



**CHIEF
ADMINISTRATIVE
OFFICER
AUDIENCE**

CITY HALL
HÔTEL DE VILLE

Table of Contents

Chief Administrative Officer AudienceC-1

IntroductionC-2

The Top Ten Ways A CAO Can Effectively Use Their Executive Assistant to Improve Their ProductivityC-4

Tips For The CAO in Hiring an Executive AssistantC-6

A Business Case to Hire an Executive AssistantC-6

How to Hire a Great Executive AssistantC-7

- Top Characteristics of a Great Executive AssistantC-7
- The Hiring ProcessC-8
- How to Finetune the Job Interview QuestionsC-9

Finding the Right Personality and FitC-9

Helpful ResourcesC-10

Creating a Partnership With Your Executive AssistantC-11

How to Create a Dynamic Partnership with Your Executive AssistantC-11

The Importance of the CAO - Executive Assistant RelationshipC-11

The Importance of Having a Performance Evaluation with Your Executive AssistantC-14

How Can You Help Your Executive Assistant Grow and Develop?C-15

Being a Role Model for Work-Life BalanceC-18

How to Foster Healthy Working RelationshipsC-20

How to Delegate WiselyC-20

Getting the Most from Your Executive AssistantC-23

What is the Most Rewarding Aspect of Being Executive Assistant to the CAO?C-26

This chapter is for the Chief Administrative Officer Audience but is part of the “Toolkit for the Effective Executive Assistant to the Chief Administrative Officer” which can be found on the CAMA website at this [link](#).

Introduction

Executive Assistant is not just a fancy name for a secretary that is sitting outside the boss' office door – they are so much more and are sometimes known as the CAO's "secret weapon", "gatekeeper", "ears and eyes", "trusted confidante", and liaison to the senior management team.

They are your business partner, ensuring that you and the municipality meet their goals every day and are successful. Once you find a good partner, it is in your best interest to build a strong relationship based on a high level of trust, honesty, and open communication. Your Executive Assistant will then develop a strong sense of loyalty to you.

CAOs who see their role as a partnership with the Executive Assistant are often the most successful, as the success of the CAO is a reflection on the Executive Assistant and vice versa.

When the Executive Assistant is treated as an equal to the CAO, rather than as a subordinate, they feel more appreciated. It is also important to make your Executive Assistant a member of your executive leadership team since they will often have the authority to speak on your behalf and stand up and take the lead when a situation requires it. This sends a clear message to your leadership team and the rest of the employees in the organization, and provides the Executive Assistant with more respect, which is often overlooked in this undervalued position. There needs to be a greater understanding of the influence that the Executive Assistant has **without the big title**.

Having appreciation for the role of the Executive Assistant in local government, the Board of the Canadian Association of Municipal Administrators (CAMA) former a committee to recognize the important of this position.

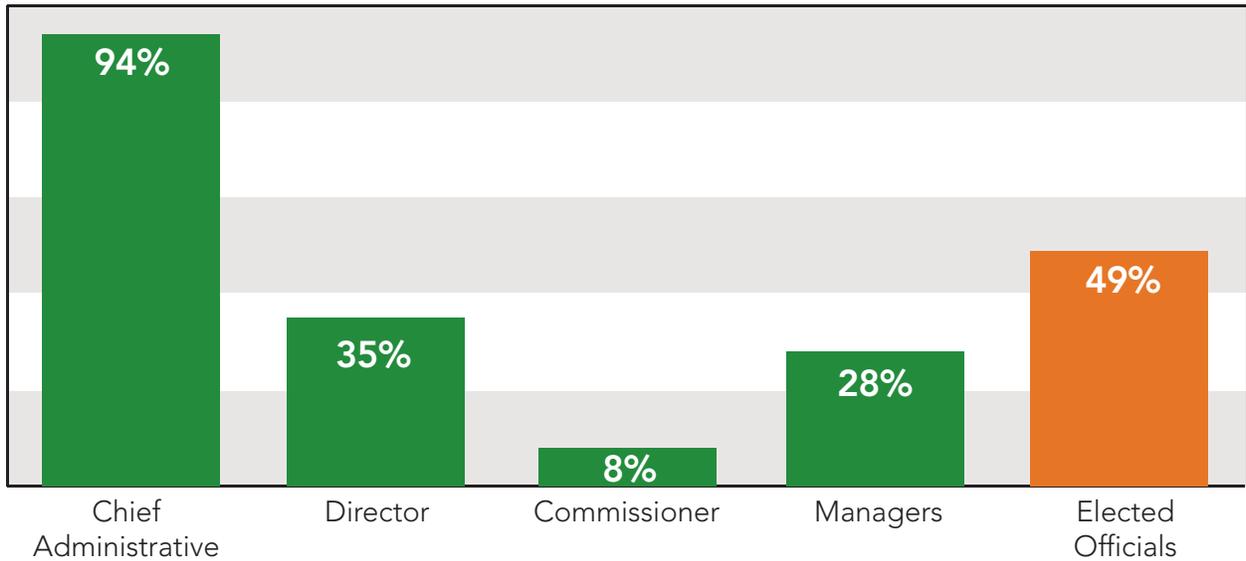
The **Toolkit for the Effective Executive Assistant to the Chief Administrative Officer** is the result of the efforts of this National Committee, led by Jennifer Goodine (CAMA Executive Director and former Office Administrator to a CAO and Mayor) comprised of Executive Assistants that work or have worked with CAOs and direct reports across Canada from all size municipalities. This Toolkit will help Executive Assistants understand how they change their community every day, gain a new perspective on their role and the many benefits that they bring to the Chief Administrative Officer and the organization, highlighting this position across the country.

The Board believed that it was also important to include this chapter for the CAO audience to provide you with some guidance on ways to build a partnership with your Executive Assistant. The topics range from the hiring process (with a sample job description, posting, and interview questions), a business case to your Council if you don't currently have a staff member in this position, to finding the right personality and fit. There are also some tips on how to foster a healthy working relationship with your Executive Assistant by communicating often, providing performance evaluations, supporting their professional goals, and delegating more so you can concentrate on the higher-level strategic direction of the organization and keeping the Mayor and Council satisfied.

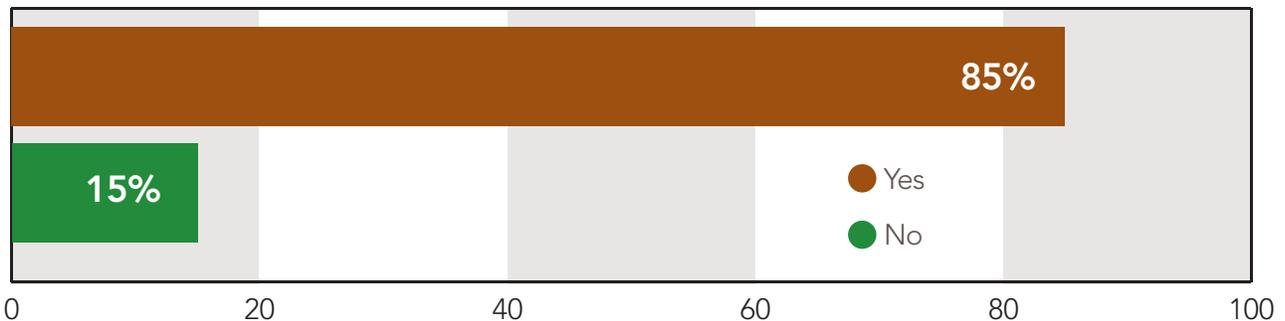
It wouldn't have been possible to create the Toolkit without the support of you, our members, and your Executive Assistants, who completed our 2022 CAMA Survey. Hearing from both sides, you will see many of the results noted throughout the Toolkit to provide you with a Canadian perspective on the Executive Assistant to the CAO role.

In the survey, 94% of the Executive Assistants indicated they provide administrative support to the Chief Administrative Officer, 35% to the Directors, 28% to Managers, and 8% to Commissioners. **However, 49% also work for both the CAO (and other members of the senior management team) and the elected officials.** The data indicated that 85% of CAOs have Executive Assistants that also provide support to other staff or elected officials in the organization. This recognizes not only the importance of the position to the CAO, but also to other individuals that the Executive Assistant provides administrative and executive level support to.

Q9 To whom in your organization do you provide administrative support? (Choose all that apply)



Q5 In addition to you, does your Executive Assistant provide support to other staff or elected officials?



The Top Ten Ways a CAO Can Effectively Use Their Executive Assistant to Improve Their Productivity

A Day in the Life of a CAO: The Mayor is calling, a Councillor is standing outside your door, you are late for a senior management meeting, there was a watermain break, a structure fire, the media wants an interview, and your son needs to be picked up at school because he's sick – just to name a few of the things that can happen each and every day.

As a CAO, using your Executive Assistant effectively and delegating is one of the most valuable ways to improve your productivity and better balance priorities. They are there to make your life easier and want you to be as successful as possible. Being clear and providing the basics, sets both up for efficiency and success.

“The Executive Assistant to the CAO - Making the Impossible....Possible”

- 1 **Help Them Understand Your Municipal World.** Whether they are new to the municipality and to their role, or have been there for their entire career, every Executive Assistant needs to know how you and the organization operates. Share your knowledge about local government, how the office works, and how the organization operates.
- 2 **Share Your Specific Preferences.** Your Executive Assistant needs to know your specific preferences so they can complete your tasks better than you can yourself. Be upfront about everything from what type of restaurants you like for lunch meetings, what meeting room you prefer, the specific font you use for letters and e-mails, etc. This information can be kept in a checklist for future reference.
- 3 **Communicate Daily & Effectively.** An expert Executive Assistant will learn to anticipate your needs, but they don't read minds. Communicate your expectations and share information with them **daily** to ensure they have what they need to make decisions on your behalf. Be available when they need you and keep them in the loop.
- 4 **Be Honest and Clear About Your Expectations.** Honesty goes a long way with any employee. Tasks need to be presented concisely and expectations clearly set in the beginning.
- 5 **Give Constructive Feedback.** If you don't provide constructive feedback shortly after the mistake it will never get corrected. Executive Assistants work hard every day to help you be successful, so provide them with specific details on how you would like them to improve and encourage them to ask questions. Conducting an annual performance evaluation is also expected.

- 6 **Delegate.** If you have a new Executive Assistant, it may be difficult for you to determine what to delegate. Start with the ongoing tasks like scheduling your meetings, managing your travel, creating reports and agendas, etc. and move on to delegating authority to make decisions on your behalf when you feel comfortable.
- 7 **Build a Respectful & Trusting Relationship.** Act with a level of respect that you would expect to receive - they are a professional with professional experience just like you. Plan to meet regularly with your Executive Assistant to provide updates on all aspects of the organization including the political nuances. This will allow them to be able to navigate through any situations very quickly having the knowledge and background ahead of time.
- 8 **Show Your Gratitude, Appreciation & Support.** A great Executive Assistant makes you look good so be generous with praise when it's due. A simple "great job" goes a long way. The days get busy, but take a moment to check in with them and get to know them both professionally and personally to make sure they are doing okay. Also, supporting their professional development goals and providing them with the right resources in the right places helps them succeed.
- 9 **Inclusion.** Treat them as part of your leadership team and include them in important meetings so they have the high-level knowledge of what is happening in the organization. Always involve them in the decision-making process as there are times when they can offer great value with a seat at the table. They often have a lot of insight into issues being the "eyes and ears" of the organization and can provide a different perspective for the CAO.
- 10 **Don't be a Bottleneck.** Your Executive Assistant's job is to speed up the flow of work in and out of the CAO's Office. If things aren't moving quickly enough, the Executive Assistant will bear the brunt because nobody complains to the CAO when they can complain to the Executive Assistant. Ensure that you make it a priority to sign off documents, review Council reports, and complete any tasks on a timely basis.

"The Executive Assistant role is imperative to any successful organization. I often compare their role to being like the wheels on a bus, and our leaders are the bus itself. Without its wheels, a bus cannot move!"

-Executive Assistant

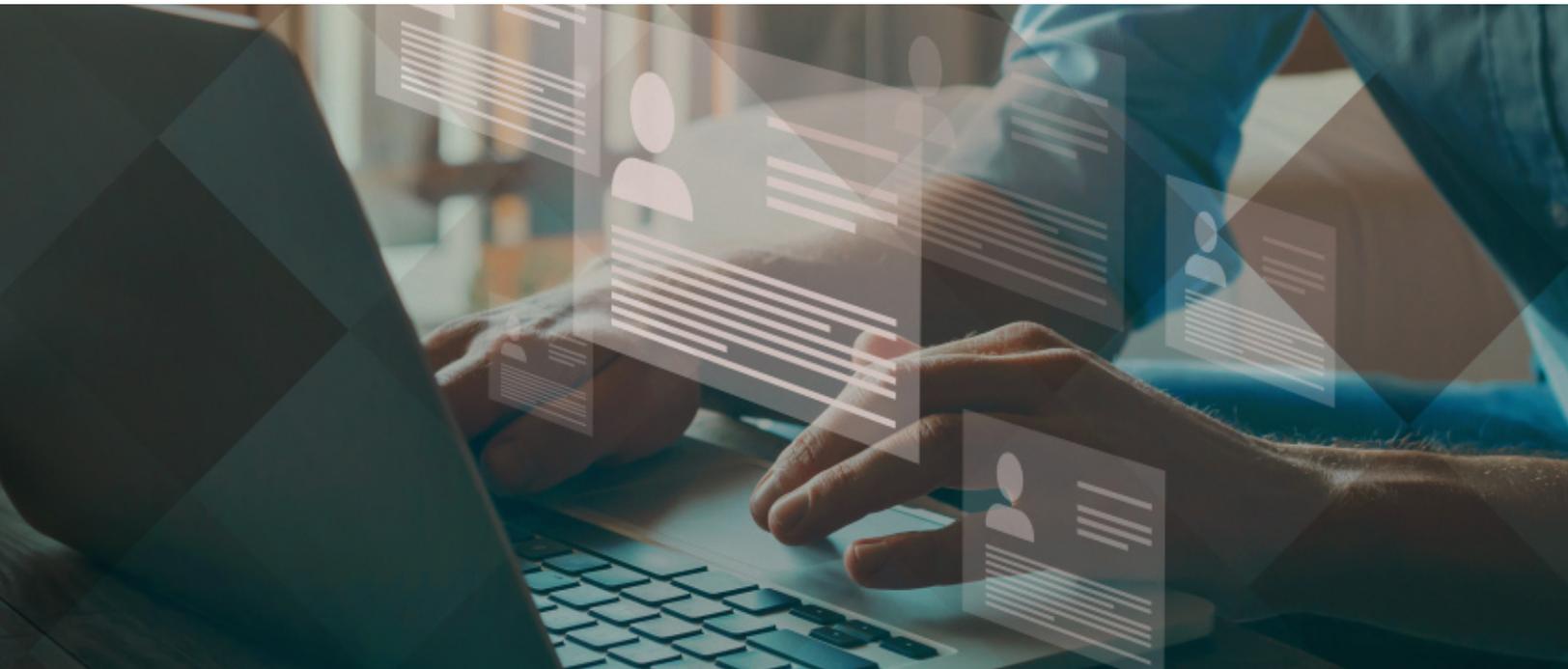
Tips For The CAO in Hiring an Executive Assistant

In addition to finding the right fit for the organization, our CAMA members told us the most important characteristics that they look for when hiring a new Executive Assistant are excellent communication and organizational skills, loyalty and trust, professionalism, the anticipation of their needs and preferences, and working independently, always with a positive attitude.

This means they are not constantly relying on the leader's direction for every little task they need to perform. This also is a testament to the CAO delegating authority to the Executive Assistant. One CAO stated that "an Executive Assistant must have a servant's heart" - truer words were never spoken.

A Business Case to Hire an Executive Assistant

Many small municipalities are unlikely to have an Executive Assistant position due to limited financial and human resources. This translates into the CAO having to do the administrative tasks in addition to his/her regular duties. Have you reached the point where you simply don't have enough hours each week to get everything done, and hiring an Executive Assistant may be a great solution to your problem - and Council may be open to the idea? If this is your status, we have provided you with a sample [Business Case Template](#) to present to your Council outlining the position and how it would assist you in focusing more on staff and Council's strategic priorities.



How to Hire a Great Executive Assistant

Top Characteristics of a Great Executive Assistant

Hiring the right Executive Assistant can be a challenge as the one-on-one dynamic is so important - sometimes more so than the skills or experience. Good Executive Assistants will pay close attention to the boss' behaviour and learn what they need, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and how best to accommodate their personal style. The Executive Assistant is "the face" of the CAO's Office and they represent senior leadership.

In the 2022 Survey, CAOs were asked to list the top three characteristics they valued most in their Executive Assistant.

This list of the "Top 10" is almost identical to what the Executive Assistants told us about the skills they feel are most important in their job:

- ① Excellent Communication
- ② Organizational Skills
- ③ Detail Oriented
- ④ Time Management
- ⑤ Critical Thinking/Proactivity
- ⑥ High Level of Confidentiality
- ⑦ Ability to Work Independently / Self-Driven
- ⑧ Adaptability in a Changing Environment
- ⑨ Professionalism
- ⑩ Trust and Integrity

Information Technology Skills, Multi-tasking, Diplomacy, and the Ability to Perform Under Pressure were also mentioned by the Executive Assistants in their "Top 10" list. These characteristics were noted by the CAOs as well but didn't rise to the top.

The Hiring Process

If you need to hire a new Executive Assistant here are some tips to help navigate the process:

- 1 Think about your requirements.** To determine the qualifications that you want in an Executive Assistant, review the above-noted “Top 10” list but also think about what level of administrative assistance you require based on your needs. Do you need an assistant that does basic administrative responsibilities, one that handles those tasks but also assists with projects, preparing for meetings, scheduling travel logistics, etc., or one that can fill a more strategic role by providing objective advice, participating in meetings, spearheading projects, and managing important assignments all on your behalf. It's important that you choose the type of person that you need based on the support that you require, and the expectations are set from the beginning.
- 2 Advertise the position.** Now that you know what level of an Executive Assistant you require, you need to write the job description and prepare the job posting advertisement with the assistance of your Human Resources Department (if you have one). Posting the job locally but also on multiple job sites will boost the presence. Included in this Toolkit is a sample [job description](#) and [job posting](#).
- 3 Review of Job Applications.** This task may be completed by the Human Resources Department, however you may also want to be involved in the screening of the applicants. Don't be surprised if you receive interest from unqualified candidates that don't have any Executive Assistant experience. You may or may not want to train someone from scratch, but you may also miss out on an ambitious candidate that is willing to learn. LinkedIn is also another recruitment channel to consider Executive Assistants who are not currently looking for a job but may be interested if they are sought out and you are impressed with their profile and skill set.
- 4 Arranging Interviews.** Your Human Resources Department (if you have one) has experience in studying resumes, screening candidates, arranging interviews, and asking the right questions. Letting them handle these initial steps will save you a lot of time. [CAMA's Human Resources Toolkit](#) also provides some great tips.



How to Finetune the Job Interview Questions

When it comes to the in-person interview, make time to properly prepare. After all, you'll be working closely with the person you choose so you will want to find out as much about their skills and poise as possible. Fashion your questions in a way to elicit the most revealing answers. CAMA has provided you with a sample set of [interview questions](#) in this Toolkit specific to the Executive Assistant to the CAO position, however, here are some additional questions for your consideration:

- ① What kind of work environment brings out your best performance?
- ② How would you describe your ideal boss?
- ③ What appeals to you about our organization and this Executive Assistant job?
- ④ Can you tell me about a workplace conflict you were involved in while in an administrative role and how you handled it?
- ⑤ How do you go about learning new software programs and keeping up with technology?
- ⑥ How do you anticipate the needs of the senior leader you're supporting?
- ⑦ Tell me about a project you are particularly proud of managing.
- ⑧ Why are you leaving your current job?
- ⑨ How would your co-workers describe you as a team member? As a team leader?
- ⑩ What have you done at your current company to save time or reduce costs?

Finding the Right Personality and Fit

Hiring the right Executive Assistant can be a challenge. In some ways it's trickier than filling one of your senior management positions, because personal chemistry and the one-on-one dynamic are so important - sometimes more so than skills or experience. You should be directly involved as one of the interview panelists, as you are choosing your work partner. As noted, some candidates may be very qualified, with many years of experience working in the Executive Assistant role, however, may not have the right personality for your leadership style and the organization. Some may have less experience, but you "click" with them which is promising for a good future partnership.

While the requirements and preferences that you listed on the job posting for your new Executive Assistant should serve as your guide throughout the interview process, you need to rely to some degree on your gut. Is this a person who can be a true partner to you? This is the most important, as your relationship with your Executive Assistant will be the secret to your success as a CAO. While you want to find someone with a personality and work style that's consistent with your own, you may also want to think about the skills and qualities you don't have, to create some balance in the relationship.

Your Executive Assistant doesn't just manage your calendar and book your flights - he/she is your partner that will keep you balanced as you both maneuver through some chaotic days in your municipality. Working with someone so closely and in such diverse ways calls for a professional who is a good communicator, troubleshooter and problem-solver who uses their discretion on confidential matters - all without any direction from you. They help you read and understand the organizational culture, guide you through different (and difficult) personalities, and serve as a sounding board. They are reverse mentors, using their experience to teach you.

Expert Executive Assistants understand the CAO's unspoken needs and have high levels of emotional intelligence. They pay close attention to shifts in their boss' behaviour and temperament and understand that timing and judgment are the foundation of a smooth working relationship. Good matches are hard to come by and that's the reason why so many good assistants will follow their boss from job to job. Simply put, the best Executive Assistants are indispensable.

Given the new hybrid working environment, you should also take into consideration the fact that communication will be essential using all the tools of modern technology.

Identifying an Executive Assistant who is the right fit can be challenging, but taking the time to find one will increase you and your leadership team's productivity and job satisfaction and reduce stress - the key to any CAO's daily life. You both may have different goals, but you know where you are headed, which means a positive impact on the entire community.

Helpful Resources

- [Sample Business Case Template to Council for Hiring an Executive Assistant](#)
- [Sample Job Description of an Executive Assistant to the CAO](#)
- [Sample Job Posting of an Executive Assistant to the CAO](#)
- [Sample Interview Questions for Executive Assistant Position](#)

"Don't ever take responsibility for anyone else's emotions or take it personally. If your CAO, Mayor, or Director seems upset one day, it's likely nothing to do with you."

-Executive Assistant

Creating a Partnership With Your Executive Assistant

How to Create a Dynamic Partnership with Your Executive Assistant

"Communication is key. The CAO needs to have complete trust and faith in that the Executive Assistant is fully capable to 'run the office'."

-Executive Assistant.

"A good Executive Assistant should be able to anticipate what you need before you know what you need – that can only be possible if you bring them up to speed on what is happening. There needs to be trust and confidence in your Assistant's capabilities."

-Executive Assistant

The Importance of the CAO - Executive Assistant Relationship

The importance of the Executive Assistant/Chief Administrative Officer partnership cannot be overstated.

This Toolkit was written to support the Executive Assistant and his/her Chief Administrative Officer/CAO (or other Senior Executive), as they navigate and support their community and organization.

A solid partnership and a smooth-running office is a reflection of both the Executive Assistant and the CAO communicating regularly, and being aware and on top of what is happening in the organization - this speaks volumes to a successful office.

Reviewing the findings from our national survey, it was obvious that the Executive Assistant was not always in the loop or getting the CAO's undivided attention. We know the municipal world/business is a busy one, important business matters are happening constantly, reports need to be written, read and approved, presentations are constantly on the forefront, not to mention our residents and elected officials need the CAO's full focus, always. Every attempt should be made to find time to build that CAO/Executive Assistant relationship.

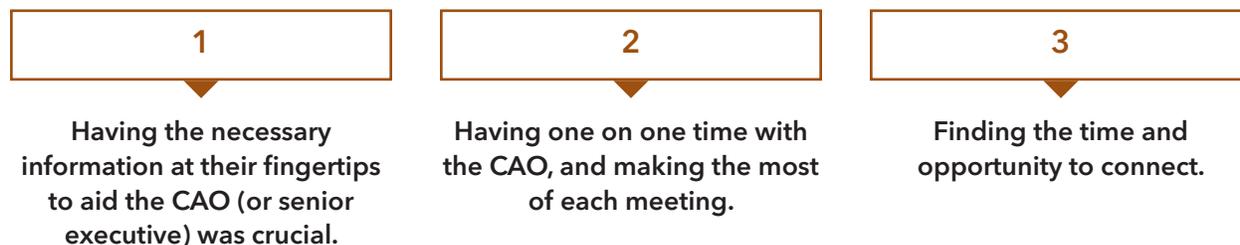
The CAO's **acknowledged** that the

"Executive Assistants need to know that their position is extremely important to the organization, they typically have their finger on the pulse of everything happening in the Mayor and CAO's Office(s), and their role is instrumental in the success of the administration office".

The Executive Assistants were asked "what is the most challenging aspect of being an Executive Assistant to the CAO (or other Senior Executive)?"

Recognizing that it can be a very demanding and stressful work environment, both the CAOs and Executive Assistants agreed that they have demanding workloads, and at times, managing and balancing multiple priorities and tasks simultaneously can become overwhelming. It was also noted that dealing with the public and elected officials can sometimes be difficult. Executive Assistants mentioned that managing multiple people who have different requirements/service level needs and **understanding how things piece together is extremely important to their success, "always being in tune to the pulse of the organization and being aware of any issues that could erupt into problems".**

The Executive Assistants are always anticipating what will be required next? **The top three asks that we heard** were:



So, whether you found your person and just hired a new Executive Assistant or you have been fortunate enough to have had your Executive Assistant for a number of years - here are some tips on how to support each other and communicate with each other whether working remotely or side by side.

- **Be good communicators.** Whether it's in person or by phone, e-mail or text, quality communication is key in an effective partnership. If it's a message that can't be put in writing or could get crypted, set up a Teams call or pick up the phone.
- **Delegate Authority.** We will talk about delegating authority in more detail later in this chapter, however, encourage your Executive Assistant to take initiative and offer their high-level administrative and strategic support.

Why Meeting Regularly Works

PROS

Take some time to reflect on your goals; both the CAO and Executive Assistant must be clear as to what they need or want to accomplish in the upcoming year.

Ensure the Executive Assistant is in the loop of the CAO's timelines (i.e. personal vacation, conferences, training plans.) These all make for seamless planning and smooth calendar scheduling.

An Executive Assistant needs to be heard, respected and trusted, and we heard from you, that they are the "ears and eyes of the organization", "they have the pulse on what is happening". Let them share and trust them.

An Executive Assistant supporting both the CAO, and the Mayor and Councillors Offices can read the political versus corporate pull and differences. He/she can assist in workloads that stem from two very busy offices. Meeting regularly with the CAO results in being in the loop of a potential matter(s) escalating.

Meeting regularly and establishing clear rules and expectations helps everyone "to continue to be one step ahead".

Setting boundaries, working together as a team by committing to building and maintaining a working relationship, "striking a balance".

Meeting regularly can bring important matters, e-mails, meetings, and documents to the forefront early.

CONS

Confidential/sensitive matters could be difficult for the Executive Assistant to understand and/or handle. In some cases, we respect the CAO (or Senior Executive) cannot share everything.

An Executive Assistant that is not in the loop will spend more time (wasting his/her time) rescheduling and juggling calendars.

CAMA members wrote "Executive Assistants working unselfishly, not needing credit". Yes, this might be true but meeting with your Executive Assistant on a regular basis and simply saying thank you and acknowledging a good task goes a long way.

If a CAO is not keeping his/her Executive Assistant in the loop, what does that say to him/her? The CAO is not utilizing their Executive Assistant's full potential.

If you are not meeting regularly how can the Executive Assistant ensure the CAO has sufficient time to concentrate on "strategic planning, budget, deadlines and capital projects". This could result in the CAO feeling overwhelmed and taking work home, more often than maybe necessary.

Not meeting regularly results in increased stress on both ends, chasing deadlines, rushing through important documents, and maybe even missing an important step.

Some Executive Assistants find it intimidating speaking to CAO's (or Senior Executives) especially if they are new to the role. Make them feel comfortable and welcome to share their thoughts.

Advice on Meetings with Your Executive Assistant

Some advice on meeting with your Executive Assistant:

- Don't cancel your one on ones - these meetings are just as important as your other ones.
- Keep them short and frequent, for example, in the morning or the end of the day for 15-minute daily check-ins.
- Your Executive Assistant may prepare a short agenda with their top asks, and you can do the same. Don't deviate from the list.
- Put your Executive Assistant first.

The result will be a well-informed CAO (or senior executive) and his/her Executive Assistant, working seamlessly; after a few months of regular check-ins (not to mention a few years), the partnership becomes stronger. You will also feel less overwhelmed when attending meetings as you are better informed by the Executive Assistant of what is going on.

Including your Executive Assistant makes them feel supported and like they are "helping others be successful" and "making the impossible, possible!".

"Help your Executive Assistant understand your world and share your specific preferences with them so they can make decisions on your behalf. Provide frequent constructive feedback."

-Executive Assistant

"Rarely is an Executive Assistant praised for all they do, and rarely do they seek pats on the back - it often is a thankless job. The reward is knowing that all the effort and dedication contributes to a successful outcome."

-Executive Assistant

The Importance of Having a Performance Evaluation with Your Executive Assistant

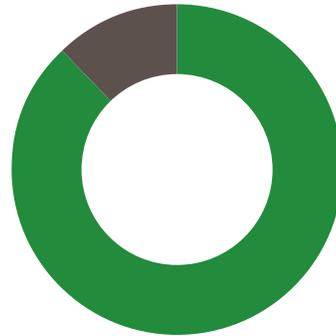
Just like regular performance evaluations are important for the CAO by the Mayor and Council - they are also equally as important for you to conduct one for your Executive Assistant. This will provide you with an opportunity to increase communication, identify goals to support their career objectives, and show appreciation for, and feedback on their work. It will also provide you with an opportunity to recognize and hear about any challenges that they are facing, and like the CAO and Mayor and Council - this should be an **"ongoing process - and not just an annual event"**.

When it comes to setting performance goals, Executive Assistants may have a difficult time establishing objectives since they are involved in so many areas of work within the organization. This Toolkit provides you with a sample [performance evaluation template](#) that assists with this discussion.

The response from the survey was extremely positive.



77% of the Executive Assistants received an annual performance evaluation.

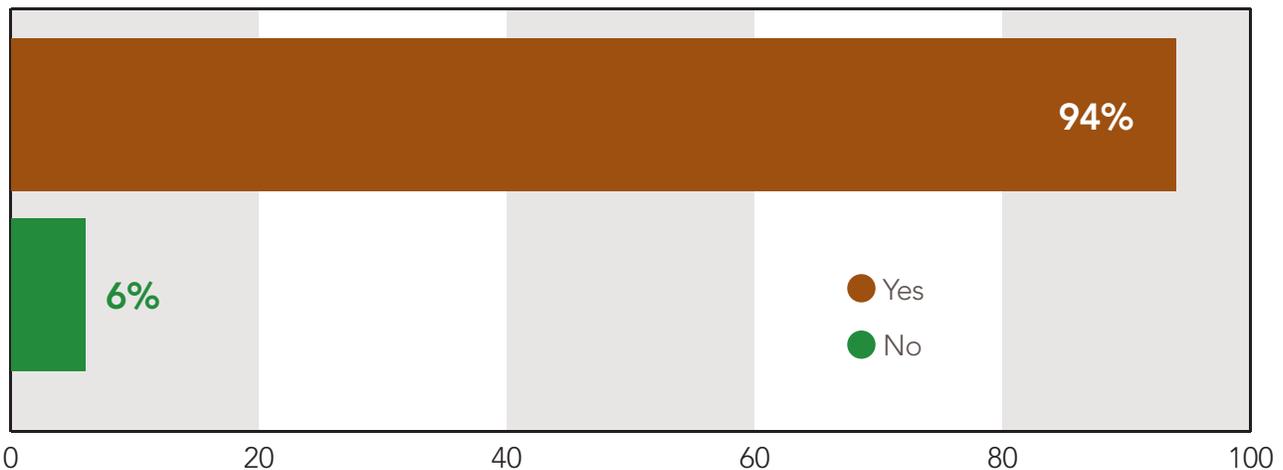


88% of the CAOs provided an annual performance evaluation.

How Can You Help Your Executive Assistant Grow and Develop?

Ninety-four percent (94%) of the CAO survey respondents indicated that they provide their Executive Assistant with a training budget each year to pursue education. The training budgets noted ranged from \$600 to \$10,000 with the average being \$3,000.

Q8 Do you provide a training budget for your Executive Assistant to pursue education each year?



Executive Assistants may be interested in learning about more than just their job so they can ultimately move into other roles within the organization. They may be interested in one day becoming a manager or CAO themselves and you can be the best mentor to them. Remember that the Executive Assistant's job responsibilities are different today than they were thirty years ago – they are rapidly changing, and helping them develop their talents and potential are extremely important for both their personal and professional development.

“For me, the most rewarding aspect of being an Executive Assistant is that I have an amazing boss who I respect and who is invested in my success and progression within the organization.”

-Executive Assistant

In the survey, we asked the Executive Assistants what would help to improve their skills and it was evident that they appreciated more training on the following topics:

- **Executive Assistant Courses.** General administration, business administration, office management and business acumen.
- **Leadership Training.** Managerial courses, the art of supervision, how to think outside the box and how to delegate to others, confidence building, stress management, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and developing resilience during times of change.
- **Communication.** Customer service, public speaking, communicating with authority, effective listening, social media, decision making, and writing.
- **Project Management.** An Executive Assistant manages projects every day on behalf of the CAO. This is a great skill to have.
- **Relationships.** Relationship building with others in the organization, dealing with difficult people, conflict management, having difficult conversations, assertiveness training, and diffusing difficult situations.
- **Time Management.** Training courses on how to get the many tasks done in a more efficient way.
- **Minute Taking.** Having the ability to take minutes confidently for Council or senior leadership meetings is important.
- **Technology.** MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Microsoft Suite, Office 365, social media platforms, and website training.
- **Records Management.** Digital record keeping and record management training.
- **Writing.** Grant writing, report and letter writing, and presentation skills.
- **Organizational Skills.** Task management and how to manage time and priorities, structure, discipline, and multi-tasking.
- **Human Resources.** Organizational behaviour, change management and introduction to human resources courses.
- **Event Planning.** A large part of an Executive Assistant's job is in planning events so a course might be helpful.
- **Local Government.** Understanding by-laws and policies, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, NACLAA courses, political acumen and professionalism with Council, *Municipal Act*, Roberts Rules of Order/parliamentary procedures, Council meeting regulations, *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy*, zoning/planning and development, budgeting, strategic planning, policy development, local government procedure training, general legal information, and learning about different levels of government.

Some Executive Assistants are on their own learning journey and appreciate an annual training budget each year, and welcome networking opportunities with their colleagues in their own Province or Territory or across the country. Others also love to learn new skills on the job through their daily experiences, in-house training, coaching and mentorship. Learning will improve their performance in their current job and prepare them for their future. Providing them with the right resources in the right places helps them succeed.

Be proactive and ask your Executive Assistant each year during the budget process if there are any conferences, webinars, or on-line courses that they would like to participate in. CAMA provides a great [List of Executive Assistant Programs, Resources and Training Tools](#) which includes Conferences that are offered across the country - both virtual and in-person. It may be difficult for you to be without your Executive Assistant for a few days, but keep in mind that his/her learning also benefits you, and the return on investment from a skilled employee can be substantial. It's important to keep their skills current.

In a fast-changing work environment, skills become obsolete. One area that Executive Assistants need to stay ahead of the curve on is with information technology so they can assist you when you need it. The best Executive Assistants are not afraid of new technology and in fact, embrace it. They will routinely look for tools and resources to streamline communication processes and fix inefficiencies in the office. When things go sideways technology-wise, an Executive Assistant rarely has time to wait for IT to fix things. The ability to trouble shoot for you, the boss, is a must-have skill. Therefore, having a strong handle on the latest trends is also critical so they are prepared for any tool that is introduced to the organization.

Having said that, it is important to request that your Executive Assistant and the Assistants in the other municipal departments are trained first on any new software programs, Outlook, meeting technology, etc. to ensure that they know how to use it at the outset, so they have the expertise to assist you and the management team. The CAO's Office must remain up to date on modern technology which can easily become outdated.

Flexibility and the willingness to embrace change are important traits of Executive Assistants, so give them the tools to help them deal with many different opportunities and settings that they face daily. Help them support you.

"I would ask any CAO or senior executive to pass along any resources that they found helpful for themselves; whether it is a training course or reading material, having that general understanding of their workload is very helpful."

-Executive Assistant

The Executive Assistant to the CAO will inevitably experience a certain amount of distance from their colleagues as they are often viewed as a member of the executive team and the boss' secret agent. It's not personal - it's just part of the position. Having said that, sometimes Executive Assistants isolate themselves from the opportunity to network because they work in the "top office". At the same time, this negative behaviour deprives them from learning and growing and in turn, providing better support to the CAO.

Encouraging your Executive Assistant to create an internal network in the organization with the other Executive Assistants will help build morale, provide networking and a forum to share best practices within the organization. Also, you may wish to introduce them to other Executive Assistants within municipal government that you may know across the country through your CAMA network.

Lastly, encourage them to ask you questions if they need clarification or are unsure of something that you have requested, and let them know how much they are valued - which will go a long way towards improving their confidence in their role.

"An Executive Assistant career is a great one. You will always be involved in very exciting endeavors, and it is hard work but so rewarding. It is a step to something more if you choose that path."

-Executive Assistant

Being a Role Model for Work-life Balance

Work-life balance for an Executive Assistant can be challenging at times, as they are often not necessarily nine to five jobs, so there are times where one goes beyond the call of duty. We asked the Executive Assistants what they do for work-life balance, and it was apparent that they do a great job at setting boundaries between their personal and professional lives, take their vacation, practice relaxation and self-care, exercise, enjoy nature, travel, spend time with their families, and enjoy a flexible work schedule.

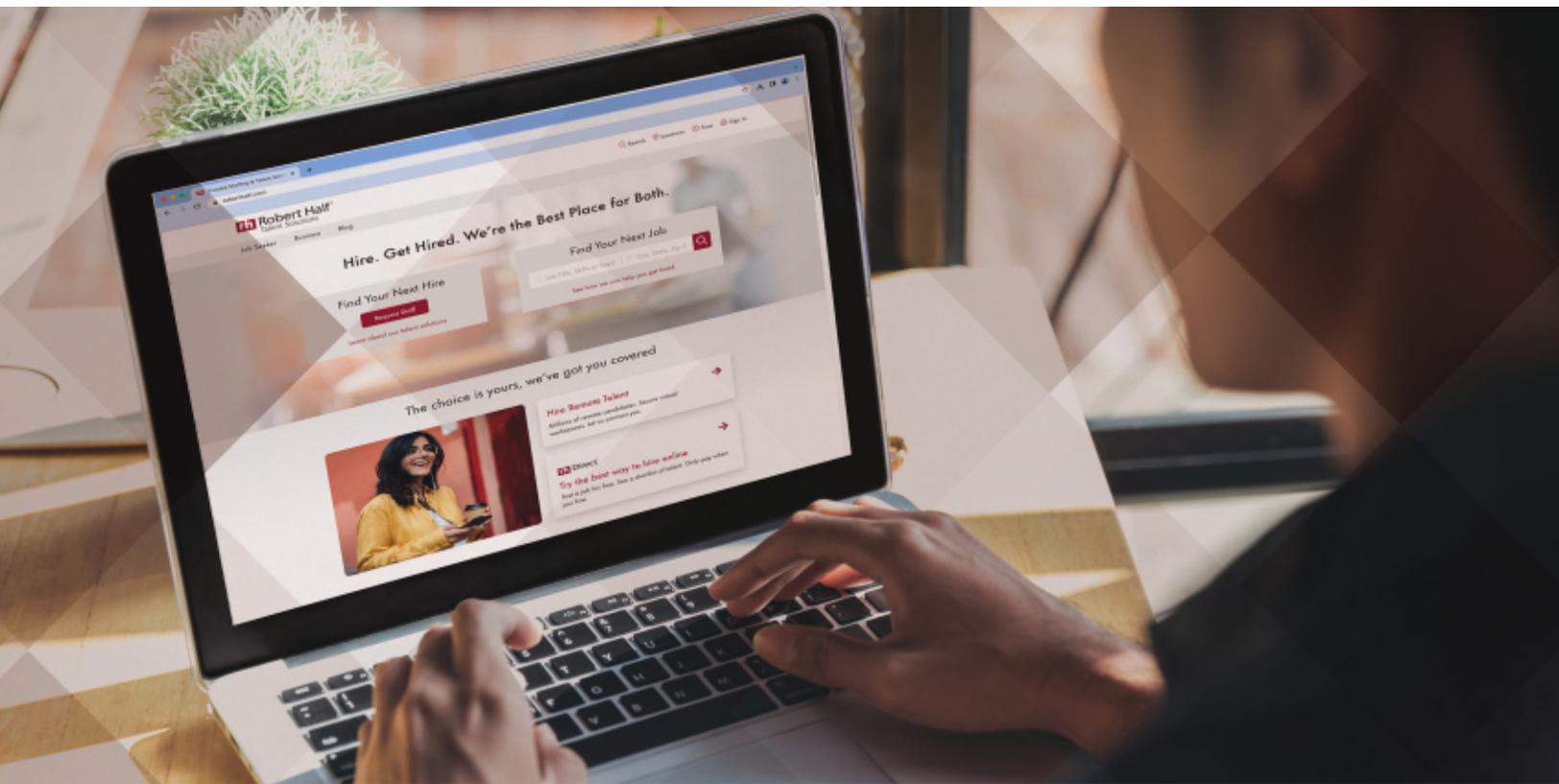
Support from the CAOs was appreciated to ensure Executive Assistants achieved a healthier work-life balance.

"Leave the job when I leave the office. I'm dedicated to my professional goals and obligations while I am at work and equally as dedicated to my personal goals and obligations while I'm not at work. I rely on the support of my manager to ensure this is possible."

-Executive Assistant

"My CAO is incredible at ensuring I am aware that there is no expectation to work through lunch, stay late, etc."

-Executive Assistant



Many survey respondents attributed their work-life balance to the newly introduced hybrid work schedules including a compressed work week, working from home one to two days per week, and a flexible work schedule.

Robert Half Management Resources offers four tips to support the Executive Assistant in achieving a work-life balance:

- 1 **Know what your employees are striving for.** Not everyone has the same work-life balance goals. Talk to each employee about their objectives, and then determine what you can do to help them. Some employees may benefit from working remotely a couple of days each week, while others may prefer altering their daily work schedule. It's important to be open-minded and flexible.
- 2 **Set a good example.** Your employees follow your lead. If you send e-mails at all hours of the day and night or work hard on the weekends, your staff may think that is what is expected of them as well.
- 3 **Let employees know what their options are.** While employers typically do a good job of highlighting their work-life balance offerings to prospective job candidates, the same can't be said for communicating those initiatives to current employees. Regularly discuss with your employees the options that are available to them. Also, sit down with soon-to-be parents and discuss parental leave options.
- 4 **Stay at the forefront.** It is important to keep ahead of the curve on emerging work-life balance trends. What works today for employees might not be a good fit a year from now. Keep your work-life balance initiatives fresh and offer in-demand benefits. Plus, consider offering work-life programs.

How to Foster Healthy Working Relationships

Executive Assistants display high levels of loyalty and dedication. They won't always agree with the CAO's decisions, but their steadfast loyalty to you and their belief in the importance of the working partnership will ensure that they continue at their best. It's important that you know that you can trust them with confidential information that they need to do their job at the highest level.

Boss' must be open regarding their expectations of the Executive Assistant from the beginning.

The hard skills are a given in the Executive Assistant profession, but things like confidence and resourcefulness are intangibles that make this role's impact so much more valuable to an organization. The mindset of a successful Executive Assistant is invaluable. They need to be able to not only do their job, but push their CAOs to another level professionally. They need to have the courage to share their opinions, and the strength to protect their CAO's time. Their focus is to maximize the time and output of their CAO, and that comes from providing them with the best work environment possible. Prioritizing the CAO's schedule to the essentials, making sure they are mentally prepared for meetings and challenges, and really going the extra mile to do as much as they can to allow the CAO as much time to do the things that only they can do. That confidence, consideration and camaraderie builds a foundation for a massively successful working relationship with the CAO and makes the Executive Assistant an invaluable asset to the team.

"Reporting to a high-up official can be intimidating – It's hard to say no".

-Executive Assistant

How to Delegate Wisely

Your willingness as the boss to delegate pieces of your work to your Executive Assistant and their willingness to take on more responsibilities are two key factors. They will take on these responsibilities with a high level of confidence and resourcefulness. Share your thoughts and opinions regularly with your Executive Assistant and depend on each other to solve problems and achieve results.

If you are new to your role as the CAO, your Executive Assistant can be instrumental in helping you navigate the first few months. They become a critical on-boarding resource, helping you maneuver through a variety of new situations and reading the organizational culture, introducing you to Council and staff, and providing you with insight on the inner workings and different (and difficult) personalities of the organization. Never underestimate the power of knowledge.

Younger CAOs have grown up with technology and are self-sufficient, so have become accustomed to doing their own administrative work and don't require an Executive Assistant for this purpose. If this is you, maybe think of your Executive Assistant as a strategic advisor and involve them in other initiatives in your office such as managing teams, leading meetings, overseeing projects – just to name a few.

Some things that you can delegate to your Executive Assistant would be as follows:

- The Executive Assistant should sit in on phone calls and participate in meetings to listen for anything that needs to be done or followed up on. It is the Executive Assistant's job to ensure that promises made by the CAO are promises kept.
- Managing the information flow that comes into the CAO's Office, drafting and responding to e-mails on your behalf, financial and budget management, and taking on a more supervisory role. This tells the Executive Assistant that you trust them representing you to make decisions.
- Reviewing many decisions with your Executive Assistant before you finalize them. They can read complex settings and circumstances in the organization that you may not be aware of.
- Treat your Executive Assistant as a member of your Executive Leadership Team.
- Delegate higher level work to your Executive Assistant.

Also, in our survey, we learned that more Executive Assistants are taking on more supervisory roles. They have a team of other Executive Assistants in the CAO's Office or throughout the organization and have real authority from their boss to represent them and make decisions.

You can often tell a lot about a CAO's management style from the way he/she interacts with their Executive Assistant. Does the CAO trust and delegate, or does he/she micromanage? Do Executive Assistants like working for that CAO, or is there a history of a revolving door?

"Delegate tasks to the Executive Assistant – we are here to make your job easier."

-Executive Assistant

"Let us help you!! We know you are extremely capable, but we can help you and free up some of your capacity and schedule so you can focus on the community as a whole."

-Executive Assistant

"Trust them in their role, you hired them for good reason."

-Executive Assistant

"Someone in this role is typically hungry for challenge. The more opportunity you give your Executive Assistant to assist you, the more valued they will feel. The best thing my boss has ever done is trust me to do things that were challenging. It gave me a chance to prove to not only myself, but to my employer, that I was capable. And that snowballs into better and better service and frees the CAO to do the high-level work that they need to do."

-Executive Assistant

“Delegate – they can take on more than you think!” Freeing up the most precious commodity – your time!”

-Executive Assistant

“Let them manage your calendar! Don’t complain that you are too busy/fully booked when you have accepted all the meetings!”

-Executive Assistant

“Let staff who are professionals do their jobs. Don’t undermine or micromanage.”

-Executive Assistant

“Delegate with expectations clearly laid out, trust your staff, empower them to make decisions.”

- Executive Assistant

“Showing confidence in an Executive Assistant and keeping them involved empowers them to build their own confidence and be engaged.”

-Executive Assistant

“Download to ease workload....this is a team!”

-Executive Assistant

Getting the Most from Your Executive Assistant

“Executive Assistant’s are there to make the CAO’s look good and can be your best asset.”

-Executive Assistant

In the survey, we asked the Executive Assistants “What advice would you give a CAO (or other senior executive) to make the best use of their Executive Assistant?”

It is very apparent that communication and trust is the key in building a strong relationship with your Executive Assistant, as well as meeting with them on a regular basis and keeping them in the loop on all happenings in the organization and community. Delegation, not micromanaging, being open to their opinions and insights, and giving them authority is also the key to a successful relationship with the Executive Assistant - it also doesn’t hurt to check in on how they are doing and ask if they require any training or resources to do their job better.

It is important to treat your Executive Assistant as part of your leadership team and not a glorified secretary. Make sure your Executive Assistant is involved in every aspect of your role and make it well known that your Executive Assistant is an extension of you as CAO, so others view the position with respect and an understanding of responsibility to report and follow direction if direction is given. Treat your Executive Assistant well as they are your best support in the office and will have your back when others won’t. They are your closest team member, your confidante, and your best resource.

Never underestimate the value of your Executive Assistant’s opinions and insights. He/she often has a lot of insight into issues being dealt with by senior management or other employees - they are the “eyes and ears” of the organization. Tapping into their experience and showing respect for it will build your relationship. Always include them in the decision-making process as there are times where they can offer great value with a seat at the table.

When you are building your relationship with your Executive Assistant, give them permission to disagree and discuss matters with you in a respectful manner. They will learn a lot from those discussions, look at things from a different perspective, and understand what your thought style is to accurately reflect any decisions that need to be made on your behalf.

The Executive Assistants provided the following advice to the CAOs:

"Be clear on your directions and expectations." For example, "I want you to respond to these types of e-mails on my behalf without checking..."

"If there is something the Executive Assistant is lacking suggest it right away and not wait until evaluation time as they need to know sooner than later if there is something they need that they are not getting. It is very important to have a close working relationship with each other and if it isn't working changes need to be made right away."

"Build a relationship of give and take, it is just the two of you so trust matters so much."

"Don't be afraid to give me a list of work. I won't be overwhelmed and then will always feel like I'm doing what you need/want."

"Be a team – don't just acknowledge errors, but also any positives."

"Be available when you need them – don't brush them off as often the work requires your input."

"Build strong working relationships. I cannot stress the importance of it enough, the more effective the Executive Assistant, the more effective the CAO...and the more effective the organization, Council, and the community. Working as a team is so much easier and productive than 'lone ships'".

"Use your Executive Assistant! If used effectively, they can help alleviate your workload and help you better balance priorities. They also have their ear to the ground and know more about the organization than most. Be honest and clear with your expectations, be supportive and most of all appreciative. They would do anything for you and want you to be as successful as possible. As they have your back, you too need to have theirs. A successful CAO/Executive Assistant relationship can make all the difference, so really get to know them both professionally and personally".

"The worst thing that one can do is keep the Executive Assistant out of the loop."

"Check in with them and make sure you are on the same track. Make sure their workload is not too large or too little. Be honest with each other."

"Don't decide last minute that you are taking a day off requiring a full calendar day to be rescheduled."

"Communicate – tell them what you need/want. They can't read your mind (yet). Act with a level of respect that you would expect to receive – they are a professional with professional experience just like you and have expectations on behaviour in a professional setting."

"Be completely transparent with expectations. Honesty goes a long way with any employee. Tasks need to be presented concisely and expectations clearly set in the beginning."

"Include them in important meetings so that they have the high-level knowledge of what is happening in the organization."

What is the Most Rewarding Aspect of Being Executive Assistant to the CAO?

The Executive Assistants told us that they find their profession to be extremely rewarding as they get to perform a variety of tasks while supporting the CAO in seeing the vision of the municipality and helping others solve their problems.

There is a strong sense of accomplishment when they see their many projects come to fruition through teamwork, which is most often very much appreciated. This in turn, makes the organization successful and they played a huge part in it behind the scenes.

"You are respected and held in confidence by all levels of the corporation, Council, stakeholders, and the community. You also get a "corporate wide" experience as you are constantly dealing with each and every aspect of the corporation (i.e. finance, infrastructure, strategic planning, legislation, planning, etc.)"

"That I can make a difference in the community by how I support the CAO. I like that I know many different things about what is going on in the community and within our organization. I can help share a different perspective with the CAO at times."

"Doing the behind the scenes work and then seeing great pay off when big moves are made."

"Making the impossible, possible. Facing the daily unknowns and being able to navigate well through them solving problems. Constantly learning. Helping others be effective."

"The most rewarding part is seeing the difference we make in our CAO's day, being there for them through the good and the bad and helping where we can."

"I have had a great career working with some great CAO's who have mentored me and that I totally respect, and they respect me. All advice makes you better."

"For me, the most rewarding aspect is that I have an amazing boss who I respect and who is invested in my success and progression within the organization."

"Seeing your CAO organized and ready to seize the day and being reflected in a positive light."

"Enjoy a lot of autonomy, and my boss lets me often run with the ideas I have pitched to him."

"That alongside your CAO you are facing the same challenges from a different lens. Sometimes the way we view situations and share with our CAO allows them to see a different perspective. It is rewarding when you are heard. The job allows you to learn every day, face the same challenges as our CAO and be effective in the job."

"Working with senior management to affect positive change within the organization and throughout our municipality."

"When major projects come to fruition and you can sit back and enjoy the moment as a team!"

"I like having the big picture of how our entire organization works."

"When you have made your boss shine and they are successful, be it at an event, or in a specific situation."

"Learning experience. I'm not sure that what I've learned in the Executive Assistant role could actually be taught anywhere."