

The Evolving Role of the Chief of Staff

by Natalie Bennett



In recent years, the role of the Chief of Staff has gained prominence in both large corporations and startups. This, once, lesser-known position has now become a strategic partner to executives, responsible for ensuring the smooth functioning of the organization. However, the role of a Chief of Staff is diverse and varies greatly from one organization to another. In this article, we will explore the history of the Chief of Staff role, its current scope, and how it is evolving in the modern business landscape.



Collaboration is key for success in the Chief of Staff role.

Defining the Chief of Staff Role

Traditionally, the Chief of Staff role originated in political and military settings. However, over the past few years, corporations have adopted this position to drive efficiency and alignment within their organizations.

One of the key characteristics of the Chief of Staff role is its uniqueness. No two Chiefs of Staff are the same, and their career paths to reach this position differ as well. Some Chiefs of Staff may serve as senior-level executive assistants, while others act as strategic partners to the executives they work with.

A Harvard Business Review article titled, *“The Case for a Chief of Staff,”* suggests that there are three levels of responsibility. But, regardless of the specific responsibilities, certain foundational abilities such as organization, attention to detail, business acumen, and excellent [communication skills are essential for a Chief of Staff's success.](#)

Many Chiefs of Staff grow from within the organization. They come with the experience of having contributed to various teams and departments within the firm. In my own experience in executive search, I've had the opportunity to contribute to various teams and departments. This includes being part of search execution teams, collaborating with clients and candidates, working closely with business leaders and finance teams for reporting, as well as engaging in training, onboarding, marketing, and technology initiatives.

This diverse exposure provides a holistic understanding of how the business operates and how all the different departments interconnect. This experience, along with good program management skills, helps the executive to evolve into the Chief of Staff role with the ability to understand different areas of the business and how they fit together - a crucial skill for this role.

Setting Boundaries and Facilitating Collaboration

One of the challenges faced by Chiefs of Staff is avoiding being overwhelmed with tasks and responsibilities. While they have a breadth of knowledge across various departments, it is important for them to delegate work and allow experts in specific areas to take charge and avoid stepping on their toes.

Collaboration and effective communication are key in ensuring that teams work together efficiently. Chiefs of Staff must strike a balance between getting involved when necessary and empowering others to make decisions. By facilitating collaboration and removing any blockers within the organization, Chiefs of Staff contribute to the overall success of the company.

Understanding the Chief of Staff Decision-Making Process

In any organization, decision making is crucial for success. As a Chief of Staff, understanding how decisions are made within the organization is a critical skill. Chiefs of Staff gather information, analyze various courses of action, propose options, and involve the right people in the decision-making process.

The ability to make decisions on behalf of executives, especially for less critical tasks, allows them (the executives) to focus on high-impact priorities. Clear communication and collaboration ensure that decisions align with the organization's strategic objectives and outcomes.

The Future of the Chief of Staff Role

The Chief of Staff role is evolving and gaining recognition as a valuable asset for organizations.

Collaboration, communication skills, and the ability to act as a connective tissue between leaders are becoming increasingly crucial. As organizations continue to understand the benefits of having a Chief of Staff, the position will likely grow in prominence. By empowering executives, facilitating decision making, and promoting collaboration, Chiefs of Staff play a vital role in ensuring the effective functioning of organizations in an ever-changing business landscape.

Career Paths and Future Outlook

The career paths after serving as a Chief of Staff are diverse. According to a 2023 study by the [Chief of Staff Network](#), former Chiefs of Staff move into roles such as strategy, operations, corporate development, HR leadership, and even founding their own companies. The wide range of skills and experience gained in the Chief of Staff role opens numerous opportunities for career growth.

In conclusion, the role of the Chief of Staff has transformed from being a lesser-known position to a strategic partner in organizations. The diversity of skills and experiences required in this role and the ability to navigate complex decision-making processes and foster collaboration make the Chief of Staff an indispensable asset to modern organizations. As the role evolves to meet new challenges, it will continue to play a vital role in driving success and [ensuring organizational effectiveness](#).

Learn more about our solutions. [Talk to one of our experts today!](#)

