



The Guide to Managing an IT Staff

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For years, the conventional wisdom surrounding IT managers went something like this: You're either a people person or a tech person, but you can't be both. As technology becomes an important part of every aspect of our lives, the line between tech people and those with people skills is blurred.

Managing an IT staff is a complicated endeavor. Increasingly, IT staffs are made up of specialists that speak their own lingo and solve unique problems. It's not uncommon for members of the IT staff to find

themselves responsible for technology that didn't even exist when they started working in IT.

We've gathered some of leading voices on IT and management that have graced the pages of EarthWeb's IT Management Channel and compiled their thoughts on management, specifically as it relates to the IT world. It's important to remember that, like the technology they manage, IT managers need to evolve and constantly improve their skills. We hope what follows is a step in that direction. ■

As technology becomes an important part of every aspect of our lives, the line between tech people and those with people skills is blurred.

Why Are So Many IT Managers So Bad?

By Steve Andriole

I'm angry about our inability to police ourselves against self-inflicted wounds. I've been at this for a lot of years and I cannot believe how often the same problems repeat themselves and how otherwise impressive companies find it impossible to get the most basics things right. Why is the business technology learning curve so damn flat?

Not long ago I visited a large company that had 11 ERP systems and 19 instances of them. Shortly after that, I found myself talking with technology executives about their failed attempts to standardize their hardware, and right after that I helped a company think about how they should train their business technology professionals to think more about the business value of technology. I then found myself talking with some CIOs about whether they should think about outsourcing desktop support and their help desks.

Is it me, or are these issues like ten years old? Where the hell has everyone been, and why is it still so hard to practice discipline in the acquisition, deployment, and support of technology?

I told the CIO of the company with the 11/19 ERP problem that I could guarantee \$250 million to the company's bottom line if he'd agree to practice some discipline. I know, I know, you think that \$250 million is an exaggeration: I assure you that it is not. The company in question has an annual global IT budget of more

than \$2 billion and is wasting a ton of money on the installation, support, and maintenance of unnecessary hardware and software.

I can guarantee a \$250 million savings if the company commits to a disciplined approach to standardization and deployment that would forbid the deployment of redundant applications. Hell, I even offered to forgo a consulting fee to make it happen, offering instead to take a percentage of the savings that was actually

achieved - a completely risk free deal. They declined.

Why?

Why do companies continue to make the same mistakes year after year?

Well, the answer is almost too simple - and equally exasperating: they just can't bring themselves to tell people things they don't want to hear.

Reducing the number of

ERP applications "might upset some people" - I was actually told. Standardization makes people angry. People don't like being told what to do, I've been told a million times. Of course, these same people complain all the time about the cost of technology, arguing that IT should be cheaper every year because, after all, IT's all been commoditized.

Enough of this stupidity. We all learn early in life that we can't have it both ways. Either we adhere to best practices or we pay the price. I really resent manage-



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ment's insistence that technology costs be reduced when they fail to discipline the acquisition, deployment, or support processes. I really resent the CIOs and CTOs that don't have the courage to make the tough political calls when their corporate cultures might support these calls. There's no excuse for the lack of discipline that is sometimes avoided just to avoid tough conversations with the boys -- who I guess might not tell the bearer of bad news about Saturday's tee time. An even more serious concern is for the shareholders of public companies that waste millions, and in some cases billions, of dollars on perfectly avoidable technology mistakes. Who is accountable to them?

It's epidemic. Too many companies have too many applications, too many servers, and too many laptops. Too many CIOs are afraid to make anyone mad. Too

many CEOs fail to demand discipline from their technology executives - yet still complain about technology costs.

Much of the "technology-is-hard" crowd doesn't pay enough attention to the lack of discipline that makes IT so hard! It's not about performance, reliability, or even security. These are solvable problems. The really tough problems are exacerbated by lack of will, poor discipline, our need to be liked, our tendency to avoid conflict, just about everyone's desire to take the easy way out, and our desire to dodge accountability whenever we can.

No one thinks they will end up in the woodshed. Maybe we should bring it back. ■

Learn to Manage IT Staff

By Charlie Schluting

Why is managing technical people difficult? Some would say techies are socially inept, and simply can't communicate well. While that may be true in some cases, saying so doesn't help managers deal with techies any better: It just defers the problem. Here are two pieces of advice for bridging the communications gap.

First, managers must be open, honest, blunt, and candid with their subordinates. Every employee wants to know what's going on, but that especially applies to technical people. They also want to know that they're being given accurate information. Second, managers must be humble. There's nothing worse to a techie than a manager who just pretends to know something - techies see right through that.

That first point covers a wide variety of topics. Let's break it down.

"Open and honest," and to a certain extent "bluntness," refer to dissemination of information. Management should be honest about what's happening in the company, and managers should feel comfortable sharing the real reasons behind a decision. Everything from organizational changes to the company's financial standing is important and relevant information for all employees. In the IT world, people are frequently asked to implement some vague technology and they're given no reason at all besides "someone requested it, without really knowing what it is."

When the technical staff is given information about the real reasons behind a change, they can often provide valuable insight assuming someone is willing to listen. More than listen, actually: The manager needs to be able to parse the argument for what it's worth. In a situation where IT staff are simply complaining about having to implement something new, their arguments against the change will likely be 90 percent complaint and 10 percent valid arguments. An effective manager ignores the complaints and ponders the valid points, as opposed to getting upset and simply saying "because we told you to."



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The other half of our first point claimed that bluntness and candid discussions are beneficial. In many situations this is true, but it's most important in performance reviews. There's nothing worse than having to "lay off" an employee when he had no idea that his performance was sub-par.

When someone makes an avoidable mistake, confront him about it. Make it known that the mistake was unacceptable. Conversely, when someone does something well, parade that fact around the office as if the president just got impeached. Employees who know exactly where they stand are able to either correct their actions, or settle into their rut, realizing they'll never be promoted. When it comes time to let the latter go, there are really no hard feelings at all.

Finally the second point: managers must be humble.

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This goes far beyond simply admitting when you don't know something. Being an effective manager sometimes means playing dumb.

It is almost unbelievable how much friction a manager who pretends to know technical details can cause. During a secret project a few years back, where an outsider was forced to work within my group, it became clear very early on that the outsider didn't know what we were doing. Instead of admitting it, she attended every meeting and pretended to be a productive member. In the end, when it came time for reviews, everyone called her out for claiming to contribute equally. When it was all said and done, she said, "I've heard stories about dealing with techies before, but I didn't think they were really true."

The stories are all true. Technical people will be hell to work with if you undermine their hard work and years of study by making uninformed decisions or by claiming to know something better than them. Have you ever noticed experienced managers asking their employees to explain something that you thought the manager already knew? There's a reason for that.

When employees are forced to explain the way something works, they often come to new realizations during the discussion. Putting a plan into words, so that someone less technical can understand it, forces the implementer to think about it from many new angles. This works much the same way that writing a speech doesn't prepare you nearly as well as practicing it out loud.

So how does asking someone to explain what they're doing translate into "playing dumb?" Well if they already assume you know something, they will skip the gory details. The details are what truly matter, though.

It may seem counterintuitive to think that technical people want to talk to a manager who doesn't know much. Employees may even seem to get annoyed when they have to explain things. This is where your technical skill can sneak in and cause something wonderful to happen. Often, the techie won't realize the error of his way, and you can easily point it out after he's described the plan. It doesn't even take much pre-existing technical knowledge, just the ability to ... manage. Technical staff certainly won't think less of their manager for asking tons of questions—they actually enjoy teaching, most of the time.

It also pays to realize that the technical staff has put years of work into developing their skills, and they really can't imagine that any manager has done the same. They seek continual improvement and refinement of their skills, so much so that they'd probably

be just as happy with a raise as with an all-expense paid trip to a conference.

The moral of the story is to treat technical people the same as you'd treat everyone else. They will, however, respond better to certain styles of management, and they will never respond well to a manager who claims to know more than he really does. A thick skin and strong attitude are required to deal with technical staff effectively, but once you understand what makes them tick, a whole new level of efficiency can be obtained. ■

The moral of the story is to treat technical people the same as you'd treat everyone else.

12 Tips for Managing Geeks

By Rob England

Hopefully most readers will agree that people working in IT can be broadly categorized into two groups: those who are oriented around action (process, business, projects) and those who are oriented around things (hardware and software technology, documents, data).

The term geek is usually attached to the hardware-software group, so while it's not universally viewed as a positive term, we use it here to describe the IT staffers who are more interested in technology than the business drivers to use it.

Because of this group's focus, they tend to lack respect for many of the imperatives that matter to the business. In the extreme this is manifest as undisguised contempt for the sordid business of making money, derision of project managers' obsession with time and completeness, and disgust with management's pragmatic compromises and expediencies. To the geek mind only the core is important, and there is only one way to implement it: the correct way.

Those who run the business lack affinity for technology so they need the geeks, but they get frustrated by

sloppy procedures, slipped deadlines, tactless communications, mystifying documents, warped priorities, lack of respect, non-compliance, and stubborn resistance. Geeks, in the minds of business types, just don't get it.



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I once interviewed a Unix systems programmer in a bank about the machines he "owned." I asked him what applications ran on them. He started listing HP-UX, Oracle, OpenView... No, I said, applications; what business processes? He looked surprised and slightly embarrassed, because he had no idea.

For the health of the business it's most important that management understand the geek mentality and manage appropriately. Please do make a study of it, as effective geek-management rewards the effort. In the meantime, we can help by pointing out the most important threats to watch out for

from geek culture.

1) Assessment of Risk

Geeks tend to underestimate risk outside of their technical domain because they are dismissive of all but the components that matter to them. Make sure assurances

For the health of the business it's most important that management understand the geek mentality and manage appropriately.

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that it will be all right are backed up with some evidence. Get a second opinion.

2) Return on Investment

This may not even be considered in a request. Geeks think the company should spend whatever it takes to achieve a technically perfect outcome. Get architects or business technologists to translate geek-speak and evaluate the business benefits.

3) Compliance with Policy, Rules, and Standards

Geeks don't like bureaucracy, and they don't like dotting "I"s and crossing "T"s except when comparing technical specs. Get someone else to make sure it meets all the non-technical requirements.

4) Business Impact

To geeks, the business is an abstract entity "out there" that does not understand what is important, nor the burdens they have to bear. Implement change control over infrastructure and have a non-geek review and approve the timing and implications of changes.

5) People

Known to geeks as "wetware," people are perceived as a major impediment to their effective functioning, second only to security. Buffer end users from geeks with a Service Desk. Invite them to meetings when you have to. Don't expect them to wear silly hats or go rafting or other "team" activities. And don't let them near...

6) Management

Geeks make bad people managers. Do not allow them to ascend by sheer force of seniority into management or even team-leading roles. Even worse, do not commit the cardinal sin of pushing them into management roles they do not want (usually through lack of other career paths). Sometimes geeks experience a "road to Damascus" revelation and suddenly begin to understand the other half. Most don't.

7) Project Management

Geeks make bad project managers. Recall that they are thing- not action-oriented. They do what they must to get it done. The actual doing is an ordeal to be endured and minimized. Only the essentials matter, but the technical essentials must be done right: they can't be rushed. Coordinating other people, ensuring all the bases are covered and everything fits together, driving for deadlines, coping with adversity, expedient adjust-

ment, keeping records, reporting and analyzing - these are not geek skills. PMs are a specialized group of unique people: hire them.

8) Politics

There are those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who say, "What happened?" Do not expect geeks to be attuned to corporate politics, or even to know what is going on in the business at large. Make sure their manager is filtering their communications and proposals. A geek will demand a new SAN just as the business reports earnings 50% below estimates, or complain that the team is under-utilized and not appreciated just as layoffs are being planned, or tell the new CIO who moved across from Finance that the users are idiots and never know what they want anyway.

9) Estimating

Everything looks like "a couple of days" to a geek. They are always 90% done. It is the last bug. How anybody who spends their life immersed in technology (the home range of Murphy's Law) can be so optimistic seems mystifying until one recalls that process and action and time are off their radar. Double everything and get the project managers to look under the hood.

10) Hoarding Knowledge

To geeks, knowledge is personal power, not a group asset. Technical cleverness and indispensability are their antlers, their tusks, and their dominance display. Once they return from conferences or training courses, any intellectual property to be disseminated into the rest of the organization will need to be surgically extracted. Systems of Byzantine complexity will be constructed and nobody else will know how to operate or fix them. Make sure you reward people who share knowledge ("of course she's going to the conference again this year - look at all the good training she ran for us after the last one"). Assign young apprentices to study at the feet of the master. Decline transfers and promotions citing undocumented systems that will fail without them.

11) Greed and Envy

My old boss, Charles Wang of CA, spoke of how most business decision-makers are driven by the old Fear, Uncertainty, and Doubt, but technical decision-makers (or recommenders) are driven by Greed and Envy. FUDGE. Geeks are technophiles. Watch out for the vendor-crafted business case that conceals the only real

driver being that somebody wants one because every one else has one.

12) Starting with Stuff

There is a wonderful IT implementation model: People Process Technology, in that order. Geeks implement Technology, in that order. Get business analysts, architects, and other damage controllers involved in any project, especially one that is a geek's idea. Find the stakeholders (the geek won't have) and see what they think. Don't let the geeks rush off and talk to vendors until the people and process aspects are sufficiently advanced that the organization can specify what it needs from the technology.

In Closing...

Geeks are sensitive, delicate creatures, easily ruffled, in many ways helpless. They can also be infuriating, petulant, stubborn, and seemingly thick-headed, sometimes destructive. But if you take the time to understand them, know their priorities, and find their motivators, they can be effectively managed to give them personal satisfaction while returning great value. For now you can use these 12 watch points to keep them behind the fence, to move breakable objects out of the way, and to minimize damage to the business. ■

How Could You Be a Better Manager?

By Sharon Gaudin

With IT budgets growing, employees being hired, and upgrades being planned, IT managers have a new host of pressures on them. And most of the managers dealing with all of this have had very little real management training.

That could be making a hard situation even harder -- for both the manager and the employees, says Pam Butterfield, president of Business Success Tools, LLC, a consulting and management coaching company based in Manchester, Conn.

In a one-on-one interview, Butterfield spoke about the biggest mistakes that managers make, how to tell if employees are challenged or anxious, and how to help workers better handle all the change that's coming down the road.

Q: Are most managers trained or otherwise prepared to manage people?

No, not at all. I know when I first started out, I didn't have a clue that there were things I could learn to do that would allow me to be a good manager. I was technical and I had pretty good people skills. That didn't make me a good manager. I didn't know how to give feedback to people. I didn't know how to manage conflict. I didn't know how to build teams. I didn't know the difference between being a leader and a manager. I didn't know how to evaluate people. Fortunately, I worked for a company where I got excellent training.

I don't see a lot of companies giving people that kind

of training and, actually, that's why the individual clients I have who are getting coaching are paying for it themselves. These people are failing in their roles as managers.

Q: What's the biggest mistake that you see managers making on a regular basis?

I think one of the biggest mistakes managers make is that they're not setting aside time to be a manager.

When you're not a manager, you're being paid to get work done. When you're a manager, you're getting paid to define the work, to make assignments, to monitor the progress and quality of what's being done, to help people who aren't performing address what the gaps are. A lot of managers are not comfortable giving feedback and receiving feedback. It's easier to ignore those things.



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Q: What's the main thing that people could do to make themselves better managers?

People need to focus on the area of goal setting and then assigning resources to work on the things that are most important. You have limited resources today so you need to use them judiciously. Very often there's a gap between what people are doing and what they need to be doing to actually be successful. Managers have a hard time closing that gap. Very often people are good at solving technical problems but not at solving people problems. That goes back to the lack of training and the lack of experience. There's also a lack

of good managers to learn from.

People also need to seek to understand before jumping to conclusions. I've learned to become a good question asker. It's amazing what you find out when you listen to people. Often the thing you thought it was, it's not at all.

Q: With hiring and budgets both picking up, is this an easier time to be a manager?

There's an awful lot of pressure on managers these days. The rate of change is so great right now. You're trying to get people who are bombarded by change to get today's work done, while you're trying to get people in a position to handle the change that's coming down the pike tomorrow.

Part of the challenge for managers is there's not enough time in the day... They may have the best intentions but they just don't have time. One of the ways to do this is to look at everything that has to be done, including the people management stuff, and prioritize. Another thing is to learn how to delegate. Every time you don't delegate a task, you're losing an opportunity to take someone else in the organization and teach them something.

Q: With the industry doing well, are workers happier and more confident or is there anxiety still left over from the slump?

Absolutely, people are still anxious... There's a reason they are nervous. This goes in cycles. Downturns. Upturns. It will all happen again at some point.

Q: What's the best way to handle these anxious employees?

If I'm an IT manager, I'm going to help my people be able to be very comfortable with change. There are various programs that companies provide. It's change management for the individual. People are afraid of change because they're afraid the change will hurt them and they won't be able to make the transition successfully. Feeling like you'll be able to land on your feet means understanding what your skills and abilities are and how you can use them in a new setting. As a manager, I'll help my people understand their strengths and talents so as change comes along they'll be able to adapt and still be able to add value.

Q: Sounds like you might be setting them up to think they should be looking for a new job. Is that a concern?

There's a little danger there. The other part of that is I treat them very well so they won't want to look for that next job. I'll look for opportunities to give them new and different projects. I'll give them stretch assignments -- neat projects. I'll spread the wealth a little bit and let the good and the great employees have good projects to work on. I'll give them a chance to be creative.

They won't all want that. There are certain highly technical people who are able to adapt to change pretty quickly and then others who resist it. As a manager, when I'm looking at a workforce, I might lead with people who are more able to tolerate the risks of doing something new and different. There are certain people who are really happy to go out and try new technologies. There are others who would be happy to write Cobol the rest of their lives.

Q: How do you tell the difference?

There are assessments that I use that will measure a person's stress in the workplace and indicate whether they change quickly or slowly. The one that I use is a behavioral assessment put out by Target Training, Inc. If I don't have money for that, what do I look for? I'm going to look for what people are reading. What are they learning about? Do they learn? Are they interested in the latest and the greatest? People who tend to be innovative and creative are interested in the next best thing to come along. Are they good problem solvers? Are they curious?

Q: How do you tell if someone is anxious?

There are specific behaviors that I look at. There are different degrees of resistance. If people are resistant to change, they tend to be overly critical. They'll be silent. They'll find reasons why it won't work. They'll agree very easily. "Yah, that's a great idea." "Yah, do it." But they'll fade into the background and never help you do it. These are all signs of different degrees of resistance... I need to start communicating with people fairly early in the process and sell the problem, not the solution. Very often when we're implementing a change, top management works behind closed doors because they've identified a problem. Then they spring the solution on people. You need to educate people that there is a problem and you need to do something

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about it. It's a communication plan, really.

Q: What communication mistakes are managers making?

If you keep introducing change after change after change, you nickel and dime people. They start waiting for the next shoe to fall. You've got to bundle changes so it's not that constant drip, drip, drip where they never get a moments rest.

It's really tempting to want to avoid being in an uncomfortable situation so you send out e-mail or a memo. You think, "Well, I told them. It's off my plate." You need to sit down face to face with people and talk with them. Become comfortable with the discomfort. That has to be part of the communication plan. If that's the way you communicate with people -- in a consistent, compassionate, believable way -- it can do amazing things. It can develop trust. It can rebuild it. Memos can't do that. ■

Mastering the Challenge of Change

By Claudio Muruzabel

Few words can strike more fear into the heart of an individual than "change." We are creatures of habit and feel most secure when we are doing what we know.

IT is arguably taxed more than any other business department to make changes; it is often faced with executing numerous transition projects simultaneously to stay current. From the implementation of a new system, to the outsourcing of an IT service that was previously handled internally, to the deployment of a new hardware platform, every one of these modifications represents a complex change-management challenge for the CIO.

Predictably, these transformation projects are often met with a great deal of reluctance and dissension. Any project of any size has to deal with different constituencies with very different interests and stakes in the project.

Successful leaders recognize this and apply change management techniques to overcome this initial resistance.

But what exactly is "change management?" Effective change management involves aligning all enterprise resources - physical assets, know-how, technology and people - simultaneously, but with a different intensity at the organizational, work group and individual levels.

Yes, it is a challenge.

Yes, it is as involved as it sounds.

But change management can be summarized in two sentences: Understand your constituents. Communicate effectively.

By understanding these two simple, but important ideas and structuring your efforts accordingly, you can ensure the success of even the most complex changes within your organization.

Understanding Constituents

No matter how much money you're spending, how much you need the project done or how cutting-edge the technology may be, it is human beings that will ultimately decide the fate of your project.



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Depending on the scope and complexity of the task involved, participants in complex IT projects can come from various functions, departments, and groups within the organization. They range from the lowest level professionals and individual contributors within the IT organization, through all of the middle management ranks, to the senior team reporting to the CIO.

Most CIOs understand that communicating the value of the initiative to participants is a key component of success. Where many of them miss the boat is how that communication should be carried out.

Communicating change may be a question of execution, but its success also depends upon the leader's ability to effectively read what is truly at stake for each participant. Unfortunately, it's a question that many leaders, especially IT leaders, get wrong.

When projects fail, it is typically because no one told the people it impacted why they should care. Employees act based on what they believe the company needs from them, and their actions drive productivity, financial results, and ultimately decide the fate of the enterprise.

Communicate faithfully with your team, get them excited about the project, get them involved, keep them positive with frequent two-way communication, and they will ensure that the change is a success.

And don't leave out training and ongoing support. It makes all the difference.

Communicate Effectively

You cannot effectively execute and "change manage" what you have not adequately defined. If you cannot concisely explain the project in the few minutes it takes to ride an elevator, you will have a hard time getting people on board and ultimately enlisting others to help with the persuasion program.

The challenge is to clearly and consistently communicate to participants what the project is expected to do for them, and what they are expected to do for the project. If you want to motivate people, you must clear-

ly define from the beginning what the project holds for the participants, how it will impact them, and what its consequences will be to their jobs.

By balancing individual needs with group objectives, you can go a long way toward ensuring the success of your project. Successful change management requires a disciplined execution based on key success factors:

Establish a clear direction: Develop inspiring and achievable project vision and mission statements that clarify why a project exists and what it is meant to accomplish. Then set measurable objectives that will lead to the realization of these ideals.

Build a focused team: A successful project requires all affected constituencies be involved. Create champions from all affected groups to build a strong team that will help you execute every step of the initiative.

Develop a plan: Create a measurable, consistent, and ongoing communications plan that will reach your participants through numerous methods, on many different levels. Ensure that your efforts are designed to motivate your participants through interaction.

Account for culture and diversity: Organizational culture takes years to develop, but once ingrained it is difficult to modify. Your change effort must play to your company's culture or you will also be faced with the challenge of shifting company beliefs and traditions.

Therefore it is essential your communications be crafted with this culture in mind, while also taking into account geographical and social differences as well. Your efforts should be appropriate and effective for all involved.

There is no mistake that change can be difficult, but, as the CIO, you are ultimately accountable for the success of the project. By treating change management as a vital process, it will help you to be more successful and achieve outstanding results in the long run. ■

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Teambuilding Tactics That Get Results

By Katherine Spencer Lee

As much as people in a typical IT department may seem to have independent roles and responsibilities - some doing help desk, others managing security issues, for instance - they all must feel part of a team.

When employees have a connection to one another and share a common goal, the payoffs can be huge, not only for the individual but also for the department as a whole: better communication, enhanced productivity, and greater on-the-job satisfaction.

Whether you're trying to bring together the entire IT staff, a group within the department, or specific work teams, the strategies for building unity are the same:

Inspire

If the team's goals are to "optimize productivity levels" or "implement technology more efficiently," chances are participants will not be as motivated as they could be, if at all.

Vague objectives filled with business-speak fail to excite most people. Instead, give your staff a concrete objective that's easy to understand: "Earn the company's award for the department with the highest customer service levels." The mission should be one that directly affects his or her daily work so you can generate buy-in to the idea and hold everyone's interest over time.

Define

When you're initiating a project, make sure everyone within the group understands his or her role. Again, be specific. Rather than saying, "Joe and Maria will help select the new desktop systems for the accounting department," narrow it down: "Joe will be in charge of reviewing the department's needs and will then make recommendations to Maria. Maria will make the ultimate decision about the best products to purchase."

The better people understand the parameters of their work, the less risk there will be for misunderstandings and conflict.

Share Power

Also, make sure you're giving team members the authority to fulfill their responsibilities.

Avoid micromanaging and allow people the freedom to test ideas.

When a group encounters a problem, encourage participants to work together to develop a solution. It's OK to serve as an advisor during challenging situations but be careful not to rush in and solve every issue for them.

When employees work in partnership and are responsible for the ultimate outcome, they'll gain more out of the process, both in terms of bonding as a group and building problem-solving skills.



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Build Camaraderie

Team members who understand one another make the most effective collaborators. In the haste to meet tight deadlines and simply complete the task at hand, though, many companies fail to allow sufficient time for people to make a personal connection. Be sure your firm isn't one of them.

One strategy that can help is to ask individuals in a particular group to cross-train one another so all members can learn about the responsibilities, pressures, and priorities of their teammates. Also, don't be afraid to shake up the typical makeup of a unit to encourage people to bond with others outside their immediate circle.

For instance, when forming a project team, you might include employees who wouldn't normally be asked to participate, such as junior staff or individuals from a different specialty in the department. This can help the group formulate new ideas, build rapport and foster a greater respect for what each person brings to the company.

Hold Effective Meetings

Teambuilding exercises outside of the office also can be a great way to motivate a group; however, these events can have the opposite effect if they're not managed correctly.

For starters, make sure you're not planning activities that require physical strength or endurance; you'll only make those with health conditions or limitations feel

excluded. Strive to keep a balance between work and fun activities.

If events are too serious or difficult, people may find them draining, while ones with no clear connection to situations at the office may be viewed as a waste of time. Off-sites should be scheduled during slower periods so people aren't constantly checking their Blackberries and cell phones to keep up with work.

Set the Example

Finally, remember, as a leader, you set the tone for any group. If you complain openly about how difficult it is to accomplish objectives when forced to rely on others

in the company, you're effectively telling employees that teamwork is more harmful than helpful - make sure your words and actions encourage effective collaboration.

Teambuilding goes beyond just planning a special outdoor activity or assigning a group of people to solve a business problem, it takes long-

term strategy and refinement.

Even in the best of groups, problems can arise and changes in motivational strategy may need to be made. For instance, removing a team member who's damaging morale often can spark renewed energy between remaining participants.

If you periodically re-evaluate what's working and what isn't and make appropriate adjustments, you'll help sustain a group's motivation over time and generate the best possible results. ■

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Team members who understand one another make the most effective collaborators.
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Managing Your Managers

By Katherine Spencer Lee

One of the more challenging aspects of being a technology executive is supervising management-level staff. The techniques you used earlier in your career to motivate less experienced employees may not work as well with a more seasoned group of professionals who also manage people themselves.

To encourage top performance from your direct reports, you should treat the relationship as a collaboration. While you can convey authority and certainly should make the final call on important decisions, it is also critical to allow your managers to play an active role in determining the direction of key IT initiatives.

Share the Vision

You may be in charge of the department, but your managers are the ones making sure everything is implemented effectively on a daily basis. So be sure they understand your company's current technology strategy. It's also critical you get their buy-in on new projects from the beginning rather than just informing them of upcoming plans once they've been enacted.

Let them know what you hope to accomplish in the short- and long-term and solicit their input. Your managers may be aware of situations, such as staffing shortages that could prevent tasks from being completed successfully. In many cases, their knowledge of daily challenges and issues can help ensure the success of

your department's projects.

The more involved your direct reports are in new initiatives, the more supportive they are likely to be overall. They will feel connected to the cause and their enthusiasm will help them motivate their own employees.

Don't Micromanage

It is particularly important to delegate authority to your managers. If you don't allow senior-level IT professionals to make their own decisions and instead monitor

their progress constantly, they're likely to resent your heavy-handedness. They may believe you lack appreciation for their talent and authority, which can quickly deplete morale and lead to turnover.

Instead, explain the desired end result and how you will be evaluating their work. Be clear about your expectations: Do you want to be informed of delays or notified when everything

is completed? What are the top priorities with key initiatives? How critical are timelines for implementation?

Make yourself available should managers have any questions or concerns, but let them take charge once you have delegated responsibility. If you have made smart hiring decisions and promotions, your direct reports should be capable of leading their IT staff with minimal supervision.



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Tell Them How They're Doing

Formal performance appraisals and ongoing feedback are just as valuable for managers as they are for less experienced employees. Open communication about successes as well as challenges can keep people on track with their objectives and renew motivation. In addition to focusing on technical competency, also give input on such areas as supervisory and interpersonal skills and adherence to ethics.

Listen

Get to know your managers by spending time with them in regular meetings. Strive to create a work environment in which they can give you candid feedback without fear of negative career repercussions.

Sometimes the best business solutions are generated when people take a risk and recommend an idea that goes against the mainstream. Perhaps there's a more

cost-effective but lesser known technology to consider for an upcoming project? Or maybe there's a better way to handle technical support calls?

Encouraging those who report to you to "tell it like it is" and following through with appropriate action will not only help you stay on top of developments but also will show managers their input is genuinely valued.

Treating your management staff with respect, soliciting their input on projects and offering them autonomy can go a long way in keeping them motivated and satisfied in their positions. You'll help to create a reliable team to support your IT initiatives, which can have a positive effect on your entire department. ■

This content was adapted from EarthWeb's Datamation, CIO Update, and IT Career Planet Web sites.