

Chief Communications Officer Accelerator Program

303 E. Wacker Drive, Suite 1600 (Medill Chicago)

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Instructors:

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Course Overview

The Chief Communications Officer (CCO) role has never been more complex or critical. Today's CCOs are expected to operate as business strategists, trusted advisors, and stewards of reputation in an environment defined by complexity and constant change.

This intensive program will equip senior communications leaders with the strategic frameworks and executive capabilities needed to meet rising stakeholder expectations, build trust in high-stakes situations, leverage AI strategically, and influence business outcomes.

Over the two-day course, you will hear candid perspectives from industry experts and build a network of peers navigating similar challenges. You'll practice high-stakes leadership in a hands-on crisis simulation that includes a "live" TV news interview in our broadcast studio. You'll leave with practical tools for handling high-pressure moments and a personalized CCO Roadmap that charts your next steps toward communications leadership.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- **Understand the evolving CCO role:** Evaluate the expanding scope and influence of the position and the competencies required to secure and succeed in the role.
- **Showcase essential executive capabilities:** Demonstrate cross-functional influence, AI fluency, effective C-suite counsel, and the ability to link reputation management to measurable business outcomes.
- **Lead crisis communications with executive presence:** Navigate complex, high-pressure situations and advise C-suite leaders when facing hostile stakeholders and no good options.
- **Chart your path forward:** Evaluate your current capabilities against Medill's research-backed CCO Competency Model and create a personalized development plan to advance your path to the CCO role.

DAY 1 SCHEDULE	
8:30 – 8:50	Arrival, coffee, and mingling (<i>light breakfast provided</i>)
8:50 – 9:00	Welcome from Medill Executive Education
9:00 – 9:20 (20 min)	Kickoff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor introductions • Overview of course objectives • Participant introductions
9:20 – 10:00 (40 min)	Understanding the CCO Role and Key Competencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine the Chief Communications Officer role and its evolution • Review findings from Medill's CCO survey and introduce the CCO Competency Model • Assess your current capabilities against the CCO Competency Model to identify strengths and development areas
10:00 -10:15	Break
10:15 – 11:00 (45 min)	Becoming a Trusted Advisor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine how CCOs build trusted advisor relationships and build executive presence while maintaining authenticity • Explore approaches for earning credibility across functions, building strategic partnerships, and influencing without authority • Learn strategies for providing counsel to senior leaders, including how to deliver difficult messages and navigate pushback
11:00 – 12:00 (60 min)	Leveraging AI for Impact
12:00 – 12:45	Lunch (<i>provided</i>)
12:45 – 1:15 (30 min)	Frameworks & Strategic Foundation Opening: The Five Fault Lines of Modern Reputational Risk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framework: Age of Issues + Five Fault Lines: Economic Divide, Cultural-Political Divide, Tech Divide, Institutional Trust Divide, Information Divide <p>Interactive: Participants map their own organizations' vulnerabilities</p>
1:15 – 2:30 (75 min)	Stakeholder Strategy Under Societal Pressure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scenario introduction: Participants receive a detailed crisis scenario (fictional consumer goods company facing supply chain labor practice controversy) • Frameworks: Stakeholder Risk Matrix, Social License Mapping, Selective Response Strategy (when to ignore/reinforce/correct) • Team exercise: Map stakeholders, create communication cascade plans, and make strategic choices about messaging

2:30 – 2:45	Break
2:45 – 4:00 (75 min)	Executive Leadership When There Are No Good Options <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framework: Stand Firm / Pivot / Redirect / Stay Silent decision tree • Team exercise: Prepare the CEO statement, board brief, and employee communication under pressure • Hostile role-play: Teams present to a simulated executive management team (CEO, CFO, General Counsel, Chief People Officer) who use aggressive challenge tactics
4:00	Day 1 Close

DAY 2 SCHEDULE	
8:30 – 8:50	Arrival, coffee, and mingling (<i>light breakfast will be provided</i>)
8:50 – 9:00	Welcome Back from Medill Executive Education
9:00 – 9:15	Day 2 Kickoff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recap Day 1 Learnings • Overview of Day 2 objectives
9:15 – 10:15 (60 min)	Misinformation, Message Control & The New Playbook <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framework: The New Playbook (5 strategic truths: Speed beats polish, can't be neutral, loudest voices aren't your audience, disinformation is business risk, trust built in peacetime) • Framework: Building Resilience Against Disinformation (pre-bunking, vulnerability assessment) • Team exercise: Develop a holding statement, full response, channel strategy, validator activation plan • Interactive simulation: Half the room plays "the company," half plays hostile stakeholders (journalists, employees, activists, investors) in a real-time pressure test

<p>10:30 – 11:30 (60 min)</p>	<p>Live TV News Panel Simulation - Crisis in the Studio</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live broadcast simulation: Participants rotate through roles (company executive, labor rights activist, industry analyst, employee representative, journalist/anchor) • Format: 3 rounds with opening statements, hostile Q&A, breaking news injects, and closing statements • Focus: Maintaining credibility under fire, message discipline when interrupted, executive presence when competing voices attack <p>Debrief after each round: What worked, what broke down, what would shift outcomes</p>
<p>11:30 – 12:00 (30 min)</p>	<p>Synthesis & Practical Tools for Tomorrow</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Framework recap: Trace the crisis through the Five Fault Lines • Toolkit distribution: Three take-home tools (Crisis Decision Matrix flowchart, Stakeholder Cascade Template, Selective Response Framework) • Personal reflection: Return to the opening question about their own values/business collision moment.
<p>12:00 – 1:15 (75 min)</p>	<p>Lunch + Fireside Chat with Recruiter Understand current trends in CCO hiring, including what companies prioritize when selecting their most senior communications leader</p>
<p>1:15 – 2:15 (60 min)</p>	<p>Charting Your Path</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on key insights from today's sessions, create a CCO Roadmap to your development priorities and next steps
<p>2:15 – 2:30</p>	<p>Break</p>
<p>2:30 – 3:30 (60 min)</p>	<p>CCO Capstone Panel Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guest speakers who share candid insights about their career journeys and their best advice for aspiring CCOs
<p>3:30 – 4:00 (30 min)</p>	<p>Wrap up Discussion and Program Close</p>

Please note course details, including schedule, format, faculty, speakers, and topics, are subject to change.