

# Inside the Mind of the C-Suite

How leaders think, engage people,  
and manage challenges





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As a management consulting firm, we have the opportunity to work with all levels across many parts of our clients' businesses. Regardless of level or area of the business, we have learned that many people have the desire to know what is on the mind of C-level executives. To help answer this question, we conducted nine interviews and a survey of 200 C-level executives.

Over the next several pages, we help readers understand common demands, challenges, traits, and characteristics shared by C-level executives as well as nuances; i.e. what helps, what can hinder an organization, and what keeps executives up at night.

Whether you are in an entry-level role with a view to a corner office, a rising star in the business looking to hone your skills and gain a broader perspective, or looking to become a better mentor and C-level partner, the pages that follow will give you insight into C-level executive minds.

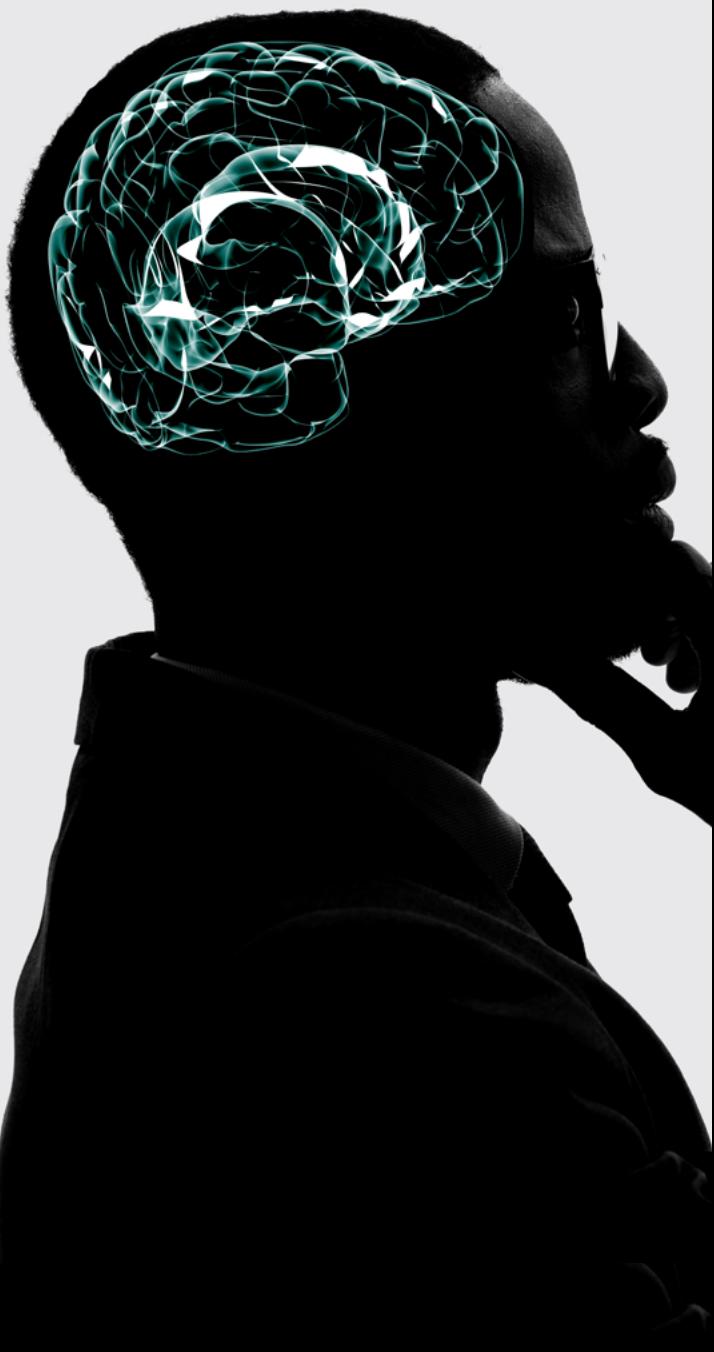
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>01. WHAT'S ON A CXO'S MIND?</b>	<b>04</b>
<hr/>	
<b>02. MEET THE EXECUTIVES</b>	<b>06</b>
Meet the Executives	06
Leadership Commonalities	12
Leadership Skills and Traits	13
Different Lenses	14
Perception vs. Reality of Being a C-Level Executive	15
Perspective Before and During Crisis	17
<hr/>	
<b>03. INSIGHTS FROM JABIAN</b>	<b>18</b>

---

## WHAT'S ON A CXO'S MIND?

Successful leaders prioritize well. Each area or topic an executive focuses on can translate to thousands of hours their company will spend trying to address the situation. Therefore, striking a balance across the multitude of considerations (see list at right) to prioritize effectively is key to success during any given day or year.



### COMPANY DIRECTION

- + Setting a clear vision
  - + Effectively executing against the strategy
  - + Achieving goals and objectives
  - + Investing in the future
  - + Anticipating and managing risks and issues
- 

### CUSTOMER

- + Acting on customer insights and addressing needs
  - + Constantly improving the customer experience
  - + Improving and protecting brand perception
  - + Anticipating future needs
- 

### EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

- + Understanding and acting against market trends
  - + Managing media perception and public relations
  - + Participating in business communities
  - + Ensuring physical and cybersecurity
- 

### TRENDS

- + Understanding, prioritizing, and responding to the right trends:
    - Technology
    - Market
    - Industry
    - Competitors
    - Partners
    - Social media
- 

### COMMUNITY

- + Listening and being in touch with key communities
  - + Engaging within communities across the company and globe
  - + Giving back
  - + Balancing and advocating participation
- 

### GOVERNANCE

- + Being legally and ethically compliant
  - + Providing organizational transparency
  - + Managing and mitigating the right risks and issues
  - + Complying with taxes and regulations
  - + Lobbying for change
- 

### SHAREHOLDERS/ OWNERS

- + Achieving targets, delivering value, and driving company performance
  - + Creating a sense of predictability
  - + Reporting on-time quarterly and annually
  - + Balancing growth and profitability
  - + Managing cash position
- 

### PEOPLE

- + Ensuring safety and well-being
  - + Improving Diversity and Inclusion
  - + Contributing to company culture
  - + Maximizing employee engagement
  - + Developing talent
  - + Managing healthy attrition
  - + Planning for succession
- 

### SUPPLIERS

- + Strategically selecting reliable suppliers/partners and driving to outcomes and monitoring metrics
  - + Negotiating respectfully
  - + Managing contracts
- 

### FAMILY AND SELF

- + Staying aware of physical and mental needs
- + Protecting and supporting family and friends
- + Managing and nurturing relationships
- + Learning from mistakes and improving

“

**Being a CEO is like conducting an orchestra; you have to rely on the skills of your team. Your job is making sure that those individual skills are being used in a way that achieves the desired result. To do that you have to be able to rapidly shift your focus from the violins to the woodwinds to the horns and then back again. But the great ones also are able, in the midst of all that cacophony, to step back and ask themselves whether it is all melding together into the right sound. That self-critical assessment of whether you’re working on the right things helps get the CEO back on track when they have been focused on the wrong things, as inevitably happens.**

TONY EARLEY

---

## MEET THE EXECUTIVES

# CONVERSATION HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE C-LEVEL INTERVIEWS



**ANDRE ANDERSON**  
FIRST VICE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF  
OPERATING OFFICER  
FEDERAL RESERVE BANK OF ATLANTA

### What has been a pleasant surprise?

“The overwhelming support and commitment to my success and our shared success. It has been heartening and makes you want to work harder for them.”

### Act with a servant leadership mindset.

“The inverted pyramid of support. I’m here to support my team – 1,750 employees spread all over 32 different states. My role is to create a culture and give them the resources to do their job the best they can.”

### Drive accountability.

As a role that often is broad-reaching, “You can’t abdicate accountability, so striking a balance of the right amount of monitoring and detail is key without being too intrusive.”

Andre easily cited normal ranges for daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual metrics. Furthermore, his team researches and anticipates future trends that may affect operations and can therefore plan accordingly.

### Listen and communicate.

Andre writes a blog that is published company-wide. He travels regularly for on-site visits and conducts frequent town halls and staff meetings to speak to and hear from all levels within the organization.

“My biggest fear is to receive all filtered information. And I don’t want filtering. I want to hear directly what people are saying and how they’re experiencing this workplace.”

### What keeps you up at night?

“Cybersecurity and culture. I believe in honesty and transparency. I believe in making decisions for the right reason. If you do that, you don’t have to fret.”

**“My biggest fear is to receive all filtered information. And I don’t want filtering. I want to hear directly what people are saying and how they’re experiencing this workplace.”**

**ANDRE ANDERSON**

**“Be long-term greedy. If you’re short-term greedy or you’re trying to close a client so you might offer them a higher fee for your own benefit, it’s not going to work.”**

**JUSTIN BERMAN**

**Both Andre and Justin said their participation in a city-level leadership program, Leadership Atlanta, strengthened their leadership skills and led to greater community involvement and awareness.**



**JUSTIN BERMAN**  
FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
OFFICER  
BERMAN CAPITAL ADVISORS LLC

### What do you enjoy about your role?

“Every day is different. And I like that because it keeps you on your feet, it keeps you motivated, it keeps you engaged, and it keeps you inspired and interested in what you’re doing.”

### Engage the right team.

“I’ve always been a believer that I might not be the smartest person in the room, but I want to have the smartest room. And I think the biggest surprise and challenge to me was somebody told me it’s going to take you three to five years to find the right team.”

### Know your customers.

Justin gets personal by truly getting to know his clients. He learns about his clients’ families and their personal lives, including helping a client’s family member overcome substance-abuse challenges. Knowing what his clients are going through helps him support them better.

### Collaborate with others.

Many executives participate in a society or forum to stay current on trends, market changes, and challenges. Justin saw the need for a society of trusted advisors to serve his clients and employees. Since one didn’t exist, he decided to create one. The group collaborated during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic on best means of helping their clients.

### Short- versus long-term perspective.

“Be long-term greedy. If you’re short-term greedy, or you’re trying to close a client so you might offer them a higher fee for your own benefit, it’s not going to work.”

### What keeps you up at night?

“These issues such as #MeToo, COVID, security breaches are significantly impactful and can collapse a company. My advice would be to wake up paranoid every day.”



**ALOK DESHPANDE**  
CO-FOUNDER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
OFFICER  
SMARTPATH

**What do you enjoy about your role?**

"I've enjoyed seeing the vision and purpose of the company and having so many people that care about it jumping on board to commit to making a difference."

**Setting expectations on change in style.**

In preparation for adapting his business to COVID, Alok shared an article by Ben Horowitz about peacetime versus wartime CEOs. He said, "We are going to be shifting to a wartime-CEO model and I want you guys to be prepared for that... I am really proud of the fact that folks understood that."

**Breadth and depth of CEO's responsibilities.**  
Alok is reminded of a quote from Gary Vee that "A CEO's job is dirt and clouds. I play in the dirt, which means when [things aren't] going well, I've got to deal with it. And I get to play in the clouds every now and then, which is vision and seeing where we're going, being thoughtful about the future, excited about the future. But a majority of it's dirt and that dirt can get really muddy."

**Remembering the mission to keep focus on serving customers.**

"When we look back at our mission and our vision, we decided very quickly and very early that we're going to lean in and help people."

**Balancing customer, employee, and investors.**

"If you treat your employees well and help them understand the mission, the reach you can have with your customers, investors, and the broader community is amplified 10x. If you have an employee who's unhappy, it is a cancer inside the organization."

**What keeps you up at night?**

"Being consistent to over-communicate with the team what's going on, being honest. But that doesn't mean you can control what the other person is going to do."



**JAY FERRO**  
CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICER  
QUIKRETE

**What energizes you to start each day?**

"To advance the mission of the organization, watch my team's eyes light up when we make a difference, and to showcase them and their hard work."

Jay gets into the details with his teams to understand the challenges and identify where he can have a tough conversation with a peer to open a door for his team to deliver. He removes roadblocks to enable his team to perform.

**You must have the right team.**

"It's critical to have the right team to enable change. If the people won't change, change the people."

**IT has become a business partner.**

"I've noticed an evolution from the order-taking IT shop to a more collaborative business partner. The role of the CIO, to me, is business leader first, technologist second." Jay enabled his team to embrace this concept so much that a peer quipped, "We were used to IT being the caboose. How the hell are you suddenly the engine?"

**The C-suite must be reachable.**

"You have to be available, be transparent, be authentic, and be proactive. Too many CXOs try to do it from on high in their ivory tower without ever spending meaningful time with their customers and colleagues on the front lines – learning and listening. I think that's a tragic mistake."

**Looking for ways to continuously improve.**

"Leaders are always looking over their shoulder, and they're always messing with what they have to make it better."

**What keeps you up at night?**

"Wanting to do everything I can for my sons, their health, and their growth. Keeping pace with the speed of change and innovation while continually improving and removing unnecessary complexity, and – of course – keeping our organization secure."

---

## MEET THE EXECUTIVES



**STACIE HAGAN**  
CHIEF PEOPLE OFFICER  
FORMERLY WITH SECUREWORKS

### What do you enjoy about your role?

"I've enjoyed seeing leaders develop across the organization. You see potential in someone, give them a shot, support them, and they flourish."

### HR must know the business to be effective.

"Understanding the business in terms of how we deliver services, what makes us unique, and how we make money is absolutely essential knowledge for the CHRO to be able to align initiatives in support of the business trajectory."

### Data-driven decisions are key.

HR leaders are working as true business partners to provide human capital data that serves business needs and enables smart business decisions.

### Managing personalities can be challenging.

"A major factor of the CPO role is working the puzzle of personalities in the C-Suite and the influence that combination has on the organization. Surprisingly, taking on the challenge of organizational alignment is often easier to tackle."

### Talent Competition.

"Retention of key talent is the primary concern in a highly competitive market (security), especially with the amount of change we're going through and the opportunities that are available for our uniquely skilled people to pick up and go elsewhere."

### What keeps you up at night?

"I think a lot about the array of skills required to be an effective HR professional and a well-rounded business leader. How do I select for these critical skills and grow my people to develop them?"

**"You have to be a student forever. There's no end to reading, talking to people, and finding best practices. Just presume you don't know and stay curious."**

**TOM KLEIN**



**TOM KLEIN**  
CHIEF MARKETING OFFICER  
MAILCHIMP

### What do you consider an essential part of your role?

"In a time of crisis, the whole point of the CMO is to be able to react, change course, and advocate for that change on behalf of our customers, and that is what we're doing. We're reacting to what our small business customers need the most right now. Our purpose is empowering the underdog and making our customer successful."

### COVID-19 effects on business.

"Because small businesses are in a crisis and potentially going to go out of business [due to the impacts of COVID-19], they need us now more than ever. This is a critical moment for small businesses to get their business online and stay connected with their customers and I'm trying to be very responsive to that. I'm trying to accelerate some product changes to meet this moment and share relevant messaging and resources about how Mailchimp can help with websites, domains, email, shoppable landing pages, and more."

### Greatest challenges of the role.

"Staying connected and attuned to my customers. In the context of how we grow the business, it's my role as a participant in the formation of the company's strategy and vision to keep us aligned on and connected to our customers."

### Continued analysis – understanding marketing data.

"Everybody in marketing is trying to wrangle data. How do we get all my data? How do we govern over it? How do we understand it, dig through it, and understand what is actually happening? We need to be able to create segments, down to a segment of one, and drive personalization across all channels."

### Embracing technology and creativity.

"There is an intense technology part and intense creative part to Marketing."

### Advice to others – learn and grow.

"You have to be a student forever. There's no end to reading, talking to people, and finding best practices. Just presume you don't know and stay curious."

### What keeps you up at night?

"It's not one thing, but more so a topic that I need more time with or to sleep on. The topics that I tend to spend more time with are usually related to organizational challenges or design, or people."



**VICTORIA HARKER**  
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT AND CHIEF  
FINANCIAL OFFICER, TEGNA INC  
ACTIVE BOARD MEMBER, HUNTINGTON  
INGALLS INDUSTRIES AND WOLFTRAP  
FOUNDATION FOR THE PERFORMING  
ARTS

**What do you enjoy about your role?**

“The variety of work is energizing – from working on transactions, reviewing operating results, generating financial dashboards, to evaluating business cases for investment... There’s rarely a day that actually unfolds as you anticipated.”

**Setting the vision for the company.**

“We have a big-picture, long-term strategic plan, but the day-to-day is fluid and we know it will change as the market does. You need to stay flexible. It’s more like a Monet than paint by numbers.”

**“We have a big-picture, long-term strategic plan, but the day-to-day is fluid and we know it will change as the market does. You need to stay flexible. It’s more like a Monet than paint by numbers.”**

VICTORIA HARKER

**Finance is now a business partner.**

“The role of CFO is no longer that of a technical specialist; it is more of a financial partner to the CEO and business leaders on all aspects of the business: M&A, operations, strategy...as well as the financial results. The market evolution is happening fast. I increasingly find that most CFOs are first and foremost smart people with experience, willing to quickly learn the fabric of the business, its cycles, and the drivers of results in order to increase shareholder value day in and day out.”

**Understand the why behind the answer.**

“I frequently tell my teams – in Finance as well as Operations – it’s not good enough that we get to a technically or financially accurate answer to a business question. It’s not just that the answer is ‘3,’ but what do we do with that information? I have a pillow on my office couch that says ‘SO WHAT?’ – meaning what we do with data is even more important than just completing a calculation.”

**What keeps you up at night?**

“The current short-term, event-driven nature of the public markets is troublesome and keeps me up at night. The right capital allocation decisions for the medium- and long-term sometimes get mis-characterized by some market players, in their haste to see immediate returns. As a CFO, CEO, or Board, you are entrusted with making decisions to increase shareholder return in reasonable timeframes; we need to be able to do the right things for the business without having darts thrown at us.”

**“Take the time to let ideas and issues percolate; sometimes the best answers become better with time. While action is important (i.e., fail fast), a good manager knows when not to move on something that needs time to play out.”**

VICTORIA HARKER

“

**Effective leaders must have the courage to make a decision and take an action, the conviction to follow through, and the willingness to be held accountable for the outcome.**

LINDA HUDSON

## MEET THE EXECUTIVES

# TWO FORMER C-LEVEL EXECUTIVES REFLECT ON THEIR EXPERIENCE



**LINDA HUDSON**

F500 BOARD MEMBER - BANK OF AMERICA AND TRANE TECHNOLOGIES. FOUNDER, STRATEGIC ADVISOR AND FORMER CEO OF THE CARDEA GROUP. FORMER PRES AND CEO OF BAE SYSTEMS

### Pleasant surprise.

A surprise of the CEO position was how much public-facing activities were involved, 60–70% of her time. Linda found she was good at it and was surprised to discover she enjoyed it us much as she did.

### Advice worth sharing.

"Forget what the org chart says. Spend time watching the way things happen around here. Understand how decisions really get made because it is not the way it looks."

### Add value.

Linda is keen on people knowing how value is added. She shared, "If you can't articulate what you're doing that makes the guy on the factory floor's job easier, then you don't deserve to be there."

### Get the right team.

"Your success is no longer tied to what you do. It's tied to what everyone around you does because you can't possibly contribute enough as an individual to make a big difference. At one point I had 65,000 employees. It is critical you surround yourself with people that you completely trust and that you have confidence in."

### Have courage to make big changes.

Linda changed the CIO role to report directly to her given the importance of technology in the current world. "The CIO must be a business partner, not just a technology expert."

### Operating during a crisis.

"A leader needs to be calm, reassuring, and supportive and know how to orchestrate a response. Fortunately, we had well-rehearsed and orchestrated crisis response protocols, business recovery, and restoration protocols. Several times we went into crisis mode where we found it helpful to have our playbook in hand that informed how to do things in a rigorous manner; otherwise, it was just too easy to forget things."

### What kept you up at night?

"I wake up at 3:00 in the morning every night, even now. More than anything else, it goes back to being responsible for the success of all of the people."

**"Understand where you need to take the culture and be self-aware of how you contribute to the culture and what your strengths and weaknesses are. Don't try to hide your problems."**

**TONY EARLEY**



**TONY EARLEY**

F500 BOARD MEMBER - FORD MOTOR CO., SOUTHERN CO. FORMER BOARD CHAIR AND CEO OF DTE ENERGY AND PG&E

### Thrill-seeking and collaboration.

Tony reflected on his time as a CEO and admitted that there was an aspect of being an "adrenaline junkie" given the surge of energy he and the team would experience when collaborating to solve complex problems. "The challenges were tough, but were also some of the best times when teams were working together."

### Create a safe environment and don't outsmart the team.

You must create a safe space for the team to bring issues and red-status items to you. Encourage teams to do so and "celebrate the gaps." "If you try and show you're the smartest person in the room right off the bat, everyone shuts up and you don't get good input."

### Be mindful of metrics.

"We put safety in the performance incentive one year and had great improvement, so we said, 'OK, we're done.' Two years later safety was in the tank."

### Focus on developing people.

"Ask yourself, 'Do I have a good pipeline of talent, not only a top leadership team?' If you don't have talent in the pipeline, at some point it's going to catch up with you."

### Think enterprise.

"If you are EVP of electricity and you've got a gas problem, jump in and help out the EVP of gas. Don't try to run it, but offer help. Think enterprise, not just your own job."

### Be mindful of your actions and how you are perceived.

As Tony walked into the office he typically passed and greeted many employees. He recalled a time when he was distracted, "probably thinking about how one of my kids did poorly on a test" or something else not at all related to work. He then heard rumblings during the day about how people were wondering, "What's going on at the company? Tony was really surly today walking in." Even the smallest actions by C-level executives can have unintended consequences and perceptions in the organization.

### What kept you up at night?

"People and culture. It is important to understand where you need to take the culture and to be self-aware of how you contribute to the culture and what your strengths and weaknesses are. Don't try to hide your problems."

**"If you can't articulate what you're doing that makes the guy on the factory floor's job easier, then you don't deserve to be there."**

**LINDA HUDSON**

**"If you are EVP of electricity and you've got a gas problem, jump in and help out the EVP of gas. Don't try to run it but offer help. Think enterprise, not just your own job."**

**TONY EARLEY**

## LEADERSHIP COMMONALITIES

There are many commonalities found across the leaders we surveyed. How each person performs on the point of commonality may be different, though. Here's what we found to be consistent:

## LEADERSHIP COMMONALITIES

### FOCUS ON PEOPLE

### NEED FOR COLLABORATION

### BUSINESS ADAPTATION

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>+ Developing people is a major source of joy and fulfillment.</li><li>+ Placing the right people in the right roles is critical for success.</li><li>+ Relying on trusted people and holding them accountable is vital.</li><li>+ Removing roadblocks to empower teams to deliver is a primary job of the C-level.</li><li>+ Making a difference for customers is a common driver and daily motivation.</li><li>+ Analyzing customer trends to anticipate upcoming needs.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>+ Seeking guidance from peers in other companies and those in similar roles proves to be helpful.</li><li>+ Building relationships and networks by joining organizations that are connected to each other.</li><li>+ Collaborating with people who think differently than you to improve results.</li><li>+ Understanding cross-functional impacts of changes to properly drive change in an organization.</li><li>+ Understanding how the business works and dependencies within the business; everyone should be aware of how the company makes or loses money.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>+ Preparing for the potential of major events with significant impacts – e.g., security breaches, #MeToo, response to COVID-19.</li><li>+ Listening for and adjusting to market dynamics.</li><li>+ Taking caution to ensure that the “small stuff” doesn’t disrupt the “big stuff.”</li><li>+ Ensuring that companies are making a positive impact on their communities.</li><li>+ Balancing the SCIENCE and ART of decision-making. Science is driven by facts and data; Art, such as public perception or employee impacts, also weighs into decisions regarding business adaptation as well.</li></ul> |
|---|---|--|

## LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND TRAITS

Successful executives develop common skills and traits that contribute to successful companies with engaged employees.

## WAY OF WORKING

### Be courageous.

Try new roles to continue learning. Doing so will provide perspective when making decisions.

### Be helpful.

Roll up your sleeves and do whatever you can to contribute, learn, and lead.

### Collaborate.

Collaboration improves the business, feeds culture, and drives employee engagement.

### Innovate.

Create an environment of innovation to solve for customer needs and desires.

### Inspire.

Raise the bar, continuously yet achievably.

### Be supportive.

Invite people to be true to themselves and respectful of others.

## CORE ASPECTS OF THE JOB

### See and set the vision.

Visualize the future and align the team on the path to realizing that vision.

### Drive strategic goals.

Communicate the goals and drive accountability accordingly.

### Plan.

Plan for multiple scenarios – happy path, unhappy path, and crisis/contingency path.

### Maintain operational continuity.

Lead reliable growth while pursuing transformational efforts.

### Remove roadblocks.

Expedite the path to success by eliminating hindrances.

### Observe, decide, and act.

Understand the situation, make a decision, and act promptly.

### Understand risks.

Transparency is key, and risk management is foundational to running a business.

### Prioritize and adjust.

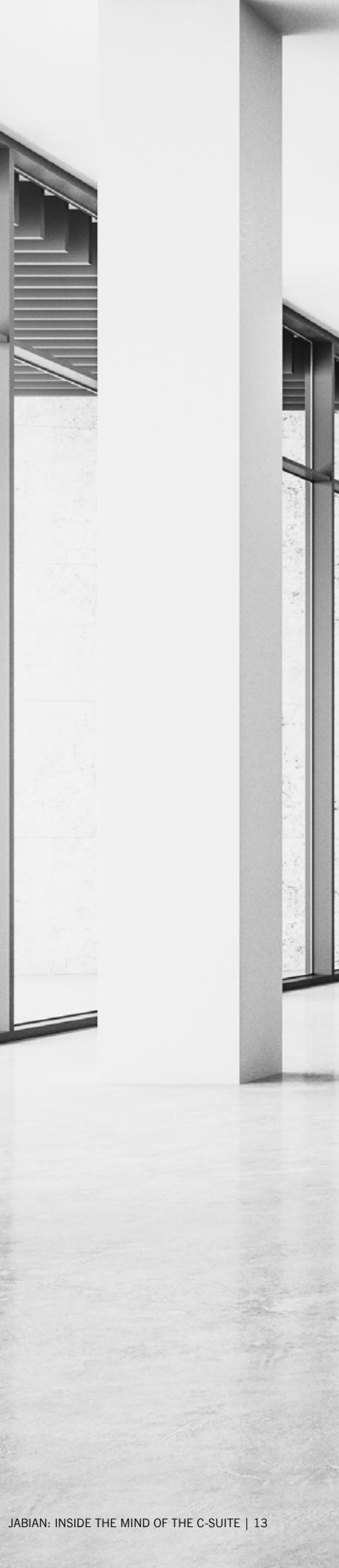
Understand competing priorities, decide on the path forward, and adjust as necessary.

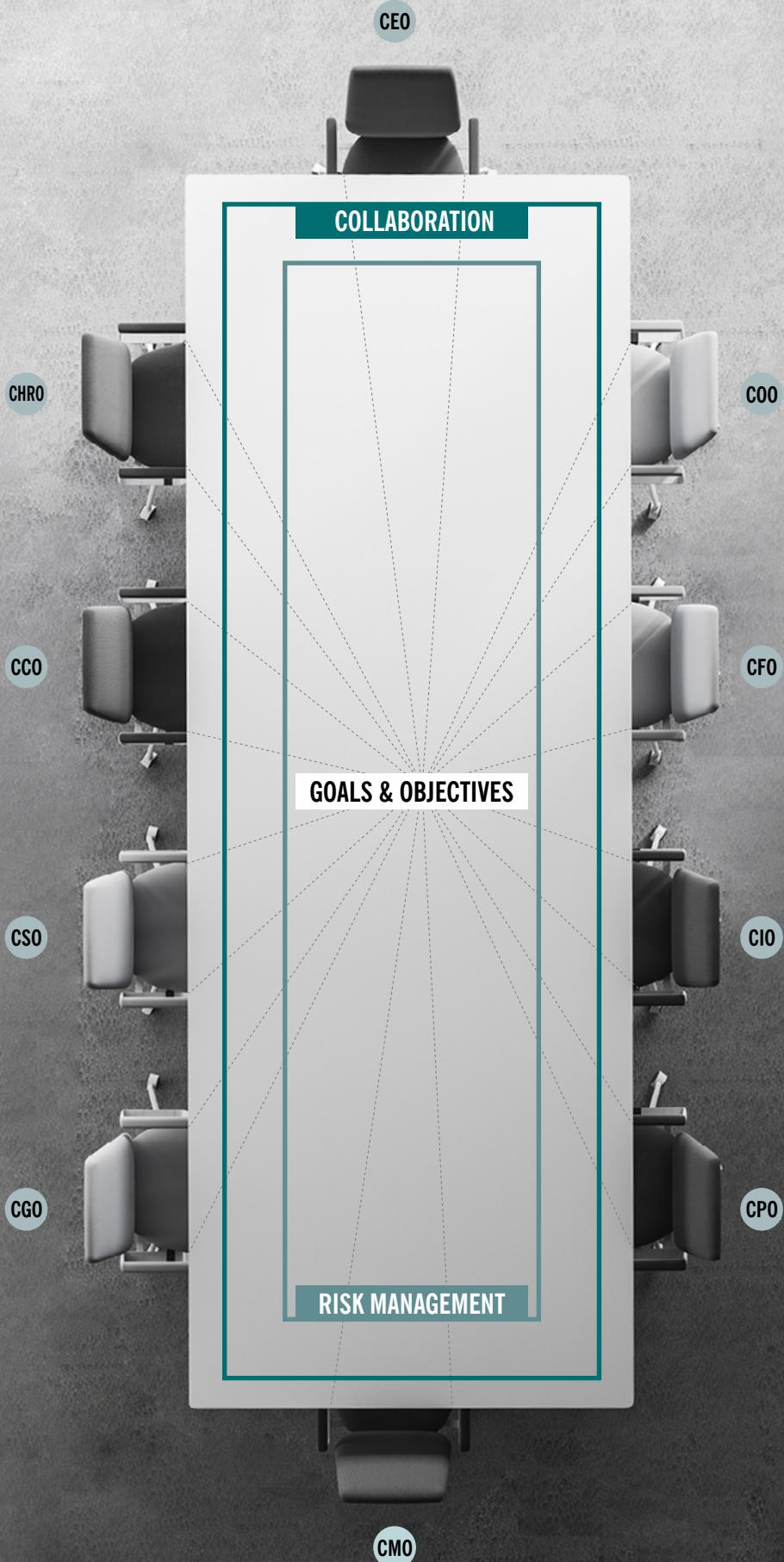
### Keep it simple.

Convey complex messages in simple ways. Encourage others to simplify.

There are many hard skills required to perform at the C-level, but the soft skills are often the differentiator. As Maya Angelou said,

**“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”**



**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

Right vision/strategy/team;  
public image; risk management

**CHIEF OPERATIONS**

Risk management; continuity  
planning and continuous  
operational improvements

**CHIEF FINANCE**

Capital and treasury  
management; spend guidance;  
opportunity analysis (e.g.,  
M&A); risk management

**CHIEF INFORMATION**

Business priority alignment;  
agility; technical advances and  
debt; risk management

**CHIEF HUMAN  
RESOURCES OFFICER**

Talent development; employee  
engagement; attrition; risk  
management

**CHIEF MARKETING**

Customer insight; brand  
positioning; market conditions;  
pipeline and risk management

**GENERAL COUNSEL**

Compliance; contract  
management; guidance and  
data privacy; risk management

**CHIEF SECURITY**

Internal protection; customer  
protection; risk management;  
retention

**CHIEF CUSTOMER**

Customer experience; insights;  
segmentation performance

**CHIEF PROCUREMENT**

Spend optimization by  
category; risk management

A high-performing C-level team will align on the optimal direction or decision for the impacted parties by focusing on their respective areas while staying aware and supportive of peer perspectives.

## PERCEPTION VS. REALITY OF BEING A C-LEVEL EXECUTIVE

Executives indicated there are misconceptions about their roles. We've shared some common perceptions and realities from our panel.

PERCEPTION	REALITY
C-level has unilateral decision-making authority.	Decisions are made at multiple levels of the organization, each with boundaries around decisions to provide “checks and balances” to manage risks.
C-level can spend money on anything upon the snap of a finger.	Even C-level has to obey the budget and has overall responsibility for financial health. Ensuring ROI on spend is of utmost importance.
C-level has all the answers.	They have experience and must rely on information from their teams to guide answers. Being the smartest person in the room will not solve the problem.
C-level knows many things they're not sharing.	Many reported this simply wasn't true. Executives stated that they shared everything possible.
C-level “has it made.”	Executives may have a better office and other perks, but this is balanced heavily with the liability and responsibility assumed by filling the role.
C-level executives are always right.	Executives shared how they learned and personally developed from mistakes. They emphasized the importance of not making the same mistake twice.
C-level executives are disconnected from staff.	Great leadership is in tune with their organization. Remember, they receive the information that is shared.
C-level develops plans towards goals once a year. Execution is simple.	Planning and adjusting is a continuous process. C-level executives need to make difficult decisions to stop, start, and continue investments based on the changing environment.

While C-level roles are extremely challenging, many reported having thoroughly enjoyed the experience and found the role to be extremely rewarding.

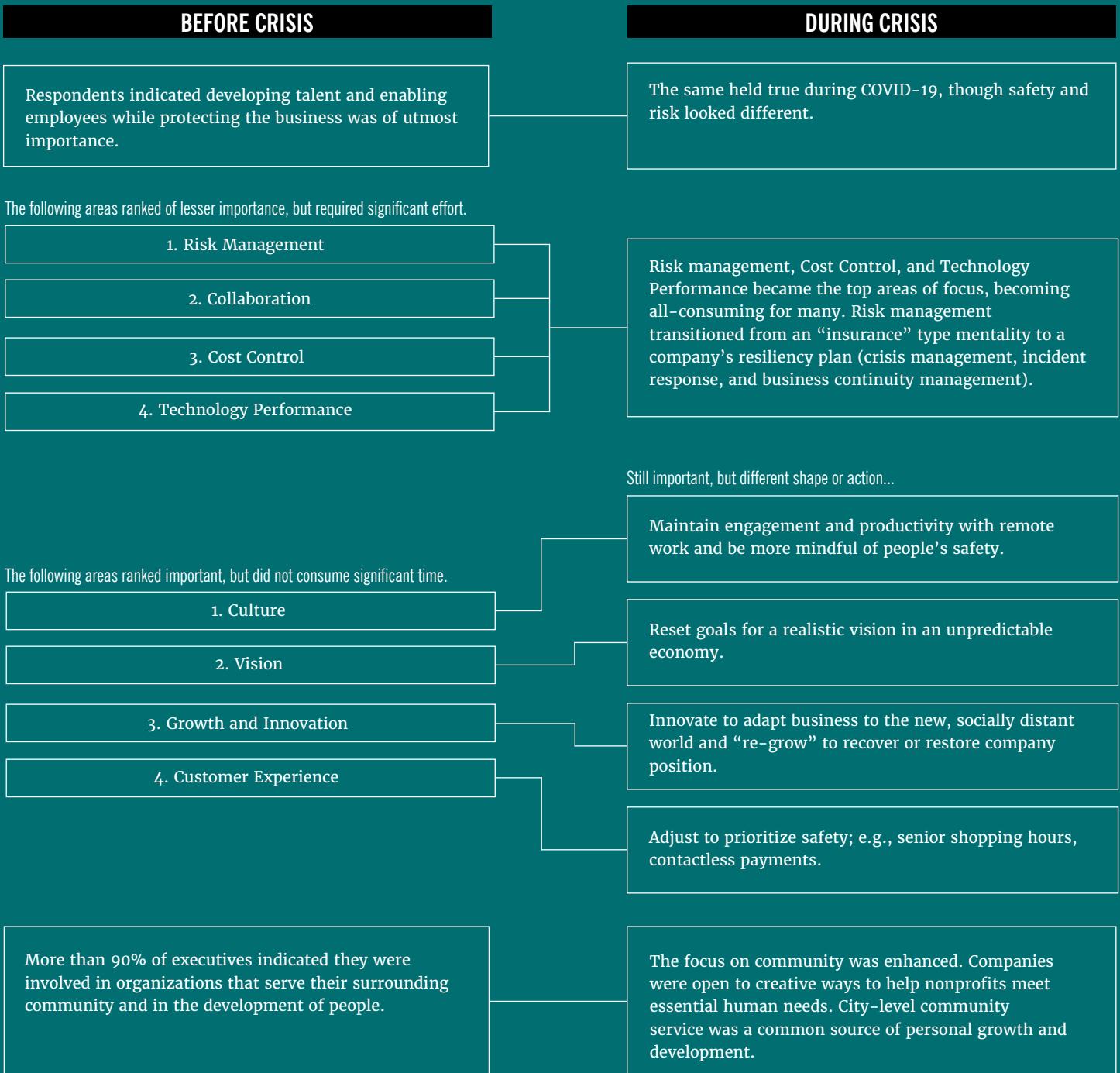


AN ANONYMOUS COMMENT FROM THE SURVEY UNDERSCORES  
THE IMPORTANCE OF MANAGING RISK:

**“ The razor’s edge - the distance between success and failure - is quite close. It takes just one client going bankrupt or one project coming up short to go from a great year to missing our annual goals.**

## PERSPECTIVE BEFORE AND DURING CRISIS

Our survey was conducted prior to COVID-19 impacts in the U.S., and interviews were conducted during COVID-19 impacts. The observations are applicable to any crisis.



**“ Anyone can lead when the world is all unicorns and rainbows, but true leadership is revealed when the universe gets ugly, when the sky is falling, and you wonder if the sun will rise.**

**Help employees with childcare, help people figure out how to operate so that the sense of commitment to the company, commitment to the customer, commitment to doing good remains the same [as compared to non-crisis times].**

LINDA HUDSON

# If you dream of being a C-level executive, prepare yourself for . . . CHANGE.

## Self-disruption is a required behavior for continuous development leading up to, and during, C-level tenure.



### C-LEVEL ROLES REQUIRE ONE TO

#### BE PURPOSEFUL

- + Acting with tenacity and conviction of purpose.
- + Thinking about what to anticipate about the future and articulating the vision thereof.
- + Fostering a hunger and desire to achieve.
- + Juggling priorities and time allocation.
- + Managing risks and finding opportunities.

#### STRETCH BOUNDS OF COMFORT

- + Gaining diversity of experience through job rotations across various functions and throughout the business.
- + Being open to opportunities outside your functional areas of experience.
- + Knocking on doors that may be closed to create opportunities.

#### LEAD PEOPLE

- + Relating to others across diverse groups.
- + Communicating in an inspiring and effective manner.
- + Challenging self and others.
- + Establishing and nurturing trusted relationships.
- + Managing perception internally and externally.

#### LEARN AND GROW

- + Establishing a support and mentoring structure.
- + Adapting quickly to find a path to success.
- + Monitoring competitors and the market to stay in touch with an industry.
- + Demonstrating the ability to influence and be persuasive.
- + Learning from failure.

Many of the responsibilities at the C-level are not “sexy,” but they are critical to running an effective business that plans to grow and leave a legacy.



---

## PARTING THOUGHTS

We enjoyed conducting the C-level research and hope you enjoyed hearing from some accomplished leaders. We leave you with some parting thoughts that stood out to us. In short, if you are or plan to be a C-level executive...

### GET RESULTS ON COMMITMENTS

#### DELIVER RESULTS

- + Set goals, develop plans, and drive to plans while managing risk.
- + Communicate, communicate, communicate.
- + Drive accountability, but don't persecute. Create an atmosphere where people can raise issues. Allow red-status items to translate to the right attention and assistance, not to the potential for being fired.
- + Know your skill gaps and bridge them with the right team.
- + Make the tough decisions.

### BE SOMEONE PEOPLE WANT TO WORK WITH AND FOR

#### FOSTER CULTURE

- + EQ trumps IQ.
- + Be aware of the tone you set from "your top" – whatever level that currently may be. Contribute positively to the culture.
- + Get out of your office, visit people in their jobs at their sites. You'll gain respect.
- + Find your balance.
- + Be honest.
- + Collaborate and sometimes commiserate with trusted peers.
- + Always be on time to HR and Finance meetings.

### GUIDANCE TO EXECUTIVES:

**Maintain perspective. Remember that monthly meetings to review metrics may be just another meeting to the C-level. But to the person sharing the update, it's the most important meeting of the month. Everything said and how it is said can keep someone up at night and ultimately inspire or demotivate them. How you are present and how you react are far-reaching.**

---

Executives, does the message resonate? Team members, do you feel as though you better understand what's on executives' minds and how to communicate and work effectively with them? We'd love to hear your feedback. Please contact us at [insights@jabian.com](mailto:insights@jabian.com) to share your thoughts.

**We would like to acknowledge and thank contributors to the article:**

Aaron Hensley  
Courtney Ramey  
Dan Gordon  
Dan Hickey  
Danny Gattas  
Jeff Hancock

Jennifer Higgins  
Kristine Jordan  
Marcus Stallworth  
Ryan Briley  
Saira Joseph  
Sean Woolley

Sid Feagin  
Steven Lubel  
Tracy Reznik

**ABOUT JABIAN**

Jabian Consulting is a strategic management and technology consulting firm with an integrated approach to creating and implementing strategies, enhancing business processes, developing human capital, and better aligning technology — ultimately helping clients become more competitive and profitable. Jabian blends functional expertise, industry knowledge, and senior experience to think strategically and act practically. It's a Strategy That Works®.

For more information, visit [www.jabian.com](http://www.jabian.com)

