

A Champion of Software Sales

As a teen, Cedric Pech competed in the European Cup for downhill skiing. Then he applied the same ferocious drive to a career in software sales.



When Cedric Pech was five years old and living in the French alpine town of Les Deux Alpes, his father would tell him bedtime stories of a quasi-mythical saint who would fly down snow-covered mountains from the clouds above, delivering to the mortals below such joy that they showered him with their gold.

Even today, over 40 years later, Pech is awestruck when he thinks of Jean-Claude Killy, the legendary French alpine skiing champ who took three golds at the 1968 Winter Olympics.

“My father spent the first five years of my life talking to me about Killy instead of Santa Claus,” says Pech.

Pech, now 48, would go on to pattern his life somewhat after Killy. In his teens, Pech became a European Cup downhill ski contender. Then he pursued a sales career and managed large multinational teams, just as Killy later managed the

▲ **Cedric Pech**

▲ **Chief Revenue Officer at MongoDB**

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BORN	MADE HIS MARK
Les Deux Alpes, France	Parametric Tech Corp
PHILOSOPHICAL MUSE	LIFE HERO
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry	Jean-Claude Killy
TOP SALES TRAIT	COLLECTS
Empathy	Etruscan pottery

winter games for the International Olympic Committee. He has also inspired a younger generation of sales leaders through his own winning example.

Today, Pech is chief revenue officer of enterprise software company MongoDB. In that role, he is responsible for developing and executing the company’s global sales strategy and managing a 550-person sales team. During a 25-year career, Pech has led software sales teams—at PTC, Think3, BladeLogic, BMC, BazaarVoice, and Fuze, the video conferencing platform—that have generated billions in revenue, consistently exceeding big growth targets.

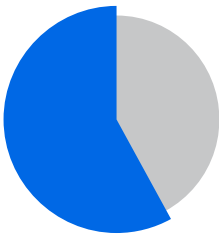
Pech’s values, and his approach to building legendary sales organizations, have played a major role in that success. They owe as much from his upbringing—and relentless quest, from age 5, for Olympic glory—as they do

to his hero, Killy, with whom Pech started a lifelong pen-pal friendship when he was a kid.

“Killy is a player,” says Pech, “in sports and business, and pretty much everything he does in his life. And he became an important role model for me.”

THE DRIVE TO COMPETE

Pech’s latest quest, at MongoDB, is to keep expanding the company’s rapidly growing customer base, which currently includes 8,300 customers in more than 100 countries. After joining the company in 2017 to head up sales in Europe, the Middle East, and Africa (EMEA), he took on the role of chief revenue officer in February 2019. In March 2020, the company reported total revenues of \$421.7 million for FY20, up 58% year-over-year.



58%

MongoDB’s year-over-year revenue growth since Pech became chief revenue officer in Feb. 2019

Pech’s formula for sales success starts with character. “I don’t think that we have a lack of very intelligent people out there,” he explains on a recent video call from his home office. In the background are soothing wood accents, industrial lighting, mid-century modern club chairs, and a pool table.

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"What is more difficult to assess and to find are qualities like drive, character, and integrity. I am often impressed by people that I work with from that standpoint, and by the way they behave in the face of adversity and difficulties. I'm impressed by people where I look at them and I'm like, 'My hat's off to you. I don't think I could have dealt with that, and you did.'"

That's not a surprising take from someone who grew up on a glacier. At 5,400 feet, Les Deux Alpes sits in the clouds. A year-round ski resort, it gave the Pech family its livelihood and drive. His father, uncles, cousins, and his brother all competed in ski races and became ski instructors.

At his racing peak, Pech (pronounced Pesh) was among the top French skiers in downhill. Then, at 18, he realized that as good as he was and as hard as he trained, he would likely never win the Olympics like Killy. "It was a shocking moment, because your whole life is structured towards something, and then all of

a sudden you admit it's not going to happen," he says. "You have to reinvent yourself."

Pech realized that the intense effort he had poured into skiing needed to be channeled into something new. He competed to get into the exclusive Montpellier Business School in the south of France. It took two years of trying, but in 1992, at age 20, he made it in.

Business school was an uncomfortable fit at first, not just because the 50,000-person city seemed huge. "My brother and I were racing machines from when we were 5 years old," he says. "And all of a sudden you get into the business world." Pech quickly threw himself into what he knew best—competition. He won seats on the student body and sailing committees. "I didn't place first in the finance course, but I was the first at organizing things," he says.

In 1995, shortly after Pech graduated, and after two years of military service, Montpellier's alumni office sent him a



A competitive youth skier, Pech channeled lessons in perseverance into a successful sales career.

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fax about a job opportunity. The listing mentioned a jaw-dropping annual salary target: 500,000 French francs, or approximately \$100,000 today. “It was 10 times more money than I had ever dreamed about,” says Pech. The fax did not mention that it was commission-based, though.

The company was called Parametric Technology Corporation, now known as PTC, the Boston-based industrial software maker with \$1.3 billion in annual revenue. “I didn’t know anything about software and even less about sales,” says Pech.

But one aspect of the job hit close to home. As Pech says, “it was the closest version of professional sport that I could think of. There were rankings everywhere. It was a very meritocratic environment.” The opportunity also mirrored his former life—spent almost entirely outdoors and among fellow elite athletes—in two other ways. “I was not locked into an office, which for me would be the end of it,” says Pech. “And there was a team with me, and I got lucky enough to meet an amazing sales leader named Carlo Carpanelli, who had the greatest impact on my career.”

LESSONS FROM ONE OF THE BEST

At PTC, Pech also met another mentor, John McMahon, the company’s head of worldwide sales, and a tough-looking exec. Although he played the part well, McMahon was also

generous. “I learned a lot from him about holding people accountable and setting standards of excellence,” says Pech. “But I also observed that there is a way to do that with empathy.”

At PTC, Pech began developing his own strategy for building a great sales organization in the software business. “Everybody thinks that in order to be great, you need to have the best sales process, the best qualification process, and the right metrics to measure everything, which in some ways is correct—but not sufficient.”

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Even more important, he says, is a sense of purpose—something he learned from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the French author of the children’s book “The Little Prince,” who was also a French aviator and fighter pilot in World War II. Saint-Exupéry once said: “If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.”

“I respected this way of thinking, because it’s the same thing in an enterprise software

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sales organization. People are never inspired by a sales process. People don't yearn for a qualification framework or even for a paycheck at the end of the month," he says. "There are companies where the more you comply with the processes, the more you advance your career. These are the bureaucracies. People don't go the extra mile in bureaucracies. They put in the emotional commitment it takes to be amazing if they understand there is something bigger in it for them, and that is what you see in a great sales team."

That "something bigger" is being part of and building a legendary sales organization with a culture of learning excellence. That requires creating a challenging learning environment where people are stretched and enjoy it, Pech says, but in an environment where there's an emotional attachment to a common goal.

What Pech helped build at PTC grew into an organization with 6,000 employees in 80 offices across 30 countries. During Pech's five-year tenure—during which he rose to regional director—PTC revenue more than doubled, from \$394 million in 1995 to \$928 million in 2000.

That year, Pech left PTC to embark on a series of other high-level sales jobs at other enterprise software companies. Among them were stints at BladeLogic, where, as head of sales in Southern Europe, Pech led a sales spurt to which

the company attributed most of its growth. When BMC Software acquired the company that year, Pech stayed on and helped expand BMC's sales in the same region.



A few years later, in 2015, after a brief period at BazaarVoice, Pech joined Fuze as a worldwide sales SVP. Then, in 2017, he joined MongoDB.

EMPATHY SELLS

Traveling most of his time internationally, he oversees MongoDB's global revenue operations. He also owns a country house, surrounded by olive trees, in an area known as Tuscia (Italy). The area was once settled by the Etruscans, a civilization that flourished for several hundred years and left behind art, pottery, sculpture—entire mysterious cities. Pech is interested in this civilization and collects Etruscan art, which he calls his greatest extravagance.

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He does it, in part, to remind himself that “everything comes and disappears,” he says. “That’s a great way to stay a little humble about whatever great things we think we do. Seen from 2,500 years from now, nobody will really care about them.”

His musical tastes run from Neapolitan opera to rock. It’s probably no surprise that the band he most admires is one that’s lasted for decades and turned its art into a world-class corporation. In short, he will “forever choose” the Rolling Stones over the Beatles. “Part of it is their duration, their adaptability and resilience to last over 50 years,” he says. “You see their endless creativity, energy, and professionalism, their ability to learn and reinvent themselves. These guys are still running around and producing great music, and I think, ‘Hats off to you.’”

Pech admits that the current global pandemic and economic downturn leaves him wondering about the future—not his own, but that of the sales teams who rely on him. “I have 550 people with me, especially younger people, who deserve to have a shot at doing great things,” he says. “The conditions we’re living in require leaders to think more creatively than we used to, to help those people fulfill their potential despite the adverse conditions.”

Empathy, he says, is especially needed today in motivating his far-off sales leads, many of

whom can’t get into their offices because of local lockdown rules and who are stuck at home, isolated and worrying.

“Over the past few weeks, I’ve been on video calls with younger members of my teams around the world,” Pech says. “They’re locked in an apartment somewhere, often away from their families and sometimes on their own. And you’re thinking, how do we keep them optimistic, motivated, and inspired versus lonely and in a bad place?”

You do it, he explains, by over-communicating, by picking up the phone and simply asking, “How are you doing, what’s going on?” Pech says he makes countless calls like that every week. While it’s a big time commitment, he adds, “sometimes I can ask just one question and then listen for 30 minutes. And when I can walk away from that call feeling like I propped somebody up, that’s an amazing thing to me.”

That’s true, in part, because Pech needed some propping up himself about 10 years ago. During what he calls “a motivational crisis,” he took some time off to refresh. He even wrote to his old pen pal, Jean-Claude Killy, to reconnect to his old self. To his delight, Killy wrote back—on official IOC stationary. His last sentence to Pech was as badass as the man himself. Killy wrote: “Cedric, remember: Big dreams shape an entire life.”