



Riding Shotgun: The Role of the COO

Nathan Bennett, Stephen A. Miles

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The role of Chief Operations Officer is clearly important. In fact, it has been argued that the number two position is the toughest job in a company. COOs are typically the key individuals responsible for the delivery of results on a day-to-day, quarter-to-quarter basis. They play a critical leadership role in executing the strategies developed by the top management team. And, in many cases, they are being groomed to be—or are actually being tested as—the firm's CEO-elect. Despite all this, the COO role has not received much attention.

Riding Shotgun: The Role of the COO provides a new understanding of this little-understood role. The authors—a scholar and a consultant—develop a framework for understanding who the COO is, why a company would want to create this position, and the challenges associated with successful performance in the COO role. Drawing heavily on a number of first-person accounts from CEOs and other top executives in major corporations, the authors have developed a set of strategies or principles to inform individuals who aspire to serve in such a position. The executives who share their experiences in this book are from some of the most established and important companies in today's economy: AirTran; American Standard Companies; Amgen; Adobe Systems, Inc.; Autodesk, Inc; eBay; Heidrick & Struggles; InBev; Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Company; Mattel, Inc; Motorola; PepsiCo; Raytheon Company; Starbucks; and many others.

Excerpts from the Book:

On focusing on success

"The primary goal I set for myself on how I define what success looks like for me is am I working at a company that matters? Am I working with somebody who I think affects positive change? Am I providing a benefit to my family? Am I enjoying myself? Why would I put a limitation on my enjoyment? There is an old view on Wall Street that says, 'They love you until they don't.' I am going to stay happy until I am not."—Dan Rosensweig, COO Yahoo!

On the relationship between the CEO and COO

"Deep down, you have to trust each other and you have to like each other. If you don't like each other, and/or don't trust each other, it may work, kind of, but it will be at a fifty percent level at best."—Craig Weatherup, Director, Starbucks, and former Chairman, Pepsi

On the challenges of transitioning into the COO role

"If you can't conceptualize the strategic objectives or help drive that or participate in that, I don't think you are going to succeed. But, equally, if you can't translate that into an executable plan, you are not going to succeed either."—Shantanu Narayen, COO, Adobe Systems

Additional Quotes:

"Miles & Bennett tackle an important and drastically under-researched area: the role, personalities, fit and success factors of COOs. We've seen several COOs who have been total winners, but it's striking how

different the models of success can be depending on role, personal competencies, business situation/cycle/type, team strengths, and CEO strengths. The authors have done a very nice job of tying all of this together."—Jim Williams, Partner, Texas Pacific Group

"The lessons reported in this book will be very useful to Boards, Heads of Human Resources and CEOs as they consider succession planning and organizational design."—Dale Morrison, President & Chief Executive Officer, McCain Foods Limited

"The job of COO is becoming more important as companies and their boards look internally for succession alternatives. One question they face: Will the organization continue to run as the number 2 becomes the number 1? *Riding Shotgun* will help answer this and many more questions about the COO role in today's corporate structure."—John Berisford, Senior Vice President, Human Resources, The Pepsi Bottling Group

"The COO plays a critical leadership role in most businesses, but its particularly true in the natural resources

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Ronald Griffin:

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