

# MyPeople®

## MEETS

A portrait of Justin Oon, a man with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a grey blazer over a pink shirt. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred office setting with a plant on the right.

# Justin Oon

## Head of Growth at Cynozure

Connecting the right people with the right solutions at the right time to build a sustainable data strategy that works!



## *Tell us a bit about who you are and what you do...*

Hi I'm Justin Oon and I'm Head of Growth at Cynozure, a data and analytics strategy company. I am normally the first point of contact for all our clients and prospective clients and I spend a lot of my time speaking and listening to people. It's a hybrid mix of business development, relationship management and trusted friend/colleague. Challenges within data can be complex and I help clients unpick what they need and find a solution. I also recruit members into our CDO Hub, which is our membership for senior data leaders.



*One of the key ingredients in building trust is being able to empathise with the person opposite you.*

**During the course of your career, which moments have you been the proudest of and why?**

Probably pivoting my career about 6 years ago. Up until that point I had always been in sales roles in publishing. It took some soul searching to realise that I wanted to do work in a more innovative environment and take myself out of my comfort zone. I think I'd got too comfortable in my career up until that point and wanted to challenge myself and see if I could do something new. I applied for a role at Dunnhumby as a media planner working with some of Tesco's biggest alcohol brands. This set me on my career in data.

Although I look back on my career in data and understand things have had a certain amount of luck, I've been fortunate enough to learn in every role and understand the full end-to-end of the data journey. This has really helped me to understand and I'm proud of the work I put into this.

**There are lots of companies out there trying to shoehorn a piece of technology, a product or a one-dimensional solution into a client – how is Cynozure's approach different?**

Our collaborative approach makes us stand out (apart from the years of experience!!).

I think where we differ is that we work with the client to craft an answer that is best for them. We help let them own the solution. This means that they can become self-sufficient and there's longevity in their decisions. Too many organisations will look at data and how they can make a "quick buck" out of a client without really understanding the depth of the problem. This is very common in shoehorning technology to solve something. They forget there are people and processes involved.

In many cases we don't come with pre-set answers but our experience, processes and frameworks help dig out the root cause.

## What is the true meaning of the end-to-end data journey?

Good question! For me, it's when an organisation uses data to aid key decision making without realising they are doing it. It just becomes part of the process. Data moves seamlessly within a business (from capture to stakeholder) without it being a hinderance. Above all, data is a business thing and not a tech thing. We should all be using data to help us make better decisions. It doesn't replace the human; it should help them.

## As a firm believer in pints over PowerPoints and coffee chats over Slack, how did you manage during lockdown and what will you do differently in lockdown 2.0?

It's been hard for everyone and I'm certainly no exception. I think I've been very fortunate to work in an industry that has not stopped, and if anything, has gained a significant amount of momentum, so I'm busy. I think having a great team around you with open and honest communication channels has been key. Jason Foster, Cynozure CEO and Founder, has built an awesome team around him where everyone is always open and supportive, so although not meeting face to face and having a chat over a coffee has been hard, the impact has been lessened hugely by the culture we have.

Fundamentally I probably wouldn't approach much differently apart from try and give myself a break every now and again.

## How do you align a business strategy with data?

You don't, you align data with the business. Data value is highest when it's aligned with the overall goals of the organisation. It's where too many companies go awry. Find out what the key goals of the business are, and point data at it. That's when data is at its most powerful.

## Tell us about the work you do with the CDO Hub?

The CDO or Chief Data Officer, is a relatively new role in an organisation. Generally, it's the most senior data person in your organisation and the one who has ownership of the data strategy. A person in this role should be on the exec of any business.

The challenge this person faces is that they are often first in role and are put "on an island" as the business expects them to have every answer for every problem that has data in it. The reality is, that no one ever has all the answers, and a company has to take responsibility for their data, not just one individual. However, who does this person turn to as no one understands what they do?

About 3 years ago, we recognised that there was no peer-to-peer network and community for senior data leaders to learn, develop or frankly have a moan away from their business and be amongst peers. We set up the CDO Hub to be this safe space, with Chatham House Rules, so that everyone can learn together away from vendors and consultancies.

I think we've managed to maintain the ethos of the group and we now have monthly gatherings (virtually for the time being) for our 160+ members.

My role within this has been to grow the membership, help manage our members and spread the word. I think once people have experienced an event they invariably like to come back for more!

## Earlier this year the CDO Hub launched internationally – tell us about the new chapter you’ve started in the U.S?

Very simply, data challenges are the same all over the world. As Covid has forced us to be online, it means there are no travel barriers to attending an event. We started having more attendees from further afield and organically we grew our global footprint. We had coincidentally recruited several members from the US who were enthusiastic enough to set up their own chapter in the US at an even more convenient time.

It’s great to know that the community and ethos that we have created around the CDO Hub has meant that it is a very unique experience and not one that has really been done before.

## How do you build trust in your team relationships – what is the critical factor?

Honesty and openness. I think one of the key ingredients in building trust is being able to empathise with the person opposite you and trusting in their abilities. Don’t claim to know all the answers.

## A little birdie told me that you used to compete in British and World Powerlifting Championships... (WOW) – how did you first get into this sport?

Again, I fell into it really. I used to play a lot of rugby so going to the gym was part of my routine in any case. One of my friends and teammates is a strength and conditioning coach and challenged me to see if I could make weight and compete. I’m stubborn enough to never shirk a challenge and before I knew it, I had been competing for 5 years!

## For those new to powerlifting, can you tell us a bit about your experience?

It's about standing in lycra in front of a group of people and lifting stupidly heavy things!

In all seriousness, it takes a lot of dedication and hard work in the background. It's an incredibly solitary sport too, and you don't always see the results of the hours you can put in. No one can make you stronger apart from you! Adding even 5kg more to your deadlift, bench-press or squat can take weeks and weeks of work.

Much of the challenge is mental as much as physical. Where in rugby it can be relatively fast to atone for an error, in powerlifting an error can end your competition. That's a lot of pressure. Especially if you've taken years or more to train for that single moment.

## What is your top pointless piece of knowledge that would be useful to know in a pub quiz?

The reason why people shake hands with their right hand. It's to show that they are not carrying a sword! You would always carry a sword on your left hip and draw it with your right. If you are offering your hand, you are showing that you can't draw your sword. It's also the reason why we drive on the left, so we can draw our weapon and defend ourselves from highway men!

## What sports are you a fan of watching the most?

Rugby, American Football, Cricket and Football. Frankly I can watch most live sports and enjoy it!

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