



(U) The Life of An Exec

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Run Date: 07/18/2003

(U//FOUO) "Life, as we know it, will cease to exist if I don't see MG Quirk immediately." As MG Quirk's executive assistant, this is one of the many dramatic opening lines that I've heard. An exec is a senior leader's front door, traffic cop, information manager, and most importantly, conscience. Like triage in an emergency room, an exec's main task is prioritization. Which of the hundreds of incoming daily e-mails and documents are truly important? Out of the dozens of requests, whom should they meet with today? What do they have to sign now so the Earth does not spin off its axis? An exec must make hundreds of decisions every day to optimize the senior's time. The worst decision is no decision. Without an effective filter, the senior is doomed to drown in information overload and unending meetings.

(U//FOUO) What is a "typical" day in the life of an exec? Opening the office before the craziness begins is critical as the exec must skim new incoming information and tee up the hot issues of the day. Then the daily roller coaster ride begins. The exec will attend many of the back-to-back-to-back meetings-- look for the slightly haggard individual sitting in the back row documenting actions or going through volumes of paperwork. The exec must be prepared to steal quality time with the senior between meetings or in transit to provide updates or background on upcoming events. The churn of activity usually continues through the late afternoon or early evening. The end of the day is often the only available time to work off actions and complete paperwork.

(U//FOUO) Keeping pace with a frenetic schedule is only skimming the surface of being an exec. An exec is a confidant who works significant and sensitive issues behind the scenes. They are the senior's staunchest ally to the outside world but privately their toughest critic providing candid assessments of decisions, meetings, and briefings. The exec represents the senior at all times and must build positive relationships across the organization, particularly with the staffs of other senior leaders. An exec makes sure promises are kept and questions are answered. An exec is the voice inside the senior's head reminding them of their priorities and obligations.

(U//FOUO) So the hours are long and the pace is relentless-- why would anyone want to do this? Immersion into this job provides one of the purest training experiences. An exec has a front row seat to the good, the bad, and the ugly of the senior leadership lifestyle. Most execs serve for a limited duration (12 to 24 months is typical)-- long enough to learn the job and be effective, but short enough to maintain sanity. Whether they aspire to be a senior or just more effective at their current level, executive assistants return to the workforce with a much-improved understanding of the implications of their work as part of the big picture.



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