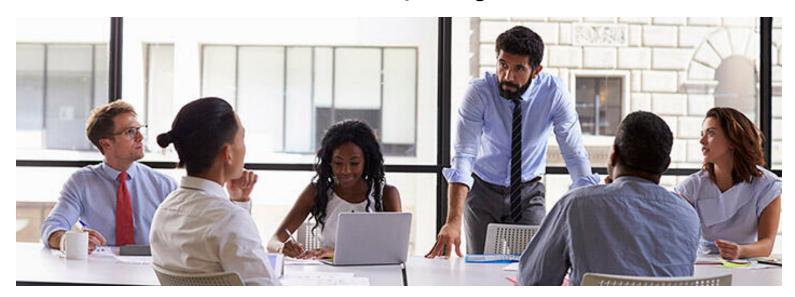# Achieve New Levels of Business Success by Adding a Chief of Staff

The vice president of a leading health care system had been tasked with completing multiple major operational changes and initiatives within a set time frame, in addition to the everyday organizational goals, but it became immediately apparent that the amount of work and oversight expected from this vice president could affect productivity and effectiveness.

Problem to Solve

The role of "chief of staff" has long been associated with politics and the military to describe someone who controls access to a high-ranking official. Increasingly, health care organizations are hiring chiefs of staff to serve as operational and administrative extensions to senior executives who might otherwise be overwhelmed in their roles.

That was the challenge faced by the vice president (VP) of a leading health care system, who had been tasked with completing multiple major operational changes and initiatives within a set time frame, in addition to fulfilling everyday organizational goals. It became immediately apparent that the amount of work and oversight expected from this VP could affect productivity and effectiveness.

The health care system determined that the most immediate way to provide sufficient support to this VP would be through a newly designated, limited-term chief of staff role. The health care system selected a Freed Associates (Freed) consultant for the chief of staff role.

Strategy

Organizationally, the health care system sought to successfully introduce an innovative new division, based on its historically high-quality customized care, to align all of its externally facing products, services and networks with employers, brokers, health plans and others. The organization's VP would lead this effort, with support provided by the chief of staff, over a nine-month period.

The primary collaborative tasks for the VP and chief of staff to complete included:

• **Developing an organizational design milestone tracker** – to monitor progress of the new organizational design

• **Conducting design meetings** – with appropriate stakeholders system-wide

• **Coordinating with human resources and internal/external recruiters** – to fill open positions needed to fulfill the new division's task requirements

• **Generating technical specifications for key metrics** – to support the division's operations

• **Finalizing orientation and on-boarding material** – to support new division employees

• **Establishing ongoing status checks with stakeholders** – to discuss progress, barriers and approvals/decisions needed to meet organizational goals

For the chief of staff, much of the work consisted of helping the VP sufficiently prepare for intra-departmental, organizational and external meetings and internal and external presentations. It also involved helping support the work of the VP's direct reports. Much of the day-to-day work of the chief of staff consisted of downstream work management such as ensuring all required tasks were completed properly and on-time. Just as important was upstream reporting, such as updating the CEO and senior executives on the division's progress and resource needs.

The role of chief of staff for an executive in a health care organization requires someone who can oversee day-to-day tasks, is adept and up-to-speed with all pertinent subject material and who is adroit and objective in all colleague interactions. In this case, since the chief of staff would literally be acting as a workplace extension of the VP, all materials and communications produced by the chief of staff needed to properly represent the VP's own work.

Results

The VP's use of a chief of staff was a significant success, enabling the VP to achieve operational and strategic activities, given the depth and breadth of the role. With ongoing support from the chief of staff, the health system's VP completed the following within nine months:

• **Designed a system supporting multiple payers, services, functions and needs that integrates with the health system's new division and the health system overall**

• **Created a structure to make the health system's products and services more accessible for employers, brokers and health plans**

• **Filled three key leadership positions and mapped more than 30 resources to appropriate accounting units**

• **Developed technical specifications for key metrics to support key division goals**

• **Finalized orientation and onboarding materials to support new division employees**

• **Provided ongoing project management support for the health system's commercial risk program**

Based on the success of the chief of staff in helping the health system achieve these results, the health system is considering adding a permanent chief of staff position in the organization.

Conclusion

Operational oversight demands in health care organizations are increasingly becoming too complex and time-consuming for a single senior executive to properly manage. That is why an increasing number of organizations are employing chiefs of staff to help senior executives fulfill their responsibilities. As the leaders of health organizations continue to be tasked with managing multiple priorities, a chief of staff can provide invaluable support for helping these leaders achieve their ongoing operational as well as strategic goals.