

The nine functions. *One system.*

The nine are not a list. They are a system, and the system has a shape. The foundation sits at the top; everything else flows from it.

FOUNDATION

01 **Positional**

WHOLE-SYSTEM VISIBILITY. NO FUNCTIONAL CAPTURE.

The Chief of Staff sits at the intersection of every function, every leadership relationship, and every strategic priority without being owned by any of them. This is not a seniority position. It is a vantage point no other role occupies, and that view is the precondition for everything else.

02 **Political Intelligence**

THE INFORMAL MAP BENEATH THE FORMAL ONE.

The Chief of Staff reads who actually influences whom, where the real alliances sit, what motivates and threatens each leader. Not gossip. Not participation in politics. Intelligence gathered and held in service of the organization's health. Without it, every other function operates blind.

INTELLIGENCE LAYER

03 **Diagnostic**

PATTERN RECOGNITION ACROSS THE WHOLE SYSTEM.

The Chief of Staff reads patterns, not just what is happening but what the pattern behind it means. Breakdowns seen before they become crises. Misalignments caught before they become conflicts. The output is early warning.

EXECUTIVE-FACING · ORGANIZATION-FACING

04 **Directional**

HOLDS THE VISION STEADY. INTERROGATES IT WHEN NEEDED.

The Chief of Staff holds the executive's vision as the fixed point and pulls the system back toward it when functions drift. They also carry responsibility for recognizing when the direction itself requires interrogation, including when the executive is wrong.

05 **Truth-Telling**

TELLS THE EXECUTIVE WHAT NO ONE ELSE WILL.

The Chief of Staff has both the access and the mandate to deliver hard truths upward. That combination is rare and load-bearing. Challenge happens in private. What goes outside that relationship is united and consistent.

06 **Brokerage**

BRINGS MINDS TOGETHER. NOT MEETINGS.

The Chief of Staff constructs the conditions for alignment. Not by organizing meetings, by bringing minds together. Intellectual and relational work, with credibility on the leadership team that is independent of the executive.

07 **Sounding Board**

THE PERSON EVERY LEVEL THINKS OUT LOUD WITH.

The Chief of Staff is the person people think out loud with, at every level of the organization, before an idea is ready for the room. They ask, challenge, and offer a clear point of view, without taking ownership of the decision away from the person whose decision it is.

STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONS

08 **Incubation**

HOLDS WHAT HAS NO HOME YET. DEVELOPS IT UNTIL IT DOES.

The Chief of Staff holds the things that do not yet have a home, ideas real but not ready, problems named but not owned. They develop them until they have enough shape to find their place, then land them where they belong. Generative work: it grows capacity rather than just managing what exists.

09 **Guardian**

PROTECTS THE EXECUTIVE'S ATTENTION. ABSORBS THE NO.

The Chief of Staff protects the executive's attention and the quality of what reaches them. They absorb the no, the refusals and redirections the executive would otherwise deliver personally, and protect the executive's judgment from being gamed. Not control of access. Protection of judgment.

All nine are the role. The absence of any one of them is diagnostic.

The definition is the standard. The exemplar is what it looks like built. Read the full framework, or see a properly mandated Chief of Staff role designed on paper.

coulandgold.com/cos-functions · Explore the framework · Read the exemplar JD