

# The startup chameleon: why a flexible Chief of Staff is key to supporting company growth

What do you do as a Chief of Staff? It's a question I'm frequently asked, and one that has a far from straightforward answer. I'd describe it as like being a chameleon: the role is constantly shifting.

---

A single day will see me dive into a vast range of different tasks and responsibilities – lending support and expertise to whichever part of the business needs it most. I might spend the morning discussing company strategy with the CEO and providing updates to our shareholders, before collaborating with the Product or Sales team to ensure each of the projects they are working on is progressing effectively.

It's a hugely flexible and multifaceted role, which reflects the inevitable dynamism of a fast-paced startup. But the role of Chief of Staff becomes increasingly important as you scale. We've grown from a team of just three to over 100 in the past few years at [Patchwork Health](#). Since moving into the position of Chief of Staff, I've seen my role flex and adapt considerably to meet the growing needs of our evolving team.

Below are some of the key skills that have helped me along the way, and which I hope can support others taking on the role of Chief of Staff:

## 1. Communication

As the connector between each of the different teams within a company, the role of Chief of Staff is to ensure that everyone is on the same page when it comes to the company's vision, mission and values. Achieving this – particularly during periods of high company growth or change – requires consistent communication and transparency.

Set aside time every week to regularly check-in with each team, and take a deep dive into what they're currently working on. This will allow you to maintain a detailed understanding of the challenges and concerns they might be facing, and to spot any potential areas that require realignment with the wider organisation. By doing this, you'll be able to connect the dots and bridge communication, helping foster company-wide cohesion and collaboration.

## 2. Perspective

In what can often feel like the break-neck speed of an average start-up or scale-up day, providing 'big picture' perspective is also a key part of the Chief of Staff's role. You need to be able to take a step back and look at both the macro and micro in any given situation. The CEO and other team leaders will turn to you as a sounding board, and it's your job to provide an opinion that's free from any bias or personal leaning.

Keep an open mind and take time to consider each challenge or problem from all angles. Think through the implications from different teams' perspectives, put yourself in your customer's shoes, and measure the potential impact of the various outcomes. By zooming out and ensuring every angle and scenario has been considered, you'll be able to present a balanced and measured opinion to your CEO, fellow senior leaders and wider company, to help support their decision making.

## 3. Honesty

You cannot be shy in giving your honest opinion as Chief of Staff – you need to be comfortable and confident speaking truth to power. There may be times when you and your CEO or senior leaders in the team may have differing opinions, or you believe that there is an alternative option that's not yet been

explored. Voicing this is not only OK, it's part of the job description.

The strength of my relationships with colleagues at Patchwork Health, including with our co-founders, Anas and Jing, means we're able to speak openly with each other and productively debate any and all matters which arise. Nothing is off the table. Building these trusted relationships and being able to act as a respectful 'challenger' is essential to supporting your team to successfully adapt and grow.

## 4. Resilience

If there's one thing that's constant about the role of a Chief of Staff, it's that it never stays the same. Your tasks and responsibilities will evolve as the company grows. You need to be prepared to take on anything – from hands-on frontline delivery to top-level team mediation and decision-making – and swap between these at the drop of a hat.

It can be incredibly rewarding and challenging in equal measure, but it's essential to nurture a strong sense of resilience. This will support you to embrace the necessary flexibility of the role, which will in turn allow you to support your wider team to ride the choppy waves of company growth.

Omar Bhakri is Chief of Staff at [Patchwork Health](#).