

# CTO



**CTO'S GUIDE TO BECOMING A**

# Business Strategist



# The Right Path

**C**ongratulations. You're a CIO, so you're already an IT strategist. You've got the email and the data center under control, you've wrestled with the ERP beast, and you're trying to keep the hackers out. So why do you need to also be a *business* strategist? Isn't that the CEO's job?

Yes, but the CEO needs help. A PricewaterhouseCoopers survey of CEOs found that they view "technological advances" as the No. 1 trend transforming their business over the next five years. (Dirty little secret: The CEO and the board of directors are really, really afraid of being on the wrong end of digital disruption on their watch.) This is where you come in—consider yourself the CEO's chief digital consultant, helping the CEO find a way to be a digital hero, a disrupter instead of a disruptee. Our colleagues at the CIO Executive Council call this C-suite role the "digital pathfinder."

But you'll need more than tech savvy. You'll need to thoroughly understand how your business makes money and monitor the broader trends in your industry (and society at large) so you can identify new business opportunities and risks.

You'll need political savvy, too. Not the bad kind that features sharp elbows and backstabbing. The good kind, where you work with C-suite colleagues to move the business forward, together.

The digital pathfinder will either be you, as CIO, or the chief marketing officer (or perhaps both of you as a dynamic duo). Otherwise, the CEO will hire a hotshot chief digital officer to do the job and you'll be left sweeping up the digital crumbs. So let's get started. The expert advice in these pages, carefully selected from *CIO* magazine's Business Strategist columns, will put you on the right path.

—Mitch Betts



**CONTRIBUTORS**

**EDITORS IN CHIEF**

Dan Muse, CIO.com,  
Maryfran Johnson, magazine and events

**EXECUTIVE EDITOR**

Mitch Betts

**MANAGING EDITOR**

Bob Rawson (copy and production)

**ART DIRECTOR**

Terri Haas

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# On Becoming a Business Hero

Here's how to find the exit door from the techie trap **BY MICHAEL HUGOS**

**T**hey scheduled you for just 30 minutes right after lunch on the second day of the annual senior management retreat. They did it because, even though you are a senior exec, they still think of you as “the techie.”

Your business colleagues on the management team don't have time for techie talk, and they don't want to hear why they can't get the systems they want right away. So they put you into that oh-so-forgettable slot right after lunch when everybody is half asleep.

If you're an IT director or CIO, you may have been in this same position. I've been there. I feel your pain. Welcome to the classic predicament of the rising IT exec. It's the “techie trap,” the IT version of the glass ceiling. They won't take you seriously or let you go any higher because you're the techie. So how do you break out?

## A Wake-Up Call

You start by waking them up with a surprise presentation after lunch. You say you've decided to change the way you finance and deliver new apps and systems. You say you have a plan for reducing the risk of big-dollar, up-front investments in new systems (a.k.a. capital expense or “capex”); instead you are going to switch to a pay-as-you-go (operating expense or “opex”) model to pay for new apps and systems.

You expand on this by saying you are also going to roll out new, high-priority applications and system upgrades on a continuous 30-, 60- or 90-day delivery cycle that aligns with quarterly company objectives. You tell them they can change their system development priorities every 30 days as business needs change and unexpected things happen.

By the time you finish saying this, you will have the rapt attention of everyone in the room.

You have not said anything techie; you have not dropped

a single TLA (three-letter acronym). As your words sink in, people look up from their smartphones or laptops, and those staring out the window shift their gaze to you. Several people (like the CEO and maybe the CFO and the COO) even lean forward in their chairs and start nodding their heads as they listen.

**The strategy for business success can be summed up as: Try many things, follow success, abandon failure.**

You have surprised and delighted them. Ideas flow and IT is the topic of conversation for the next two hours instead of the scheduled 30 minutes. You have just opened the exit door from the techie trap.

The strategy for business success these days can be summed up as: Try many things, follow success, abandon failure. Since business operations and IT have

completely merged, the advantage goes to those companies whose IT groups can try many things (because nobody knows what will work) and quickly scale up what does work. And further advantage goes to those who can walk away from the many things that don't work—without leaving behind a lot of sunk cost (capex) in hardware and software. IT executives who get things done quickly and avoid squandering big capex dollars are in huge demand.

Use cloud computing (public, private or hybrid) to quickly provision new business units. Build new systems and apps from a mix of in-house and hosted software, leverage social media and mobile consumer devices, and write a bit of custom code when needed. Do all of this with no money up front, no long-term licenses, and a pay-as-you-go model. Break big projects into smaller pieces and roll new pieces into production every 30, 60 or 90 days.

You probably already know this, or at least strongly suspect it. So all I'm doing is telling you that you're right. This is how you get out of the techie trap and become a business hero.

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Michael Hugos, a former CIO, is an author, speaker and principal at the Center for Systems Innovation ([www.michaelhugos.com](http://www.michaelhugos.com)).



# Great CIOs Are Politically Astute

Despite all our objective metrics, executing a business strategy requires a personal touch **BY JACK BERGSTRAND**

**E**very IT professional has been taught how important it is to be objective. To that end, we have budgets, planning methods, scorecards and metrics that are supposed to be numerically based. And, as a result, we have no shortage of red lights, green lights and yellow lights to keep us focused.

But to succeed in strategic business initiatives, we have to work with many people, and you may have noticed that we humans aren't always 100 percent objective. And even if we were, our personal forms of objectivity are often in conflict. Different stakeholders have different visions and goals, work on different time frames, have different backgrounds and have varying areas of expertise. (Just think of the different points of view you see among the top executives of finance, HR, engineering and marketing departments.) Yet for strategic initiatives to be successful, executives also need the subjective management skills to get key people on the same page, keep them on it, and make sure they're headed in the same direction.

Peter Drucker, the father of modern management, pointed out that to get better organizational results, leaders should take a social-science-based approach. In other words, it requires social skills as well as objective metrics.

This is the productive use of political savvy, which is a sincere effort to bring people together to turn strategy into results—not the backstabbing, self-aggrandizing, double-crossing tactics that give corporate politics a bad name.

## No Rope-Climbing Required

The social aspect of being strategically successful has little to do with the tactic that many executives use to deal with the problem, which is: "Let's have a team-building exercise!" Yuck! Strong teams are critical, but a team-building event is too often what managers do when they don't know what to do. Making strategy work has very little to do with

climbing ropes, having offsite sessions and taking Myers-Briggs tests. One of the biggest problems I see in cross-functional strategic initiatives is that managers mistakenly think that the holy grail is "alignment." Alignment is usually hogwash. It's often code for "I'll do what I want, you do what you want, and let's keep one another informed via a predetermined set of worthless meetings."

Harsh? I don't think so. At this magazine's CIO 100 event in August, several CIOs mentioned that they were trying to stop using the term "alignment" and replace it with "integration." With alignment you can avoid working interdependently. With integration, you can't. Integration requires the tough choices that make strategic initiatives successful.

Great CIOs are savvy—in a healthy and honest way—when it comes to corporate politics. They have a personal touch. They

are perceptive about where key people are coming from. They see similarities and disconnects among the various stakeholders. They're able to respectfully and effectively identify the trade-offs that any strategy requires, and communicate those trade-offs to people at any level of the corporate hierarchy.

So, as a strategic CIO, don't disregard objectivity, but put it in its proper context. You'll need to continually know where your strategic stakeholders intend to go and why (which is subjective), what therefore needs to happen and when (which is objective), how to best deliver those priorities (which is objective), and who is motivated to do them with distinction (which is subjective).

It's often not easy, but it's worth it. The truth is that political savvy is essential to making strategy work.

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Jack Bergstrand is founder and CEO of Brand Velocity, a consultancy that helps companies implement critical business initiatives. He is a former CIO and CFO at Coca-Cola and author of *Reinvent Your Enterprise*. Contact him at [jb@brandvelocity.com](mailto:jb@brandvelocity.com).



# Are You a Scrambler or a Leader?

An IT veteran describes the four stages of the technology organization—and what it takes to move up a notch **BY BOB RONAN**

**T**echnology organizations evolve on a four-step path, with each step enhancing the value of the organization to its customers. Most IT organizations are in the first two stages: Scrambler and Producer. Scramblers have a great deal of difficulty getting the basics right and spend much of their time reacting to events. Producers get the basics right but haven't yet evolved further.

To better understand Scramblers and Producers, it's important to define the basics—the distinguishing criteria. In short, what separates Producers from Scramblers is a level of competence in IT operations, application development, personnel and finance. The list of specific capabilities is long, but it includes items such as hitting online and batch service-level agreements, managing security risks and producing high-quality software. Caution: The basics sound like common sense, which may tempt you to jump to the conclusion that you have them handled, but most organizations don't execute the basics as well as they think they do.

Organizations that get the basics right for operations and application development may be tempted to declare victory. But any success is probably temporary if the organization isn't paying attention to its people and its finances. If an organization doesn't treat its people properly (for example, no mentoring or training), the high-quality employees may go elsewhere. If an organization mismanages its finances, it may lose out when the company decides how to allocate capital.

The transition from Scrambler to Producer is often achieved once the IT organization embraces metrics. Metrics allow management to quickly and objectively evaluate issues so they can take steps to determine the root cause and make changes. Scrambler organizations rarely have good metrics in place.

The next rung on the ladder is Innovator. It's very dif-

ficult to become an innovator if you're spending much of your time chasing production problems or working significant overtime to hit project milestones. So most organizations need to solidify their Producer status before they move to the Innovator stage, which requires a mental shift from tactical to strategic.

**Leader organizations empower employees at all levels—not just the senior execs—to make decisions and take risks.**

Innovators have the vision to think past traditional ways of doing business and see the possibilities of creative approaches. They are willing to take risks and they want to see results—too many aspiring Innovators have great ideas but spend more time thinking than implementing. Innovators create a culture that lets employees know their ideas are valued, encourages employees to take prudent risks and shines a spotlight on innovative projects.

For successful Innovators, the last step up is to become a Leader. The difference between the final two stages is subtle but real: Leader organizations empower employees at all levels—not just the senior execs—to make decisions and take risks. It means all employees are aware of, and can take steps toward, the organization's big-picture goals without waiting for permission. Leaders make decisions quickly because slow decision-making can paralyze an organization. They emphasize failing fast because not every path will lead to a positive outcome, and they reflect on what is or isn't working.

Of course, even Innovators and Leaders occasionally have to scramble to fix problems, but they'll do so aggressively and quickly. They remember the pain associated with being a Scrambler. They know how difficult it is to evolve to the higher-level stages and will do anything to stay there. In contrast, most Scrambler organizations don't realize how much different life could be if they could fix the root cause of their problems and stop being so reactive.

Bob Ronan recently retired from Fidelity Investments, where he was a senior vice president of technology.



# How to Get Strategic

Joining the inner circle requires a clear vision, great communication skills and a reputation for managing change **BY JACK BERGSTRAND**

**S**trategy is more than just an important part of a CIO's job, it can also be the most fun part. Yet some very talented CIOs get boxed out of the inner circle, overlooked because they aren't seen as strategic enough. There are three essential ingredients to succeeding as a strategic CIO: Your vision, your ability to communicate that vision, and your reputation as a change agent.

Start with a winning strategic vision—which doesn't mean coming up with crazy ideas. The vision should focus on your company's business model, including what needs to stay the same and what should change. Capitalize on your individual assets, especially your employees, your customer relationships and your operating capabilities. Ultimately, the vision comes down to execution, which is one reason CIOs are in a good position to create a successful strategy.

A clear vision can also help your company manage its portfolio of projects by helping executives make better decisions when multiple projects are competing for resources. The litmus test for a successful strategic vision is when key stakeholders can say "no" to good ideas because they are off-strategy.

Of course, one of the best ways to ensure the success of your strategic vision is, in the words of management legend Peter Drucker, "to invent your own future." To do this successfully requires the second ingredient: effective—that is, clear, consistent and constant—communication.

Many IT professionals don't put sufficient time and effort into their communication, which leads to a lot of redoing work and undermines their reputations. People in IT too often spew out a sea of acronyms and don't connect on the human and emotional levels. Learning how to clearly communicate the company's vision and strategy is one of the best investments an executive can make.

Communication requires hard work. And less is more when it comes to length. I'm often stunned by the needle-

in-a-haystack-style communications that come from IT departments, where readers and listeners have to hunt for the main idea. Make your point, make it connect, and make it over and over again.

This leads to the third and most important ingredient for strategic CIOs: effective change management. Your ability to be a change agent will define your success and your reputation. I often encounter organizations that are struggling with change management. The biggest hurdles are usually differing visions of success and over-engineered governance structures. These problems trigger finger-pointing, undermine decision-making, and cause a slew of project-management problems.

With change management, as with communication, less is more. I remember when I was brought in to restructure Coca-Cola's global SAP implementation. Because of the size of the project, the governance structure—developed by a highly respected consulting firm—included more than 100 people. We cut the governance structure to three people—yes, three—and the situation turned around quickly.

If you involve too many people, your initiative will be destined to have many interesting points of view and precious few conclusions. By enforcing a clear vision, consistent communications, and a simple change-management structure, employees will self-organize much more productively—moving ahead independently when it makes sense, working together when that's what is needed, and staying on the sidelines if their expertise is not required.

Strategic value ultimately comes from better serving your customers, increasing your sustainable growth rate, and generating more profit from products and services. CIOs should play a strategic role in making that happen.

**Learning to clearly communicate the company's strategy is one of the best investments an executive can make.**

Jack Bergstrand is founder and CEO of the consultancy Brand Velocity and author of *Reinvent Your Enterprise*. He is a former CIO and CFO at Coca-Cola.



# Preempting the Next CIO

Tackle the problems that your successor would jump on—now, while you still have the chance to be the hero **BY BRYSON PAYNE**

**I**n my six years as a CIO, I've heard countless statistics, jokes and other reminders of my job's typically short shelf life. Fortunately, I'm also a tenured associate professor, so I'll get to opine about IT leadership long after my "best if used by" date has passed.

After about four years in the post, though, I stopped asking *why* CIOs are such a famously short-lived breed. I chose instead to focus on pressing problems at my organization from a new perspective:

## What would the next CIO do?

It's one simple question that produces searing clarity. I came up with three areas of concern to help me answer that question and focus on the long-term health of my IT team and my organization as a whole.

**Pain points.** What annoying problems would my replacement fix? New leaders typically start by fixing the most easily solved problems—the low-hanging fruit. Of course, IT leaders have many other duties, such as strategic innovation, 24/7 operations and 99.999 percent availability. Along the way, though, stay connected enough to users to know whether there are pain points that need addressing. Your replacement will certainly start there, so why shouldn't you?

**Jackhammer issues.** What nagging problems do users deal with so often that they've tuned them out, like a jackhammer operating right outside the building? When someone starts using a jackhammer within earshot, it's jarring and unpleasant. If the jackhammer continues every day, though, your discomfort eventually fades as you learn to filter out the noise and work around the inconvenience.

A new person would ask, "How can you work with that jackhammer running all day?" but those who have been there awhile might reply, "What jackhammer?"

What workarounds are your colleagues and users forced to use? What hoops do your customers have to jump through to deal with persistent annoyances in your IT sys-

tems and processes? What new options would a replacement CIO offer to get rid of lingering, minor hurdles in the technology experience in your organization?

Don't let someone else come in as the hero. Eliminate unnecessary inconveniences for your users while you still have the chance.

## What relationships would the next CIO build, repair or transform to reconnect IT to the daily business of the organization?

**Relationship rescue.** What relationships would the next CIO build, repair or transform to reconnect IT to the daily business of the organization? What partnerships would your replacement strengthen or form to make technology more effective across your organization?

If you strive to connect people more than you separate them, if you include people in prioritizing, planning, and preparation, if you reach out to people that others sometimes overlook, you'll build relationships that allow you to accomplish much

more than you could eke out alone.

Author and futurist Thornton May says, "Your network will keep you safe." He's not talking about gigabit fiber optics. He means your human network will keep you connected to the organization, connected to users, connected to your customers—and that more than anything will keep you safe. It won't make you untouchable or invincible or guarantee your job. Rather, your relationships will keep you in tune with your organization's needs, which will focus your vision on bringing the most value to your workplace.

So while you've got the opportunity *now*, tackle some of the things you would do if you were the new guy. Remove some pain points, eliminate some nagging jackhammer issues, and start forming the relationships a new CIO would need to bring the most value to the role. Don't wait for someone else to take all the glory.

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Bryson Payne is CIO at North Georgia College and State University. Contact him at [bpayne@northgeorgia.edu](mailto:bpayne@northgeorgia.edu).



# Trumpet IT's Triumphs

Take a tip from Intel, where IT showcases tech plans and accomplishments with its own annual report and a mobile app full of multimedia content **BY PETER HIGH**

**L**et's face it, most CIOs aren't very good at marketing IT's value to the business. The IT group tends not to celebrate its successes, or if they do, they do it internally without letting other departments in on the good news. Not only does this mean that other departments aren't aware of the value IT contributes, but it may even contribute to a false impression that IT is underperforming.

In my book *Implementing World Class IT Strategy: How IT Can Drive Organizational Innovation* I discuss how high-performing CIOs constantly make the enterprise aware of IT's contribution to bottom and top lines of the business. One of the rare IT leaders doing a great job of that is Intel CIO Kim Stevenson, who has developed an IT version of the corporate annual report. Just like the typical company's overall annual report, Stevenson's IT version covers accomplishments from the past year, projections for the year ahead and (this is especially important) financial information. That means an analysis of the money invested in IT and the value created from that investment.

Stevenson's 2013 annual report touts accomplishments such as building a "robust private cloud," creating a social platform for sales team collaboration and developing analytics systems that "help drive unit sales by focusing our Sales & Marketing people on key customers at the right time with the right set of products."

IT's yearly update also presents her team's views on subjects like big data, cloud computing and security. The 2013 edition covers a range of hot topics in articles such as these:

- "Our IT Environment," an overview of the technology that Stevenson's team manages, with statistics such as IT spending per employee.
- "Protect to Enable," in which Chris Sellers, general manager of IT information security, discusses the company's security strategy.

- "Embracing Change," an explanation of how Intel IT embraces the consumerization of IT by David Aires, general manager of IT operations.
- "Design Innovation," in which Dan McKeon, general manager of product development IT, describes how Intel IT is helping to accelerate and transform product design.

**Top IT leaders, like Intel CIO Kim Stevenson, constantly make the enterprise aware of IT's contribution to bottom and top lines of the business.**

Of course, an annual report is just that—annual. What can IT do to provide more frequent updates? Stevenson says one small Intel IT team came up with the bold idea to reinvent the way "we deliver information to our peers and the industry" by using social channels and mobile devices. The fruit of this thinking has been the development of the "Intel IT Business Review" app, which delivers a regular series of articles from Intel experts via a mobile app for smartphones and a digital magazine for tablets. The goal, as Stevenson puts it, is to "engage with [readers] at

key points along our journey, sharing insights and best practices and regularly [connecting readers] with our IT experts, customers and fellow travelers."

The app provides multimedia content such as white papers, videos and podcasts, plus the Intel IT Annual Report. The company hopes the app will encourage IT professionals to share Intel content on social networks and "help Intel IT keep the conversation going throughout the year."

All of these ideas draw in the broader company to become active participants in Intel IT's journey. More importantly, these activities reorient the IT team toward documenting and communicating the value and accomplishments of their department. Stevenson wishes to do the same thing that the business, writ large, does in communicating its performance to investors. More IT executives should follow her lead.

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Peter High is president of Metis Strategy, a CIO advisory firm.



# Managing the Risk of Status Quo

In today's ever-changing tech markets, one of the greatest risks a CIO faces is not moving fast enough **BY ADAM HARTUNG**

**U**ptime, response time, mean time between failures—the history of IT is full of metrics improved by reducing risk, making sure nothing interferes with operations and productivity.

But times have changed. Today one of the greatest risks is maintaining the status quo—being wedded to dated (or nearly obsolete) IT solutions as competitors move to cheaper, faster and better platforms that are easier to use and produce happier customers and business partners.

The best way to manage the risk of being stuck in the status quo is to do scenario planning. Rather than planning toward a better future starting from what you have and what you know, start by taking your mind all the way out to 2018 and asking “What could the world look like?” and then plan backward to today. Forget about the status quo as you look through the windshield to see what likely lies ahead.

Nobody wants to be caught behaving, or even looking, out of date. Yet it's easy to fall behind. Look at how fast BlackBerrys lost market share. Remember a decade ago when Unix servers and workstations were common, only to be almost entirely replaced by Windows servers and faster PCs as Sun Microsystems and Silicon Graphics faltered in just five years? Preparing for the possibility of radical change is better than finding yourself tied to a struggling vendor that lacks the solutions for your needs—and charges more than your CFO will accept.

For example, what if the market shift to tablets and smartphones continues unabated? What if in five years users don't carry laptops at all? What happens to your IT shop if Microsoft Windows sales decelerate, as you and your peers no longer feel compelled to upgrade existing PCs or buy new ones? Are you prepared for a wholesale transition to devices using operating systems like iOS or Android?

Overcoming status quo risk offers your IT department

the opportunity to be of even greater value to your business. Rather than thinking about how you can improve what you have, free yourself of the status quo to think about what you could deliver.

Aggressively project the performance of tablets, smartphones, apps and cloud services to see just how capable, and cheap, IT services could be in five years. Then rethink how you could change the business by changing your IT. You'll be able to engage your peers in an entirely different discussion about how IT adds value.

## A Few What-If Scenarios

What if you're the first in your industry to replace all laptops with mobile devices? Which jobs would convert first? What sorts of tablets would you use? What OS would you adopt? How much could you improve productivity and lower cost?

What if you're the first in your industry to shut down all company servers, moving applications to outsourcers or the cloud? How fast can you move? How much could you lower your costs?

What if you're the first to eliminate your office land lines by having employees use their smartphones? How much would you save in line costs, switch services and voice mail? How would you handle central inquiries and phone directory services? Could you use this as a springboard for getting half your employees to use a home office half the time? How much would you save in office costs? What OS selections and applications would you need to support to enable this decentralized workplace?

Most of these scenarios aren't realistic for 2013 implementation. But how many are realistic for 2018? By examining what-if scenarios like these, you could leapfrog the competition and build a more efficient organization that serves happier users and saves money.

**Rather than thinking about how you can improve what you have, free yourself to think about what you could deliver.**

Adam Hartung is a consultant specializing in innovation, and the author of the book *Create Marketplace Disruption*.



# To Innovate, CIOs Must Unlearn

It may be uncomfortable, but it's time to dive into realms where you don't have all the answers **BY CHRIS CURRAN**

**U**nlearning feels unnatural. As business executives, we're hardwired to store information so we can recall it at a moment's notice. However, shedding outmoded mind-sets can free you to create the breakthrough innovations that CEOs are demanding from CIOs today.

The first thing you may need to unlearn is what you think about innovation. Many IT departments equate innovation with improving internal operations and systems. Such enhancements are part of the story, but innovation that improves the balance sheet may require something more: pivoting to face the customer and embracing the uncertainty of testing products and services on external customers.

Forget about playing it safe. Companies that create inventions that draw a crowd anticipate what customers want and need before consumers know it themselves—and then deliver it before anyone else. You should dive into the dark to find the undiscovered space and emphasize what you don't know rather than what you do know. Yes, to innovate radically, you have to amplify ignorance.

Most CIOs are in the habit of knowing and supplying all the answers. Business-unit managers and employees have beaten a path to IT's door and demanded assistance. However, the knocking isn't as steady as it used to be. In the era of the consumerization of IT, executives and employees are taking full advantage of their newfound ability to exploit today's technology themselves.

It's time to unlearn the notion that you should wait until you're asked for help, and dispense with the urge to have all the answers up-front. Instead, reach out to business-unit managers and employees with questions about what they need to innovate. Ditch the idea of being a technology distributor and step into the role of strategic counselor. Focus on asking questions and listen intently. You may feel like you're operating from a position of weakness, but

this act is quietly powerful. So is turning your attention to information that's outside of your enterprise.

For years, we have focused on collecting and analyzing data generated internally—orders, payments, sales leads and employee performance, for example—to make business decisions. Now, there are treasure troves of publicly available data that weren't previously accessible. You can marry outside data from the government, marketing agencies, business partners and social media with internal data to unearth hidden pathways to new products and services. Big data's big potential lies in taking an outside-in approach to decision-making. Unlearn the notion that the only data you need is the data you create.

The final thing you need to unlearn is something that you should have never learned in the first place: outsourcing software engineering. You're not alone.

Everyone got carried away. Vendors were fast and cheap. Outsourcing was hard to resist, but we went overboard and gave away a core skill set that is critical to exploring new ideas. Bring software-building skills—requirements management, architecture, prototyping and user-interface design—back in-house so you can quickly visualize the possibilities of innovation and share that information with business-unit managers.

The good news is that it's never been a more exciting time to be a CIO. Technology is at the heart of innovation and the power to make the impossible possible is in the palm of your hand. Step outside the IT department and forge relationships with business managers. Delegate so you can set aside time to dream about how you can play a central role in inventing the next must-have product or service. Unlearn so you can lead.

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Chris Curran is a principal at PricewaterhouseCoopers and chief technologist for the U.S. firm's advisory practice.

# The C in CIO Isn't for Celebrity

The best IT leaders have a powerful trait rarely associated with senior executives: humility **BY DAN ROBERTS AND BRIAN P. WATSON**

**L**ongtime CIO Steve Bandrowczak has accomplished a lot in his career: He's run large global organizations, spoken on the biggest stages, and driven impressive results. But he still sets aside 30 minutes each day to learn something new.

That's a big commitment for a globe-trotting executive who sleeps more nights at 35,000 feet than he can count. Why is he so diligent about continuous learning? As seasoned as he is, Bandrowczak says he recognizes he will never know it all, so he's always looking to improve. His curiosity is a formidable tool.

After many years as a CIO at companies such as Nortel, Lenovo and DHL, Bandrowczak is now senior vice president for global business services at Hewlett-Packard. He's one of several CIOs profiled in our book, *Confessions of a Successful CIO*, who demonstrates a powerful yet rarely mentioned leadership quality: humility. And in this digital age, dominated by selfies (look at me!) and cluttered with self-described "visionary" leaders, it's time for some collective introspection.

Studies have found humility to be a valuable executive asset. A September 2013 study by a team at the University of Washington's Foster School of Business found that workers who thought their managers were more humble were more engaged in their work and less likely to seek employment elsewhere. A May 2014 study by Catalyst found similar results.

While interviewing the CIOs in our book, we found it refreshing that the best leaders share this trait. Yes, they're confident, but it's not ego-driven.

There are easy ways to spot a humble leader. For one, they talk openly and honestly about failure. Wayne Shurts, CTO at Sysco, starts leadership discussions by talking about mistakes. The results of one failure, early in his career at Nabisco, are "ingrained in my soul," Shurts says.

The humble CIO will also emphasize his people's

importance more than his own. Shurts objects to corporate cultures where workers in the field are mere minions of headquarters staff. He thinks his people are more valuable to the company than he is.

Humble leaders also know they need to lean on others for advice and counsel. When Carol Zierhoffer was CIO of ITT, she had to do a 180-degree turn from centralizing the conglomerate's systems and processes to decentralizing them so that ITT could be split into three companies.

Zierhoffer knew she couldn't go it alone. One of her first decisions was to solicit insights from peers at companies like Motorola, Cardinal Health and Altria, all of whom had managed corporate break-ups. She received some spot-on advice not only about the IT operations, but also about how to retain her best talent.

But the most striking evidence of a humble leader? When their organizations succeed, these CIOs talk about "we" and "our." When something goes wrong, they talk about "I" and "my."

The problem is that too many other business leaders don't. We cringe at how often we find executives who are proud and self-important.

Humble people tend to be more likeable and more respectable—qualities you just can't buy. While too many people are asking, "What's in it for me?" humble leaders ask, "How can I help you?"

Will you embrace lifelong learning? Will you speak openly and confidently about your failures? Will you seek advice from your network—and give advice without expecting something in return?

Those are just a few of the questions current and aspiring leaders must ask themselves. As Sheleen Quish, another great CIO, told us recently: "Don't lose your humility in the job. The 'C' in 'CXO' does not stand for 'celebrity.'"

Dan Roberts is CEO of Ouellette and Associates. Brian P. Watson writes and speaks about IT leadership.

**Will you embrace lifelong learning? Will you speak openly about your failures? Will you seek advice from your network?**

# Take the Time to be Strategic

Write a blog? Keep a 'beer list'? CIOs share unusual tricks for carving out space to think about competitive advantage. **BY MADELINE WEISS AND JUNE DREWRY**

**Y**our day is already jam-packed and long. Yet every pundit says you need to be more strategic. How do you find the time to think strategically about positioning your business to gain and sustain competitive advantage?

At a recent meeting of the Society for Information Management's Advanced Practices Council (APC), successful CIOs shared their techniques for carving out time to think strategically.

## Make it a habit.

Two APC members book time on their calendars—one for after business hours and the other for before business hours—for strategic thinking. Another makes sure he works offsite at least one day per week to avoid getting brought into tactical issues. One member uses his time in a scheduled spinning class to ask himself strategic questions such as, "What did I miss?"

## Meet with colleagues.

Many CIOs sponsor IT summits to encourage strategic thinking among IT managers and, in some cases, all IT staff. Adrian Gardner, CIO of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, seeks out ideas from strategic thinkers and makes sure to include staff with less than two years of tenure in IT strategy sessions.

Steve Heilenman, CIO at Computer Aid, holds a weekly Innovation Friday event, where he invites a rotating cadre of "crazy thinkers and doers." Several APC members hold future workshops for a mix of people representing management and staff at varying levels, making sure to invite those who've had good ideas in the past as well as some who haven't participated before.

One CIO tells his direct reports that they must balance three types of work: manage today, deliver tomorrow, and innovate for tomorrow. Since the team naturally gravitates to the first two categories, he often reminds them of their responsibilities in the third.

Of course, technology can be used to engage colleagues,

too. One APC member identifies the top five strategic priorities and blogs about them, with the whole IT organization as an audience. This approach generates a great deal of participation and gets the entire department engaged.

Other techniques: Schedule three meetings a week with colleagues outside IT to learn what they're thinking. Take business leaders out to dinner regularly to get their ideas and learn their pain points. And keep a "beer list"—ideas for the future that are explored at the bar.

**Enlist a wide network of insiders and outsiders—even 'crazy thinkers'—to get fresh insights and to challenge your thinking.**

## Seek outside perspectives.

Attend association meetings with great speakers, establish networks of CIO peers, and cultivate relationships with what one CIO calls "deep-thinker organizations." Although think tanks and universities fit this category, several APC members emphasize the value of connecting with venture-capital firms, too.

Simon Gauthier, CIO of the Inter-American Development Bank, engages a Georgetown University professor as the facilitator of his quarterly strategy meetings to ensure he gets outside perspectives. And the professor brings along a student, because students "believe everything is possible."

Other techniques for gaining new perspectives include regular visits to external customers and serving on local nonprofit boards.

## Putting it all together.

First, adopt the practices that fit your personality and lifestyle. If thinking alone doesn't work for your extroverted personality, don't fight it. Second, you can't possibly have all the strategic answers. Enlist a wide network of insiders and outsiders to provide fresh insights—and to challenge your thinking. Third, find ways to push yourself out of your comfort zone.

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Madeline Weiss is director of the Society for Information Management's Advanced Practices Council (APC). June Drewry is former CIO of Chubb and a contributing adviser to the APC.