

The CEO Advantage: Executive Assistants are Critical to CEO Success

By Nancy MacKay, Ph.D

CEO challenge

A CEO had been working with his executive assistant for the past year and things just weren't working out well. Their personalities clashed, and her performance wasn't meeting his expectations, so they agreed to part ways during a very busy time in the company's business cycle.

This was the CEO's third assistant in three years, and the hiring process in each case had used up a lot of time that he really didn't have. He liked to be self-sufficient, so decided to go it alone and manage all his own administration.

Three months later, his office was piling up with paperwork, he had missed some important customer meetings and he was being told by his executive team that the whole company was suffering.

CEO mistake

In hiring his last three assistants, the CEO had informally reached out to his network instead of using a formal recruiting process.

Because he didn't appreciate the potential value of a top executive assistant, the CEO hadn't paid close attention to the level of skill and experience of the job candidates. He also hadn't viewed the relationship as a partnership from which he had as much or more to gain.

In the case of each of his three former assistants, the CEO had also neglected to set any specific priorities to focus the assistant's work. As was his style, he worked somewhat independently while his assistants did their best to tread water.

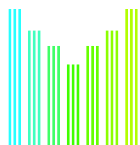
CEO solution

Top talent is necessary for more than just your executive team. The best assistants can be a significant asset not only to the CEO, but to the organization as a whole.

Your assistant is part of your CEO "brand." As the gatekeeper and frequent first point of contact, your assistant is often the initial impression others have of you and your organization. With that understanding, it's not hard to realize that your assistant's work style and capabilities should enhance, not detract, from you and your brand.

First, it's essential to use an experienced recruiter who specializes in executive support. Focus on finding someone who is a great personality fit and is professionally trained to be an executive assistant.

Second, develop and train your assistant. Meet weekly to plan your time and then daily to check in and make sure both of you are on track. An effective assistant will help you set appropriate boundaries to manage your priorities, so be sure he or she understands those priorities. Ask your assistant for feedback regularly and let him or her know whether your expectations are being met.



Last, don't let a great assistant get away. Make sure you say thank you and acknowledge his or her efforts daily. Compensate well and recognize the significant contribution your assistant makes to your success. •

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