



Job Description

Chief Executive Officer

Overview^{1 2}

Your job is open-ended with pressures that few understand or appreciate. Yours is an art not a science, dependent more on intuition than academically-prescribed technique. There's no clear path. It's difficult to disengage. You're the main link between your business and the outside world, always in the lime light. Your role appears glamorous, but the routine wears thin.

Verbal communication – talking and listening - is the heart of your work, and the foundation for your clout. Your richest insights tend to come from informal networks you've set up. There's limited time for reflection. You're torn between the *could dos* and *must dos*. Adapt to surprises, prefer action, and rapidly convert information into decisions – or you won't last; But never lose sight that shallowness is your primary job hazard.

Then there's the formal organization where you're sandwiched between sharp, discriminating, and demanding directors and an ever-evolving senior leadership team, all at different stages of management and leadership development. Your ability to elicit and decipher the countless inputs flowing from unique talents on both sides of the divide, then aligning them into a coherent strategy and clear direction is the foundation skill upon which your personal and ultimately your business's success resides.

Your title is somewhat inaccurate. Your job and that of any manager is only partially about execution. When you get more involved it's usually when you get into trouble. Your role is to get things to happen through your team, and they in turn through their teams. That boils down to shrewd delegation and effective communication through organizational layers: Easy to say, difficult to do. You have to pass along key information, much of it stored in your head, which devours time. You're constantly torn between continuing to do it yourself, or adding to your workload in the short-term to delegate to someone new. The trade-off is often a high risk proposition. Mastery of those trade-offs is essential to your sustainable effectiveness.

Accountabilities^{3 4}

1. **Self** - You do the internal soul, spirit, and mind work required to withstand the relentless pressures of your position. You are the shadow of what you want to create in others. As you grow, so grows the company.
2. **Relevant Outside** – You choose where and how your company will compete in the world. What is your strategy in simple-to-understand terms? What business are you in? Not in? What markets, customers, suppliers? What geographies, products, services? What is the viable profit model that ties it all together?

¹ "The Role of the CEO," Henry Mintzberg, *Harvard Business Review*, Aug 15, 1998

² "The Problem with the CEO's Job Title," Ludo Van der Heyden, *Harvard Business Review* Nov 7, 2013

³ "The American CEO," Peter F. Drucker, *The Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 30, 2004

⁴ "A CEO Job Description," Stever Robbins, www.steverobbins.com

3. **Information** – You identify and assemble the information you need to stay in touch with your relevant external environment.
4. **Results** – You decide what you want your company to accomplish before and beyond the bottom line. Qualitative and Quantitative. Short, intermediate, and long term.
5. **Priorities** – You choose where your team will focus. It's your most difficult accountability. There are always more projects to accomplish than resources to accomplish them. To what will you say "NO?"
6. **Culture** - You establish a sustainable, life-giving culture that marks your company as a great place to work. Your behavior sets the tone, every one of your actions and inactions scrutinized to some degree and impact others' behavior to some degree.
7. **People** - You hire competent people, put them in roles where they can be most effective, and delegate responsibilities and projects to them that align with their strengths. It's your most important accountability. You're your company's Chief People Officer. Your ability to put folks in the right roles, with the right teams, doing the right things is the greatest determinant of your and your company's success.
8. **Senior Leadership Communication** – You establish and nurture engaging, dynamic, and direct relationships between and among your board chair and directors and between and among your senior leadership team; concurrently relaying timely, meaningful information between the two groups.
9. **Process** - You sponsor and underwrite development of sustainable processes in 3 vital areas: Product and service creation, Customer acquisition and growth, and Production and service delivery that customers embrace.
10. **Capital** – You make the decisions where to allocate capital. Which projects will support strategy? Which ones won't? Which ones need to be ramped up? Tapered down? These are your calls.

Required Skills⁵

1. **Visioning** – Ability to frame your company's business challenges.
2. **Planning** – Ability to generate potential solutions to problems that arise.
3. **Deciding** – Ability to commit to a course of action.
4. **Explaining** - Ability to clearly state rationale behind your key decisions, legitimate expectations owners can hold for results, the approach you'll take, and rewards that success will allow.
5. **Executing** – Ability to align your team around your decisions, spurring them on to see things through to a successful conclusion.
6. **Evaluating** – Ability to routinely step back from your day-to-day program and assess the processes you used to generate your vision, the results and rewards you attained; in search of the mistakes you made along the way and the adaptations you'll make to improve results in your next cycle.

⁵ "The Problem with the CEO's Job Title," Ludo Van der Heyden, *Harvard Business Review*
Nov 7, 2013