

LESSONS IN IT TRANSFORMATION

**Technology Expert to
Business Leader**

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Preface

Every generation must deal with the challenges of a constantly changing world. Although many of the issues and dynamics we face may change over time, the one variable that remains constant is the need for quality leaders to help us navigate difficult and uncharted waters. There have been countless books written on the subject of leadership. I have read many of these books and learned a great deal from the experience. While all of them were valuable, no book written by another human being can capture an individual's personal evolution as a leader. This book is meant to share my own journey to date in the hope that the lessons I have learned will be of value to other leaders. It is also written from the point of view of a CIO so that it can be of specific value to technology leaders. It is by no means meant to be the definitive tome on the topic of leadership. Many of the lessons contained within these pages are certainly reflected in other books on this topic.

What Is a CIO?

CIO is a term that means many things in various organizations. The idea of creating a position of chief information officer is about 25 years old. CIOs have historically been entrusted with operating the technology services and assets of modern organizations. However, today more than ever, the shift in focus is away from simply being a “utility provider” who keeps the lights on. The modern CIO has to be an evangelist,

an innovator, a revenue producer, a consumer expert, and an executive relationship manager. These are skills that are not always naturally inborn into many IT executives who have grown up through the ranks of technology organizations. We will focus on the traits and talents that you must be able to incorporate into your portfolio if you hope to be a successful CIO in the year 2011 and beyond.

It's Common Sense

Over the years, I have noticed that the teams who win on Sunday are not the teams with the best trick plays, but rather those who block and tackle the best. Much of what is contained in this book will seem like common sense, but as a wise man once told me, common sense is not that common! It is amazing how often we don't leverage the lessons we've learned over time to improve our relationships and outcomes. This book is not intended to impress the reader with complex concepts. It is meant to help share the simple concepts that I have seen make a meaningful difference in leading successful teams.

The older I get, the more I realize that I will always be a student of leadership. I am not arrogant enough to believe that I am an expert or that I have all the answers. My desire is to continue to learn until my last day on this planet. I hope that readers will take away from my experiences some useful bits of knowledge that will help them become a better leader and help them to develop the leadership qualities in the people around them. As a person who has a great passion about the subject of leadership, writing this book has been a labor of love.

Introduction

Why should I read this book? Be honest—that's what you are really trying to figure out before you decide to invest the time and money required to read any book. There are thousands of books available on the topic of leadership. Why is this book different, and why should you care? Here are a few answers to your question.

First of all, this book is written for the IT professional as its stated audience. It focuses on the topic of leadership through the unique perspective of an IT practitioner. It is also written through the lens of an actively practicing CIO who lives the challenges of leading and managing a complex technology organization every day.

The book is also very different from many resources written for the IT community in that it focuses on what I lovingly refer to as the *human side* of IT leadership. Many IT executives have risen through the technical ranks and already have a great handle on leading IT projects, implementing technical solutions, and handling the day-to-day operations of a technology organization. What most CIOs or aspiring CIOs don't always have is a great deal of experience or focused education in dealing with the human elements of leading an organization that ultimately will decide whether you, as well as your organization, succeed. In this book we will focus on real, pragmatic issues that are critical for executive success. These topics include:

- Helping to create a vision that your team will embrace
- The real purpose of IT—driving business value

- Developing effective communication skills
- Becoming an effective relationship manager
- Developing the people on your team for maximum contribution
- Leading a major change effort
- Creating an atmosphere of partnership with your people, clients, and vendors
- Developing the qualities of great leaders
- Sustaining success once it's achieved

These topics are critical to executive success but are not often taught in MBA programs or easily learned on the job. I will cram nearly 30 years of lessons from the school of hard knocks into these pages in the hope that you can avoid having to invest as much time (and make as many mistakes!) as I have.

Finally, the book has two major focuses—helping the individual evolve from a technical expert to a business executive and helping his/her organization evolve from a utility service provider to a trusted business partner that drives true business value. If these are goals you hope to accomplish, then this is the right book for you at the right time.

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First Things First: What Is Leadership?

Before we get into the “nuts and bolts” of what is involved in transforming an IT organization, we will spend some time defining some key concepts. Specifically, we will focus on the following concepts:

- ☐ Defining what I mean by leadership
- ☐ Comparing and contrasting leadership and management
- ☐ Reviewing common misperceptions regarding leadership
- ☐ Examining the critical roles that a transformational leader has to play

Defining Leadership

There are probably as many definitions of leadership as there are people who have an interest in the topic. Many of us have formed our thoughts and definitions based on the people in our lives from whom we have learned our lessons of leadership. For many people, the image of leadership comes along with formal power and authority. For others, it elicits a vision of eloquent orators who can inspire with their thoughts and words. Some may conjure up emotional pictures of military leaders or sports coaches who “fire up” the troops.

What we will explore in this book is the fact that there is no one approach or definition to leadership. Individuals bring their own unique personality and talents to their position of leadership. In trying to define leadership, perhaps a good place to start is to differentiate between two very important but different things—leadership and management.

Leadership versus Management

Before we begin our discussion on leadership, it is important to differentiate between the concepts of leadership and management. Many people will share that they think good leadership is more important to an organization's success than excellent management. This is akin to saying that speed is more important to an athlete than strength. The truth of the matter is that both are critical to success.

Over the almost 30 years I have worked in the industry, I have come to realize how rare excellent management is and how rarely it is appreciated and rewarded. In many organizations, when an individual contributor excels, he or she is promoted to a management position. The thought process is that if someone is proficient in a functional area, that person would naturally be able to manage others who are focused in that area of endeavor. Nothing could be further from the truth. Although some people clearly can make this leap, excellence in any endeavor and the ability to manage people in the same discipline are two very different sets of muscles. Working in the field of IT, it is sometimes painful to watch very talented technical people who entered the field because of certain skills and personality traits being asked to act in what can only be described as unnatural ways to try to manage the efforts of other technical contributors.

In my experience, there is a dearth of quality managers. People who can help teams execute and deliver results are a precious commodity. Many organizations do not value or reward

excellent managers. However, without these people, companies would never accomplish the results required to achieve success. Therefore, in our discussion of leadership versus management, I want to be clear that I value both capabilities. It's just that they are very different things.

Picture This

How many times have you seen this movie play out? An extremely talented technologist does a stellar job on a critical project. As a "reward" for his efforts, he gets promoted into a management role. Suddenly, this incredibly intelligent and talented person finds himself in a whole new world. Instead of being able to leverage his technical acumen and quantitative skills to get a job done, he is asked to manage people who just a week ago were his peers. Some of these people resent his promotion and his new role. He doesn't know how to relate to people who were colleagues but now are in his employ. No one has trained him on how to adapt to this new role.

Even worse, his introversion and quiet demeanor, which were assets up until now, are viewed as challenges as he struggles to communicate his vision for the team and how he hopes to execute against it. Being quiet and reserved is mistaken for lacking leadership qualities required to manage the team. He hasn't developed the relationships required to build credibility and confidence in the people above him in the organization. Months go by, and instead of delegating critical tasks, he tries to do it all himself. His people are disgruntled. His management is disappointed. He is frustrated. Finally, a year into his tenure, he is called into his manager's office and relieved of his responsibilities.

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Part of him is shocked—how could I have gone from being a star to being a bum in a year? Part of him is actually relieved to not have to fit into a role for which he was clearly not suited. He has to take his severance check and explain to his family that he is unemployed and has to look for a new job. Sound familiar? Could it happen to you?

To me, the simplest way to differentiate between leadership and management is to identify three questions that must be answered for teams to succeed. The first two questions are issues of leadership. The third is a question of management.

Question #1: Where Are We Going?

The first question that must be answered by a leader is, “Where are we going?” The essence of leadership is setting the direction for the organization. Leaders must work with their people to explain their destination. There is an old expression that if you don’t know where you are going, you might not like where you wind up! The first responsibility of a leader is to know where you are going so you can communicate this direction with your team. Many books I have read on the topic of leadership stop there! They feel that the primary responsibility of a leader is to determine and communicate the team’s destination. I think that there is a second related question that leaders are required to answer.

Through the Lens of the CIO—The Need for CIOs to Inspire

I can remember the first time I heard the idea of the CIO having to inspire the organization. It was at an industry conference, and we had a keynote speaker who suggested that leaders must inspire their people to greatness. Why is this a daunting challenge for most CIOs?

Let's think about where most CIOs come from. Many of us grew up through the ranks of the technology organization. Our skill sets were in areas such as business analysis, systems development, and process management. In school, we were more likely to be attracted to topics such as math and science than to subjects such as psychology and philosophy, which many of us probably viewed as "fluff" courses. (I will make the admission that I was a dual major when I got my undergraduate degree, pursuing both economics and psychology!) We are most comfortable with quantitative, hard-core, tangible items that we can see and touch. We are often binary in our thinking—after all, computer science is at its core based on ones and zeros! We count lines of code; we install and program switches and routers—no bull happening here!

All of a sudden, many of us are placed in positions where we have to lead and "inspire" people. Inspiration is the stuff of evangelists and football coaches, not managers of technology. But like it or not, people only perform at their greatest potential when they are inspired.

One of the big mistakes many CIOs make when attempting to inspire is to think that they have to come up with some magic words that awaken the greatness that resides in all of us. We have to know exactly what to say to light the fire in people. Truth be told, individuals have their own motivators that inspire them. All we have to do is figure out what those things are for the people we lead and find a way to align our vision and our mission to the things that drive people. You can call that inspiration. Motivation is really an "inside job." Our role is not to create the things that inspire people but simply to make people understand how what we are doing connects with what *already* inspires them.

Another challenge many CIOs have is trying to develop the *cult of personality*. Some of us (like me) happen to become

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extroverts over time. I started out an introvert, but based on life experiences and situations have become far more extroverted and comfortable in dealing with people than many CIOs are naturally wired to be. But what about those of us (and this is probably the great majority) who are introverted? After all, there is a reason we went into IT as opposed to sales or marketing. What do we do about the introverts? Remember that inspiration is about your people, not about you! What CIOs have to do is to be real, to be human, and to be themselves. People can smell a phony from a mile away. Therefore, trying to be a cheerleader if this is not your nature will most certainly backfire. Be yourself. Be genuine. Speak from your heart in a way that people know is true to who you are, and they will respect you for it. Don't try to be someone you're not. Be yourself—but be your *best* self and work to bring out the best in each of the people you lead. This is the true essence of inspiring people, not being some loud, fiery B.S. artist!

Question #2: Why Are We Going There?

Getting others to support a shared vision requires that they buy into what you are trying to accomplish. A big part of ensuring that this happens is answering for them why you plan to go in a stated direction. When I was starting out, the roles of management and labor were very clear. As a member of the staff, you were simply expected to do as you were told by your management. No questions asked! However, things have changed. Most of us lead “volunteer” armies! People can pick and choose among many opportunities and employers. If you truly expect to get people to rally around you and accomplish great things, you need to help them envision why you want to go toward your planned destination.

In setting the course and explaining why you are headed for your destination, every leader must be prepared to answer two parts of this question:

1. *Why are you as the leader planning to go in this direction?*
Of all the places you could go, why is this the best place? What about this destination makes it special, different, important? What about this destination inspires you and energizes you to put forth the effort required to arrive there?
2. *Why should the people on your team want to go there with you?* This question might be even more important for the people you lead. What about this trip speaks to their needs, hopes, dreams, and desires?

We will explore both parts of the “why” question in this book. The bottom line is that most people want you to explain to them, “What’s in it for me?” Unless you can create the same level of motivation and excitement in them that you must personally exhibit, at best you will get lukewarm buy-in and less than full effort. Great objectives require great effort and great passion. Getting people excited about the possibilities for them as individuals as well as for the team is critical to getting the required level of involvement.

Question #3: How Do We Get There?

Once a leader has articulated a vision of where the team is going and why the members of that team should be excited about going there, management must ensure that the team executes. It’s the manager’s job to help lay out the plan for how to get from where we are to where we hope to arrive. Management is accountable for working with the team to chart the actual course for the intended destination—identifying and planning the required steps needed to get from where we are to where we hope to go. Managers need to work with their team to provide