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# SCC VOICE

Thoughts and ideas from The Systems Consulting Consortium

## Dialogue & Balance: CIO Critical Success Factors

IT managers in “smaller” companies are typically expected to provide reliable email services, prompt PC support, and a pretty basic suite of “canned” or “plain vanilla” business systems. In “larger” companies, these expectations often expand to a point where IT is looked to as an enabler of innovation and competitive advantage.

However, it is not a simple task for a CIO to make the transition from a provider of “just the basics” to a respected enabler of corporate innovation and competitive advantage. For a CIO to earn a seat at the “Executive Table”, that CIO must intentionally make the transition from being a manager of technical resources to being a valued equal of his senior management peers.

**How To Get There** - First and foremost, an upwardly mobile CIO must start building positive relationships with his/her peers:

- **Balance** your use of email. Avoid being overly reliant on it. Email is a one-way, “push” form of communication. It can be effective for communicating facts but is of little value in developing relationships.
- **Increase** your one-on-one, face-to-face meetings with your peers. Establish rapport, understand their challenges and pains. Then, do something to help them.
- Do **lots** of listening. Engage in a positive “how can we help you” dialogue and constantly seek an open balance amongst all the many wish lists.

- Look for areas where IT can make a difference helping customers select your company over your competitors. Examples include getting new products to market faster, speeding up the quotations on custom orders, or making product orders easier for customers.

Avoid becoming an office *hermit*. Walk around, talk to people. Meet with your executive peers one-on-one as frequently as possible. Avoid all use of “techno-jargon” (SOA, SaaS, etc.). *Alignment* is important but demonstrating that IT can be an enabler of *Competitive Advantage* and *Innovation* is more important.

If you want a seat at the Executive Table, think and act like a company executive.

While your budget is important, don't focus on this to the exclusion of other issues. A successful CIO spends more time focusing outside of IT (i.e., how IT can help the company) than inside.

If you truly wish that seat at the Executive Table, you must:

- [1] - have an innovative vision that offers meaningful competitive advantage,
- [2] - communicate that vision, preferably via the “Spoken Word” in peer-to-peer dialogues,
- [3] - be a balanced leader - Build an IT staff that allows you to focus outward while they focus inward to keep the IT “ship” sailing smoothly and efficiently.

[Jim Spitze, ©SCC,Inc., Sept. 2007]



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