

Announcing a New C-Suite Role - The CJO

The C-suite nomenclature is full of TLAs or Three Letter Acronyms to remember. Common examples are Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Operations Officer (COO), Chief Information Officer (CIO), and Chief Financial Officer (CFO). And now a new role has been announced as belonging to the executive suite. It carries a long tradition and has an acknowledged importance and place in halls of power. Boardrooms today are full of strategy, governance, metrics, planning, business cases, accountability, reporting, responsibility, persuasion, influence and positional power. There is also power-play, scheming, back-room and under-the-table dealing, overthrows, subversive manoeuvring, silent eliminations, and other tactics for gaining and subverting power.

In the noble rooms of Europe, in the palaces where so much upfront communicating and behind-the-back dealing was a norm, the Monarch or noble person had a vital ally. The Jester was tasked with providing amusing, targeted and timely critical feedback. Sometimes he was the lunatic. He got to say and do what no one else was prepared to or possibly able to do: speak the truth, make clear the idiocy of what he was noticing, and to actually state the obvious: "Oh King, you are naked. You are not wearing any clothes."

At last this role is being recognised in today's boardrooms and management suites. The CJO has a



New C-Suite Role: Chief Jesting Officer (CJO)

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Abstract

Explores the suggested role of CJO which would be responsible for keeping the organisation honest, for stating what typically goes unsaid, and calls people on their intentions.

Keywords

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very important balancing role, speaking and behaving authentically, being honest, speaking the unspoken, cutting to the chase, naming the elephant in the room, destabilising and outing the plotters and schemers. The CJO is a disturber, a truth-teller, and ensures all that is needed for a sound decision to be made is available, not just the information those with an agenda believe ought to be presented. The CJO also ensures that other ideas are considered and that the Devil's Advocate role is positively represented. The CJO names the behaviours and makes anything less than genuine visible for what it is. So, at last, after a long absence from the places of power, a long treasured and truly significant role returns: the Chief Jester or Chief Jesting Officer.

When truly functioning to full capacity, the CJO will speak the unspoken and shine a light on the hidden. Examples include:

"Great business case. I notice it only supports your agenda for ... How about these stakeholder's missing from your assessment and their needs?"

“Bob, I realise your family supports us with significant contributions, and has incredible influence, and you are hoping for a promotion, but this plan is appalling. Sort this out and only come back when you have. Ain’t that right King?”

“Sharon, I really did not think you’d make the cut, but this work you’ve submitted is excellent and I have to change my thinking of you, and about this subject. Everyone else got this very wrong.”

“King, you’re acting like a fruit loop at the moment. That is the poorest excuse for a submission you have seen in ages, and your saying ‘Thank you. That is great work.’ WAKE UP Kingee!! What does this person hold over you? Next king please.”

Or perhaps, working alongside in a mentoring role:

Manager: I am really disappointed in you. I hear from your peers that you are negative all the time, way too direct, that you are letting your frustration show, and are not supporting your colleagues. You need to be more measured in how you speak and what you say. Perhaps you should learn to sugar coat what you say so you are not too in their faces, or mine.”

Subordinate: I will be more positive in the future and ensure any frustration I feel is managed. I will learn to bite my tongue and find other ways of dealing with the issues I have with them.

CJO: [Whispering in Subordinate’s ear] Try this.

‘Those same people telling you I am negative and uncooperative are putting together such a flimsy concept, one without value, that is so short-sighted that it will be very damaging if allowed to proceed. I have done my level best to work this through with them offline so it did not have to escalate. My frustration highlights the pressure I have been working with to find something that works. I will not bury such a potent emotion that can make a positive difference when channelled correctly. They actually need to hear it direct and clear. It would be even better if it came from you. Nothing to date has persuaded them of what a useless and damaging approach they are taking. Sugar coating? That just means that while it tastes sweet initially the turd is still a turd.’

Absolutely shocking! I can hear the rumbles around the planet that someone so uncouth could be permitted a senior role. Yet, at last, someone prepared to cut through the nonsense, address the unspoken, and name the elephants in the room. Finally someone who can make a fabulous difference to all the political backstabbing and gamesmanship, is being appointed and a real difference will now be had.

Just jesting! Unfortunately.

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