

Lily Shippen

CASE STUDY

Transforming Business Efficiency:
The Power of an Executive Assistant



in partnership with:
Gorilla Experiment Builder



lilyshippen.co.uk

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At Lily Shippen, we understand that the right Executive Assistant can have a significant impact on a business, providing more than administrative support and becoming a key strategic asset.

Gorilla, a fast-growing business, recognised the need for a highly capable EA to free up leadership time, streamline operations and drive efficiency.

However, finding the right individual, someone who could not only take on core EA responsibilities but also evolve into a leadership role, required specialist insight.

This case study explores how our expertise in Executive Assistant recruitment enabled Gorilla to make a hire that not only improved day-to-day efficiency but also laid the groundwork for long-term operational success.

From the leadership team's perspective to the EA's own experience in making an impact from day one, this is a story of how the right talent can transform a business.



Jo's Point of View:

When we decided to hire an Executive Assistant, my approach was guided by the "Buy Back Your Time" framework, which emphasises delegating low-leverage tasks to free up time for high-impact activities.

I was confident that a strong EA would allow us to focus more on strategy and leadership, but my co-founder initially had reservations, as we hadn't yet seen the tangible impact of this type of role in action.

To ensure the success of this hire, we partnered with Lily Shippen. Their expertise was significant in identifying candidates who not only had the organisational skills of an EA but also the leadership potential to grow into a broader operational role.

"Working with Lily Shippen's network helped us narrow down the search to individuals who fit our needs perfectly."

Someone with the drive to take ownership of administrative tasks and the ambition to evolve into a key player in our leadership team.

With the right candidate in place – sourced through Lily Shippen – we quickly saw the immediate benefits. Our EA took over crucial tasks like scheduling, email management, and project coordination, freeing us to focus on high-leverage activities like strategic planning and growth initiatives.

This led to a clear shift in our perspectives, as we saw firsthand how hiring an EA could implement so many processes and structures that have resulted in significant improvements in our operations, enhancing overall efficiency and scalability.

Perhaps the most surprising benefit has been the improvement in the quality of our daydreams. Our brains are remarkable at solving problems, often working on them while we sleep, exercise, or even watch TV. This subconscious process identifies what drains us, such as an overflowing inbox or disorganised tasks.

By having a full time EA to manage these elements of life, we were able to reclaim time to engage in productive daydreaming focused on the big, hairy problems of our business rather than the sand that clutters our inboxes and desks.

Ultimately, the combination of the 'Buy Back Your Time' framework and the experience from Lily Shippen made this hire not just successful, but transformational to Gorilla's operations. It has allowed us to reclaim time for strategic priorities while building a foundation for long-term operational success.



Jemma's Point of View:

From the outset, I approached the role of Executive Assistant as more than administrative support, aiming to be a strategic partner to the founding team at Gorilla.

How did you make the role your own from the outset?

I invested time in understanding the company's broader business goals, the founder's priorities, and the specific pain points the company was facing.

One key aspect was identifying areas where I could provide added value beyond my job description, such as streamlining communication across teams, developing processes to support scaling, building out and supporting the HR function, and even contributing to operational decisions. This mindset shift, from task executor to problem solver, helped me make the role my own.

What steps did you take to make an impact from day one?

In joining a new role I've always taken time within my first month to independently build a personal development plan. To make an immediate impact, I tend to focus on three main areas:

1. Quick wins

I identify tasks that will have an immediate effect on the efficiency of the team. This included organising high-level and team meetings, improving calendar management, and documenting workflows to minimise operational friction.

2. Understanding key stakeholders

I hold introductory meetings with key internal stakeholders to learn about their pain points and how I can help alleviate them. This proactive engagement not only helped me gather insights but also fostered trust early on.

When identifying key stakeholders, I look for not only decision makers but also the influencers among the team. Identifying the team member(s) who acts as the team voice can give invaluable insights to what's working and more importantly what is not working at team level.

3. Leveraging technology

I familiarise myself with the tools and platforms the team use (e.g. project management, communication tools), meaning I was able to add value right away by optimising the way we used these systems for daily operations.

How did you build and foster relationships within a remote business?

In a fully remote setup, building relationships requires intentional effort, and I approached this by focusing on rapport-building, clear communication and transparency.

To build personal connections beyond day-to-day work interactions, I made a habit of starting

meetings by asking the team about their day or weekend, showing genuine interest in their lives and remembering personal milestones or events they had shared, without ever probing for information they hadn't volunteered.

I made it a priority to over-communicate, regularly checking in with the team and ensuring I was approachable, encouraging open dialogue so everyone knew I was available to support them.

Additionally, I emphasised transparency and visibility by clearly communicating my progress and contributions to both leadership and the wider team, ensuring that even in a remote environment, the impact of my work was recognised and understood. By regularly updating the team and seeking feedback, I built a culture of trust and collaboration, despite the physical distance.

How did you progress to Chief of Staff? What steps did you take to make this happen?

Progressing to Chief of Staff required both proactive career management and delivering measurable impact. It was heavily supported by both Founders who encouraged me to take hold of the business area's I wanted to lead.

Early in my EA role, I identified projects that would align with company goals, such as implementing company-wide operational processes based on the EOS model, working on cross-functional projects, and supporting leadership in decision-making processes. I began leading initiatives outside the typical EA scope, positioning myself as a leader within operational business areas such as HR and Procurement.

Through consistent delivery and strong relationship-building, I earned the trust of the founding team. I positioned myself as their right-hand person, ensuring I could anticipate their needs and challenges. I believe high-level trust was critical in making the transition from EA to CoS.

I also proactively sought - and still seek - mentorship from senior leaders and continue to upskill myself in areas that are essential for my role at Gorilla, such as strategic planning and understanding data. By continuously improving my knowledge and understanding of the business, I continue to demonstrate that I can contribute to the company at an impactful level.

Conclusion

At Lily Shippen, we believe that transitioning from Executive Assistant to Chief of Staff is not merely a career shift, but a profound transformation that redefines leadership within any organisation.

It is important to recognise that a Chief of Staff role is not a natural progression from an Executive Assistant, it is an entirely different role that requires distinct skills and a strategic understanding of business operations.

"This case study exemplifies how strategic foresight, proactive career management, and a commitment to continuous personal development can catalyse such a transformative journey."

We champion these stories because they illustrate the profound impact that dedicated individuals can have when they are empowered to lead the charge in rewriting their professional destinies.

To hear more about, or to talk to our team, contact us using any of the details below:



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