if that means lowering the bar for others as well. It avoids a challenging conversation but makes the rules less meaningful over time.

Question 4

Two of your partners are making competing claims on the same deal. Partner A surfaced the lead months ago but never followed through. Partner B later engaged the same customer directly, built momentum, and is close to closing. Now both partners are saying the deal is theirs.

There was no deal registration in place. Both are essential partners in a high-value market. The customer is moving fast, and both partners expect to be protected.

How do you decide which partner to support?

A Investigate and make the call based on facts. You gather both partners' perspectives and look at who moved the opportunity forward. You include the customer if needed, review the timeline, and assess who brought the most value. Once you have what you need, you decide based on merit and explain your reasoning clearly. It may not satisfy both sides, but it reinforces that your process is consistent and fair.

B Split the deal. You decide that both partners contributed and create a structure where each plays a role. One handles product sales, while the other manages services or support. It is not a perfect solution, but both partners stay engaged and feel recognized. You use this as an opportunity to show flexibility and avoid alienating either side.

C Back the partner who can close it now. You need the deal done. You choose the partner with the current momentum and the best chance of winning. You inform the other partner after the fact and try to smooth things over later. It's not ideal, but you're making a fast call under pressure and focusing on the result.

D Go with whoever raised it first. You apply a first-in rule and give the deal to the partner who originally brought it to you, even though they lost traction. You avoid digging into the details and rely on timing to settle it. It feels easier in the moment, even if it leaves questions unanswered.

EXECUTION

Execution is what turns a plan into impact. In channel programs, that means delivering on what you promised — not just to partners, but across your teams. It includes meeting deadlines, staying aligned, and ensuring actions align with expectations.

The scenarios in this section examine whether your plans are carried out reliably and whether your teams follow through as the program instructs.
You've laid out clear rules of engagement. Partners are supposed to own the deal once they're involved. However, some of your direct representatives are still bypassing them, working directly with the customer, offering better pricing, and closing the deal themselves.

Question 5

In a recent case, a rep undercut a partner who had already invested time with the customer. The partner escalated. The deal went to the direct rep anyway. Now the partner is threatening to walk.

This isn't a one-off. A few representatives still view the channel as optional, and frontline sales managers are not intervening. Your strategy says partners matter. Your internal actions don't match that yet.

How do you align your teams?

A Elevate the issue and reinforce expectations. You bring it to sales leadership, restate the rules clearly, and ask for specific follow-up with their teams. You recommend tying rep behavior to comp or pipeline credit to make it real. You make it clear that protecting partner trust is part of the job, and that there are consequences when it's ignored.

B Coach for better alignment. You highlight examples where working with partners has led to stronger outcomes, and discuss with managers how to guide representatives through these situations. You avoid public pressure, but use conversations and reminders to bring people back into alignment. You believe most reps will adjust once they understand what's at stake.

C Address incidents one at a time. When a partner raises a concern, you discuss it quietly with the manager, ask for a solution, and then move forward. You inform the partner that it will be handled, but avoid escalating or engaging in broader communication. You are focused on keeping things moving without stirring up conflict internally.

D Let it slide and stay focused on deals. You give the rep a quick reminder, but do not push further. You tell the partner you are aware, offer something small to ease the frustration, and hope it doesn't come up again. You figure some channel conflict is going to happen, and it is not worth slowing things down to fix it.

Question 6

You launched a new Market Development Fund (MDF) program this year to help partners run local marketing campaigns. The budget is there. The structure is in place. But almost no one is using it.

Some partners say the process is too complicated. Others are unsure about which campaigns to run. A few haven't even opened the announcement. You have a budget sitting idle that was supposed to drive partner-sourced demand.

How do you get this program moving?

A Invest in education and visibility. You host a live session or create a walkthrough that shows partners how to use the funds effectively. You share examples of simple campaigns and highlight any early success stories. You keep the program visible in your regular communications, so partners stay informed and start taking action on their own.

B Step in and make it easier to use. Identify the partners who could benefit most and reach out to them directly. You offer help drafting proposals or give pre-approved examples to get them started. You also simplify the approval steps to expedite the process. You want to show that this program is real and worth their time.

C Shift the funds somewhere else. If partners are not using the MDF, you assume it is not a priority for them. Rather than chase participation, you move the budget to a vendor-led campaign or a direct incentive. You inform partners that unused funds will be forfeited and focus your efforts on what can be executed immediately.

D Extend the deadline and hope for better results next quarter. You assume interest will pick up with more time and fewer distractions. You send a reminder and keep the process as-is, figuring it will start working once partners are ready to engage.

Count how many times you selected A, B, C, or D:

Mostly
A's

You bring structure and a long-term mindset. You're building trust by sticking to a model that partners can rely on.

Mostly
B's

You're adaptable and relationship-focused. You adjust when needed, though it's worth checking whether your flexibility is still driving consistency.

Mostly
C's

You respond quickly and handle what's in front of you. That can help maintain momentum, but it may be beneficial to anchor your decisions in a more straightforward strategy.

Mostly
D's

You're moving fast and solving what's in front of you. If it feels like decisions are happening one at a time, this is a chance to step back and reset the system around you.

WHAT NOW?

This wasn't just a quiz.
It was a chance to step back and see how your program works when it counts.

If your answers leaned reactive, inconsistent, or overly flexible, you're not alone. Even strong teams encounter friction when revenue pressure builds or program ownership becomes unclear.

The best programs do more than survive that pressure. They grow stronger because of it.

If you're serious about building a partner program that:

- Attracts the right partners without chasing
- Provides consistent support that partners can count on
- Builds trust and leverage, not one-time deals

Then let's talk

BOS Consulting

MAXIMIZE YOUR BUSINESS POTENTIAL