NEGOTIATION PREP BRIEFING | CISCO ENTERPRISE AGREEMENT, SPLUNK AND TRUE FORWARD

Cisco EA Renewal: Talking Points, Call Scripts, and Negotiation Prep

A three call playbook for sourcing teams: word for word scripts for the first, second, and third call, the mechanics behind Cisco's side of the table, and prompts to customize every line | 27 August 2026

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READ THIS BEFORE YOU DIAL

A Cisco enterprise agreement is a ratchet with a calendar, sold through a channel that is not on your side. True Forward bills growth going forward from each anniversary while reductions wait for renewal, so the base moves one way during the term. The suite bundles behind your cross portfolio discount almost certainly contain software never activated, and the papering partner's margin is protected by deal registration, making an as is renewal the safest outcome for everyone at the table except you.

Your counters are structural. The activation audit in your own Smart Account data separates deployed from merely entitled, and renewal is the one moment the gap comes out of the bill. The portfolio has weak flanks: collaboration is nearly free money, security is contested, and only the network core is truly sticky, so the negotiation runs per segment, and Splunk, now inside the same motion, deserves its own line and alternatives. And Cisco's fiscal year ends in late July, putting the deep close in a month when every other vendor is quiet. Three structured calls are how all of it gets used.

1. THE 2026 REALITY: FOUR SHIFTS THAT CHANGE YOUR SCRIPT

- **True Forward is a ratchet with a calendar.** No retroactive billing, but every anniversary resets the base upward and nothing resets it down until renewal. Know your anniversaries, time major deployments just after them, and get the measurement definitions in writing; the mechanism is only as fair as its paper.
- **The suite bundle hides shelfware.** Cross portfolio discounts were earned by committing to suites, and activation data usually shows an entitled to deployed gap that has quietly renewed for years. Measure it yourself; the gap is your reduction list, and renewal is its only exit.
- **Splunk changed the bill.** The observability and security analytics estate now arrives inside the Cisco motion, with bundle pressure to match. Keep it on its own line, optimize ingest and pricing model first, and hold its own competitive set against it; a Splunk renewal hidden inside an EA is a rate nobody benchmarked.
- **The portfolio has weak flanks.** Collaboration competes against giants and is routinely discounted to near nothing to keep the logo; security is genuinely contested segment by segment; the network core is the sticky center. Negotiate per segment and let the flanks fund the deal, and the attach subscriptions riding on hardware are negotiated at purchase time, not at renewal, when the leverage is gone.

2. BEFORE CALL 1: WHAT YOU ASSEMBLE

- **Their calendar, not yours.** Cisco's fiscal year ends in late July, with quarters ending in late October, January, April, and July. July is the deep close, and its off cycle timing is leverage for buyers who plan into it.
- **The activation audit.** Smart Account and portal data on entitled versus deployed versus actively used, per suite and per product. This is the whole renewal; build it before anyone quotes anything.
- **The True Forward file.** Anniversary dates, measurement definitions, and your deployment timing plan for the coming term. Growth that lands the week after an anniversary rides free until the next one.
- **The segment map with alternatives.** Collaboration, security, networking, and observability, each with a named alternative and a real quote where credible; nobody replaces the core, and the flanks are where quotes get believed.
- **The support rationalization.** Hardware support contracts reconciled against the estate, with a third party support quote for the mature, stable portion; the annuity conversation changes when that quote exists.
- **A second partner, and one voice.** Deal registration protects your incumbent partner's margin; obtain at least one more partner quote and ask Cisco's desk directly about deviation pricing. The partner is a channel, not your negotiator.

CALL 1: THE FRAMING CALL

T MINUS 9 TO 6 MONTHS

Goal: control the process, force the renewal basis onto activated counts, and extract the True Forward mechanics in writing. You are not negotiating on this call; you are setting the rules the negotiation will follow.

> **OPEN WITH THIS**
>
> *"Thanks for making time. We are starting early because we run this renewal as a formal sourcing event, alongside an activation audit across every suite in the agreement. All commercial communication routes through me, including anything through the partner.* **[network owner]** *owns the technical estate, not commercials. Today I need three things: a renewal quote basis of activated counts rather than entitlements, the True Forward measurement definitions and anniversary dates in writing, and your timeline from quote to signature."*

Ask these five questions, in this order

1. "Will the renewal be quoted per suite at our activated counts? I need that basis confirmed in writing before anything else."
2. "Send me the True Forward definitions that apply to us: what is measured, when, and how the anniversary resets work."
3. "Which suites, including Splunk, does Cisco intend to add or restructure in our renewal, priced line by line?"
4. "What is the deviation and approval structure on an account our size, and who owns it beyond the partner?"
5. "When does your fiscal quarter close relative to our renewal date of **[date]**?"

> **INSIDER NOTE**
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> The basis question is the deal. Cisco's default renewal math starts from entitlements, which quietly renews every suite you never deployed at the size you never reached. Forcing the activated basis into writing before the first quote exists moves more money than any discount conversation that follows. Announcing the audit alongside it tells the account team the gap has been measured, which is the one thing that makes the entitled basis indefensible.

Deflect these, word for word

- They point to the cross portfolio discount: "The discount earned by commitment does not oblige us to renew shelfware. Requote on activation and we discuss structure."
- They ask about budget: "We build the budget after we see your quote on the activated basis, not before."
- They ask about refresh or growth plans: "Any growth is part of the negotiation, not context for it."
- They route pressure through the partner: "The partner transacts; commercials run here. Nothing personal; it is the process."

> **CLOSE WITH THIS**
>
> *"Action items: the activated basis confirmation, the True Forward definitions, and the restructure disclosure, in writing, within three weeks. Our next commercial call is* **[date]**. *Anything sent to anyone else in this company, including through the channel, comes back to me unanswered."*

CALL 2: THE DECONSTRUCTION CALL

AFTER THE FIRST QUOTE, T MINUS 4 TO 3 MONTHS

Goal: take the quote apart suite by suite, execute the activation reduction, put the flank competition on record, and force deviation authority into the room. Never react to numbers in the meeting where you receive them: acknowledge, schedule this call, respond on your clock.

> **OPEN WITH THIS**
>
> *"We have reviewed the quote. Before we discuss it, the baseline: our current agreement costs* **[X]** *per year, and our activation audit supports* **[Y]** *at current rates. Your quote is* **[Z]**. *Walk me through every suite, one at a time."*

The six moves of Call 2

- **Unbundle the suites.** "Each suite gets its own line, its own counts, and its own decision, and the undeployed ones come out. A single blended number is a decline."

- **Renew what activated.** "The counts on the next quote are our deployed and used counts: **[figures]**. We take the difference as a lower invoice, not as value shifted into new suites we did not ask for."
- **Work the flanks.** "For collaboration, **[alternative]** quotes **[amount]**; for **[security segment]**, **[alternative]** quotes **[amount]**. Close the gaps or the segments close themselves." Named vendors, real numbers; the flanks fund the deal.
- **Give Splunk its own table.** "The observability estate renews on an optimized baseline of **[ingest or workload position]**, at its own rate, benchmarked against its own market. It does not hide inside the EA."
- **Fix the True Forward paper.** "Measurement definitions, anniversary dates, and a growth band go into the agreement, with no retroactivity confirmed. A ratchet without paper is a dispute waiting for an anniversary."
- **Summon the desk.** "For the next call, bring whoever owns deviation authority on this account. I do not run final rounds through the channel, and I do not run them with people who cannot approve."

> **CLOSE WITH THIS, AND ONLY THIS**
>
> *"No counteroffer today. If the renewal lands per suite at activated counts and* **[target]** *overall, we can then discuss structure and term. You now know the order of operations."*

HOW THE OTHER SIDE OF THE CALL IS PAID, AND WHY IT IS YOUR LEVERAGE

Cisco's account teams are paid on subscription revenue and, since the acquisition, on Splunk cross sell, while the partner in the middle earns margin that deal registration protects from competition. That alignment means the path of least resistance for everyone else at the table is your renewal, as entitled, as bundled, as is. Your counters are the second partner quote, the direct ask for deviation pricing, and commercials running through you; buyers who use all three reach pricing the channel never volunteers.

The flanks are where their flexibility lives. Collaboration is defended against larger rivals and gets priced accordingly when a real alternative is logged; security segments are contested enough that named quotes move numbers; the network core is where they hold firm, where your activation audit, not a discount argument, is the lever. And the calendar is a gift: the late July year end arrives when your other vendors are quiet, and a buyer who plans a July signature gets the quarter's attention to themselves.

Know what is cheap for Cisco to give: collaboration seats, value shift rights between suites, services credits, training funds. Know what is expensive: the networking subscription rate and the Splunk rate. Trade cheap things you want for expensive things you need, never the reverse.

CALL 3: THE CLOSE CALL

TIMED TO CISCO'S QUARTER END, IDEALLY JULY

Goal: convert leverage into signed paper. Everything lands in the agreement and its schedules; the desk honors paper only.

> **OPEN WITH THIS**
>
> *"We are prepared to sign inside your quarter if the remaining items land. Here is the complete list. Nothing gets added by either side after today, including by us."*

The final asks checklist, read it out loud

1. Per suite pricing at activated counts, line by line, with undeployed suites removed and taken as a lower invoice.
2. Renewal uplift capped at **[0 to 3]** percent, written into the agreement.
3. True Forward terms fixed: measurement definitions, anniversary dates, a growth band of **[x]** percent, and no retroactivity, in the schedules.
4. Value shift rights between suites at renewal and anniversary, in writing.
5. Splunk on its own line at the optimized baseline, rate locked for the term, with its pricing model stated.
6. Collaboration repriced against the market or removed; the flank quotes did their work and the result goes on paper.
7. Hardware support rationalized, with written confirmation that third party support on designated mature estate carries no penalty elsewhere.
8. Everything co terminated to one date, with a short extension pre agreed in writing as fallback.

> **TWO TRADING LINES THAT WORK**
>
> *"A referenceable estate is worth real money in your account plan. What is that worth at the desk?"   And when it stalls: "The activation reduction executes either way. The question is whether the rest lands in your July or in next year's number."*

3. THE TIMELINE, END TO END

WHEN	WHO	WHAT HAPPENS
T minus 12 to 9 months	**You**	Activation audit run in Smart Account data, True Forward file built with anniversary calendar, segment alternatives quoted, support rationalization done with third party quote, second partner engaged, single voice announced.
T minus 9 to 6	**Call 1**	Framing call. Activated basis demanded in writing, True Forward definitions extracted, restructure and Splunk plans disclosed line by line, audit announced and logged.
T minus 6 to 4	**Cisco**	Quote arrives on the entitled basis, suites blended, Splunk woven in, partner applying gentle pressure to keep the shape. Acknowledge, do not react.
T minus 4 to 3	**Call 2**	Deconstruction. Suites unbundled, counts moved to activation, flank quotes logged, Splunk separated on its optimized baseline, True Forward paper fixed, deviation authority summoned.
T minus 3 to 2	**You**	Conditional counter in writing per suite. The second partner quote lands, and the collaboration pilot visibly exists; evidence argues better than emphasis.
Final 6 weeks	**Call 3**	Close aligned to a quarter end, ideally the July fiscal year end. Complete final list on the table, extension pre agreed as fallback, nothing new accepted from either side.
Signature	**Both**	Every concession in the agreement and schedules. Counts, caps, True Forward terms, value shift rights, and the Splunk line verified word by word before anyone signs.

4. CUSTOMIZE THE SCRIPT TO YOUR SITUATION

The scripts above are deliberately generic. Adjust them with the rows below, and replace every **[bracketed item]** with your numbers before the call, never during it.

IF THIS IS YOU	CHANGE THIS IN THE SCRIPT
Heavy Splunk estate inside or beside the EA	Optimize before you renew: ingest hygiene, retention tiering, and the right pricing model routinely cut the baseline by double digits. Then benchmark against its own market and keep it a separate line; a Splunk rate blended into an EA is a rate you will never see again.
Collaboration suite in the agreement	This is the easiest money on the table. Price the alternative honestly, let it be logged, and accept collaboration only near free or not at all; Cisco defends this segment with discount, and your job is to collect it.
Hardware refresh approaching	Peak leverage arrives with the refresh, not the renewal. Competitor quotes at refresh time discipline everything, and the attach subscriptions and support terms are negotiated at purchase, when losing the hardware deal is the risk Cisco prices.
Mature, stable network estate	Rationalize the support annuity: reconcile the contracts against the estate, take the third party support quote for the stable portion, and get the no penalty confirmation in writing. Stability is leverage; use it quietly.
Over committed EA with undeployed suites	The activation audit is your whole renewal. Refuse the entitled basis in the first call, take the reduction in cash, and treat every value shift offer as what it is: their booked number defending itself.
M&A or divestiture in flight	Negotiate transfer, split, and True Forward recount mechanics now, while you have a renewal to trade. A ratchet inside a changing organization is where surprise bills live.

5. QUICK REFERENCE: THE ONE PAGE YOU BRING TO EVERY CALL

PRINCIPLE	THE LINE OR THE RULE
Activated, not entitled	"The renewal basis is our deployed and used counts." The entitlement gap is the reduction list, and renewal is its only exit.
Never react live	Numbers received in a meeting get acknowledged, never answered. Respond on your clock, in writing, days later.
True Forward has a calendar	Anniversaries reset the base upward; time deployments just after them, and fix the definitions and bands on paper.
Their calendar	The fiscal year ends in late July, off cycle from everyone. Plan the close into July and get the quarter to yourself.
Weak flanks first	Collaboration near free, security contested, networking sticky. Segment quotes fund the deal; blended numbers hide it.
The partner is not your agent	Deal registration protects their margin, not your price. Second partner quotes and direct deviation asks reach pricing the channel never volunteers.
Splunk is its own deal	Optimized baseline, own rate, own benchmarks, own line. Inside the EA it is a rate nobody checked.
Paper only	The agreement and schedules. Account and partner emails are conversation, not contract, and the desk honors paper only.

FIVE SENTENCES THAT REPRICE THE DEAL AGAINST YOU

- "Just renew everything we have entitled." You just renewed the shelfware nobody could have made you renew.
- "We standardize on Cisco end to end." You just deleted the flank competition that funds this entire deal.
- "Our partner handles the commercials for us." Their margin is registered and protected; you just outsourced your negotiation to the other side of the table.
- "The refresh is planned for next year; here is the design." Pre announced refresh plans are a concession given away for free; hardware leverage is traded at purchase, never disclosed before it.
- "The board needs this signed by **[your date]**." Your deadline is their leverage; only their July should exist.

6. WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE AT SIGNATURE

Judge the outcome against these markers, not against the discount percentage in the final slide. A well run Cisco renewal lands per suite at activated counts with the undeployed suites gone and taken as a lower invoice, the uplift capped, and the True Forward mechanics fixed on paper: definitions, anniversaries, bands, no retroactivity. Splunk renews on an optimized baseline at its own benchmarked rate, collaboration was repriced by the market or removed, the support annuity was rationalized with the third party quote acknowledged in writing, and everything co terminates to one date you chose with July in mind.

And it delivers the position that compounds: an estate measured by you before anyone quotes it, a channel that transacts while sourcing negotiates, and an account team that learned your renewals arrive audited, benchmarked, and timed to their calendar rather than yours. Against a vendor whose ratchet only turns one way during the term, the buyer who owns the renewal moment owns the decade.

USING THIS DOCUMENT

Fill every **[bracketed item]** before the call. Rehearse the openers out loud once; scripted lines only work when they sound like yours. Keep the quick reference table in front of you on every call, and keep this briefing off any screen you share. If the conversation leaves the script, return to the basis: "Let us come back to the activated counts first." Nothing in a Cisco renewal is ever lost by slowing it down, and almost everything is lost by speeding it up.

100 percent buyer side. Zero vendor affiliations. No reseller agreements. No referral fees.