

## Add a Chief of Staff to Increase Your Success



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You might think a “chief of staff” is a role reserved for politics and Fortune 100 firms. Increasingly, due to significant business, regulatory and cultural changes and expansions, health care organizations are employing chiefs of staff to support their CEOs and other senior executives on a temporary or even permanent basis.

In years past, health care CEOs and other top executives could typically single-handedly fulfill their designated roles. Today, that is often no longer possible. Consider the CEO of a typical medium-sized health care system. This CEO is responsible for daily business affairs and board relationships, must be alert for new business opportunities and threats, and vigilantly oversees the organization’s structure, quality, finances, regulatory affairs, communications, community relations, and more.

Enter the chief of staff (CoS), considered to be a direct professional extension of the CEO (or another senior executive represented). Not to be confused with a medical chief of staff, an administrative CoS is typically responsible for connecting with resources and engagements the CEO simply cannot regularly meet with on his/her own. For example, a CoS might be tasked with representing the CEO at key operational meetings or even speaking

on behalf of the organization at public events.

How can you tell if your organization's CEO or other senior executive might benefit from a CoS? Consider the lessons learned from a recent CoS engagement within a leading health care system.

### **A Chief of Staff Success Story**

In addition to fulfilling her everyday organizational goals, a vice president (VP) of this health care system was newly tasked with overseeing and completing several major operational changes and initiatives. Almost immediately, it was apparent that these responsibilities were more than any one person could reasonably handle without impairing productivity and effectiveness. Rather than waiting for the VP to flounder, the health care system proactively hired a CoS from a consulting firm familiar with the particular needs of this organization.

Specifically, the VP needed to oversee, within nine months, the creation of an innovative new division aligning all of the health care system's externally facing products, services and networks with employers, brokers and health plans. Macro responsibilities for this role included conducting division design meetings, coordinating with human resources and recruiters on staffing, and generating technical specifications for key operational metrics. Day-to-day responsibilities included developing a design milestone tracker, checking in with key stakeholders and overseeing the development of new training and onboarding materials.

The new CoS helped the VP prepare for all necessary intra-departmental, organizational and external meetings and presentations relevant to the nine-month project, as well as support the work of the VP's direct reports. Downstream, the CoS monitored and managed project development. Upstream, the CoS regularly reported on project progress to the VP and her senior executive colleagues.

The VP's use of a CoS was a significant success, enabling her to fulfill her everyday work requirements while also properly monitoring and overseeing the health care system's key initiatives, which were completed on-time. During their time together, the CoS and VP collaborated on several key project decisions, including creating a new operational system for the new division, properly staffing it, developing all key metrics to support the division's goals, and ensuring training and support for new staff. In fact, the input and support of the CoS proved so useful that the health care system is now considering adding a CoS permanently.

### **Finding Your Optimal Chief of Staff**

If you have concluded that adding a CoS on a temporary or permanent basis is right for your organization, what qualities should you seek in this person? For starters, a CoS must be wholly focused on the success of the executive he or she supports, and of the organization as a whole. Additionally, the CoS should be highly skilled in:

- **Organization** – An adept multitasker able to effortlessly stay on top of multiple needs and responsibilities.

- **Communication** – As an extension of the executive served, the CoS must regularly engage in clear and concise verbal and written communications with others.
- **Interpersonal relationships** – The CoS should be adept at forging effective personal relationships, able to read other people and situations and navigate through challenging and often unfamiliar subjects.
- **Daily support** – The CoS must anticipate and address the immediate needs of the executive being supported, including helping with time management, handling logistical details and potentially assisting with staffing and budgeting needs.
- **Self-awareness** – The CoS should be fully aware of his/her skillsets in relation to the executive served, and know which activities might best be provided by another resource.
- **Decision-making** – As an extension of the executive served, the CoS may often be asked to make decisions to move activities ahead. The CoS should have a clear sense of his/her decision-making authority.

While it may be ideal to hire a CoS internally, due to that person's familiarity with the organization and the executive to be supported, this may not be immediately possible, especially if the CoS is needed for a limited term. You might consider hiring a CoS from an external resource to provide objectivity and a fresh viewpoint, as the health care system did to support its vice president.

Whomever you designate to serve in the CoS role, do not be surprised if this individual adds exponential value beyond original expectations. What politicians and senior business executives have long known about the benefits of having a CoS, health care executives are now starting to realize themselves.