

ChiefofStaff
.network

2023 Chief of Staff Pathways Report



○ Introduction

The Chief of Staff role has become incredibly prominent across companies of all sizes, stages, and sectors. Due to the high variability of Chief of Staff job descriptions, the jobs that CoS can “graduate” into are also highly varied.

Our goal for undertaking this research is to assist current and future Chiefs of Staff in understanding their possible career pathways and advocating to achieve them. We collected data about “graduated” Chiefs of Staff (i.e. those who moved onto another role) and considered demographic factors such as gender, location, and education, as well as the seniority levels, functions, and roles that these graduates find themselves in today. We will refer to these CoS as “alumni” throughout our report.

If you’d like to discuss the report and elevate your career through peer support, upskilling, and thought leadership, join the [Chief of Staff Network](#). We invite you to apply [here](#).

○ About the Chief of Staff Network

Since 2017, the Chief of Staff Network has been leading the way in developing the Chief of Staff role into one of the most exciting positions in the private sector.

Through community-led research, shared stories and experiences, and education programs designed to maximize the CoS experience for individuals and teams, our platform has supported hundreds of Chiefs of Staff in daily execution, learning & development, career navigation and more.

As Chiefs of Staff become an even more prominent part of leadership teams and beyond, our commitment to our members is to be there at every step of their journey. We achieve this by building the ecosystem to help the role develop and the professionals in it to succeed.

○ Methodology

We analyzed publicly available data on ~400 alumni of the Chief of Staff Network, spanning educational history, work history, skills, endorsements, location, and more. We painstakingly combed through this unstructured data to remove erroneous information and verified collected data to the extent possible.

However, we do acknowledge that public data from sources such as LinkedIn, just like self-reported survey data, can have faults, especially around credential and title inflation. LinkedIn is social media, after all. With that said, we have made best efforts to draw statistically significant conclusions about the Chief of Staff role and its potential graduation pathways. With about ~30,000 for-profit CoS globally, our data will get us to a confidence level of 95%, so you can rest assured knowing it’s reliable.

○ Whither Chief of Staff?

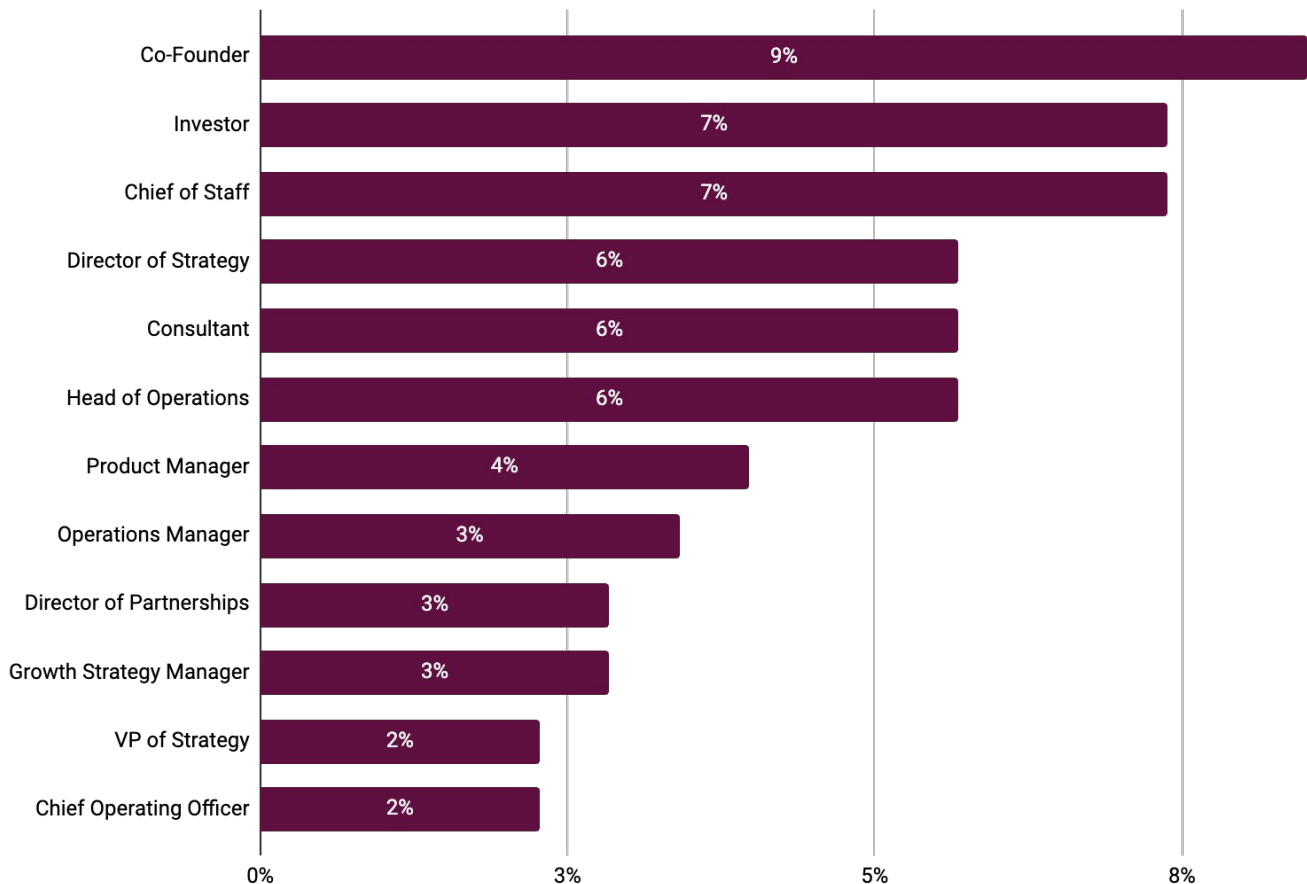
One of the most common questions we hear from Chiefs of Staff is: “**where do I go from here?**”

Chiefs of Staff take on diverse operational, strategic, and cross-functional execution responsibilities. With such breadth, Chiefs of Staff are a unique group that could genuinely step into any role. But freedom of choice can bring analysis paralysis. This report will shed light on common paths for graduating Chiefs of Staff, including:

1. **Staying at Your Current Company in a Leadership Role:** Many former Chiefs of Staff choose to stay with their current organization due to their deep connections and understanding of the business, both internally and externally. They often transition into senior operations or strategy roles, such as Vice President or Chief Operating Officer, leveraging their CoS experience for broader management roles. While this option provides continuity, it may be challenging to fully detach from your CoS duties and establish new boundaries.
2. **Leaving Your Current Company for a Non-CoS Role:** This is a common choice, driven by potential CoS burnout or a misalignment with the company's long-term vision. Former Chiefs of Staff often pursue leadership positions in strategy, operations, corporate development, or many other functional areas, depending on their past experience. While this transition offers independence, it involves rebuilding trust and rapport with a new executive team.
3. **Leaving Your Current Company for Another Chief of Staff Role:** Some individuals opt to continue their journey as a Chief of Staff, either due to a genuine passion for the role or external factors like company changes or personal relocations. The advantage here is that you already know the role, minimizing the learning curve. However, it may be perceived as a short-term role in some organizations, and burnout is a common concern.
4. **Starting Your Own Business:** Leveraging the unique insights gained from the CoS role, some former Chiefs of Staff become entrepreneurs. They use their credibility and experience to start and grow businesses, but this path is challenging and not a guaranteed ticket to success. However, past failures in the corporate world can serve as valuable lessons. Starting your own business allows you to manage it according to your vision and potentially even involve your former employer as a client, depending on the services you offer.

Where are CoS Alumni now?

Current Titles of CoS Alumni

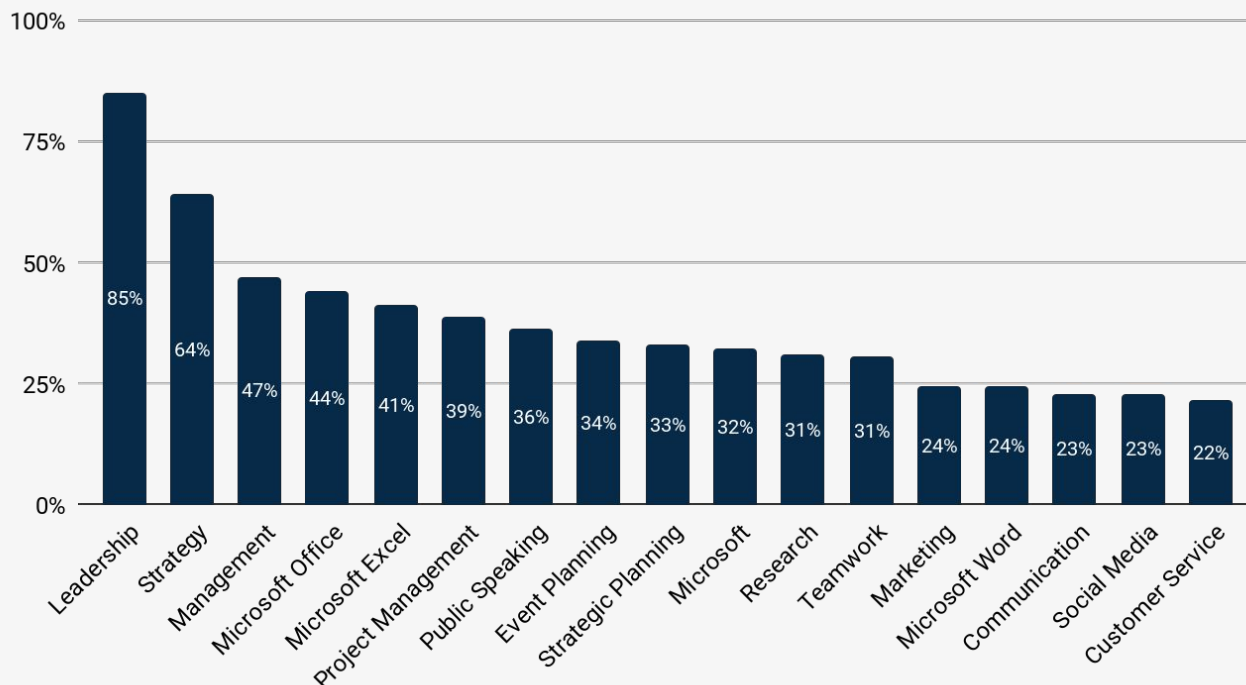


No single title exceeded 10% of our dataset; in fact, we had 55 unique titles, even after standardizing the data. This chart only captures the roles that accounted for 2%+ of the overall dataset, so there is a long tail or roles not pictured here.

The greatest proportion of CoS Alumni went on to found their own companies. Tied for 2nd, we saw that CoS either became investors (typically VC / PE) or began another tour of duty as CoS elsewhere. We were excited to see CoS landing very senior strategy and ops roles.

Most intriguing to us was the relative prominence of product and partnerships / growth roles. Some of the more unique roles were VP of Engineering, Chief Product Officer, Marketing Manager, Director of Risk Analytics, and Change Management Lead.

CoS Alumni Skills by Frequency



Commentary:

The Chiefs of Staff in our data possessed a whopping 2,078 *unique* skills!

As you might expect, the most common skill that CoS Alumni possess is by far Leadership, followed by Strategy and Management. It's intriguing that Chiefs of Staff, who often don't manage people directly, cite Leadership and Management as top skills. It's possible people added these skills to LinkedIn *after* their CoS roles.

Also of note, CoS did *not* cite technical or quantitative skills with any great frequency (with the exception of Microsoft Excel).

We do see lots of skills related to cross-functional collaboration and project management, which is completely in-line with the typical work of CoS (i.e. being the "glue" or "connective tissue" of the company).

Miscellaneous Findings:

Apart from the most common skills, we did find some interesting skills that a minority of CoS possess:

Product Management	9%
Adobe Photoshop	6%
Java Python HTML	4%
SEO AdWords	2%

Most Unique Skills:

Here are skills that only a single CoS in the dataset possessed, showcasing the variety of CoS backgrounds:

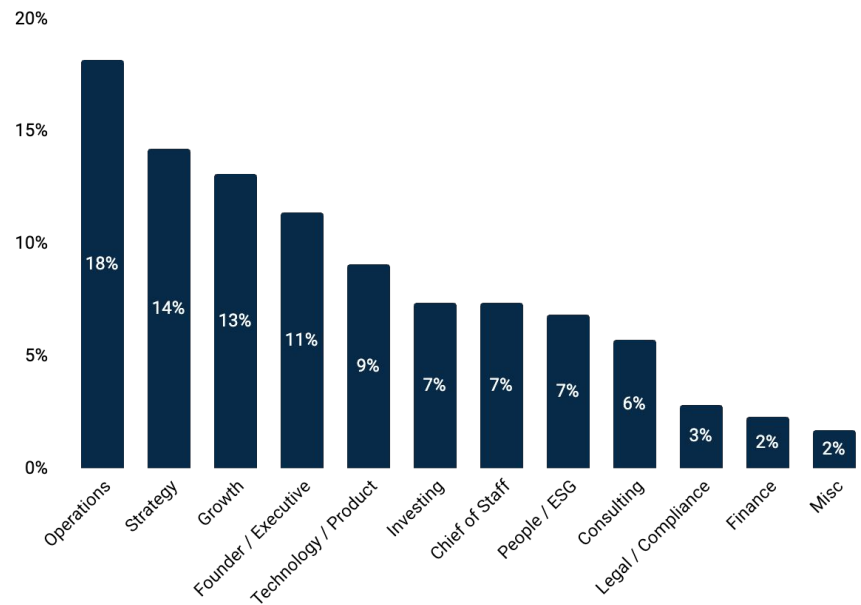
- Counter-Insurgency
- Ancient History
- Car Racing
- Gene Therapy
- Animal Behavior
- Floral Design
- CNC Machining

Current Functions of CoS Alumni

Most CoS end up in Operations and Strategy roles, which makes sense, given the spread of titles above.

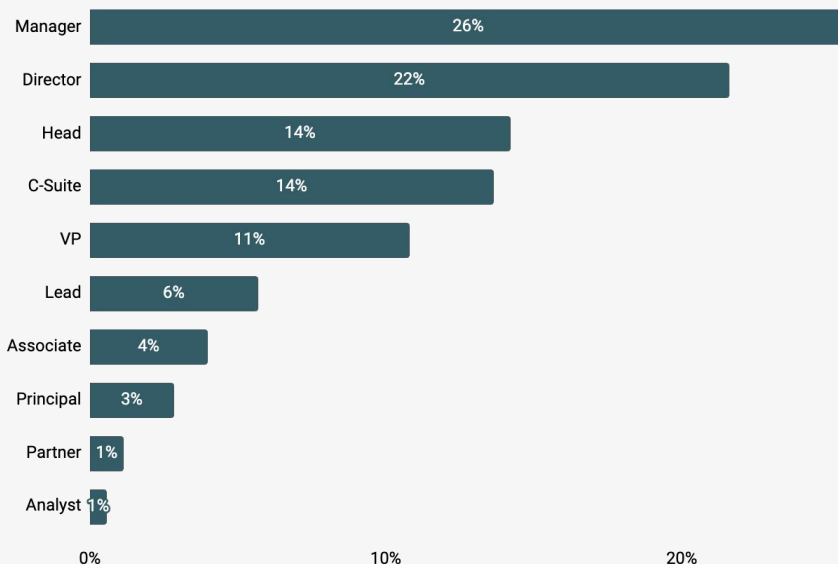
It's interesting that more CoS end up in Growth and Technology / Product roles than People / ESG roles, given how frequently CoS handle cross-functional communication, as well as people and culture challenges.

Very few CoS end up in Legal, Compliance, and Finance roles, which makes sense, given the infrequency of relevant skills in the last analysis.



Note: Founder / Executive refers to Co-Founder, GM, and Board Member roles. Misc refers to roles outside of the other listed functions.

Current Seniority of CoS Alumni



48% of graduating CoS end up in Manager or Director roles, which we believe runs somewhat counter to the common narrative that Chief of Staff is the launchpad to an executive role.

We grant that 39% of alumni have landed Head, CXO, or VP titles, but not enough to suggest that serving as CoS make such a title guaranteed.

We remain curious why most CoS who become investors get relatively junior titles such as Analyst or Associate. We speculate this is because an unspoken prerequisite for many Partner roles is to be an exited founder.

Noteworthy CoS Trajectories



Ben Casnocha



Undergraduate @
Claremont McKenna



**Chief of Staff to
Reid Hoffman**



Author, The Alliance &
The Startup of You



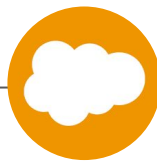
Founder & MD,
Village Global



Cindy Morse



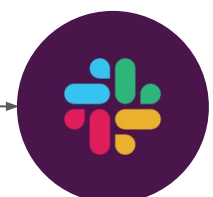
Undergraduate @
Indiana University



Dir., Global Ops,
ExactTarget



**Chief of Staff to
Bret Taylor (co-CEO)**



Chief Operating Officer,
Slack



Kyle Daigle



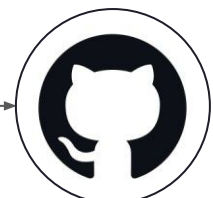
Undergraduate @
Boston University



VP Product,
Geezeo



**VP & Chief of Staff to
Thomas Dohmke (CEO)**



Chief Operating Officer,
GitHub



Robin Merritt



Undergraduate @
Fairfield University



**Global Head of
Internal Comms**, Box



**VP & Chief of Staff to
Nick Mehta (CEO)**



**Chief People & Ops
Officer**, Gainsight



Maxine Litre



Undergraduate @
Stanford University



Chief to Staff to CEO,
Group Nine Media



**Head of Customer
Experience**, Slice

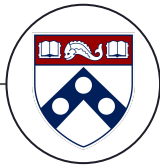


VP & General Manager,
Nuts.com

Note for this page and following: only selected career experience is shown. People are presented in no particular order. Data on these individuals may or may not have been included in the analysis on prior pages.



Raina Moskowitz



Undergraduate @
UPenn Wharton



CoS to the President,
American Express



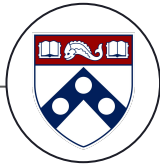
**VP US Customer
Marketing, AmEx**



Chief Operating Officer,
Etsy



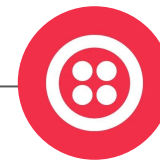
Aidan Viggiano



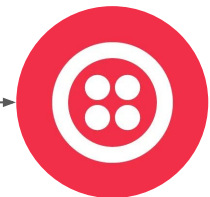
Undergraduate @
UPenn Wharton



**Chief of Staff to the
CFO, General Electric**



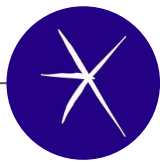
VP, Corporate Finance,
Twilio



Chief Financial Officer,
Twilio



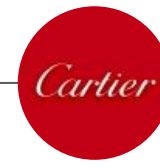
Arnaud Carrez



Undergraduate @
ESCP Business School



**Chief of Staff to the
President & CEO, Cartier**



Marketing Director,
Cartier



Chief Marketing Officer,
Cartier



Karen Kwan



Undergraduate @
Simon Fraser University



Compensation Analyst,
Lululemon



**VP, People & Culture,
& Chief of Staff,**
Lululemon



**Chief People & Culture
Officer, Aritzia**

Commentary:

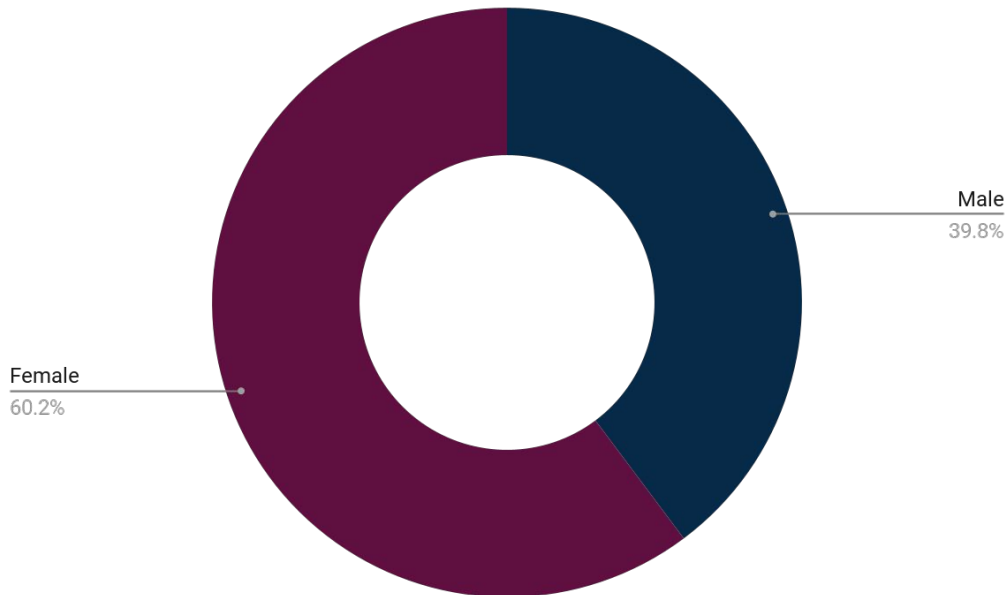
These Chiefs of Staff achieved senior titles at household names through tireless effort over years and decades. Most of them began their careers 15-20+ years ago and are just stepping into CXO roles now. Interestingly, none of these Chiefs of Staff rose to the position of CEO; this gives credence to the idea that CoS who want that title are best off becoming founders.

Also of note, all of them had only undergraduate degrees; it appears that serving as CoS can take the place of an MBA or similar degree in propelling someone up the career ladder.

Ultimately, they all had circuitous and somewhat unpredictable paths, before and after their CoS tenure. In most of these cases, it seems that landing a functional VP title was the salient factor in getting them to the C-Suite (whether internally or at a competitor). So if you're aiming for the big leagues, remain persistent and work towards that VP title!

Who are CoS Alumni?

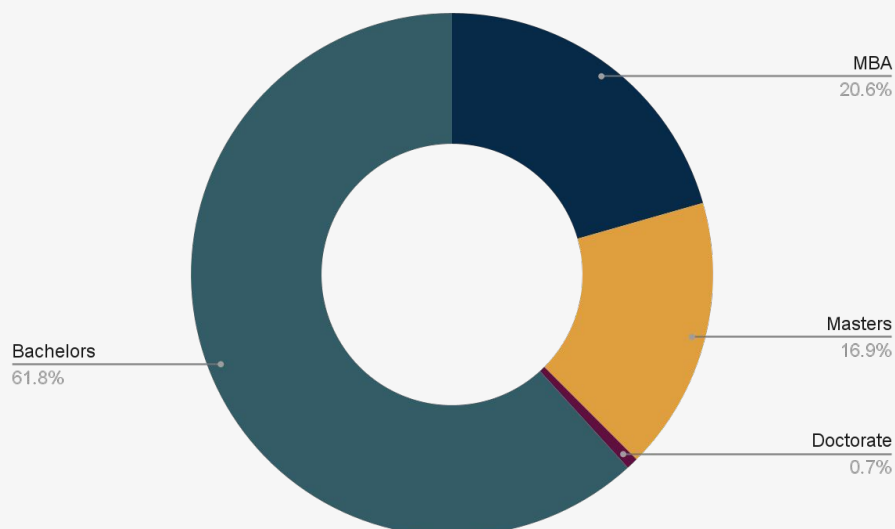
Gender Breakdown of Alumni*



The gender breakdown is unsurprising as it reflects the demographics of our community; over 7 years, we have consistently seen that the majority of Chiefs of Staff are female.

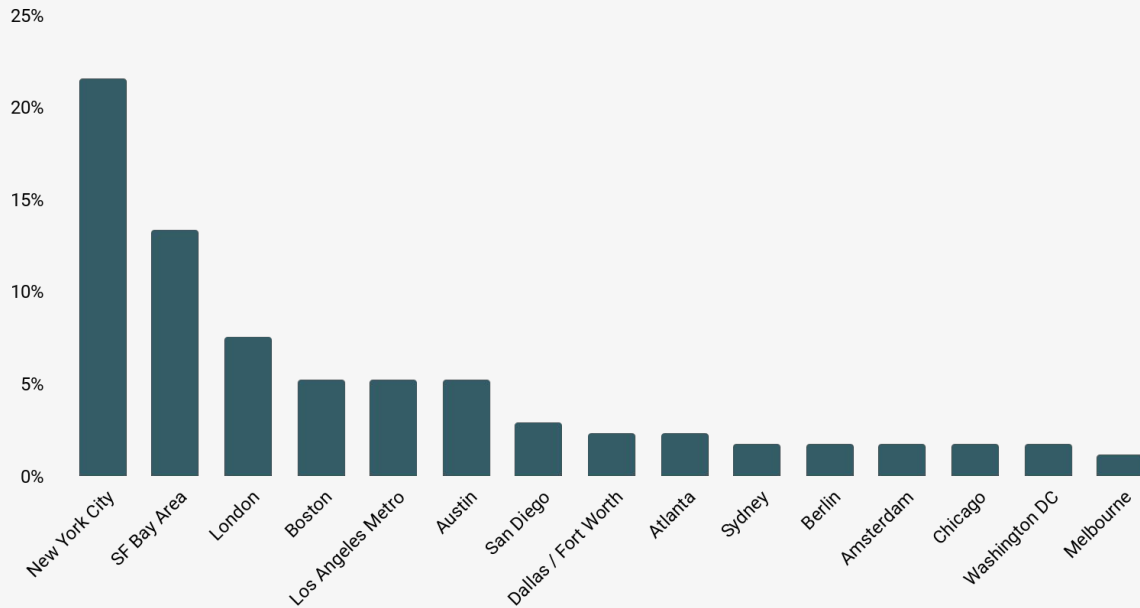
*Note: gender is predicted from other demographic factors, *not* self-reported, so it may not be correct. Furthermore, it is very likely the dataset underreports non-binary people.

Highest Degree Earned by Alumni



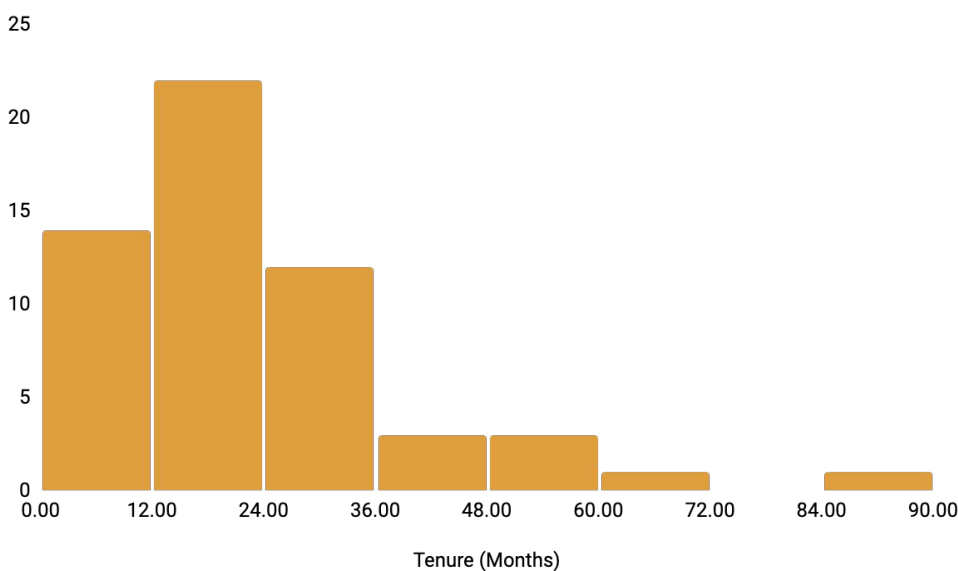
The majority of CoS Alumni have earned Bachelor's degrees as their highest form of education. The next largest group have Master's in Business Administration; we teased this apart from other forms of Master's degree due to its frequency. Only a single person had a PhD.

Locations of CoS Alumni



The skewness towards the United States is not shocking, especially because the data focuses on former Chiefs of Staff. Historically, the role has been most common in the US, followed by the UK, then Australia & mainland Europe. We've seen CoS emerge in Asia, LatAm, and Africa more recently!

Tenure as Chief of Staff



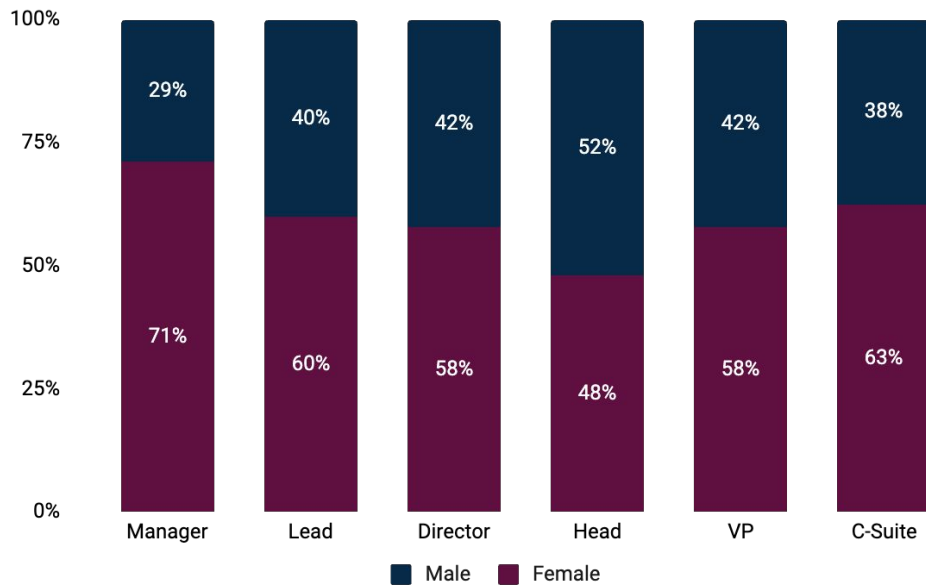
Note: this chart reflects a much smaller subset of the data, as we could not find reliable tenure data for many CoS alumni.

We commonly hear that the average tenure of a Chief of Staff is between 18-36 months. This data illustrates the truth of that adage.

There's a sharp drop-off at the 36-month mark, and exceedingly few CoS make it past 5 years in the role.

The unexpectedly large bar at 0-12 months appears to be CoS who were sadly impacted by layoffs since the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

Gender vs. Seniority

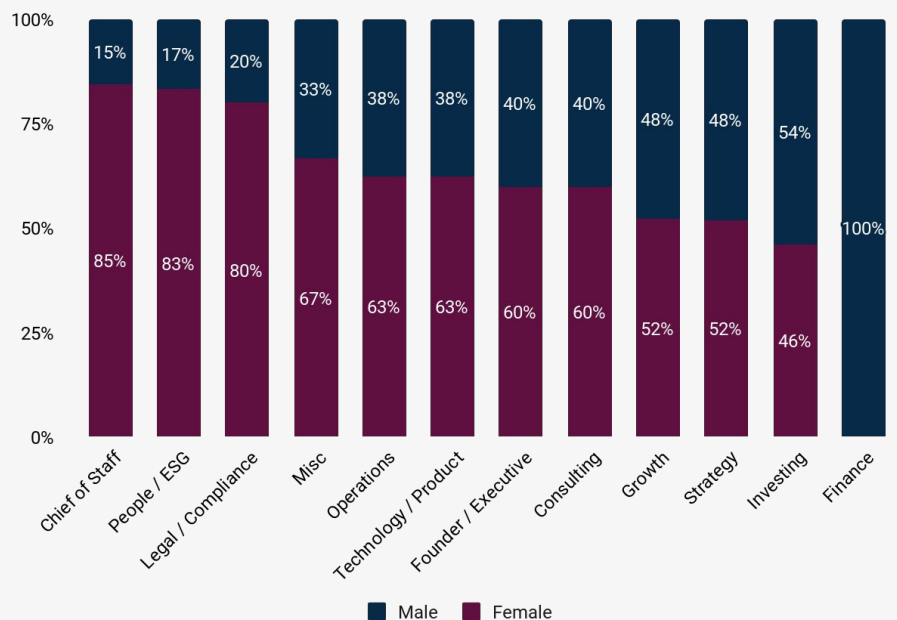


In terms of Seniority, women comprise the majority at each level, except “Head”, where they are slightly edged out by men. We believe the prevalence of woman at each level of seniority stems from the simple fact that the CoS role overall is highly skewed towards women. However, we have not been able to ascertain why the role tends to predominantly attract women. If you have a hypothesis, let us know by emailing hi@chiefofstaff.network!

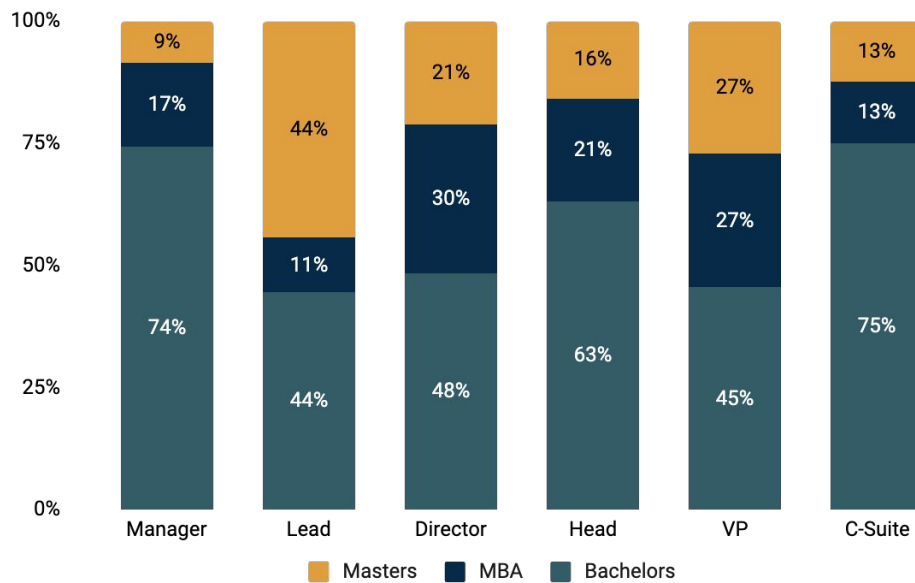
Women predominantly landed in subsequent CoS roles, as well as People / ESG and Legal / Compliance roles. This makes sense as 76% of HR managers are women and more than half of compliance officers are women.

On the other hand, men were likelier than women to hold roles in Finance and Investing. We suspect this skewness is because the Financial Services industry as a whole tends to lean male, with women occupying ~45% of roles in the industry; women only sit in 23% of all investment banking roles.

Gender vs. Function

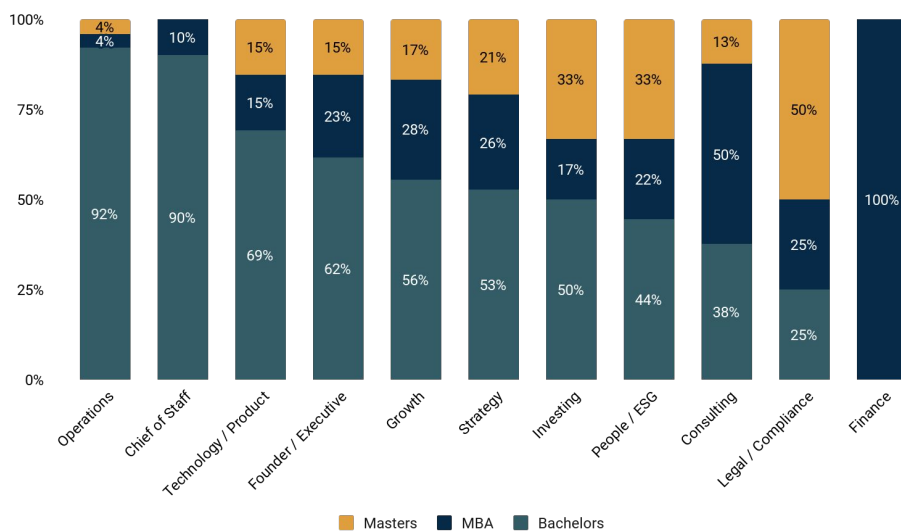


Education vs. Seniority



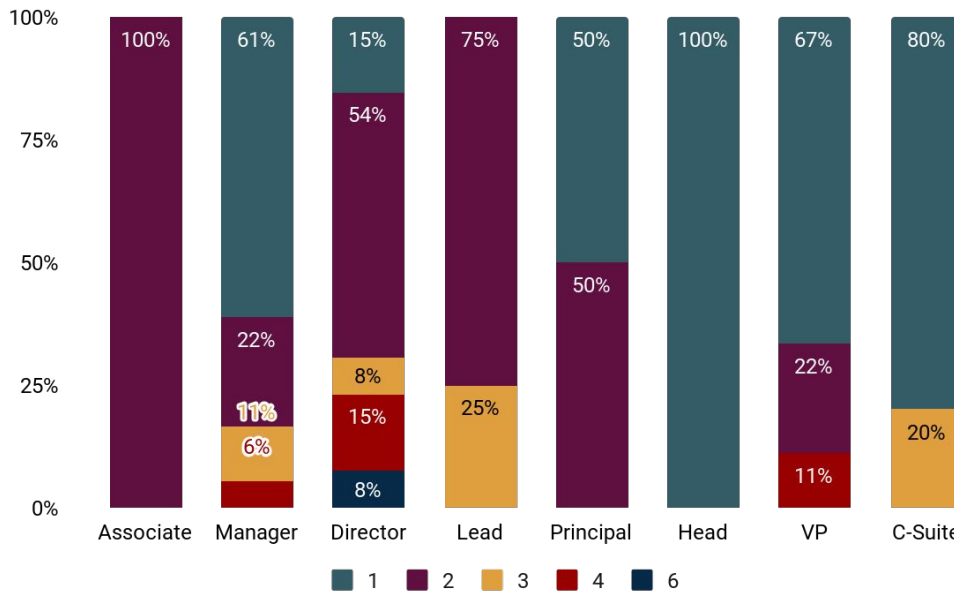
At either end of the seniority spectrum (Manager and C-Suite), Bachelor's degrees win the day. Why are there so few advanced degrees in the C-Suite? In our data, the C-Suite consists mainly of startup founders, meaning that credentials are not a prerequisite. In Lead - VP roles, advanced degrees play a much larger role; this correlates to size of company. Big companies have more layers of management and tend to require graduate degrees as a prerequisite.

Education vs. Function



The chart above shows obvious skew in some functions for advanced degrees. In Finance, 100% of ex-CoS had MBAs. In Legal / Compliance, most held other Master's degrees (we commonly saw JDs). In Consulting, many have MBAs - this likely helps with marketing and increasing your rates. In Operations, subsequent CoS roles, and Tech / Product roles, advanced degrees matter much less.

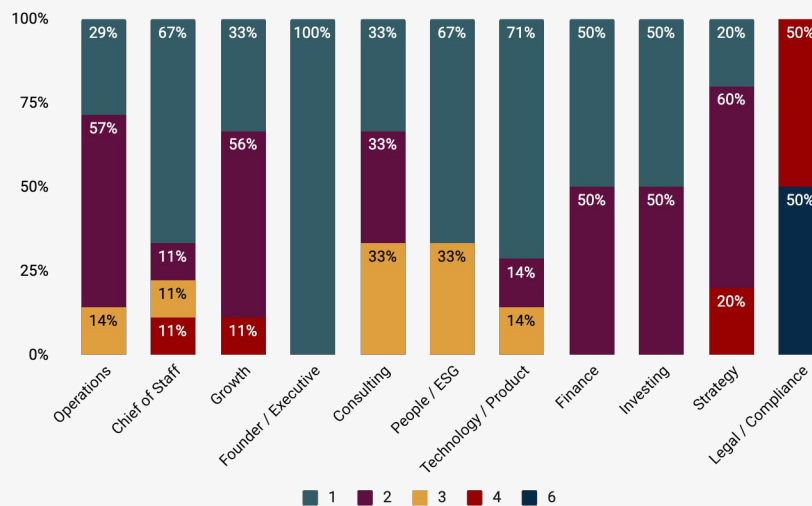
Tenure* vs. Seniority



This chart reveals that, overall, tenure as CoS matters very little. This runs counter to [Gokul Rajaram's](#) (GM of Square & DoorDash) advice of "don't be jumpy" and instead gives credence to the idea that people should move jobs every ~2 years to maximize their expected ROI. However, the successful CoS we presented above often had longer tenures than the average on this chart.

*Note: tenure is expressed in years in both charts on this page; we took the months data and rounded it per standard rules.

Tenure* vs. Function



Again, tenure has little import towards the function that CoS alumni end up in. The only exception is Legal / Compliance, where tenure may indicate a greater understanding of the legal and regulatory issues at play. Notably, every Founder for which we had reliable tenure data only served as CoS for ~1 year.

○ Conclusion

This report exists to answer one of the most common CoS questions: “where do I go from here?”

Certainly, many former CoS step into Operations and Strategy roles as manager-level roles. But if you wish to lead Growth or Product, start investing, or become an entrepreneur, remember that many before you have taken these paths.

The collaboration, project management, and planning skills that are mainstays of the CoS position will serve you well, no matter where you end up. Picking up further technical competencies such as SQL analysis, computer programming, or tools such as Photoshop and Figma will only increase your value.

When it comes to demographics, the CoS role is special in that it can catapult people through barriers of gender, education, and tenure that we so commonly see in other professions. If you’re a woman with a Bachelor’s degree and spend 1-2 years as CoS, you have as much, if not more, likelihood of later career success compared to a man with a PhD and 4 years in the CoS role.

This is not to say that demographics have no impact and that CoS never fall victim to bias. Indeed, we see this in our data: no women ended up in corporate finance roles after their CoS tenure. Advanced degrees became important for titles such as Lead, Director, and VP (titles that often exist at larger companies where credentials matter). And tenure did matter for some post-CoS roles (especially those in Legal / Compliance).

With all of this in mind, the Chief of Staff role continues to present an unparalleled launchpad for bright generalists to climb the career ladder faster than otherwise. And for those that wish to continue as a CoS, the role certainly provides those opportunities as well.

As a Chief of Staff, the next time you ask yourself “where do I go from here?”, think back to this report and remember that there are endless possibilities arrayed in front of you.

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Elevate your career through peer support,
upskilling, and thought leadership!

