

The Blackbook Report 2026

Hiring Executive Assistants, Chiefs of Staff,
and the Office of the CEO

A comprehensive report on how the world's leading CEOs, founders, and investors build the teams around them: how each seat works, what it costs, and what separates the top of the market.

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Executive summary

The executive support professional exists to give a principal back the one asset they cannot buy more of: attention. Every seat covered in this report, the Executive Assistant, the Chief of Staff, the communications lead, the analyst, and the Office of the CEO that holds them together, is a different mechanism for the same outcome. The principal spends their time on the handful of decisions only they can make, and everything else is absorbed, synthesized, or executed by people operating at their altitude.

That is the frame for everything that follows. A support hire is an investment in the principal's focus. If the additional focus produces better and faster decisions, the hire has paid for itself many times over. If it does not, the seat was scoped wrong or filled wrong, and the principal ends up managing the person who was meant to be managing for them.

The market has moved. Three forces are reshaping this profession at once. The roles have moved up the value chain: the administrative layer that once defined the EA has been automated or delegated, and what remains is judgment. The Office of the CEO has become a recognized function with configurations, budgets, and career paths, so every seat is now defined partly by what the other seats do. And AI has arrived in the hands of support staff before executives, producing a sharp divide between operators who can design and govern that layer and operators who cannot.

The top of the market is more expensive and harder to find than it has ever been. The top of the Executive Assistant market now clears \$500,000 in total compensation, mostly in Big Tech and in some of the world's largest family offices. What separates those people from the rest is altitude: the level of principal they support and the consequence attached to getting it right every day, without exception. The people who can operate there are measured in the hundreds, and their roles are never advertised.

Five things a principal should take from this report

1

Hire for the leverage you need, not the title you know.

Time, authority, information, narrative, and execution are five different kinds of leverage. Each maps to a different seat. Most bad hires come from wanting one and hiring for another.

2

An Executive Assistant and a Chief of Staff are not the same job.

An EA's leverage runs through the principal's time; a Chief of Staff's runs through the principal's authority. Mixing them in one hire is possible at smaller firms but should be a deliberate choice, priced accordingly.

3

Once more than one person supports you, you have an office, whether you have designed it or not.

Undesigned offices produce crossover, friction, and a principal refereeing their own support team. A written ownership matrix and an operating cadence prevent most of it.

4

The best candidates are not in your applicant pool.

They have a seat, a salary, and a relationship with a principal they trust. They move through referral and discreet approach, and only for something compelling. A hiring firm has three levers: compensation, chemistry with the principal, and a genuine step up in scope. Title is not one of them.

5

Interviews measure how someone interviews.

Executive Assistants, Chiefs of Staff, analysts, and communications leads all spend their working lives in rooms with senior people, so they can hold their own in an interview by default. Across every one of these seats, the signal that matters is how the person decides under operational pressure, which is why every shortlist we send is built on scenario-based assessment rather than instinct.

Why this is not a general market survey

Most published compensation data aggregates executive support roles across levels, employer types, and scopes of responsibility. That approach is useful for broad workforce planning, but it obscures the market Blackbook works in: senior, high-trust hires supporting CEOs, founders, rainmakers, investment principals, and private families.

The figures in this report are drawn from Blackbook Associates' live retained mandates, completed placements, and active candidate conversations in this specialist market. They are not intended to describe the median EA or generalist Chief of Staff role. They describe the upper end of a distinct market, in which altitude, discretion, proximity to the principal, commercial judgment, and the consequence of error determine value.

The rest of the report. Section 2 sets out the leverage model. Section 3 defines the four seats. Section 4 covers the Office of the CEO as a unit. Section 5 is the market: compensation, geography, industry, principal type, and scarcity. Section 6 covers AI. Section 7 is how to hire. Section 8 collects the failure modes we see most often.



The principal's leverage model

A principal is constrained in five ways, and each constraint is relieved by a different kind of support. Naming them separately is the single most useful thing a principal can do before hiring, because most mis-hires come from wanting one kind of leverage and buying another. The model applies whether the principal has no support at all, one Executive Assistant, or a full Office of the CEO. It describes the principal's constraints, not a structure.

Figure 1

The principal's leverage model

Five constraints, five kinds of support. Name the constraint before choosing the seat.

01	Time	The principal's day is consumed by coordination, preparation, and logistics rather than decisions	Seat Executive Assistant
02	Authority	Decisions get made but do not get executed; cross-functional work has no owner; the leadership team needs constant chasing	Seat Chief of Staff
03	Information	Raw upstream information arrives faster than the principal can digest it; decisions are being made on incomplete or unsynthesized material	Seat Analyst, or a technical Chief of Staff
04	Narrative	The principal's voice and reputation are being shaped by others; press, investor, and internal moments are handled reactively	Seat Communications lead
05	Execution	Strategic projects, transactions, and initiatives need senior ownership close to the principal	Seat Chief of Staff, with analysts on technical work

Time. The most common constraint and the first to solve. A principal who is scheduling their own meetings, preparing their own briefings, or managing their own inbox is spending the firm's most expensive hours on work that a strong EA removes entirely. The return is focus: the principal's attention goes to the activities that move the business, and if that produces better and faster decisions, the seat has paid for itself. For most principals this is the first hire, and for many it is the only one they need.

Authority. A principal cannot be in every room. A Chief of Staff carries the principal's authority into the rooms the principal cannot reach, and is effective only for as long as the principal visibly backs them.

Information. Once a principal sits above a certain volume of reporting, the bottleneck moves from time to comprehension. An analyst triages and synthesizes what arrives, and turns it into packs the principal can act on. The same seat provides technical depth when the business is running M&A or another strategy-heavy initiative.

A Chief of Staff can provide this relief too, but only a technical one: a former banker, consultant, or operator with the analytical background to do the synthesis themselves rather than coordinate someone else doing it. An organizational Chief of Staff cannot, and asking them to is one of the common ways the seat fails.

Narrative. Reputation is a balance-sheet item, and speed is the product. A communications lead who sits beside the principal hears things when the principal hears them, flags reputational exposure before a decision rather than after, and runs the response when something breaks.

Execution. The most senior form of leverage, and the one most often conflated with the others. Owned outcomes, transactions, integrations, and special projects need a senior operator working directly for the principal. This is the Chief of Staff at the technical end of the role, supported by analysts where the work is information-heavy.

One seat relieves one constraint. A principal with a single EA has bought time and nothing else, and that is often exactly right. When two or more constraints bind at once, the seats have to work together, and at that point the principal has an office whether or not they have designed one. Section 4 covers how to build it deliberately.



The four seats

Each seat is described the same way: what it is for, what the top of the market looks like, the spectrum of capability inside the title, and where it sits in the office. Compensation, hiring, AI, and failure modes are covered once each, in Sections 5 through 8.

The Executive Assistant

Purpose

An Executive Assistant exists to add significant leverage to a principal's world and to generate a return on that investment. The return comes from efficiency. A strong EA removes the coordination, preparation, and logistical load that otherwise sits with the principal, which frees the principal to spend their attention on the activities that actually move the business.

At the senior end, the EA is the principal's operating system: the person who controls the calendar, filters the inbox, manages the relationships around the principal, and makes hundreds of small judgment calls a week that the principal never sees. Done well, the principal experiences the world as simpler than it is.

The profession has moved from typist to quarterback. For most of its history the role was clerical, and the title "secretary" described the work honestly. The administrative layer has since been automated or delegated. What remains is judgment. A modern EA at the top of the market decides who gets access to the principal, in what order, and with what preparation. They manage the principal's energy across a week, not just their calendar. They hold relationships with board members, investors, and other principals' offices. They run projects that have no other owner.

What the top of the market looks like

The top of the Executive Assistant market now clears \$500,000 in total compensation, mostly in Big Tech and in some of the world's largest family offices. That number surprises people who still think of the role as administrative, and the surprise is the point: the people earning it are doing something most of the market has never seen.

What separates them is altitude. A \$150,000 EA and a \$500,000 EA might both manage a calendar. The difference is the level of principal they support and the consequence attached to getting it right every single day, without exception.

At this level the stakes are as high as they get: a public company CEO's earnings week, relationships with the White House and regulators, the on-stage moments at a product launch or developer conference that ripple through the economy the moment they happen. There is no tolerance for a missed detail because the cost of one is measured in market value, in relationships, or in reputation.

Counterintuitively, the very top is often less about being "more strategic" and more about doing a very specific role exceptionally well, one hundred percent of the time. In a public company Office of the CEO, the EA owns the readiness layer:

the who, what, where, and why of the principal's day, plus the coordination and logistics around it. Strategy sits with the Chief of Staff. The EA enables it, flawlessly, inside a well-oiled machine where a single error is visible to the board.

In the ultra-high-net-worth (UHNW) world the same altitude looks different: highly ambiguous, rarely a job description, and paid as much for discretion, judgment, and retention as for output. These EAs understand their principal's world in a way almost nobody else does, and they are priced out of the market deliberately so they stay.

The people who can operate at this level are measured in the hundreds, not the thousands. Six things distinguish them:

Experience at altitude. They have proven themselves in a world that is alien to most, though this does not always mean years of service.

Commercial acumen. They understand what moves the business forward and what has to happen for it to do so. You cannot enable strategy if you do not understand it.

Intelligence. They are smart, in career decisions, on-the-job decisions, and in how they read people. They operate with real sophistication.

Work ethic. They match the pace of their principal, and to them it is not a sacrifice. Nobody supports the CEO of a public company by shutting down at five.

Communication. They know the difference between speaking to their own CFO and speaking to the CEO of a \$100 billion business, and they can turn it on when it matters.

Return on investment. They add value well beyond their compensation. Their principals have deep pockets, and deep pockets do not mean carelessness. At this level the EA is an investment the principal expects a return on.

The number is similar across environments; the structure is not. In Big Tech the package is equity heavy: a base of \$200,000 to \$300,000, then restricted stock units (RSUs), annual refreshers, and a sign-on cash bonus doing most of the work above it. In finance it is cash heavy, with a high base and a bonus component that can approach it. Some venture firms add carry. In the UHNW world it is often almost entirely cash, structured bespoke around the principal and priced to retain.

These roles are never advertised. They are filled quietly, through retained search and trusted referral, and the principals who hold them know exactly what they have.

Table 1

What separates the top of the Executive Assistant market

Five capabilities separate the top of the market from the competent middle. The duties are the same; how far each is taken is not.

Capability	What competent looks like	What the top of the market looks like
Calendar ownership	Keeps the calendar accurate and conflict-free	Designs the principal's week around energy, priorities, and travel; declines and reschedules without being asked; protects thinking time as if it were a board meeting
Inbox and information flow	Triages and flags	Drafts responses in the principal's voice, resolves what does not need the principal, and delivers a daily brief that surfaces the three things that matter
Judgment on access	Follows a rule set	Reads intent, seniority, and timing; knows which "urgent" requests are not; manages the principal's exposure to their own leadership team
Anticipation	Reacts quickly	Sees two weeks ahead; preempts logistics, preparation, and conflicts; has the briefing pack ready before the principal thinks to ask
Discretion and trust	Keeps confidences	Is trusted with personal, financial, and legal matters without hesitation; handles the principal's family and personal life with the same standard as the business

Table 2

The spectrum of Executive Assistant capability

The EA market is wide, and the label hides enormous variation. Six bands cover most of it.

Band	What it looks like	Typical environment
Junior, transactional	Calendar, travel, expenses, inbox triage under direction. Low ambiguity.	Mixed. Supports one or several mid-level principals.
Senior, strategic value-add	Owns the principal's operating rhythm, prepares them for meetings, manages stakeholders, takes initiative on projects.	Mixed. C-suite support in corporates and finance.
Rainmaker support	Supports a revenue-generating principal in finance. Fast, relationship-heavy, high-touch with clients and LPs. Deep discretion.	Private equity, hedge funds, investment banking.
Public company CEO	High stakes, high altitude, tight focus. Board, investors, earnings calendar, media. Zero tolerance for error.	Big Tech and large corporates.
Mini-Chief of Staff	EA who has grown into open scope: owns special projects, coordinates the leadership team, synthesizes information. High ambiguity and usually underpaid for what they carry.	Founder-led firms, scale-ups, smaller finance houses.
Office of the CEO EA	Similar altitude to public company CEO support, plus a strong team dynamic. Works alongside a Chief of Staff, analysts, and comms staff with tight scoping.	Large corporates, Big Tech, institutional finance.

The bands are not a ladder. A rainmaker EA and a public company CEO EA are both at the top of the market and would often fail in each other's seats. The rainmaker EA is built for speed, informality, and relationship management with a small number of very demanding people. The public company EA is built for precision, governance, and managing a much larger and more formal stakeholder set. Hiring across the boundary is one of the most common and expensive mistakes in this market.

**Consider the below
nuances**

CEO vs. CFO. A CEO's EA is externally facing: investors, board, press, partners, and the wider leadership team. A CFO's EA works internally: audit committee, finance leadership, controllers, close cycles, and the auditors.

Public company vs. start-up. A public company runs on the earnings cycle, disclosure rules, and board governance. A start-up runs on the raise. The first rewards precision and process; the second rewards speed and tolerance for chaos.

Institutional vs. elite boutique. Institutional firms are bureaucratic by design and the EA operates within layers of process. Elite boutiques expect the EA to operate with minimal process and maximum discretion, often for a founder-partner whose name is on the door.

Corporate vs. family office. Corporates have a support infrastructure. Family offices blend business and personal support, and the EA is trusted with the family's life, not just the principal's calendar.

Mid-level principal vs. rainmaker or CEO. Supporting a mid-level principal is largely transactional. Supporting a rainmaker or CEO means being switched on at all times and protecting the principal's time as if it were revenue, because at that level it is.

**Where it sits alongside
other seats**

For most principals the EA is the only support seat, and they own everything short of strategy: calendar, inbox, travel, logistics, stakeholder access, and the principal's personal affairs where those are in scope. When a Chief of Staff or an analyst joins, the EA keeps the readiness layer, and the new seat takes on owned outcomes, strategy, and synthesis: work that until then sat with the principal, or with no one. That boundary needs to be written down. An EA and a Chief of Staff with overlapping scope will either duplicate work or let it fall between them, and the principal ends up refereeing.

The Chief of Staff

Purpose

A Chief of Staff extends the principal's authority into the business. Where an EA multiplies the principal's time, a Chief of Staff multiplies their reach. The role varies greatly depending on the company, and the title covers several distinct versions of the job. A principal hiring a Chief of Staff is usually hiring one of the following, and should know which.

The owner of specific and technical outcomes. Special projects, cross-functional initiatives, integrations, board preparation, planning cycles. This Chief of Staff is hired to deliver things that need a senior owner and have none.

The Chief of Staff who takes care of secondary responsibilities. The work that matters but does not deserve the principal's direct attention: operating cadence, follow-through on decisions, keeping the leadership team honest about commitments. This version keeps the machine running so the principal does not have to.

The talent accelerant. A high-potential operator placed beside the principal for two to three years, then deployed into the business in a line role with the principal's vision fully absorbed. The seat is a rotation by design.

The EA and Chief of Staff mix. In smaller firms one person covers both. This works only when the principal understands they are getting half of each and prices the role accordingly.

Whichever version is hired, the same rule applies. A Chief of Staff unlocks leverage across the firm by carrying the principal's authority into it, convening, deciding, and pushing where others cannot, because the organization knows they speak for the principal. They have no formal power of their own. That borrowed authority is the whole asset, and it evaporates the moment the principal stops backing it. Principals who undermine their Chief of Staff in front of the leadership team, even once, have usually ended the role's usefulness whether or not the person stays.

*That borrowed authority is the whole asset,
and it evaporates the moment the principal
stops backing it.*

On the Chief of Staff

Figure 2 The Chief of Staff landscape: strategic focus against role ambiguity



A new and developing role

The title comes from the military and from political offices, where a chief of staff runs the machinery around a general, a governor, or a president so the principal can focus on decisions. In those settings the role is well understood, formally powerful, and often a stepping stone to the top job. The corporate version inherited the title without the formal authority, which is why it depends so heavily on the principal's backing.

Technology firms adopted it first, founders of scale-ups next, and banks, funds, and family offices have followed as their principals' spans of control have widened. It is now one of the fastest-growing titles in corporate America, and demand has outpaced any shared understanding of the role. The same title covers a 26-year-old former consultant working beside a start-up founder and a 45-year-old former Head of FP&A streamlining assets-under-management (AUM) reporting across a global asset manager, with a dotted line into the Office of the CEO.

People are still learning. Most principals hiring their first Chief of Staff have never worked with one. Most candidates applying have never been one. The result is a high failure rate driven by mismatched expectations rather than a lack of talent.

Strategic focus vs. role ambiguity

The single most useful tool for defining a Chief of Staff role is to place it on two axes: how strategic and technical the work is, and how ambiguous the scope is.

The general rule holds across industries: strategic and technical work comes with tight scope and higher compensation, because the premium is what buys the domain expertise the mandate demands, and that expertise is priced by the banks, consultancies, and funds these candidates come from. Operational, high-ambiguity work comes with open scope and comparatively lower compensation. Lower does not mean below market: these roles pay well for what they are. It means the firm is not competing against the purchasing power required to pull top technical talent out of those industries. Firms get into trouble when they want the second and pay for the first, or want the first and hire for the second.

Where the seat differs by environment

Public companies. The Chief of Staff sits inside a formal structure with general counsel, a corporate secretary, investor relations, and a communications function already in place. Their value is coordination and execution across those functions, board and earnings preparation, and being the principal's eyes inside the organization.

Start-ups and scale-ups. Often the first operator hired after the founding team. Scope is everything the founder cannot get to: fundraising process, hiring, board management, investor updates, and whichever function has no leader yet. The role should be designed with an exit in mind.

Relationship-heavy environments: finance, law, and similar. The Chief of Staff often supports the principal's external relationships, coordinates fundraising and business development, manages deal processes, and handles partner-level communications. Discretion and relationship management matter more than project methodology, and the best candidates frequently come from inside the industry.

Family offices and UHNW. May run the office itself, oversee household and business operations, coordinate advisors, and act as the principal's proxy with everyone from bankers to contractors. The profile depends on what the family is trying to achieve. A family focused on wealth creation often needs a technical Chief of Staff with an investment management background; one focused on stewardship, governance, or philanthropy is usually better served by an open-scope operator, often a former senior EA or someone from an operations background. Either way, trust is the qualification, and it is usually earned over years.

The EA to Chief of Staff transition. A senior EA who has already been operating with open scope can be the right Chief of Staff candidate, if the principal prioritizes organizational skills, discretion, and insider knowledge over technical depth. They know the principal, the stakeholders, and the failure modes in a way no external hire can. What they usually do not bring is the analytical or strategic background a technical mandate demands. The transition works when the principal formally changes the mandate, the compensation, and the EA's replacement, and fails when the title changes and nothing else does.

Where it sits in the office

The Chief of Staff is usually the senior member of the office, coordinating the EA, analysts, and comms lead, and owning the operating rhythm of the whole function. This adds a management dimension that many first-time Chiefs of Staff have not had.

In practice the Chief of Staff is often the office's head of alignment and context. That is not an official title, but it describes the purpose. The Chief of Staff holds the full picture of what the principal is trying to achieve, why, and what is happening across the business, and makes sure everyone in the office and around it is working from the same version of it.

When the EA is deciding who gets time, the analyst is deciding what to synthesize, and the comms lead is deciding what to say, the Chief of Staff is the reason those three decisions point the same way.

In the largest offices the Chief of Staff may also steward the office's AI layer, covered in Section 6. Others hire separately for that mandate, such as the AI Program Manager role described in Section 4.

3.3

The Communications Lead

Purpose

A communications lead inside the Office of the CEO owns the principal's narrative, voice, and reputation, internally and externally. This is a sub-function of the Office of the CEO, not a corporate communications reporting line, and it is entirely separate from marketing. Marketing sells the product and the brand. Corporate communications protects the company. This function protects and positions the principal, and through the principal, the firm.

Speed is the product. Sitting inside the office means the comms lead hears things when the principal hears them, not after they have cascaded through three layers of a corporate communications department. That proximity gives them direct line of sight into the calendar, the board pack, the deal pipeline, and the people issues, which means they can flag reputational exposure before a decision is made rather than draft the apology afterward.

Reputation is a balance-sheet item, and speed is the product.

The core responsibilities

Shaping narrative, internal and external. The internal story leaks and the external story gets read by staff, so one person needs to hold both threads and keep them consistent. Voice ownership sits here: writing as the principal, not as the corporate house style.

Reputation management as an ongoing discipline. Long-term positioning, thought leadership, the speaking calendar, bylines, and board and investor perception. Reputation is destroyed in hours and rebuilt over years, so the comms lead maintains the baseline that gives the principal equity to draw on when something goes wrong.

Rapid crisis response and high-stakes issue management. Leadership departures, deal leaks, litigation, layoffs, activist investors, a principal's personal conduct, regulatory action, and viral moments. Pre-built playbooks, holding statements, and stakeholder maps so the first hour is not spent deciding who does what.

Executive positioning and strategy. Where the principal shows up, on what, and why. Saying no to most of it, and building a multi-year platform aligned with what the firm needs next: a raise, an exit, a succession.

Coordinating the wider office to set wheels in motion. The comms lead sets the message; the EA, Chief of Staff, analysts, legal, and investor relations execute around it on the comms lead's timeline. In a crisis, the office becomes the war room and the comms lead runs it.

**From press officer to
strategic operator**

What this once was: press releases, media lists, reactive statements, and a corporate communications department three reporting lines from the principal, briefed after the fact and asked to clean up.

What it is today: a seat inside the office. Deloitte, Mastercard, and MongoDB have each recently recruited for dedicated communications roles built around the CEO or the Office of the CEO, and the same pattern is emerging at large funds under quieter titles.

Why it moved: reputation is a balance-sheet item. Executives surveyed by Weber Shandwick in 2020 attributed 63 percent of their company's market value to its reputation, and the firm's 2015 research put the CEO's own reputation at 44 percent of market value.

Handling a crisis well is rewarded accordingly: in Aon and Pentland Analytics' 2018 study of 125 reputational crises, the companies whose response restored confidence gained around 20 percent in shareholder value, while those whose response did not lost close to 30 percent.

Yet in PwC's 2019 Global Crisis Survey, 69 percent of leaders had faced a crisis in the previous five years, and only about a third had a response plan designed to work for any type of crisis. For a founder-led firm, where the principal and the company are close to the same thing in the market's eyes, these numbers understate the exposure.

63%

of company market value that executives attribute to reputation (Weber Shandwick, 2020)

44%

of company market value attributed to the CEO's own reputation (Weber Shandwick, 2015)

Change in shareholder value after a reputational crisis



Sources: Weber Shandwick and KRC Research, *The State of Corporate Reputation in 2020* and *The CEO Reputation Premium* (2015); Aon and Pentland Analytics, *Reputation Risk in the Cyber Age* (2018), 125 crises.

Table 3

The spectrum of communications capability

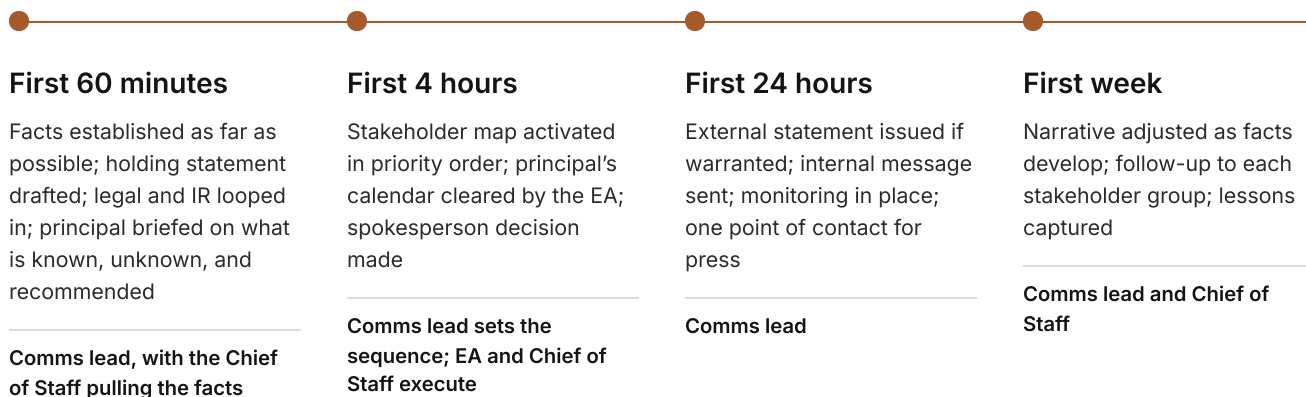
Six profiles share the title. They differ in what they own, and in the scope and pay that come with it.

Profile	What they own	Where it sits on the landscape
Generalist communications support	Whatever comes up: reactive statements, internal notes, event support, social	Open scope, reactive, lowest pay
Executive communications writer	Speeches, memos, talking points, voice ownership	Tight scope, tactical, high pay
Media and PR lead	Press relationships, placements, media handling for the principal	Tight scope, tactical, high pay
Crisis and issues specialist	Playbooks, holding statements, war-room coordination	Tight scope, high stakes, high pay
Strategic positioning lead	Multi-year platform building, thought leadership, narrative aligned to raise, exit, IPO, or succession	Defined mandate, strategic, high pay
Head of Executive Communications / Senior Advisor	The whole function; sits at principal altitude and coordinates the office in high-stakes moments	Open in scope but strategic and trusted; highest pay

The crisis playbook, in outline

The value of a comms lead inside the office is most visible in the first day of a crisis. A functioning office should be able to run the following sequence without the principal directing it.

Figure 3 The first week of a crisis, run by the office



The playbook should exist before it is needed: a stakeholder map with named contacts, template holding statements for the scenarios most likely for this principal, a decision tree for who speaks, and a pre-agreed division of labor across the office.

Where it sits in the office

The comms lead runs the principal; corporate communications runs the brand. The interface between the two must be scoped tightly and in writing, covering who approves what, who speaks to press on which topics, and who owns the principal's social presence. Unscoped overlap produces two competing narratives and a principal caught between them.

3.4

The Analyst

Purpose

An analyst is hired when more raw information reaches a principal than the principal can absorb, most often inside the Office of the CEO. The analyst triages and synthesizes that information, and turns it into the packs and briefings the office runs on. Where the EA owns the readiness layer and the Chief of Staff owns outcomes, the analyst owns the intelligence layer.

The second reason to hire an analyst is technical depth. A business focusing heavily on M&A needs capable people inside the office who can work those initiatives: diligence, modeling, integration planning, and the information flow around a transaction. Analysts are excellent here. More generally, the seat is the answer any time the office needs technical expertise on information and strategy that the Chief of Staff does not have the capacity or the background to supply alone.

In practice the work covers research and quantitative analysis for decisions the principal is about to make, briefing packs and reading stacks ahead of meetings, board and investor materials, tracking progress against firm priorities, and ownership of discrete projects assigned by the principal or the Chief of Staff. At funds and larger corporates the remit extends to cross-departmental initiatives and competitive analysis for the leadership team.

What the top of the market looks like

The best analysts we place are not junior. They are people who can sit between a firehose of upstream reporting and a principal with fifteen minutes, and produce the version of the truth the principal needs. They travel with the principal when the role demands it, own the preparation for the rooms the principal walks into, and hand what they produce to the EA and the Chief of Staff to turn into action.

In one recent Office of the CEO build, the mandate was exactly this pairing: an analyst to own the intelligence layer and an EA to convert it into global coordination and relationships.

Backgrounds cluster in investment banking, consulting, private equity, and corporate strategy, which is what makes the seat expensive relative to its seniority. A firm hiring an analyst is usually competing with those industries for the same person.

Table 4

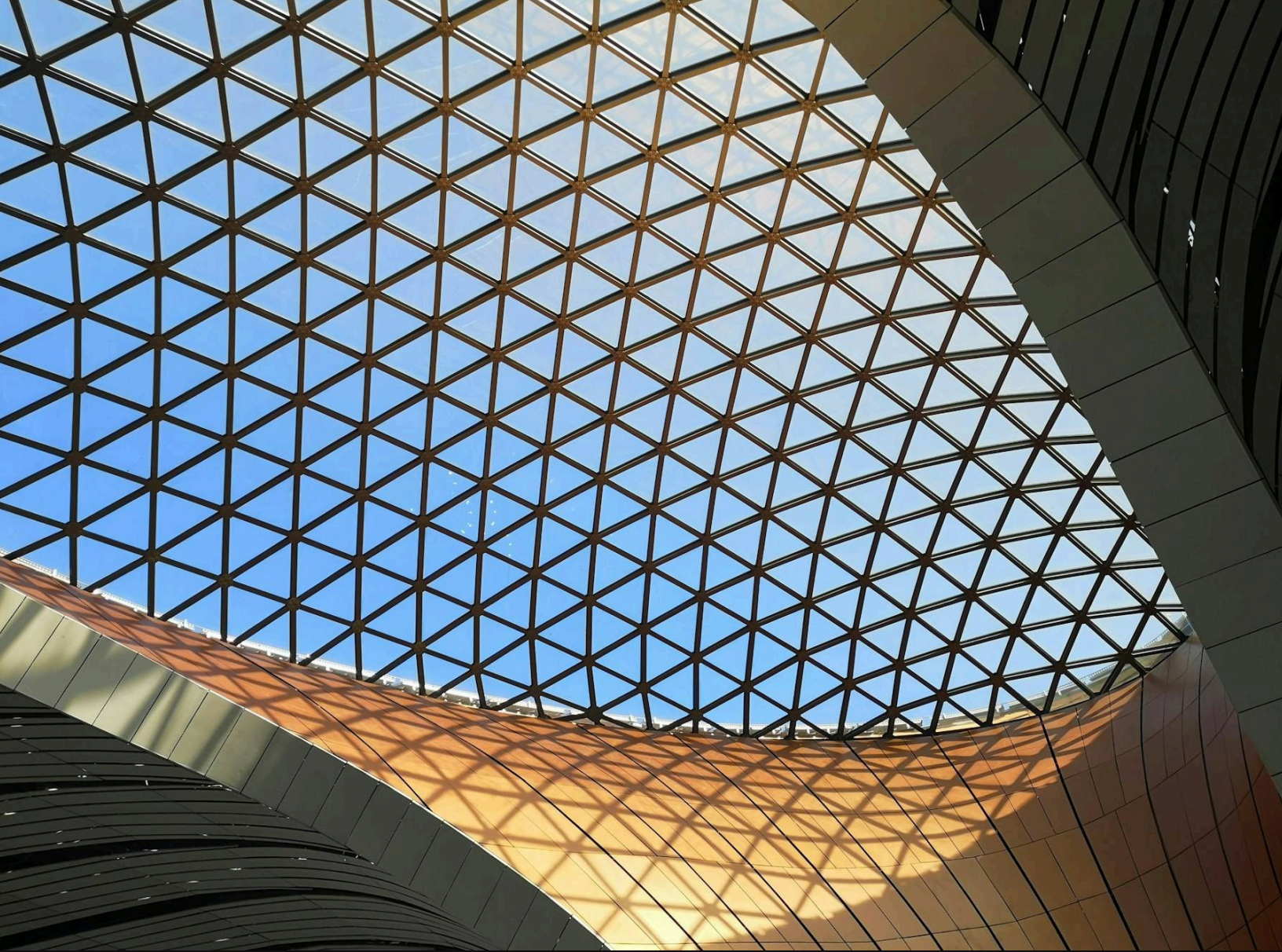
The spectrum of analyst capability

Four bands, from recurring reporting to senior strategy work alongside the Chief of Staff.

Band	What it looks like	Typical environment
Reporting analyst	Assembles recurring packs, maintains dashboards and priority tracking for the office	Corporates, institutional finance
Synthesis analyst	Digests and triages raw upstream information into decision-ready briefings; owns meeting and board preparation	Public company Office of the CEO, large funds
Transaction analyst	Works M&A, fundraising, or capital markets initiatives from inside the office; diligence, modeling, integration	Firms in an active deal cycle, PE, corporate development-heavy businesses
Strategy analyst	Senior; runs strategic analysis and cross-departmental initiatives alongside the Chief of Staff; often a future Chief of Staff	Full-apparatus offices, Big Tech, large funds

Where it sits in the office

The analyst reports into the Chief of Staff in almost every configuration and works most closely with the EA on preparation and readiness. The seat is most valuable when its output has a clear consumer: a daily or weekly brief, a board pack, a deal update. The analyst seat is also the most common internal route into a Chief of Staff role, which makes it useful as a succession position as well as a working one.



The Office of the CEO

The Office of the CEO as a unit: when you need one, how it is configured, who owns what, and when to redesign it.

When you need one

An Office of the CEO (OCEO) exists where one person is no longer enough. Once a principal's span of control, external exposure, and information load exceed what a single EA or Chief of Staff can absorb, the answer is a team built around the principal with clear roles and one shared purpose. An OCEO is a machine. It takes in everything directed at the principal, processes it, and returns decisions, outputs, and readiness.

What a well-built office delivers

- Decision support and owned outcomes.
- Readiness, coordination, and preparation.
- Narrative, internal and external.
- A talent incubator where future leaders learn how the principal thinks.
- A principal who is kept focused rather than managing down.
- Control of information upstream and downstream.

Raw information in, synthesized, and presented. Decisions made, execution coordinated, and outcomes owned.

The OCEO is really the OCXO. The same structure works for a CFO, a COO, a CIO, or the head of a major business unit. The principle is identical: build a small, high-trust machine around a leader whose time is the scarcest resource in their part of the firm.

The diagnosis drives the build

- If you are drowning in raw upstream information, you need someone to synthesize and filter it into a form you can act on: a strong analyst or technical Chief of Staff, perhaps more than one.
- If you are struggling with time and coordination, you need an exceptional Executive Assistant.
- If your Executive Assistant leaves or takes time off and the office struggles to cope, you need a backup EA, a junior in the office, or access to float EAs across the firm.
- If you need support with strategic responsibilities, special project ownership, and coordination across a global team, you need a strong Chief of Staff.
- If the principal faces heavy press and public demand, you need someone in the office who can shape the narrative internally and externally: a communications lead.

- If you have a talent problem and want to instill the principal's vision across the business, set up a rotational Chief of Staff program.
- If you are targeting a major exit or IPO, include people in the office who can help reach that objective: capital markets experience, investor relations, transaction management. Shape the office to suit the future of the business, not its past.

The point is to hire who you need and create titles where necessary. A title gaining traction right now is AI Program Manager (OCEO): someone who builds internal systems and tools using AI to improve efficiency within the office itself. Two years ago that role did not exist. Two years from now most full-apparatus offices will have one.

4.2

Configurations

Five configurations cover most of what we see.

The office should always be bespoke. The configurations are a useful overview, but the build should follow the diagnosis above.

Sequencing the build. Where a principal is building from nothing, the order matters. The senior EA comes first, because time is the constraint everything else depends on. The Chief of Staff comes second, once the principal can articulate three outcomes to own. The analyst comes third, when information load or a technical initiative justifies it. The comms lead comes when the principal's visibility, regulation, or a live process demands it. Hiring in a different order usually produces a Chief of Staff doing an EA's job or a comms lead with no office to coordinate.

Figure 4 Sequencing the build from nothing

1	2	3	4
Senior EA	Chief of Staff	Analyst	Comms lead
First, because time is the constraint everything else depends on.	Second, once the principal can articulate three outcomes to own.	Third, when information load or a technical initiative justifies it.	When visibility, regulation, or a live process demands it.

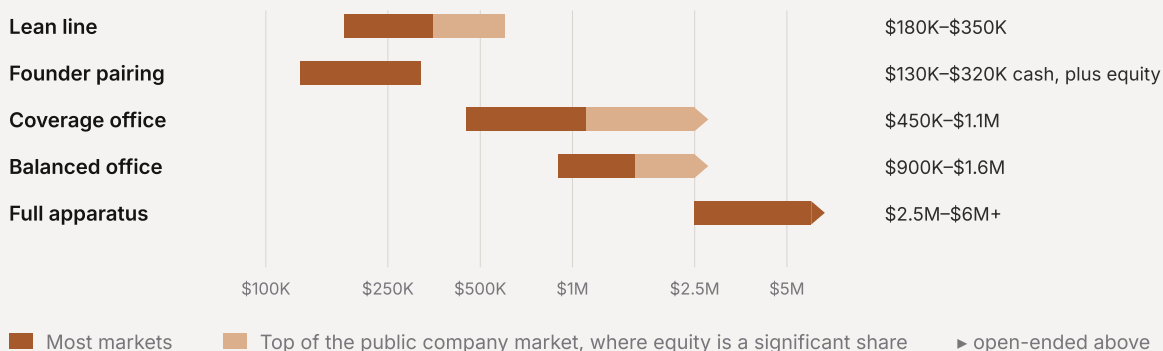
Figure 5

Five configurations of the Office of the CEO: seats and cost

A design decision, not a maturity ladder: from \$130K to \$6M+ a year, fully loaded.

Configuration	Seats	Best for	Watch for
The lean line 1 seat	One Executive Assistant operating above their title	Principals with strong, self-managing teams; most rainmakers in finance and big law	The EA drifting into Chief of Staff work on an EA package; one person is the whole operating system
The founder pairing 1–2 seats	A Founder's Associate or early Chief of Staff; optional virtual-assistant readiness support	Seed through Series C; founders in build mode	A role with no natural shape; set an 18 to 30 month exit or evolution point at the offer stage
The coverage office 2–4 seats	One or two Executive Assistants, a Chief of Staff, and potentially a comms or PR lead	Globally scheduled large company CEOs whose constraint is hours of coverage	An unclear boundary between the EA and the Chief of Staff; with two EAs, unwritten scope and no lead EA
The balanced office 5–6 seats	Primary EA, junior OCEO administrator, Head of OCEO Operations, rotational Chief of Staff, comms or PR	CEOs of substantial institutions, building for a decade rather than surviving a year	Two load-bearing seats: the primary EA and the Head of OCEO Operations
The full apparatus 8+ seats	EA bench, several Chiefs of Staff with business-unit lines, an analyst pool, comms, and personal support	The genuinely few: public company CEOs operating, and traveling, at global scale	Insulation from unfiltered truth, shadow hierarchy, and cost nobody inside has an incentive to shrink

Fully loaded annual budget, US



Fully loaded: base, bonus, equity where applicable, benefits, and employer costs. Top of the US market in 2026 (large public companies, elite finance, well-funded start-ups and scale-ups, family offices in high-cost markets); expect meaningful discounts elsewhere. Source: Blackbook Associates, *The Five Configurations of the Office of the CEO*, August 2026.

Ownership matrix

Because the office is a team and not one person, it has to be built with care. Open scopes create crossover, inefficiency, and friction. Two people who both believe they own board preparation will either duplicate the work or let it fall between them. Those inefficiencies create a need for the principal to manage down, refereeing their own support team. The end result is an office doing the opposite of what it was designed for.

Every seat should have a written mandate, a clear owner for each recurring output, and an agreed escalation path. This is not bureaucracy; it is the mechanism that lets a small team move fast without colliding. The outputs most often left with two owners or none are board preparation, investor updates, the principal's external appearances, internal communications from the principal, and the principal's personal affairs. Each should have one named owner, with the others listed as contributors.

Team chemistry matters as much as individual capability. It is hard enough to find good chemistry between two people, let alone a team of five or six operating under constant pressure around one principal. Good chemistry means the team works well, shares information freely, and respects one another's lanes. Poor chemistry means the team constantly breaks down and the principal ends up mediating.

Bad actors, whether political, territorial, or simply unable to work in a team, must be removed from the office quickly. A single one degrades the whole function.

Chemistry can be assessed before a hire: the candidate should meet the existing members of the office, and the question to ask each of them is whether they would trust this person with their part of the principal's world if they were away for a month.

Figure 6

Ownership matrix, by kind of leverage

One named owner for every recurring output, grouped by the five kinds of leverage.

Recurring output	EA	Chief of Staff	Analyst	Comms lead
01 Time Protecting the principal's day for the decisions only they can make				
Calendar, access, and travel	●	○		
Inbox and correspondence	●	○		
Daily schedule and readiness brief	●	○	○	
Meeting logistics and readiness	●	○		
The principal's personal affairs	●			
02 Authority Carrying the principal's decisions into the business				
OCEO alignment and context	○	●	○	○
Operating cadence and decision follow-through	○	●		
Leadership team coordination	○	●		
The principal's board preparation	○	●	○	○
03 Information Turning raw upstream input into material the principal can act on				
Synthesis of upstream reporting		○	●	
Briefing packs and meeting content	○	○	●	
Research and analysis for live decisions		○	●	
04 Narrative Shaping the principal's voice and reputation, inside and out				
The principal's external appearances	○	○		●
Internal communications from the principal		○		●
Press and crisis response	○	○		●
05 Execution Delivering outcomes that need a senior owner close to the principal				
Special projects and owned outcomes		●	○	
Transactions, integrations, and strategic initiatives		●	○	
The office's AI layer	○	●	○	

● Owner: one per output ○ Contributor

Illustrative four-seat office. Where a seat does not exist, its column passes to the seat that covers it.

Redesign triggers

The Office of the CEO should have seasons. In any fast-growing business, the office should either adapt to new objectives or be reshaped to suit where the business is going next. The external, governmental, internal, and narrative demands on a principal change as the firm grows, raises, restructures, or prepares for an exit.

The triggers are predictable

- A fundraise or capital markets event
- A change in the principal's external visibility
- A major acquisition, integration, or M&A program
- A leadership transition below the principal
- A change in ownership
- A decision to pursue an exit or IPO

Each changes what the office needs to be good at, and a well-run office anticipates the shift rather than discovering it.

Never keep a suboptimal person in the office out of loyalty. Move them elsewhere in the business and upgrade the seat. Mistakes at this altitude can be seriously damaging, and the cost of a weak link compounds through everything the principal touches.

The office should be always on but never rebuilt all at once. Wholesale change creates political fallout, loses institutional memory, and produces exactly the inefficiency it was meant to fix. Change one seat at a time and let the team reform around it.



The market

Compensation, geography, industry, principal type, and scarcity.

Compensation

Why this is not a general market survey

Most published compensation data aggregates executive support roles across levels, employer types, and scopes of responsibility. That approach is useful for broad workforce planning, but it obscures the market Blackbook works in: senior, high-trust hires supporting CEOs, founders, rainmakers, investment principals, and private families.

The figures in this section are drawn from Blackbook Associates' live retained mandates, completed placements, and active candidate conversations in this specialist market. They are not intended to describe the median EA or generalist Chief of Staff role. They describe the upper end of a distinct market, in which altitude, discretion, proximity to the principal, commercial judgment, and the consequence of error determine value. If the seat you are filling is more junior, or supports a mid-level principal, the market will price it below these bands, and a broad salary survey will serve you better.

Reading the ranges

Unless a column says otherwise, every figure is annual base salary in US dollars, for the high-cost markets of New York and the San Francisco Bay Area, along with Los Angeles, Miami, Austin, and Connecticut. Each role has a typical band and, where relevant, a ceiling. The ceiling is the exception; most hires land inside the typical band.

Base. Fixed annual salary before any bonus or equity.

Bonus. Annual cash bonus, shown as a dollar figure or a percentage of base.

RSUs and refreshers. Restricted stock units, quoted as a total grant vesting over four years, and the further equity granted each year after joining.

Sign-on. A one-time cash payment on joining.

Carry. A share of fund profits, found in venture capital and some private equity roles.

All in. Base, bonus, and equity combined for one year.

What drives the number

Four factors set where a role lands in its range.

Who the role supports. Supporting a CEO pays the most. Compensation rises with the seniority of the principal and, in finance and law, with the revenue that principal brings in.

Sector. Technology, alternative investments, family offices, and the C-suite of large corporates pay the most. Large institutional finance firms pay less unless the role supports the CEO.

Company type and stage. Start-ups pay a little less, public companies a little more, and Big Tech sits at the top.

Scope and technical capability. Open-scope and hybrid roles pay above the standard range. For Chiefs of Staff and analysts, the premium follows genuine technical depth: expertise the candidate has built and applied in a demanding role, not a credential on a résumé.

How the package is built

The number is similar across environments at the top of the market; the structure is not. Each sector builds the offer from different components, and the mix matters as much as the headline figure.

Carry as a retention tool. Carry for support roles is rare in private equity and venture capital. Firms that offer it use a small percentage to keep high-quality people, whether an Executive Assistant or a Chief of Staff.

Equity at start-ups and scale-ups. Cash is usually lower, so equity carries the offer. For a candidate who believes in the company, it is a route to a significant wealth-creation event at exit, and it is the reason strong operators take the seat.

Stock growth at public technology companies. The same grant is worth different things at different companies. A \$900K grant at a large company that has already made its move has less room to grow; a \$500K grant at a newer public company whose stock is still climbing could be worth \$3M to \$4M in five years. Hiring leaders at growth-stage companies should sell the growth potential of the grant, not just its dollar value.

Table 5

What the full package looks like, by sector

Base salary is one part of the offer. The rest differs sharply by sector.

Sector	Cash	Equity or carry	Beyond pay
Banks, asset managers, hedge funds	Base, annual bonus, discretionary bonus	None	—
Private equity and venture capital	Base and bonus	A small carry percentage, in rare cases	—
Public technology	Base and annual bonus	RSUs and annual refreshers	Sign-on bonus, relocation support
Start-ups and scale-ups	Lower base	Equity, often a meaningful share of the package	A stake in a potential exit
Family offices	Base and discretionary bonus	None	Proximity to the principal; housing, travel, and personal support can blur the number
Large corporates and other industries	Base and annual bonus	Varies by company	Benefits; pay scales with the executive's seniority
Private companies	Base and a small bonus	Rarely	Good benefits
Law firms	Base and a small bonus	None	—

Build flexibility into the budget

Treat every range here as a starting point, and leave room to go above it for the right person. A senior Executive Assistant, Chief of Staff, or founder's associate works in close proximity to someone who is already extremely valuable to the firm. When the hire is critical, paying somewhat more than planned is often the right decision: it secures the best talent and keeps them for the long run.

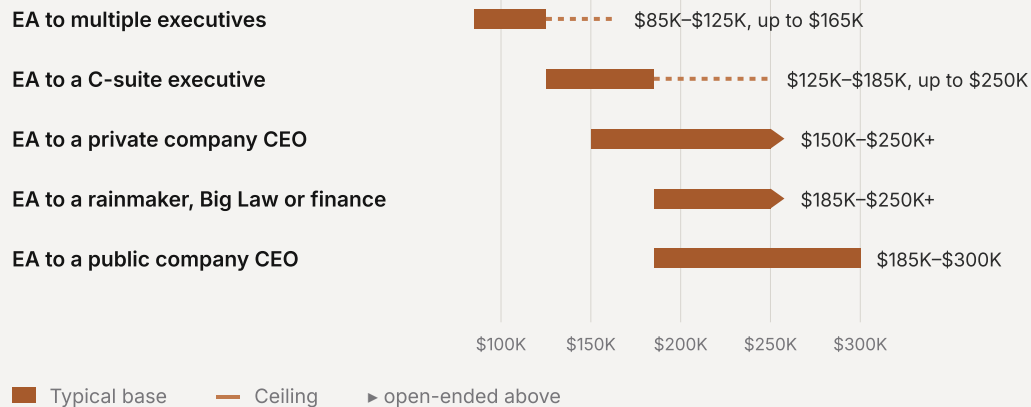
Defaulting to internal bandings or HR guidance can severely limit the search. The usual result is a hire of the wrong caliber, or one who falls short of what the principal expects.

Executive Assistant compensation

Figure 7

Executive Assistant base salary, by who the role supports

The principal sets the range before the sector does. US high-cost markets.



Read the chart by who the Executive Assistant supports: the more senior the principal, the higher the base. Within each band, the employer moves the number. A start-up CEO's assistant usually sits toward the bottom of the private company band, and an assistant to a rainmaker is paid in line with the revenue that principal brings in. All figures are base salary only; bonus and equity come on top.

Table 6

Executive Assistants in technology

Public technology companies pay the highest total compensation in the market, and most of the difference is equity.

Environment	Typical base	Ceiling	On top of base
Start-up or scale-up	\$100K–\$200K	\$200K+ for a hybrid EA, Chief of Staff, or founder's associate role	Equity
Public company	\$100K–\$250K	\$300K	RSUs, refreshers, sign-on, relocation
CEO or divisional CEO, Big Tech	\$200K–\$300K	\$300K	Full package in the spotlight below

Table 7 | SPOTLIGHT

The Big Tech CEO package

An Executive Assistant to the CEO or a major divisional CEO at a large public technology company, where equity can exceed the base.

Component	Range	Timing
Base	\$200K–\$300K	Annual
RSU grant	\$400K–\$600K, up to \$900K	Vests over four years
Annual bonus	\$50K–\$60K	Annual
Equity refresher	\$100K–\$150K	Granted each year
Sign-on bonus	\$100K–\$200K	One time
Relocation support	Case by case	One time

Spread evenly over four years, the RSU grant is worth \$100K to \$150K a year, and up to \$225K at the top. Together with base, bonus, and refreshers, this is how the very top of the Executive Assistant market clears \$500K.

Table 8

Executive Assistants in hedge funds, private equity, and venture capital

The best-paying part of finance, paid almost entirely in cash. Firm size sets the range: small firms start at \$150K to \$165K, and the largest pay \$250K and above.

Environment	Typical base	Ceiling	On top of base
Boutique firm, outside the high-cost markets	\$85K–\$125K	\$150K	Cash bonus
Hedge fund or private equity firm	\$150K–\$250K	\$250K+ at the largest private equity firms and elite hedge funds	Annual bonus of up to 20%
Venture capital founder, high-cost market	\$185K–\$250K	\$350K	5%–20% bonus; small carry at some firms

Table 9

Executive Assistants in investment banks and asset managers

Investment banks and alternative asset managers pay more than traditional banks, though not quite as much as private equity and hedge funds. The principal sets the number: support to a rainmaker or the CEO sits well above support to a managing director. Pay is in cash, typically with a 5% to 10% annual bonus. Traditional retail and commercial banks pay below these ranges.

Environment	Typical base	Ceiling	On top of base
MD or a team of MDs	\$135K–\$150K	\$165K	Bonus
Rainmaker	\$185K–\$250K	\$250K+	Scales with the revenue the principal brings in
CEO	\$185K–\$250K	\$250K+	Bonus

Table 10

Executive Assistants in family offices

Among the highest cash salaries in the market, with no equity and a bonus set at the principal's discretion. At the largest offices, principals deliberately pay enough to price their staff out of the market.

Environment	Typical base	Ceiling	On top of base
Family office or UHNW principal	\$150K–\$375K	\$400K	Discretionary cash bonus

Table 11

Executive Assistants in private companies and other markets

Outside technology, finance, and family offices, base salaries top out near \$250K. In private companies, base depends on the seniority of the principal, the profitability of the business, and the altitude of the CEO; packages default to base, a small bonus, and good benefits.

Environment	Typical base	Ceiling	On top of base
Private company	\$85K–\$185K	—	Small bonus and good benefits
General industry, life sciences, consumer goods	\$125K–\$200K	—	Varies with the executive's seniority and whether support is one-to-one
Big Law (rainmaker, chair, or managing partner)	—	\$250K	Small bonus

Chief of Staff compensation

Chief of Staff pay is set less by the principal than by the mandate and the background it demands. The same title covers two quite different profiles, and they are priced differently in every sector.

Two profiles, priced differently

The organizational Chief of Staff usually comes from an Executive Assistant or operations background, and is hired for coordination, discretion, and comfort with ambiguity. The value is in how the office runs.

The technical Chief of Staff brings a specialist discipline into the seat: FP&A, management consulting, investment or wealth management, or technology and engineering. Some are former founders, now applying an operator's judgment as Chief of Staff inside a venture capital firm. The profile is scarcer, the mandate is usually tied to an outcome, and it costs more. In finance, a significant bonus sits on top of base, and total compensation for a technical hire can reach \$600K to \$800K.

The tables that follow apply that split sector by sector. Where a sector does not separate the two, the range covers both.

Table 12

Chiefs of Staff in technology

Scope narrows and becomes more technical as the company grows. At a start-up, the Chief of Staff covers everything the founder cannot, from fundraising to HR. At a public technology company, the mandate is tighter and far more technical, and equity can double total compensation.

Environment / mandate	Typical base	On top of base
Start-up or scale-up	\$175K–\$275K	Equity; rare packages reach \$1M all in
Late-stage private technology company	\$175K–\$300K	Equity
Public Big Tech	\$250K–\$500K+	Large RSU grant and sign-on bonus

Table 13

Chiefs of Staff in hedge funds, private equity, and venture capital

Hedge funds and private equity pay a clear premium for the technical profile, most of it through bonus. The top of each range is reserved for someone exceptional. Venture capital firms often hire former founders and operators, and can add carry on top of base.

Environment / mandate	Typical base	On top of base
Hedge funds and private equity		
Organizational	\$200K–\$300K	Bonus
Technical	\$250K–\$400K	Significant performance bonus; total compensation of \$600K–\$800K
Venture capital		
Either profile	\$175K–\$400K	Bonus or carry

Table 14

Chiefs of Staff in banks and asset managers

The seat is rare in these markets. Where it exists, it is usually a technical hire at a global asset manager or one of the top global banks, working within the Office of the CEO or owning a specific project and its outcomes, typically with a dotted line back to the CEO. Pay leans heavily on bonus. Organizational hires are paid mostly through base.

Environment / mandate	Typical base	On top of base
Organizational	\$175K–\$250K	Bonus
Technical, global asset manager	\$200K–\$300K	Significant bonus; total compensation of \$600K–\$800K for a tight scope, such as reducing AUM reporting timelines

Table 15

Chiefs of Staff in family offices

The family's objectives set the profile. Wealth creation calls for a technical Chief of Staff; stewardship, governance, or philanthropy for an organizational one.

Environment / mandate	Typical base	On top of base
Organizational	\$175K–\$375K	Bonus
Technical	\$250K–\$400K	Performance bonus

Multi-family offices. Either profile can work, but the Chief of Staff serves many high-net-worth families rather than one, so the role calls for a white-glove, client-centric approach. Pay usually sits a little below the single-family ranges above.

Where structure matters most

The EA to Chief of Staff step is earned, not automatic. It should not be the default next move for an Executive Assistant. The step calls for capability well beyond calendar management, inbox triage, and expenses: strategic value-add, genuine thought partnership, the ability to own projects from start to finish, and in some cases P&L ownership for specific initiatives.

When the step is made, it has to be real. A title change without a compensation change is the most common way the transition fails.

Project-focused mandates in finance (deal, fundraising, integration) command a premium over organizational mandates, with defined outcomes and often a defined end.

5.4

Analyst compensation

The analyst role is one of the broadest in the Office of the CEO. In practice it is a very specific skill set, matched to the needs of the principal and the objectives of the office. Budget for that skill set and the market it comes from, not for internal pay bands.

Table 16

Analysts in the Office of the CEO

Priced against the market the hire is pulled from.

Profile	Base	Bonus
Analyst, general	\$150K–\$250K	Depends on the skill set required
Analyst, technical	\$200K–\$300K	A large bonus, typically 50%–150% of base

Match the source market to the mandate

M&A. An analyst expected to source, model, and evaluate transactions should come from private equity or investment banking, and be paid in line with those markets.

IPO preparation. An analyst leading research ahead of a listing needs capital markets experience: how a company moves through the IPO process, and what underwriters and investors look for along the way.

Strategy and transformation. Management consulting is the natural source for analysts working on strategy, operating model, or transformation programs.

Each source market sets its own benchmark. A private equity investment professional, for example, earns a \$250K to \$300K base and a year-end bonus of 50% to 150% of base, while consulting firms and investment banks pay on their own structures. An offer pitched at internal banding rather than the source market will rarely land the right person.

5.5

Communications lead compensation

In this report, communications means one seat: the communications lead inside the Office of the CEO, or the office of another C-suite principal. It is not corporate communications, marketing, or PR, and we do not search for those functions. The seat exists to protect and position one person, and its pay follows what that person needs: the capability the moment calls for, and fluency in the industry the principal operates in. Title and sector matter far less here than in the other seats.

The Office of the CEO communications lead carries a premium over the corporate communications equivalent, reflecting altitude, access, and the expectation of crisis ownership. A senior agency retainer is the alternative, and it stops paying for itself once the principal is visible, regulated, or running a process.

What sets the price

Capability. Where the hire sits on the spectrum in Section 3.3, from a writer who owns the principal's voice to a senior advisor who runs the room in a crisis. Each step up adds judgment and trust, not output.

Industry fluency. A communications lead who can explain fund performance to limited partners, a quarter to analysts, or a model release to regulators without a translator is worth more than a stronger generalist who needs one. Fluency shortens every cycle and lowers the risk of saying the wrong thing.

Stakes. A public company, a regulated firm, or a principal running a process (a raise, an IPO, an exit, a succession) raises the cost of an error, and the premium rises with it.

Table 17

Communications leads by capability

Pay rises with judgment and trust rather than title. The same person can sit at different points on this table depending on the mandate.

Capability	Typical base	On top of base
Generalist communications support	\$120K–\$175K	Bonus
Executive communications writer	\$170K–\$250K	Bonus, often around 20% of base; equity in technology
Media and PR lead	\$175K–\$275K	Bonus; equity in technology
Crisis and issues specialist	\$200K–\$300K	Bonus; a premium at public and regulated firms
Strategic positioning lead	\$200K–\$300K	Bonus; equity in technology
Head of Executive Communications or senior advisor	\$275K–\$450K	Significant bonus and equity; priced against the Chief Communications Officer market

5.6

Geography

This report focuses on the high-cost markets of the United States. New York and the San Francisco Bay Area are the reference points for the ranges in it, and Los Angeles, Miami, and Austin sit within the same remit. Each sector concentrates in its own handful of these markets, which shapes both the profile and the pay.

Family office roles are the exception everywhere, because principals set pay by what the person is worth to them rather than by the local market. Relocation support is common at the top of the market and is often the difference between a search that closes and one that does not. Outside the high-cost markets, base salaries run noticeably lower.

Table 18

Where each sector concentrates

The high-cost markets are not interchangeable. Where to search depends on the sector.

Sector	Primary markets
Finance	New York and Connecticut, and increasingly Miami
Technology-focused finance (VC/PE)	California, concentrated in San Francisco and the Bay Area
Private wealth	Connecticut, Miami, and San Francisco, with family offices spread across the country
Technology	California and, for now, Austin

5.7

Industry

The industry determines the profile more than the title does.

Big Tech and public technology. Formal governance, the earnings cycle, and disclosure rules. The most developed Office of the CEO structures in the market and the highest EA compensation. Precision and process are rewarded.

Institutional finance. Bureaucratic by design. Structured bands, compliance on every external word, and a support infrastructure the office operates within.

Elite boutiques, PE, and hedge funds. Fast, judgment-led, relationship-heavy. Support staff operate with minimal process and maximum discretion, often for a founder whose name is on the door.

Family offices and UHNW. Relationship-first, private, and ambiguous. Trust is the qualification and retention is the objective.

Start-ups and scale-ups. Chaos tolerance, open scope, and a Chief of Staff who is often the first operator hired after the founding team.

Success in one of these environments is no evidence of success in another. Section 8 returns to what happens when firms hire across the boundary.

Principal type

Beyond industry, the type of principal decides who fits. Four distinctions matter most.

Public company CEO. The highest altitude and the highest stakes. Support staff work inside a formal machine and the readiness layer is everything.

Founder. The principal and the firm are close to the same thing. Support staff carry ambiguity, build infrastructure from nothing, and operate at the founder's pace.

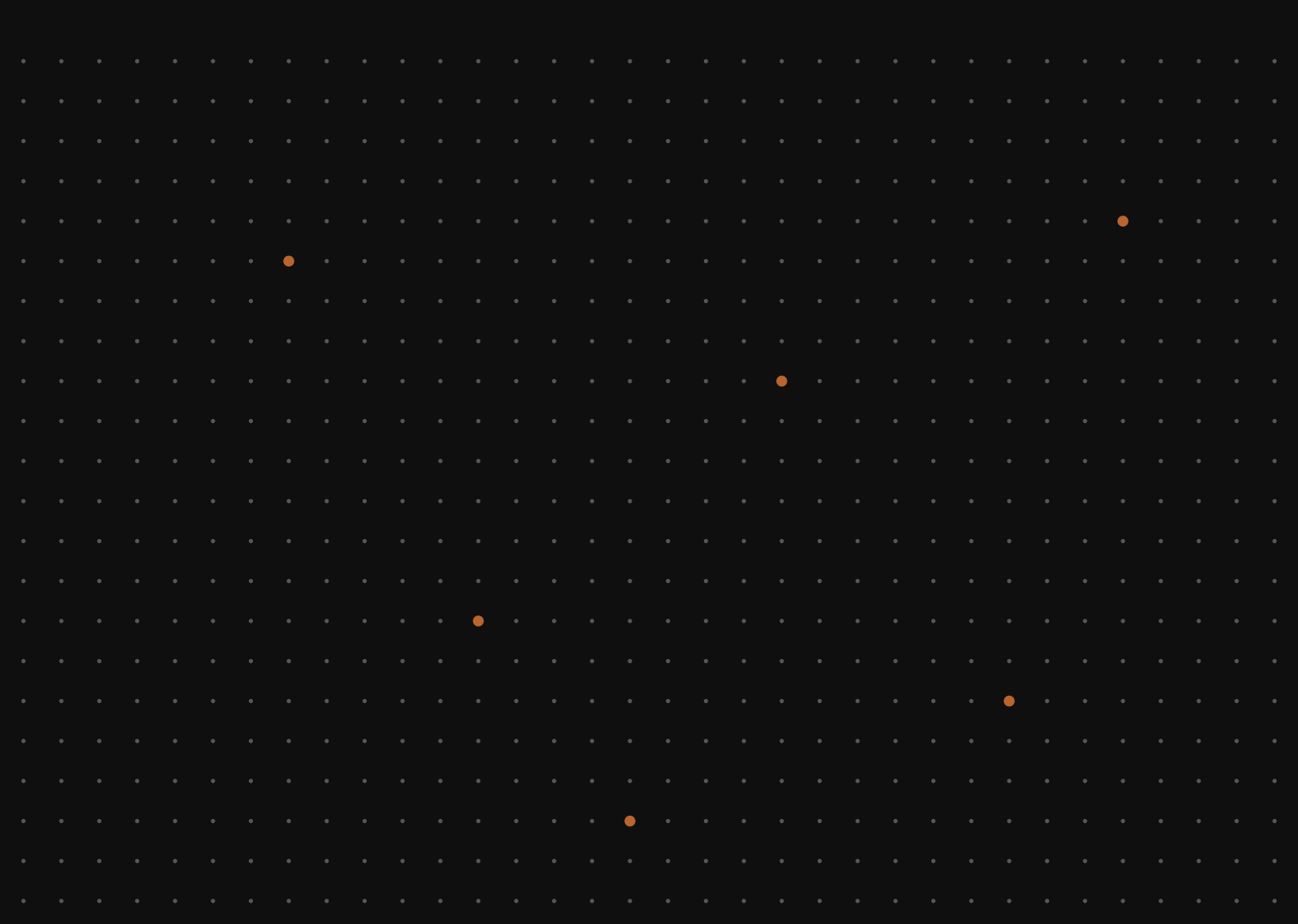
Rainmaker. A revenue-generating principal in finance. Support is fast, relationship-heavy, and often extends into the principal's personal life.

Internal-facing executive (CFO, COO, CIO). The stakeholder map points inward. The office is closer to operations and change management than to external narrative.

Talent scarcity

The pool at the top of this market is small, and at any given moment almost none of it is looking.

The scarcity is sharpest in three places: EAs who can operate at public company CEO altitude, Chiefs of Staff with real technical mandates behind them, and support professionals who can design and govern the office's AI layer. All three are expensive, and all three are hired almost entirely through approach rather than application. The third group is the newest, and the gap between those who have the capability and those who claim it is the hardest thing in the market to assess from a résumé.



How AI is changing the market

Top executives are rarely the primary users of AI. The people supporting them are. This holds even at the firms actively developing AI and leading the market; many of those CEOs run offices with multiple EAs, Chiefs of Staff, and analysts, and it is those people who build the workflows, run the tools, and decide what reaches the principal. The office is where AI is adopted first, and where the difference between an AI-native operator and a traditional one shows up most clearly.

The maturity ladder

The visible layer is drafting and summarizing. The valuable layer sits underneath it. A capable operator can now build systems that pull data from the principal's inbox, calendar, CRM, and document stores, route it through a model with the right instructions, and produce briefing packs, meeting preparation, stakeholder summaries, and monitoring alerts. Agents can triage, prioritize, draft responses for approval, track commitments, and flag what has slipped. None of this requires a software team. It requires one person in the office who understands how the pieces connect.

Figure 8 The office AI maturity ladder

0 None	Manual processes; AI used occasionally for individual drafting	Most offices outside technology
1 Assisted	Individuals use AI tools for drafting, summarizing, and research; no shared workflows	The majority of offices at the top of the market today
2 Systematized	Recurring workflows built: daily brief, meeting preparation, inbox triage, commitment tracking. Data boundaries defined. One person owns the system	Leading offices in technology, a minority in finance
3 Agentic	Agents act within defined limits: scheduling proposals, first-draft responses queued for approval, monitoring with alerts. Human checkpoint before anything leaves the office	A small number of offices, usually with a dedicated builder
4 Governed at scale	Office AI layer documented, audited, and reviewed; integrated with firm-level data security; used as a template across other executives' offices	Very rare; emerging at the largest technology and financial firms

Most offices should be targeting level 2 within a year. Expect a strong operator to automate the repetitive layer of their own work within months and to redeploy that time into judgment and coordination. Do not expect them to replace a data team

or build production-grade software. The realistic target is an office that runs 30 to 50 percent lighter on administrative load, with the saved capacity spent on preparation and foresight.

Level 2

The target for most offices within a year

30–50%

Lighter administrative load: the realistic target

6.2

Workflows by seat

EA: daily brief generation from calendar and inbox; meeting preparation packs pulling from past correspondence and documents; travel and logistics coordination; inbox triage with drafted responses for approval.

Chief of Staff: commitment tracking across leadership team meetings; board pack assembly; synthesis of upstream reporting into decision memos; monitoring of project status across owners. In many offices the Chief of Staff is becoming the steward of the principal's AI: agents that draft, summarize, monitor, and prepare sit below the Chief of Staff, who decides what they touch, what they see, and how their output is checked.

Analyst: structured extraction from documents and data rooms; recurring reporting; first-pass synthesis of upstream information for the Chief of Staff to shape.

Comms lead: first drafts in the principal's voice from a maintained corpus of their material; media and social monitoring with alerts; stakeholder communication sequencing in a crisis. Response times have compressed from days to hours, which means the comms lead's edge is judgment rather than production.

Governance

The office handles the most sensitive material in the firm. Every AI workflow needs an answer to four questions: what data is going in, where is it being processed, who can see the output, and how is the output checked before it is acted on.

Figure 9 **Data classes and the rule for each**

Data class	Examples	Rule
Open	Public information, published material, general scheduling	Any approved tool
Internal	Calendar detail, non-sensitive correspondence, project status	Enterprise-grade tools with no training on inputs and contractual retention limits
Confidential	Deal information, personnel matters, board material, financials	Only tools covered by the firm's data agreements, with access restricted to the office and a human checkpoint on every output
Restricted	Material non-public information, legal privilege, the principal's personal, medical, or family matters	Never put through a model unless the firm's counsel and security have explicitly approved the specific tool and use

The office should keep a written register of which workflows exist, which data class each touches, and who owns the checkpoint. This is the document a principal should ask to see, and its absence tells you the office is at level 1 regardless of what anyone claims. For the comms lead the guardrails matter more than almost anywhere else: a fabricated statistic in a CEO's byline is a reputational event in its own right.

The AI-native operator

The premium is already visible. An EA or Chief of Staff who can design, build, and govern the office's AI layer is worth more than one who cannot, and the gap is widening. Firms that price this correctly will secure the top of the market. Firms

that try to hire the traditional profile at the traditional price and add “AI skills” to the description will get neither.

To assess whether a candidate really understands the fundamentals, ask them to describe a workflow they have built, end to end, in plain language. The answer should follow a recognizable shape: **data flow, then the model, then data manipulation, then the pass to a frontend or function**. Where does the information come from? How does it reach the model? What does the model do with it? What happens to the output?

A candidate who can walk through that chain and name the failure points has the fundamentals. A candidate who talks about prompts and tools without ever mentioning where the data lives does not.

Three areas to probe

- **Data hygiene and accurate outputs.** How do they check the model is right, and what breaks when the source data is wrong?
- **Constraints in AI.** Context limits, hallucination, drift, and cost, all of which anyone who has built something real will have hit.
- **Constraints in data security.** What they would refuse to put through a model, and why.

The last question separates a competent builder from a liability.



How to hire

Scoping, sourcing, assessment, references, and chemistry.

Scoping

Scoping is the work that decides whether the hire succeeds, and it happens before a description is written. It answers three questions.

Which part of the leverage model is this seat relieving? Time, authority, information, narrative, or execution. Naming it prevents the most common mis-hire, which is wanting one kind of leverage and buying another. A principal who says they need a Chief of Staff but describes a calendar problem needs an EA. A principal who says they need an EA but describes unowned cross-functional projects needs a Chief of Staff. Most seats touch more than one part of the model, and the scope should say which ones and in what proportion.

What exactly will the role cover? The recurring outputs it owns, the decisions the person can make without asking, who they interface with on the principal's behalf and at what level of authority, and what is explicitly out of scope with a named owner for each of those things instead.

For a Chief of Staff, this is where the version of the role gets decided: owner of specific outcomes, keeper of secondary responsibilities, rotational talent hire, or a blend. For an EA supporting a UHNW principal, it is where personal and family support is defined or excluded.

Where does it sit? If an office already exists, the scope has to describe the boundaries with every other seat in it, because the failure mode is overlap rather than gaps. If no office exists, the scope should describe how the role supports the principal directly, and what happens when the principal is unavailable.

Tight scope and open scope are both viable, and the choice should be deliberate. Tight scope produces precision, clear accountability, and an easier search, because the market can be mapped against defined requirements. Its risk is a capable person waiting for instruction.

Open scope produces initiative and a person who grows with the principal, and it suits environments where the work genuinely cannot be predicted, which is most of the UHNW world and most early-stage companies. Its risks are scope creep, burnout, and collision with other seats.

The role attracts work either way: every leader in the firm will try to hand the Chief of Staff their unowned problems, and the principal has to protect the scope or the seat becomes an expensive dumping ground.

Revisit the scope annually, and whenever the business changes shape. A seat that is still doing what it was hired to do three years later is either well designed or underused, and it is worth knowing which.

Sourcing

Most firms believe these seats are straightforward to fill, which is the first problem. An Executive Assistant role looks well defined, a Chief of Staff role looks like a generalist one, and an analyst or communications seat looks like a smaller version of a job the firm already hires for. So internal talent teams post the role, collect two hundred applications, and assume the search is covered.

What they cannot do from a résumé or an interview is tell a good candidate from a great one, because the traits that separate them sit beneath the title in every seat. For an EA, it is judgment under pressure and discretion. For a Chief of Staff, it is the ability to carry borrowed authority and deliver outcomes without formal power. For an analyst, it is synthesis a principal can act on in fifteen minutes. For a communications lead, it is knowing what not to say. None of it shows up on paper. The result is a competent hire who unravels in month three, and a search that starts again.

The best candidates are never in the applicant pool. They already have a seat, a salary, and a working relationship with a principal they understand. They are retained by principals who know exactly what they have, and they move through referral and discreet approach, never through a job board.

Each seat draws from a different market. Senior EAs who can operate at public company CEO altitude are few, and almost none of them are looking. Technical Chiefs of Staff come from banking, consulting, private equity, and corporate strategy, so a firm is competing with those industries for the same person; analysts come from the same pools at an earlier stage. Communications leads who have run a principal's narrative from inside a functioning office, rather than from an agency or a corporate function, are rarer still. Reaching any of them requires a market map built for that seat, a confidential approach, and a reason to take the call.



7.3

Assessment

Anyone can interview well. Few can perform. People at this altitude spend their working lives in rooms with senior people, so they can hold their own in an interview by default. That polish is real, but it is a product of altitude rather than evidence of judgment. The signal that matters is how someone communicates and decides under operational pressure, and a structured conversation does not produce it.

Anyone can interview well. Few can perform.

Every shortlisted candidate on a Blackbook search goes through Blackbook Assess, our proprietary scenario-based assessment platform built exclusively for Executive Assistants, Chiefs of Staff, and Office of the CEO talent.

It is engineered per mandate: the scenarios are drawn from the principal's actual world, the sections are weighted to what the principal values, and the candidate works through them under time pressure with no way to copy, paste, or rehearse. Four question types produce one signal:

- Long-form responses, read for judgment and sequencing.
- Choice-and-justification questions, where the reasoning matters more than the option.
- Document review tasks that test whether the candidate catches what is wrong.
- The Tower of London, a cognitive exercise in executive function measuring planning, deliberation, response to complexity, and execution quality.

The competencies scored are the ones the market rewards at the top: commercial acumen, prioritization under conflict, discretion and information hygiene, stakeholder communication, executive leverage, and operational fluency.

The cognitive exercise: the Tower of London

Figure 10

The Tower of London inside Blackbook Assess

Problem 7 of 12: reproduce the goal arrangement in five moves. The pegs hold three, two, and one disc.

Tower of London
Problem 7 of 12 · Attempt 1/3 · 0/5 moves

6 : 35

Tap another peg to place it (back and forth is fine)

Goal — match this

Holds 3 Holds 2 Holds 1

Your board

Holds 3 Place here Place here

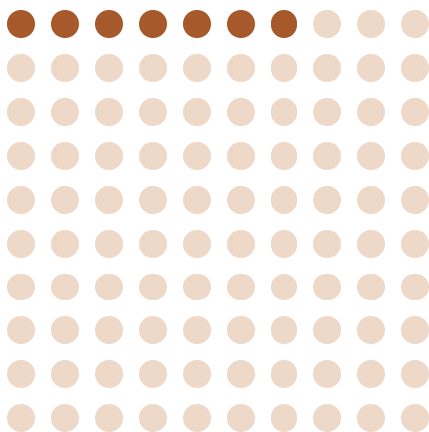
Put disc back

The cognitive section of every assessment is the Tower of London, a planning exercise introduced by the neuropsychologist Tim Shallice in 1982, while he was at the National Hospital in London, and now one of the most widely used measures of executive function. Shallice later returned to University College London, where he became the founding director of its Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience in 1996. The candidate rearranges colored discs across three pegs to match a goal in a set number of moves. Because each peg holds a different number of discs, the obvious first move is often the wrong one, so the problem has to be solved before the first disc is lifted.

That is the habit a principal relies on every day: thinking several steps ahead before acting. We score planning time, move efficiency, and accuracy, and weight the exercise as one section of four, read alongside the scenario work, the interviews, and the references.

The bar is calibrated to what separates the best in the market, and it does not move to fit the field. In our most recent EA round, more than 300 candidates completed the assessment and 7 percent came out with a Strong Yes, the highest hiring recommendation the report produces and the one reserved for candidates whose scored performance says they will do the job well from the start.

The two competencies that separated them were commercial acumen and thinking ahead. Both are what a principal pays for. Both are close to invisible in an interview.



7%

of the 300+ candidates in our most recent EA round came out with a **Strong Yes**, the highest recommendation Blackbook Assess produces.

What separated them

Commercial acumen
Thinking ahead

The report is deliberately not the primary hiring signal. It is read alongside the interviews and the reference conversations to assess the gaps in between: how the candidate communicates, how they follow up, how they handle a brief that

shifts, and how willing they are to make things work and make life easy for the principal.

Those gaps show whether someone who interviews well will actually perform in the seat. We watch them closely, because the best candidates behave the same whether or not anything is being scored.

7.4

References

Reference conversations with prior principals tell you more than the résumé, and they should be held directly with the principal rather than through HR. The questions that matter are the ones the assessment cannot answer: what the person was like on a bad day, what they pushed back on, what they were trusted with, and whether the principal would hire them again without hesitation. A reference that cannot answer the last question directly is an answer.

7.5

Chemistry

The principal is the job. When one of these people evaluates an offer, they are not assessing a promotion. They are assessing two things: the environment, and the principal. The process should give a strong candidate a real chance to make that choice, which means time with the principal early, not a final-round formality.

Chemistry cuts both ways. Principals do not want people with sharp elbows. Across searches in private equity, investment banking, and large technology firms, executives consistently reject candidates who are aggressive, territorial, or ruthless in how they operate, even when those candidates are effective.

They want someone who offsets their energy rather than mirrors it, who can hold a line without leaving a trail of bruised egos, and who represents the principal well in rooms the principal is not in.

Equally, the strongest candidates in every seat, whether EA, Chief of Staff, analyst, or communications lead, will not sign up for a principal who is difficult in ways that have nothing to do with high standards, and they can spot one quickly. Where an office already exists, the candidate should meet it, and the existing members' views should carry real weight.

Failure modes

The mistakes in this market repeat. Most of them come from one of three errors: treating the seats as interchangeable, importing a job description from a different industry, or hiring for a title rather than a scope.

The EA and Chief of Staff confusion. Firms routinely post a Chief of Staff role when they want a senior EA, and vice versa. An EA's leverage runs through the principal's time; a Chief of Staff's runs through the principal's authority. If the role is about protecting and organizing the principal, it is an EA role. If it is about owning outcomes across the business, it is a Chief of Staff role.

Hiring across the boundary. A tech start-up EA placed with a public company technology CEO. Both are credible operators, but one has run on speed, informality, and open scope, and the other has to work inside disclosure rules, board governance, and an earnings calendar where a single error is visible to the market. The environment determines the profile.

The environment determines the profile.

The title change that changes nothing. A senior EA promoted to Chief of Staff with a new title, no new mandate, no new compensation, and no replacement in the EA seat. The newly promoted Chief of Staff keeps doing the EA work because nobody else was hired, and the transition stalls.

Wanting one quadrant and paying for another. Firms want strategic, technical outcomes and hire an organizational Chief of Staff, or want cadence and coordination and hire a former banker who leaves in a year.

The Chief of Staff as bottleneck. Everything routes through them. The leadership team treats them as the principal's spy. The principal uses them to avoid difficult conversations they should be having directly.

The undesigned office. More than one person supporting the principal with no written ownership. The signs, in the order they usually appear:

- The principal is asked the same question by two members of the office.
- Preparation for a significant meeting arrives late or in two conflicting versions.
- The principal starts scheduling their own meetings because it is faster.
- Members of the office escalate disagreements with each other to the principal.
- External stakeholders receive inconsistent messages.
- The principal's time allocation bears no relation to their stated priorities.

Any two together mean the operating model needs attention before any further hiring.

Loyalty over performance. A suboptimal person kept in the office because they have been there a long time. Mistakes at this altitude are seriously damaging, and the cost compounds through everything the principal touches.

Replacing everyone at once. Changing every seat in one go loses the knowledge the office has built up, creates politics that take months to settle, and produces exactly the disorder it was meant to fix. Change one seat at a time.

The commodity search. Posting the role, collecting two hundred applications, and hiring the best interviewer. Interviews measure how someone interviews. The people who can do these jobs at the top of the market are not in the applicant pool and would not respond to a posting if they were.

AI on the description, not in the price. Adding "AI skills" to a traditional profile at the traditional price, and getting neither.

Engaging Blackbook Associates

Blackbook Associates is a retained executive search firm with one focus: building the teams behind exceptional leaders. Executive Assistants, Chiefs of Staff, communications leads, analysts, and the Office of the CEO as a whole, placed with principals across all industries, including Big Tech, global finance, and family offices. Our mandates run across New York, California, Austin, Miami, Connecticut, and the other major US centers.

We are trusted partners to companies valued in excess of a trillion dollars, through to boutiques and private families. Our placements support some of the world's most admired CEOs, founders whose names define their categories, and the senior executives of the institutions that move global capital.

Generalist search firms do not understand this market. They see individual roles rather than the structure around a principal, so they fill a seat without asking what it is meant to relieve or how it interacts with the seats beside it. They rarely have the network to reach people who are not looking, or those at the very top of this profession. We built the firm to do only this, and the market we serve is small enough that we know most of the people in it.

Every mandate is retained and exclusive, and led by a senior consultant with real depth in this market. Each search includes a structured brief built from the frameworks in this report, a bespoke market map, confidential headhunting, Blackbook Assess on every shortlisted candidate, reference conversations with prior principals, and a six-month replacement guarantee.

We advise on the shape of the office before we fill a seat in it, and we will tell a principal when the role they have written is the wrong role.

If you are building or rebuilding an office, or hiring one seat in it, we would welcome the conversation.

Credit



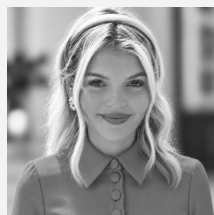
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