

## Case 6: Choice of an Executive Assistant

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Jack Brown, an active member of his local church, genuinely desired to serve as a Christian businessperson. At the age of 42, he was hired as the CEO of ZYX Corporation. The previous CEO's executive assistant, Miss Emma Cummings, who had served 30 years as personal secretary/executive assistant to the last six CEOs, decided that it was a good time for her to retire. This would allow Mr. Brown the opportunity to select her successor as he began his tenure.

The executive assistant to the CEO serves a strategic role. In larger organizations that have a team of executive officers, there may be a group of personal secretaries or executive assistants who jointly as well as separately exercise great influence. Whereas the executive officers generally have only a few years' tenure, especially in any one position, the executive assistants often make a career of their roles, typically having proven their company loyalty, skill, and intelligence by moving up from other secretarial positions in the organization. They do not make policy decisions but are most influential regarding access to policy makers. They value the public reputation and integrity of the organization and are gatekeepers between the CEO and its stakeholders, including owners, managers, employees, customers, suppliers, and the public-at-large.

CEO Brown, recognizing the critical importance of the position, asked human resources to set up interviews with the three most technically qualified candidates. The manager of human resources suggested the following three applicants:

1) **Cynthia Whyte**, 30, a college-educated teacher with excellent computer skills. Two years ago she married the vice president of human resources for ZYX Corporation. They have had no children, and she says she wishes to assume a full-time position for her personal career development. She emphasizes that she already knows the company well because of her husband.

2) **Edgar Greene**, 33, an employee of ZYX's engineering department. Since joining the company three years ago, he has risen

rapidly due to outstanding performance reviews and a track record of productive suggestions. He has completed two years of college and is unmarried. He says that he is seeking the position as a way to broaden his business experience.

3) **Amanda Blue**, 56, a widow, is a recent early retiree who served 20 years as an executive assistant in ABC Corporation, a firm in ZYX's industry with headquarters in another state. She says that she seeks the executive assistant position because she misses her work, having realized she is a long way from needing to retire. In addition, whereas she recently moved to the community in order to be close to her grandchildren, she now realizes that she should work so as not to interfere too much with the child-raising efforts of her son and daughter-in-law.

After interviewing each of the candidates, Jack Brown is convinced that each is well-qualified in terms of the technical skills listed in the job specifications and that each, based on reference checks and interview discussions, appears to be a person of good Christian character. Moreover, each candidate appears to understand the requirements in the formal job description and has confirmed that he or she will accept the job, if offered. Jack faces a difficult choice and wants to make the right choice with godly wisdom.

Jack wonders if he needs to consider anything else – any special circumstances or relationship factors that will help him to determine the most appropriate choice. He wonders whether it would be culturally appropriate to hire a male as his personal executive assistant. He is unsure how he would relate to a significantly older personal assistant. He and his wife already have a close acquaintance with Cynthia and her husband, Bernard Whyte, not only because of company gatherings but also because they attend the same church and belong to the same neighborhood ministry group. Edgar Greene and Amanda Blue regularly attend other churches whose pastors have supplied good character references.

Jack has been very impressed with Bernard Whyte as a capable and innovative executive, one who is enthusiastic about some major strategic changes Jack Brown thinks ZYX Corporation needs to meet its strategic objectives. In particular, Bernard has proposed hiring a small computer consulting firm with expertise in ZYX's industry. Jack knows

this firm very well, having worked with it during college. He worked directly for its founder, who also is Bernard's uncle. Jack sees Bernard Whyte as someone with whom he needs to work closely in building the company, but wonders whether the other employees would see his hiring of Bernard's wife in the strategic gatekeeper role of executive assistant as an appropriate choice.

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