CORNERSTONE EXECUTIVE SEARCH

Cornerstone Executive Search has been exclusively retained by Ad Astra to conduct their search for a new Chief Experience Officer.

Ad Astra

CHIEF EXPERIENCE OFFICER

Ad Astra

Fast Facts

- **Company Snapshot:** Higher education technology company focused on data-informed academic planning, Smart Scheduling, and student success.
- **Reports To:** CPO
- **Location:** Kansas City, Missouri (in person)
- **Key Focus:** Client experience, post-sale operating model, client outcomes, gross revenue retention, services P&L, and value & insights.

The Organization

Ad Astra Information Systems is a leading provider of academic scheduling and resource optimization software for higher education institutions. For more than 30 years, Ad Astra has partnered with colleges and universities to improve student outcomes by helping institutions align academic planning, course scheduling, and facility usage with student demand. Through data-driven insights and innovative technology, Ad Astra empowers institutions to increase efficiency, optimize resources, and support student success.

The Opportunity

The client experience is a source of measurable competitive advantage and a primary driver of client growth. The Chief Experience Officer is the executive owner of that advantage, accountable for building a post-sale operating model that consistently converts client investment into demonstrable institutional outcomes, accelerating student progress, improving retention, and increasing graduation rates at every partner institution. This role is responsible for ensuring every dollar of services delivered earns its margin, every client that onboards reaches time-to-value on schedule, and every renewal is defended on the strength of outcomes rather than relationships alone. The CXO directs the value and insights function whose analytics, benchmarks, and reporting infrastructure power client business reviews, support go-to-market positioning and enables the revenue organization to win new business on the proof of existing results.

The Position

The Chief Experience Officer is the operating executive accountable for converting contracted revenue into retained, growing, and referenceable client relationships, owning the full post-sale P&L from implementation through renewal and driving the unit economics that determine whether the business scales profitably. This role carries direct accountability for gross revenue retention (GRR) as the primary value-protection metric, and the P&L performance of the onboarding, implementation, and professional services organizations, measured through services revenue, gross margin, billable utilization, and optimized cost of goods sold (COGS). The Chief Experience Officer builds the operational infrastructure to onboard clients at speed and at scale, installs the repeatable systems that convert newly signed contracts into measurable outcomes, and deploys the capacity management and workforce discipline required to sustain margin as the business grows. This role partners tightly with sales and finance to align post-sale capacity to bookings velocity, manages churn risk through rigorous health monitoring and escalation protocols, and leads the teams responsible for retaining and growing the existing client base.

Key Responsibilities

- Own gross revenue retention (GRR) as the primary performance metric of the post-sale organization, setting renewal, churn, and downgrade targets, building the forecasting and early-warning infrastructure to track against them, and holding the organization accountable to the numbers.
- Define and enforce the operational standard for what a best-in-class client experience looks like at Ad Astra, translating that standard into measurable service-level benchmarks, staffing models, and delivery protocols that the organization executes consistently at scale.
- Architect the end-to-end post-sale operating model, spanning migration, onboarding, adoption, and support, so that each stage of the client journey has defined entry and exit criteria, clear ownership, and measurable outcomes tied to time-to-value and net retention.
- Direct client migrations from previous platform with the discipline of a program office, enforcing data integrity standards, on-time cutover commitments, and go-live readiness.

- Build and operate a modern onboarding and deployment function as a disciplined P&L, accountable for services revenue, gross margin, billable utilization, and optimized cost of goods sold (COGS). Define and enforce capacity models that match deployment staffing to bookings pipeline, set utilization targets per delivery role, and establish the project governance infrastructure that prevents scope creep and protects margin.
- Report services P&L performance monthly with clear variance analysis against plan on revenue, margin, and utilization.
- Instrument the client base with a rigorous health scoring framework that converts usage data into actionable leading indicators of churn risk and expansion readiness.
- Run the support organization as a cost-managed service function, setting response and resolution SLAs, tracking performance against them, and managing support headcount and tooling costs as a component of overall COGS.
- Partner with the CRO and finance to align post-sale capacity planning to bookings trajectory, integrate renewal forecasting into the company's ARR model, and ensure the post-sale cost structure scales in line with revenue growth.
- Establish services pricing discipline, standard rate card governance, and project-level margin tracking.
- Direct the value and insights function as a force multiplier for both client retention and revenue growth.

Qualifications

Required Experience

- Proven track record as an operating executive leading post-sale organization, spanning client success, implementation, professional services, and support, with direct P&L ownership and accountability for GRR and services margin in a SaaS business.
- Demonstrated ability to improve gross revenue retention and setup client expansion opportunities through structural improvements in implementation efficiency, adoption depth, client engagement models, and overall support quality.
- Experience leading complex, large-scale client migrations with repeatable program management, data integrity controls, and risk mitigation under tight cutover timelines.
- Fluency in the full post-sale metrics stack: GRR, NRR, time-to-value, health score, CSAT/NPS, services gross margin, billable utilization, and COGS.
- Bachelor's degree required; MBA or graduate degree strongly preferred.
- Minimum of 12 years of progressive post-sale leadership experience, including at least 5 years operating at the VP or C-suite level with full organizational and P&L accountability.
- Hands-on experience running a billable professional services or consulting organization, including ownership of the services P&L, capacity planning, utilization management, and COGS optimization.

Preferred Experience

- Experience scaling post-sale client organizations through rapid growth.
- Quantifiable track record of improving GRR and NRR with specific data on retention rate improvement, churn reduction, and expansion revenue supported.
- Experience leading large-scale data migrations from legacy or competitor platforms.
- Fluency with the modern post-sale technology stack, including health scoring platforms, CRM, ticketing, adoption analytics, and services PSA tools.
- Experience building or scaling a data, analytics, or insights function that serves both internal revenue enablement and external client reporting.

Key Success Metrics

- Gross revenue retention (GRR), renewal rate, churn rate, saves, and downgrade rate, reported monthly against plan with full variance analysis.
- Client outcomes delivered, including measurable student progress metrics, retention improvements, and graduation rate gains at partner institutions, along with client NPS, CSAT, and referral rate.
- Onboarding and deployment P&L performance: services revenue vs. plan, gross margin %, billable utilization by role, COGS efficiency, and average time-to-first-value by client segment.
- Ongoing product adoption: client health score distribution, product usage depth and breadth metrics, re-engagement rate for declining-adoption accounts, and expansion revenue influenced by success motions.
- Support efficiency and quality: first response time, time-to-resolution, ticket deflection rate, CSAT/NPS, and support COGS as a % of ARR.
- Professional services financial performance: delivered services revenue, gross margin %, billable utilization by role type, rate card compliance, and COGS vs. budget.
- Quality and business impact of analytics and reporting outputs, including ABR/QBR completion rates, renewal influence attributed to business review conversations, and go-to-market content utilization by the revenue organization.

Additional Expectations

- Architect and continuously elevate a cohesive, market-leading client experience journey that differentiates Ad Astra in the market.
- Build and operate a client center of excellence to help institutions exceed their student outcome goals.
- Translate client prioritization, support ticket volume, churn driver analysis, and client satisfaction data into structured information to support product strategy.
- Apply operational rigor to every post-sale function through standardized playbooks, automation, and escalation frameworks.
- Execute institutional change management with disciplined adoption plans, training protocols, and communication frameworks.
- Operate as the executive relationship owner for the post-sale portfolio.
- Make capacity and investment decisions across the post-sale organization based on revenue risk and growth priority.
- Personally engage at the C-suite and senior leadership level when client relationships are at risk or require executive partnership.
- Design and manage a segmented client coverage model based on institutional size, complexity, and strategic value.
- Build and lead a client advisory board and peer community.

About Kansas City

Located in the Kansas City metro, Ad Astra is part of a vibrant business community known for its entrepreneurial energy, central location, strong quality of life, and Midwest approachability. The region offers a compelling mix of professional opportunity, arts and culture, restaurants, sports, neighborhoods, and community connection.

Learn more about the area: Visit KC | KC Chamber | KC Area Development Council

About Cornerstone Executive Search

Cornerstone Executive Search is a leading retained executive search firm that helps great companies recruit great people. For more than 40 years, our firm has excelled in serving our client companies with executive talent acquisition, leadership development and career transition services in Kansas City and across the Central Midwest region of the United States. Our firm has successfully completed more than 1,600 retained executive search assignments for C-suite, President, Vice President, Director and Management-level positions. To inquire about how Cornerstone Executive Search can serve your executive talent acquisition needs, please click here to visit our website.

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CELEBRATIONG 40 YEARS IN EXECUTIVE SEARCH

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