21 Secrets

Every IT Manager ~~Should~~ MUST Know

Mike Sisco, ITBMC

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by Mike Sisco, ITBMC

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Introduction

Often, it is the little things that make a big difference in a person's ability, effectiveness, even career. As an IT manager, there are some powerful forces that will prevent you from succeeding. Become aware of them, understand them, and do something about it, , , and you will see vast differences in your results over what other managers achieve.

Little things can and do make a big difference

With over 25 years of IT management experience and more than 10 years dedicated to "helping IT managers of the world achieve more success", I've been able to see quite a lot in regards to managing an IT organization.

I would be the first to say that I don't have all the answers, but I've been very effective over the years in helping thousands of IT managers and CIO's achieve more success in their company using my practical IT manager tools and processes.

I decided to write this publication to give you some quick insights on a few things that can make a big difference in your IT management career, , , i.e., **secrets of the job** that you may not know about or haven't paid attention to.

I had to learn most of these secrets the hard way, and believe me when I say, "learning the hard way" can be painful and not a lot of fun.

If reading this book helps you prevent one mistake, makes you more effective in an area, or allows you to build a better relationship with a client, , , then it will be worth every bit of your investment, , , and help you, , ,

I call these 21 issues "secrets" because for the most part IT managers aren't aware of them or aren't aware of the significance they have in the dynamics of managing an IT organization. Certainly, this isn't an exhaustive list, but gaining an appreciation of these 21 issues can make a big difference in your management effectiveness.

Each of the 21 Secrets includes a real life example or experience. Students in my IT Manager Institute program always tell me that one of the best things about the class is my use of real life examples, so why not include them here, , , after all, each of the secrets comes from actual experience in managing IT organizations.

When you see the star image, you will know it's a real life experience selected specifically for the issue being discussed.

Best of success,

Mike Sisco, ITBMC

Mike Sisco, ITBMC

For more information, go to our web site – http://itmanagerinstitute.com where you will find an array of practical IT manager resources:

- Training
- Books
- Tools & Templates
- Consulting

In addition, there are hundreds of free articles and tools posted on my **ITLever BLOG** at http://itlever.com.

"helping IT managers of the world achieve more™ success"

SECRET #1
IT management is about business value, not technology

Most IT managers come out of the technical areas of a company. I did, and I'm sure you probably did as well. Were you a programmer, a systems engineer, , , possibly worked on the Help Desk, or maybe a project manager?

Whatever the case, if you got your IT management opportunity because you were a great technical resource, , , that's excellent, but it won't do much to help you now that you're a manager.

What got you here is not what will make you a successful IT manager!

Most young managers tend to believe that what makes the world go around is the technology. Sorry to burst your bubble, but it's not about the technology, , , it is all about the business.

Before you get too riled up and stop reading, let me explain.

The technology in your company is certainly important, probably even vital for your company to succeed. But far too many IT managers focus on the technology and not the business. The end result is that your company does not get the full value it should in their IT investment, , , and companies spend a lot of money on IT support.

Why do you think our focus tends to be on the technology and not the business?

There are several possible reasons:

1. What we know as a new IT manager is technology.
2. No one taught us about the business.
3. We probably had little to no exposure to senior management to understand what they deem important.
4. Possibly, even your CIO doesn't understand the need to focus on the business or how to do it.

Senior management concentrates on where to spend money that provides the best value for the company, , , to make it more viable, more effective, and more successful. That's what they get paid to do. If they think spending more money in IT will give them a better financial performance, they do it in a heartbeat, , , but if they question the value derived from IT, getting your projects funded is like pulling teeth.

What this means to us as IT managers is that our recommendations and focus have to provide the company business value. Let's be just a bit more specific: IT must provide business value that is:

- tangible
- quantifiable
- cost justified
- understandable

Tangible means it has to be substantial, **quantifiable** means it must be specific, **cost justified** means the company can afford to invest in such a project because there is a reasonable return on investment (ROI), and **understandable** means the senior management team must be able to understand what it is and the relevance it has for the company based upon existing conditions.

Let me explain. A project initiative you recommend may have a great return, be cost justified, and understood, , , but if we have no money due to poor cash flow, it simply may not be something we can do right now.

Senior managers of your company make tradeoffs every day. There are many organizations in the company that need money for new initiatives that will help the company succeed. In most cases senior management won't be able to afford to do them all. Your IT project recommendation may be a great opportunity but it may need to be put on the shelf due to other more pressing needs and issues of the company.

One thing is certain. If you present technical recommendations, , , your odds of getting an approval are pretty low. You need to present every IT initiative recommendation in context of business value, , , that's what senior managers understand.

Be aware that IT people, even IT managers, are viewed by business people as "techies". Unfortunately, we earn the label because we speak in technical jargon, use acronyms for everything, , , and it creates a real communication gap between us and the business.

We have to learn to speak in *business value* terms

What is business value?

Business value to a company includes five very specific things:

- Increase revenue
- Decrease cost
- Improve productivity
- Differentiate the company
- Improve client satisfaction

Every IT initiative should be addressing one or more of these items. If it doesn't, your focus won't be aligned with what the company needs from their IT organization. Senior management won't understand why they spend so much money in IT, , , or what they are getting from their IT investment. If that's the case, you are going to be on some very thin ice that ultimately breaks. The results won't be good.

If you look at the business value descriptions above, you should see that there is a **financial implication with each of them**. All of these items can have a very direct impact on the financial performance of a company, , , and that is exactly why senior business managers of your company focus on them.

It makes sense then that if this is what they view to be important, then your IT focus must be the same if you hope to get their attention.

Senior managers and **executives only care about technology if it provides a real business value for the company** in a cost effective manner.

If you meet with a senior manager to make a recommendation to spend thousands of dollars on infrastructure improvement, he or she probably will not understand your pitch when you present a technical solution. Technical presentations don't resonate with business managers and executives for the most part.

On the other hand, tie the presentation to a quantifiable and tangible business value and speak in financial terms, and they will understand you, , , and be able to make a decision.

If you have a good financial business case that includes realistic business value plus a cost effective and cost justified approach, , , your odds of gaining approval are very high.

Seems simple and it actually is, , , unfortunately, most IT managers around the world continue to present their technical solutions that frustrates senior management.

Remember, , ,

It's not about technology; it is all about *business value*

Technology is usually not the core competency of a company. Rather, technology is a means to achieve the business objectives that's necessary for a company to be competitive and a viable entity, , , such as banking, manufacturing, etc.

Focus on technology initiatives only when these initiatives help you deliver tangible and quantifiable business value. It will make a big difference in how senior management perceives you as a manager and whether or not the IT organization is viewed as a partner that can help the company achieve its objectives.

Example

I conducted an IT assessment for a small manufacturing company to evaluate a recommendation being made by the IT organization. The proposal was to upgrade the company's technology infrastructure with a cost of several hundred thousand dollars.

The assessment discovery identified many IT issues and needs, , , but none of them were really infrastructure problems. The real challenges were about support processes, business applications, and programming issues, , , not data center, networking, systems, and infrastructure.

My recommendation: "Save the $300,000 and spend a small amount of money to shore up these other areas - it will reduce risk, cost much less, and provide business value that makes sense for your company."

Why was the CIO focused on infrastructure when that really wasn't the focus needed? Because it was what he knew, , , his background was infrastructure. His proposal was an elegant recommendation; the problem was it missed the mark in what was needed.

If this CIO had focused on business value, his proposal would have been very different and probably understood and approved by the CEO.

SECRET #2
Senior managers do not want the detail

Over 90% of us in IT have high detail personalities. That's a good thing for a technical expert, but it can get in our way when we become managers.

Let's take a closer look at the traits of a high detail person:

A. They want “the book”. High detail people want a clear path and instructions of what they are supposed to do to be successful, , , if you don't provide them "the book", they will tend to write it themselves.
B. They like to be correct. High detail people don't like making mistakes so they always want to be right in their decision making and what they do.
C. They want to do things their way. Because they believe they are "right", they tend to want to do things their way.
D. They can easily become defensive. Because they think they are "right" and want to do things "their way", they will tend to defend their position, sometimes aggressively.
E. They do not like criticism. Because they think they are right, constructive critiques, or even suggestions, can be taken as criticism and can cause the person to withdraw or become defensive.
F. High detail people can complicate an issue by becoming too complex and too detailed in their work or discussions.

Now, these traits actually work to a technical expert's advantage. For example, you want your systems engineer types and programmers to be thorough, to work through the detail of issues, and to do the necessary work to be certain they are correct when they put in that new systems upgrade or code that new business application enhancement.

There is a detailed process by which to implement an upgrade or to put new code into production. By having defined processes the staff knows they are on solid ground, and it's generally not an issue about whether they are doing the right thing as long as they follow the process outlined for the work.

System engineers and programmers usually communicate with other technical people about their work. This means that things don't get lost in the discussion because the other people are also technical and can understand what is being communicated.

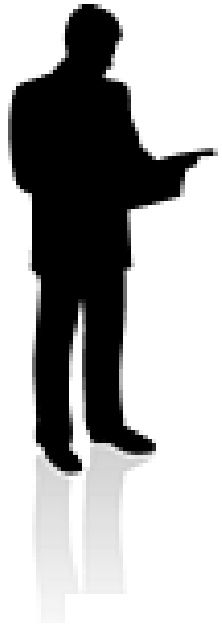
In addition, most of the work your technical people do can be done independently without a lot of dependency on others. It fits their personalities perfectly.

Here's the rub. When a systems engineer or programmer becomes an IT manager, all of a sudden they have to start working more with others, including non-technical business people. They also become much more dependent upon others to get things done.

This transition from technical expert to manager is a huge challenge. Possibly the biggest challenge a new manager has is being able to "let go" of the detail and begin focusing at an issues level and depending upon your people to focus on the detail.

So much for the background, the point is, , ,

IT people are high detail



Now, let's look at the other side - senior managers of your company.

Business executives are generally not technically oriented, don't understand technology, and don't want to be involved with technology issues. They simply want their technology managers to take care of the technology issues as necessary to support the business, , , and oh, by the way, , , don't spend too much money.

This isn't to say that an astute and sharp executive won't make significant investments in IT, , , they will if they see a reasonable return on such an investment.

But, when it comes to communication, senior managers deal at an issue level and generally hate to dive into the detail, , , especially technical detail that they don't understand in the first place.

Let me get to the key point, , ,

Executives are ***not*** high detail

This is especially true when you discuss your technical initiative recommendations. You have to avoid the temptation to educate a senior manager in some situations, , , unless their mode of operation is that they want to understand the detail. These are exceptions.

Our tendency is to provide way too much detail. **STOP**, , , it only confuses your audience and most do not want to hear it.

In general, senior managers **want the answer**, not the detail.

If they want more detail, they will ask questions and lead you to the detail they seek. When they ask for the time of day, just give them the time and stop, , , don't try to explain it unless they indicate a need for more explanation.

You will be much better served by limiting your discussions to **just the facts** than by trying to elaborate on the detail. Once you start down this path, you are likely to lose your audience if they are not technically inclined and interested in the details.

Example

As a young CIO, I met with my CEO and the President of our company to deliver a proposal for a network upgrade. The upgrade was needed to address significant growth of our company and to help us create a more scalable architecture for the future.

The meeting started out well until I was asked to justify the cost. Being somewhat inexperienced at the time, I started describing the technical reasons we needed the upgrade. At this point in my career, I had no idea about "business value" and the fact that my CEO probably could care less about my technical explanation.

After a few minutes, the CEO had a painful expression on his face. I remember it so well and that my thought at the time was that he wasn't understanding my pitch so I needed to give him more detailed explanation.

I poured on the detail and the painful expression got worse. I was killing this poor CEO and didn't even know it. After a few minutes, he looks over to the President and says, "Gene, get with Mike and then tell me what we need to do."

This was a very valuable lesson early in my career. Just give them the facts.

SECRET #3
Delivering projects successfully is the key to IT credibility

Technology is changing faster than ever before, and the rate of change doesn't seem to be slowing down. The great thing is that price keeps coming down and performance keeps going up.

Because of the continual improvement in price performance of technology and the innovation of new technology, our IT organizations are constantly implementing new projects to take advantage of the opportunity these changes give us.

It's actually not an option to avoid technology advancements, , , to do so would make our companies less effective and not as productive as needed to be competitive and profitable. Companies are depending more and more on technology to remain viable entities in their industry.

As a technology manager, you are going to be responsible for many projects over the course of a career. **To be credible, your organization must be able to deliver projects successfully, predictably, and reliably.**

Are you aware that there are several studies that suggest the failure rate of IT projects is as high as 70%?

Unbelievable to think that 7 out of 10 projects we start might end in failure by being delivered late, exceed budget, or miss the client's expectations.

Even if these studies are exaggerated and the real failure rate is only half of that, a 35% failure rate is pretty terrible.

How can that be?

There are dozens of project management methodologies, an abundance of project manager training, even certifications that designate you as a professional project manager. Yet, the failure rate by most studies continues to remain very high.

It's my belief that an entire industry called "project management" was created by this huge failure rate in technology projects. You didn't really hear about "project management" in IT until the late 1980's. Now, you better have your PMP (Project Manager Professional) certification if you interview for a project management role.

But wait, , , even with project management methodologies, great tools, excellent training and certifications, we still see high IT project failure rate. There has to be a reason.

I've looked at this issue for many years and have come to some conclusions.

The cause comes down to **"who we are"**. It's my belief that the work behavior tendencies that are so similar among IT professionals gets in our way in delivering projects successfully.

We talked about one trait in the last section - over 90% of us in IT are high detail. This trait actually helps us in managing projects so we won't spend time on it here.

The two traits that cause project management problems are that we are poor communicators and we have a high sense of urgency. Let's look at both.

A. Poor communicators - Over 70% of us in IT are more introverted and shy. This isn't a bad thing and doesn't really hurt us as technical experts, but it's a major problem when we have responsibilities that require effective communication, , , like project management work.

   Because of a lack of desire to communicate outside of our inner circle, IT people often do not do the “up front” work required to define clear goals and objectives of a new project. Likewise, we don't nail down the specific deliverables of the project and gain agreement from the project sponsor.

B. High sense of urgency – At first glance, you would think having a high sense of urgency would be a good thing for getting projects delivered successfully. However, what we like to do is get a project assignment and then simply go execute it, , , so we can finish the job quickly and move on to the next assignment.

   We don't really want to spend time documenting the project's scope, goals and objectives, and specific deliverable. We just want to do the work and get our project completed. Talking with the client and gaining agreement on the deliverable is not part of what we really like to do.

This high sense of urgency and poor communication **combine to create a big challenge** in getting a project started properly. If you don't have agreement on exactly what the deliverables are plus clear definition of what the scope and objectives will be, it is virtually impossible to deliver a project successfully.

When you fail to deliver a committed project successfully, you basically tell your clients they can't trust you will deliver. Every time you fail to deliver a project successfully you undermine your IT organization's credibility.

What this says is that you must create a culture and track record where, "You deliver projects on time, within budget, and that meets your client's expectations".

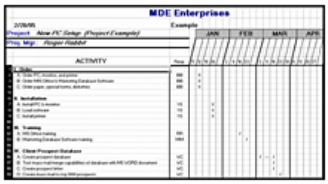
on time
within budget
meets client expectations

Managing projects well does not require you to have certifications or to use a robust methodology. Simple processes and tools work well. Having a certification says you have studied and probably passed an exam, but it doesn't tell anyone whether you can actually manage a project successfully or have done so in the past.

When I want to hire a project manager, I look for examples of successful projects they have delivered, how they handle certain situations that come up in typical projects, and whether they have strong communication skills. In other words, I want to learn more about the results and accomplishments they have achieved more than the certification and paper credentials they have.

Results are what count

Example



I managed dozens of large projects successfully as an IBM Systems Engineer (SE) long before we called it project management, , , even before laptops and spreadsheets.

Using a preprinted scheduling pad, we developed a joint plan with our client, defined individual tasks, and managed the plan weekly to install new computer systems on time and within budget. It was a very predictable process, , , I still use the same tools converted to spreadsheets to manage all types of projects today.

Learn more in my book, **IT Project Management: a *practical* approach**.

SECRET #4
To succeed in IT, you must be conservative

Let's cut to the chase, shall we? There are two dynamics going on in an IT organization that tend to cause you to fail.

First, technical projects and other types of IT initiatives tend to **take longer and cost more** than you think they will.

Have you ever started what looked like a simple project that should take 30 minutes or so, , , and it ends up taking you two hours or more to complete? Frustrating, isn't it?

Second, remember me mentioning that most of us in IT are high detail people? Actually, over 90% of us are from my research. That's a good thing, but one of the traits of a high detail person is that we tend to be very precise, even perfectionists to some extent.

What this means is that our tendency is to put a plan together that's very precise and accurate. We do the same thing when we budget, , , the reason is because internal forces are at work within us and we need very much to be **accurate**.

This trait can actually cause you to fail if you aren't careful.

In order to be a successful manager, you have to have some wiggle room, or buffer, in your plans. You also have to be conservative in managing your client's expectations. Position your organization to be able to deliver more than expected and you will win the hearts and souls of everyone you support in your company.

I want you to remember a key thought that will help you for all time:

"No one gets upset if you deliver faster or are under budget; someone always gets concerned if you are late or exceed your budget"

One of my books is about how to budget for an IT organization. In **IT Budgeting: Operational and Capital Budgets Made Easy**, there is a section specifically about budget "buffers". Building a buffer into your budget is critical if you expect to operate within your operational budget in the actual year, , , i.e., achieve your plan.

No buffer? Expect to spend more than planned and exceed your budget every time.

I have watched dozens of IT managers spend hours and hours working on their budgets and try very hard to be precise. It's a waste of time, , , what you want to provide is a knowledgeable and reasonable estimate that is appropriately conservative.

A budget is a forecast, , , not precise.

My budgeting work is relatively fast and simple and by including a few key buffers, I never miss my plan. In other words, we always spend a little less than we budget to spend. As a result, my organizations are viewed as much more predictable and reliable than the managers who spend more than they budget.

This "high detail" personality type that's prevalent in almost every IT employee is great on the one hand and creates challenges for us on the other. It is a **double edge sword**.

It's important for you to realize that this "perfectionist" desire lies deep within most in IT and can create some real challenges for you and your team. Coach your employees to be conservative when they make commitments to your client. Teach them to position themselves to "over deliver" for the client, , , it will make a huge difference for everyone.

Example

I've had other managers accuse me of "sand bagging" my budget by submitting a plan that is too conservative. Delivering a conservative budget that has room for surprises is smart, , , it's dumb to try and deliver a precise budget because surprises will happen and they always cost more money. Likewise, when I estimate timeframes to complete work, I almost always build in some buffer so we can "over deliver".

SECRET #5
Client needs and issues must drive your IT strategy

First of all, it's extremely important that you develop an IT strategy and get it approved by your senior management team, , , even if your company does not have a formal company strategy.

It is just as important that the strategy you develop be driven by your client's needs and issues. Everything you do in supporting technology of your company should be based upon helping your client do a better job.

OK then, , , who is your IT support client?

It's two, maybe three groups:

1. Senior managers of the company
2. Department managers and their employees (sometimes called "users")
3. Possibly outside clients if your company sells products or services that your IT organization supports

Your IT organization probably deals with just the first two groups unless you develop software or provide infrastructure services and sell to outside clients.

Any strategy you develop needs to be developed with your client's needs in mind.

The way to get there is to first conduct an IT assessment. It's actually a business assessment, but we call it an IT assessment.

An IT assessment accomplishes two things.

1. Identifies business needs and issues
2. Identifies IT capabilities and capacity

In other words, it's an opportunity for you to learn what the demand for IT services is plus what and how much IT support you are capable of delivering.

When you go through an IT assessment discovery process, the majority of the effort is focused on learning what is needed, , , identifying the needs and issues of your client. You do this as you learn about your client's business, their challenges and requirements as they do their part to support the company.

In the grand scheme of things, it won't matter how well your IT support organization performs if you are not delivering business value to your clients. In order to identify what they need you have to learn about their business.

It's one of the reasons the IT manager job is so difficult. We have to learn about the business of all the other departments in our company, , , not just our IT department. When we were technicians (programmers, systems engineers, etc.), no one really taught us about the business, , , they and we tended to focus our energies in learning more about technology.

Now that we are managers, it's time to get a major dose of education on what takes place in the other departments of the company. It's the only way you will learn what their business needs and issues are.

As you go through an IT assessment discovery process, you ask your clients about things that will help you learn about their business, challenges and need for IT support.

You can't ask, "What do you need from the IT organization?"

Most won't be able to tell you.

However, ask them about their business operation, their challenges, ideas they have to improve their operation's productivity or reduce cost, how they plan to help the company grow and what impact it has on their operation. Discussions like this will help you better understand their business, , , and they can talk all day on these topics.

Your clients can easily talk about their business, , , they may not know exactly what they need from IT.

When they discuss their challenges, key initiatives they need to take on to support the business and topics like these, you listen for anything that might have an IT support implication. If it does, make a note of it as a client need or issue.

My book, **IT Due Diligence: merger and acquisition discovery process**, walks you through an IT assessment process and even provides sample questionnaires to help you conduct an assessment.

Remember, it's primarily a business assessment to learn about business needs and issues that require IT support.

Once you know what the business needs and issues are of your company, you can develop an IT strategy to address these issues.

Another book I wrote is titled, **IT Strategy: align your IT vision for business value**. This book takes you through the development and delivery of an IT strategy after you complete your IT assessment.

The key thing I want you to focus on here is that every recommendation you make within your IT strategy is because there is a business need or issue to address, , , and **tangible business value** will result from the investment of time and money.

When your senior management team realizes

- Every recommendation you make is based upon business need
- All recommendations are cost justified
- Quantifiable business value is achieved by the investment
- You deliver what you say you will do

Watch out !!!

This image of an IT manager is so powerful! We need to engrave it within our very fiber of how we go about managing our IT organization. In fact, we should have something to remind us each and every day.

IT managers who are perceived in this manner by their senior management team are in a very special place, , , much different than being viewed as a “technical manager who likes to spend money for things we don’t understand”.

Something else to consider, , , most IT managers are more reactive than proactive.

One of the things you should do is to be proactive in developing an IT strategy for your organization and deliver your recommendations to your senior management team. If you are the Infrastructure Manager, your senior manager is probably the CIO. If you are the CIO, then it’s likely the CEO and CFO.

At any rate, don’t wait until they ask you to develop a strategy for your organization. Go ahead and conduct an IT assessment on your own and develop a strategy of what you think your team needs to focus on to address your client’s business needs and issues.

This is another thing that **sets you apart** from other IT managers.

Example

I’m fairly confident that one of the things that helped me get promoted and literally boosted my career in the mid-80’s was because I proactively developed an IT strategy and presented it to my senior managers before they asked me to.

It was also a strategy that was based upon client needs and issues, , , not just something I came up with from a technical perspective.

I probably wasn’t conscious of the fact in those days that other managers were not doing the same, , , I just did it because it’s what I thought you should do.

The end result was that it helped my boss and me stay on the same page, , , it informed him of where I was headed with my team, , , and it gave him an opportunity to validate we were working on the right things and provide input as necessary.

Bottom line – it made a difference because when my boss was promoted, I was promoted to fill his position.

SECRET #6
Understanding IT staff capacity is critical

The second part of conducting an IT assessment is to understand what your IT organization can do. This means you must learn what your organization's capabilities and capacity are – "what and how much you can support".

I mentioned in the previous section that the majority of an IT assessment focus is to learn what the business needs and issues are, , , the demand side. That's true but you also need to come away with a solid understanding of the supply side.

It's a fairly straightforward thing to develop a skills inventory to determine "what" your organization can do. There are a few tools in the **IT Manager ToolKit** that can help you do this quickly and easily.

What's also important is to gain a solid understanding of your staff's capacity to do what they know how to do. You need to measure their capacity to provide IT support services to manage your client's expectations on what you can deliver.

In most companiy situations there is more demand for IT services than what the IT organization has in place to deliver those services. In a few cases you may have a gap in a particular skill. The major issue is usually that you simply don't have enough capacity.

To manage your client's expectations of what you can deliver in terms of IT support you have to understand your organization's IT support capacity. There are two groups. First, you have limited capacities in certain technical areas like:

- Software licenses
- Disk space
- Bandwidth
- Server capacity

Next, you also need to understand key functional areas of your team like:

- Programming
- Desktop support
- Help Desk calls
- Projects

The first group deals with technology capacity so most IT managers pay attention to these items. You set up technology monitoring systems to monitor server and disk utilization, you watch access times to ensure users have good response times, and you maintain appropriate licenses for the software you use.

Because this first group's items primarily deal with technology IT managers are usually more comfortable with what they need to do with them.

The second group is different, , , it deals more with people capacity, and this is an area that many IT managers tend to miss because it isn't actually dealing with the technology.

How about a little test to see if you pay attention to this second group. I'll ask you a few questions and if you know the answers it says you not only understand these areas but you probably monitor them in some way.

First question: ***How much programming output can your programmers produce every month*?**

I'm talking about the actual new code and changes they can program for enhancements, revisions, maintenance, etc. that's requested by your users?

If you don't know the answer to this, it means you aren't really looking at the productivity nature of your programming staff.

It only takes a couple of minutes in an IT assessment to determine an IT organization's programming production capacity.

I know from years of experience in managing programming teams that on average each programmer should be able to produce between 100 to 120 hours of new code a month. Some months will be higher, some lower, , , but on average over the course of a year, a programmer should average about 120 hours a month if you have a productive team.

How did I get to this number?

It's an estimate that's easy to get to. First, in an average month of 4 work weeks, each containing 40 hours, there would be 160 hours in a work month (4 weeks x 40 hours per week). Deduct time for meetings, vacation, company holidays, training, being sick, etc. and it leaves the productive time a programmer will be writing code, , , and guess what, it tends to average about 120 hours of programming productivity per month.

Second question: ***How many Help Desk tickets do you receive a month?***

It's a basic question that every IT manager who has Help Desk responsibility should know the answer to, , , but you would be surprised how many don't, even when they have a decent Help Desk application installed and running.

Not only do you need to know the volume of support work coming into the Help Desk, you also need to understand some of the detail that makes up your "Help Desk business", , , things like:

- Volume by **category** or type of issue – what's the support work being requested?
- Volume by **client** – who is requesting support?
- Volume **assigned** to support people – who is doing the work?
- **Length of time** to complete support requests – how long does it take?
- Number of **rework items** – what is the quality of your support?

As you analyze your Help Desk numbers it should be pretty obvious if your team is keeping up simply by looking at the number of outstanding tickets at the end of each month, , , if it's growing, you are not able to handle the volume of work coming in.

The other thing is that you can see where you are getting behind by looking at the type of work coming in and that's getting completed (or not being addressed) and should be able to gain insight about the capacity of certain groups of people in your support team.

It's difficult to understand IT capacity if you don't have good Help Desk numbers that tell you what's going on.

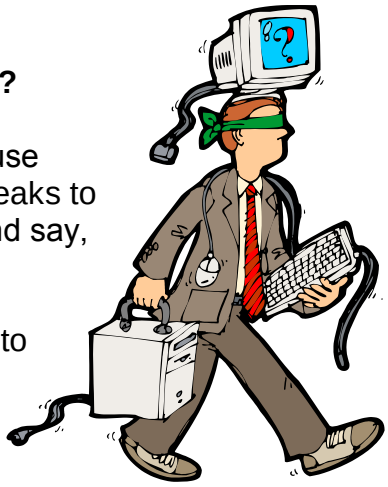
Example

I've observed many IT organizations with Help Desk applications installed but they were only collecting tickets and monitoring the number of open tickets. They had no real understanding of what was going on in their support business.

In one consulting engagement, users were quite vocal about the "black hole" their support requests fell into, and the IT manager and his team couldn't tell me how many new requests they averaged per week or the number of open tickets.

Bottom line – they were not managing the support business. No wonder requests were getting lost.

Third question: **How many Desktop Technicians do you need?**



Academic or what I call, “theoretical managers”, like to be able to use simple math to get to this number. They will read an article that speaks to the “average number of users to PC Technicians” in an industry and say, “That’s what we need!”.

There is a big challenge anytime you look at industry averages, , , to get to an average there will be wide variations that are both better and much worse than the calculated average number.

Every company is different

There are many variables that play into the number of desktop technicians needed in a company:

- Capability of your desktop technicians
- Capability of the users who are using the equipment
- Age and stability of the equipment being supported
- Whether or not the equipment is pretty much standard or if the equipment is many models and from multiple vendors
- Is the company in high growth mode?
- Distribution of the equipment – Are they in one building or distributed among many buildings, possibly even in multiple cities or countries?
- Complexity of your application environment

To read an article that suggests the average ratio of “users to desktop technician” is 150 does not in any way shape or form mean that it will apply to your situation. You may need to be at 50 users per desktop technician or 300, , , huge differences depending upon the dynamics of your company and support environment.

You should do some legitimate analysis to determine what your number should be because your situation will be different from the next company, even if they are in the same industry and roughly the same size as your company.

Start by assessing how many desktop calls you get on average per day or week. Next, try to understand how many calls each of your desktop technicians can take care of in a normal day, , , on average.

Obviously, some calls take longer time to complete than others and when there is a major problem somewhere it will affect the numbers so filter this into your analysis.

Most likely, certain technicians tend to take on the more difficult tasks, a few of them will be highly productive and a few won't be very productive, , , the rest average.

If you have ten technicians it will probably look like a bell curve if you were to map out the productivity of your desktop technicians, , , something like the graphic below:

Most of the desktop technician team will be average performers, around 60%, , , about 20% will be high performers and another 20% will have low productivity.

This principle works in almost everything you look at, , , where the support calls come from, what type of calls you are getting, who is doing the work, etc.

The point with all of this is that you need to assess how much work you can accomplish with the team. To do this you have to be able to gauge the capacity of each employee to a certain extent.

When you do, you should be able to estimate the number of desktop support calls your team can handle on a daily basis. Knowing this plus the volume of desktop support calls that come into your Help Desk helps you manage client expectations and better understand workload to manage this team's capacity.

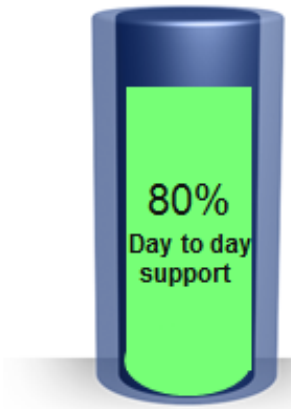
This is managing the business of IT

Final question: **How much of the support team is required for day to day support?**

In most IT organizations there is less capacity to support the client than there is need for support, , , demand exceeds supply. This is common and isn't going to go away.

You need to gauge how much of your team's capacity is required for day to day support.

Every company wants and needs its IT organization to work on special projects. It is what helps a company reduce cost or improve productivity. However, you can't work on projects and sacrifice day to day support, , , to do so can cause many problems.



If it takes 80% of your organization's capacity to handle normal support every day, you won't be doing much project work, , , and the projects you can do depends upon what type of resource has the extra capacity to do project work.

What this means is that you need to estimate how much of your organization is required for day to day support. Without this understanding it is extremely difficult to manage client expectations.

Example

In the last company I joined to become their CIO, I conducted a quick IT assessment. What was apparent was there was insufficient capacity even to meet day to day support needs much less to be able to work on special projects.

Three managers in our Corporate Headquarters told me that I should fire one of my employees because she was a poor performer. Turns out this wasn't the case at all, , , she was an excellent employee but the lack of support resources made the client think there was an employee problem.

The client was accurate in that they were not being supported adequately, but the real problem was a lack of IT support capacity. This is a management problem, not an employee problem.

When I fixed the capacity problem, guess what, , , the client issues with my employee went away.

SECRET #7
If there is an IT-Business gap, IT must close it

Many studies suggest 50% of all IT organizations around the world are out of sync with their business client. This is not a new phenomenon. It has been around for many years.

Surveys year after year also show that one of the top concerns both CEO's and CIO's have every year is, "Keeping IT aligned with the company's needs."

We call this out of sync problem an, , ,

IT – Business disconnect

I see the problem, hear and read about it all the time. It isn't going away.

The real issue here is that if an IT manager is out of sync with the business, he usually doesn't realize it. If he did he would fix it assuming he knows how. What I've seen is that most of the time the manager doesn't realize he's working on "X, Y, and Z" and the company needs him to be focused on "A, B, and C".

It literally takes about an hour to discover if IT is in sync or out of sync with the company in an IT assessment.

"Oh my goodness!", you might be thinking, , , how can that be?

It comes down to the fact that most IT managers don't know how to determine if they are in sync or not, , , worse than that they don't realize they need to. They are working on technology and not focused on managing the business of IT support.

The first thing you want to do in managing an IT support organization is to determine what your team should be working on, , , and in what priority. To do this, you need to conduct an IT assessment to identify the needs and issues of your company.

Working on technology
versus
managing the business of IT support

Remember **Secret #5 – Client needs and issues must drive your IT strategy**?

You discover these needs and issues in an IT assessment, and this is what you should develop your IT work strategy from.

When you present your strategy recommendations to senior management and gain their approval, there is **no way for your team to be out of sync** with the company.

I mentioned it takes about an hour to discover if the IT organization is aligned with the business, , , believe it or not, that's about what it takes.

If you go into a company and sit down with the CEO and CFO to begin an IT assessment and you hear things like, , ,

> "We spend a lot of money in IT but don't fully understand why."
>
> "We don't always know why IT is working on certain projects."

, , , I can guarantee you the IT organization is out of sync with the company.

On the other hand, if you, , ,

> **develop an IT strategy, , ,**
>
> **present your strategy to senior management, , ,**
>
> **and gain their agreement and commitment, , ,**

there is no way for you to be out of sync because the senior management team knows what you are working on, and they have agreed to it, , , plus their commitment means they will fund and support it.

Example

In one company where we acquired 35 smaller companies, the IT-Business disconnect was 70% or more, , , it's a very common problem in small to mid-size companies.

SECRET #8
Teamwork must be developed

It goes without saying that you need strong teamwork to become a successful IT organization, but **did you know teamwork is not a natural thing for IT employees?**

Probably not, so let me explain.

You see, over 90% of us in IT have two personality traits that actually work against teamwork to an extent.

First, almost all of us are technically oriented (a good thing), independent, goal oriented, and self-starters.

Most of these traits are good, especially as technicians or technology experts. However, this independent trait can be a challenge when it comes to working well with others.

In addition, over 90% (virtually everyone in IT) are high detail, , , also a good thing, , , you would think. For the most part, it is good, but one of the aspects of a high detail person is that they "like to do things ***their* way**".

Let me get to the essence of what I'm driving toward. Technology attracts a certain type of individual and people with consistent personality traits. These traits summed up would describe an IT individual as someone who:

- Likes to work independently and on his own
- Wants to be precise and do things his way
- Doesn't like to communicate outside of his inner circle

The bottom line, , ,

teamwork is not a natural or easy thing for IT employees

High detail people can dig their heels in and become stubborn about how things are done. IT people are smart and they have strong opinions about things, , , it can be a real challenge to build teamwork for an inexperienced IT manager.

Don't get me wrong here, , , IT people are conscientious and want to do a good job, but most want to do it a certain way, , , and that would be, , , their way.

What this means for an IT manager is that you have to build teamwork in your organization, , , that's right, it is up to you to make it happen because it's not going to happen automatically.

The good news is that building teamwork and camaraderie is the most fun aspect of being an IT manager, , , at least, I think it is.

I used to coach my teams a lot about, "We will succeed as a team; if the team fails none of us will be successful."

The key is to create focus and coach your employees on working together positively.

Focus is provided by creating an IT strategy, running projects like projects, and delivering solid employee performance plans and reviews. When you deliver these, you always want to reinforce teamwork and the positive benefits of working together as a team.

Another opportunity to reinforce teamwork is when you have staff meetings. I like to hold them at least once a month and in every meeting there is something to reinforce the importance of teamwork.

Example

I joined a company to run their IT operation of some 35 employees. They lived in two different cities and it was obvious there were teamwork issues with the groups.

Shortly after joining the company I held an IT Kickoff Meeting to bring them all together and to refocus everyone to our company's mission and the IT strategy I built to support this mission. The meeting had a key theme – **TEAMWORK**.

To have some fun, we divided the groups into three teams (Managers, City#1, & City#2) and created a competition among them to stress the importance of teamwork. Each team had to do a short skit (a play of sorts) that emphasized the teamwork message. Our management team presented a message of,

"Put your oars in the water and row together, and we will be successful."

The bottom line here is that teamwork occurs when managers cause it to happen, , , it doesn't happen all on its own.

SECRET #9
Training is a key motivator for IT employees

I would have to say training and education is possibly the number one motivator for IT employees. Granted, everyone is a little different from the next person but training always ranks high as a key motivator for IT people.

You may already know this, , , should I move on to Secret #10?

Before we do, let's talk about some things that you may not be fully aware of.

Motivating your employees is going to become more and more important because the US is about to see a **major shortage in experienced IT professionals**. There are several reasons causing this problem:

- Companies depend upon technology more than ever and their need for experienced IT workers is growing, but the IT workforce is shrinking, , , at least in the US and European countries.
- Universities are not producing enough graduates with IT related degrees. This has dropped off significantly since 2000 when the Dot.Com economy problems hit, , , IT graduates couldn't find a job so new college students stopped going for Computer Science degrees. We almost recovered when suddenly the economy began to sink again in 2008. As I write this book in 2013 we are still trying to recover but it is a very slow recovery.

- Huge numbers of experienced IT employees and managers called "baby boomers" are leaving the work force. This is a large group that makes up a majority of the US workforce and they are either retiring or changing careers in record numbers. "Baby boomers" are post-WWII people born between 1946 and 1964.

It's going to become more important than ever to retain your good employees. When there is greater need than there is supply, it's a "seller's market". I believe we will begin to see considerably more activity of IT employees moving from company to company.

It will be your best people who are likely to leave for more opportunity or money, although money has never been a high priority for why IT people leave their company. Money always ranks around 7th to 10th on survey lists, , , training and education is always in the Top 3.

Likewise, when your competition needs IT resources, who do you think they want to recruit? That's right, , , they want your best people and they will try to recruit them.

Something else you may not realize. Many IT managers are afraid to invest in IT training and education for fear that it will position their employees to leave the company.

That's a terrible way to look at it.

There is always some level of risk in losing an employee. Things change and people move onto different careers, a spouse is promoted to a job in another city, , , lots of things can happen that would cause you to lose an employee.

However, what I've seen throughout my career is that ***investing in your employees tends to make them stay with you*** because they know you care about their success and career.

Not investing in your employees gives them more reason to look for another company!

It makes sense to invest in their skills to improve your team's capabilities and to build depth in key positions, especially mission critical skill positions.

I also believe you have an obligation to develop your IT employees. They work hard for you and a good manager will make sure his or her employees have the tools and training needed to do a good job for the company.

What this says is that **every IT employee should have a targeted training program** each and every year that focuses their development in several ways:

- Supports the employee's career goals
- Improves the technical and non-technical skills of your team
- Adds depth in mission critical skills of the team
- Motivates the employee

One way to guarantee you will do this is to put a Training and Education section in each employee's Performance Plan, , , positive results will come from it.

To develop a training program for your staff the first thing you should do is determine where you need to develop their skills. Start with a skills assessment.

Most organizations have **"silos of knowledge"** where most or all the knowledge and experience in a topic is contained in one or two people. This creates risk for your support organization so you need to determine where these gaps exist in order to develop additional depth, , , especially in mission critical support skills needed in your company.

To do this, list all the technical skills and application knowledge you need in your organization, , , then quantify who has these capabilities in your organization. There are many ways to do this, , , I use a simple spreadsheet like the one below that **makes it easy to see where the knowledge gaps are**.

In this example, I show you a small section for the Business Analysts, , , you should do a similar skills inventory for each of your skill disciplines such as Programmers, Help Desk employees, Desktop Technicians, Infrastructure, etc.

There are a few things to take notice of:

- We list all the technical skills we need in the first column to the left, , , in this case each of the Business Applications we support as an IT Organization.
- Next, we make a column for each of our Business Analyst employees
- If an employee has functional knowledge of an application, shade the appropriate cell beneath the employee's name in green.
- This clearly shows you where you have minimal functional knowledge. In these cases, you need to target training for these areas.

- The red shaded cells represent the people we want to target training for each application.
- Once you see where you need to focus training, you should prioritize your training efforts by highlighting the applications you want to prioritize. This is a subjective exercise based upon which applications you deem to be mission critical or more important and the applications that have the greatest risk due to lack of functional knowledge.

In looking at the example, you can see Application A is in good shape with three people with functional knowledge. On the other hand, Applications B, C, and D only have one resource with functional knowledge for each, , , you need to do some training in these applications.

Any training program you develop needs to be focused. Determining what you have in place and the gaps of knowledge that exist to support your business will help you create a highly focused training plan.

A focused training program can do a lot to motivate your people when they see you take a proactive approach to improving the support environment of your company by developing knowledge and skill. These investments will improve the work environment you have as well as morale.

Example

In a recent 7-month consulting engagement I managed a hospital's IT organization of 38 people while they looked for a permanent IT Director. One of the objectives of the engagement was to develop an IT Career Planning Program.

Read about it and the steps I took on my ITLever Blog at:
http://itlever.com/2013/04/03/steps-to-develop-a-career-program-for-your-it-staff/

In doing this project I used the spreadsheet shown on the previous page to develop a skills assessment of what we had in place and to determine where we had gaps of knowledge.

SECRET #10
Client problems are opportunities in disguise

Early in my career I was pretty intimidated by an upset client, , , I think most of us have probably experienced this at one time or another.

What I learned over time was, , ,

client problems are opportunities

That's right, , , opportunities. Identify why a client is disgruntled and fix it, and you have a partner. It can potentially mean a lot for your company, especially for the IT organization.

Example

Many years ago (too many to count, I'm afraid), I was promoted and with the promotion I inherited an IT support organization that supported hospitals using the software our company developed and licensed to them.

A few months into the job I received a phone call from one of the support managers about a client problem. The client wasn't paying their bill (a clear sign they didn't like the support they were getting) and threatening to leave us.

I asked the manager what the issues were but she couldn't really tell me, , , what I heard was a bunch of generalities, **no specifics**.

One thing I know for sure is that if you don't know what your client's specific problems are, you are probably not going to fix them. Call me a "rocket scientist" if you like, but it's pretty simple.

We flew up to meet with the client, identified the problems and ultimately addressed their needs, , , I'll give you the process we used in just a minute.

The best part of this example is that we saved the client and they paid their bill which was well over 90 days past due. In fact, this client later purchased many new software products and services from our company worth thousands of dollars.

I told you I would give you the process we used with the unhappy client in the example.

Before I do, let's talk a bit about "unhappy clients".

A client doesn't want to be unhappy with their vendor or IT support organization.

Your client wants to be a "happy camper", , , truly. If he or she is not happy, there is a reason.

Now, here is where we have to be careful. The reason may be real or it may not be real, , , your job is to determine what the issues are and address them to turn the client around.

Sometimes a client is upset because he isn't getting supported effectively, but his assessment of why he isn't getting the support may not be accurate. If you recall the Example I gave in Secret #6, the client wasn't getting supported appropriately but the reason wasn't due to my employee, , , it was a management issue.

Again, you won't know what to do until you identify the **specific issues** causing the client to be unhappy with your IT support organization.

Another point and then we will discuss a process to deal with an unhappy client.

An angry client may yell at you, call you bad names, even throw things at you (just kidding about the throwing). The point I'm making is that dealing with a problem client can be ugly and unpleasant at times. The key thing to remember if it gets ugly is, , ,

It's not personal!

Yelling and screaming at you is just frustration. You may be talking to a client who has been unhappy for some time and if that's the case he or she may think screaming is the only way to be heard by your company.

Remember, , , an unhappy client is an opportunity !!!!

Client Rescue Guide – a process you may use to turn a problem client around.

Step 1 - Define the problem
To improve a bad client situation, you must know what the problem is. Your employees may not have a clue as to what the real problems are so you have to interview the client to get to the problem.

Step 2 - Quantify the issues
In quantifying the problem, you must quantify and articulate the **specific issues** that come from the client's discussion. You won't be able to solve the problem unless you are very specific as to the issues that are causing the problem. After listening to the client, list the issues specifically that must be addressed to resolve the situation.

Step 3 - Gain client agreement on the issues and a commitment to what will occur when the issues are addressed
Once you have listed the issues that must be addressed, gain concurrence from the client until you know you have listed every specific issue to be addressed. When you positively address the issues causing the problem, identify what the client should be committed to do. This might mean paying an outstanding invoice, developing a positive relationship with the IT organization, etc. It must be a win-win for you and the client for this effort to be a success.

Step 4 - Develop an action plan to address the issues and gain client agreement on the plan
Develop a specific action plan, or project, to positively address all issues. Be conservative in what you plan to commit to in terms of timing, cost, and specific deliverables. In other words, include plenty of buffer and position your organization to over-deliver. Communicate the plan to the client and gain agreement that the action items will positively address the problem issues identified.

Step 5 - Execute the plan
Execute the plan and be sure to do a quality and timely job. Remember, this may be your second or third chance so success is critical this time. **It may also be your last chance!**

Step 6 - Over-communicate the status of the plan
Communicate daily unless everyone agrees that less often is appropriate. When trying to turn a problem client situation around, you must over-communicate.

When you complete the projects that positively address the client's issues, you may ask the client to fulfill his part as discussed in Step 3.

SECRET #11
Strong support organizations over communicate

This is a big one and **potentially your toughest challenge!**

You see, most IT organizations are not known for their great communication skills. In fact, they are more often viewed as an organization that doesn't communicate well, lacks follow-up, and consistently does not do what they say they will do.

OUCH!!!

I'm not trying to be negative, but it is important if you are reading this to realize that this is a strong reality, , , and most of it comes down to poor communication.

If you learn to do anything well, , , learn how to communicate effectively with your clients, staff, senior managers, , , even your vendors. It will pay huge dividends.

The most effective IT managers are great communicators, and they know to be proactive in their communications rather than wait until someone asks a question. They put processes into place that helps (actually forces) their people and themselves to communicate with one another and with the client.

"Are you serious?", you may be asking yourself about now.

"Forces IT employees to communicate? Mike has surely fallen off his rocker.", may be another thought you have.

Absolutely and let me explain.

Over 70% in IT are introverted and shy, , , not a bad thing but it can create huge challenges, especially at the IT manager level.

Shy and introverted people do not communicate well and they certainly do not develop their communication skills unless someone pushes them to. Worse than that, they have a **lower desire to communicate**.

This means you need to implement processes in your IT organization that will force your team and you to communicate, , , that's right, even you.

How do you force your team to communicate?
Start by putting in processes that helps you make it happen. Here are some examples I've used:

- Scheduled monthly status meetings with key clients – forces you to prepare status updates and meet with your major clients.
- Scheduled monthly staff meetings with IT employees – forces you to prepare and meet with your team on a regular basis.
- Quarterly lunches or short meetings with key vendors – develops partnerships that helps when you need to escalate support.
- Weekly updates with my boss – forces you to keep your manager in the loop on what's going on and helps you become aware of things you need to be aware of.
- Weekly project status meetings – helps your project managers push projects along and complete them successfully.
- Weekly or monthly team meetings - helps you keep the team on the same page, discuss support issues and coach for improvements needed.
- Escalation procedures - include communication directives to insure key people including clients are aware of what's taking place and the status of problem situations.
- Annual IT assessment surveys with your client and senior managers to gauge the state of IT support from your client's perspective.
- Monthly and weekly status reporting to certain clients and managers on key projects.

The key here is ***proactive* communication!**

Strong IT organizations keep their clients "out of the dark" because good IT managers know that when you aren't communicating with clients they are getting anxious and assume you aren't getting the work done.

When clients don't know, they think the worst.

Yep, they think you not focused on their issue and that you aren't placing enough priority to resolving it.

Be certain you understand that if you or your people are shy and introverted like over 70% of us in IT are, , , it's a **high probability** you are not communicating very well. The main reason is that shy people do not place a high value on communication, , , they simply don't think it is very important.

It's paramount that you overcome this tendency at work if you are a shy person. The bottom line is that, , ,

you must communicate to succeed

Example

Early in my IT management career I was so shy I was afraid to get out of my office and go talk to my clients, , , even my employees. Some of this was probably because I didn't know what an IT manager was supposed to do, and I had no help in learning how to become an effective IT manager.

Over time I became aware of just how important effective communication can be for your success and the impact it has on your career.

Now, when I take charge of a new IT organization I put communication processes in place quickly because I know that without them we won't communicate enough.

Another tip about over communicating, , , if you have a major problem situation, let's say a remote office of 100 people has lost connectivity to the servers in the Data Center. Put someone on your Help Desk "on point" and have that person contact the senior manager of the remote office every hour to provide an update.

It may take several hours to resolve the problem, but it will reduce the anxiety somewhat for the remote manager. I can assure you that if he hasn't heard and feels like he needs to call you to learn about the status of the situation, he is stressed out, , , so save everyone some pain by communicating proactively.

SECRET #12
Deal with employee problems proactively

If you manage people for very long, sooner or later you are going to have an employee challenge or two, , , you might even have a problem employee.

Employee problems or challenges come in all shapes and sizes, from behavior issues, performance problems, quality of their work, , , even things like getting to work on time.

When you have an employee problem, it is probably not going to go away by itself. These things tend to only get worse, especially when you don't address the situation.

Here is the good news, , , most IT employees work hard, they are conscientious, and they want to do a good job for the company. I would say 90% or more of our people fall into this category.

What this says is that IT managers don't have to spend a lot of their time in disciplining an employee, but there will be times when it will be needed.

I walk through a 3-step process to resolve employee problems.

1. **Coach and counsel the employee to improve performance** – This may be several times or just one time depending upon the severity of the issue. At some point, you will decide this is the last time to coach. At this point, you inform the employee that, "If this happens again, I'll be placing you on a formal Improvement Program and if the issue comes up again it will be grounds for termination."

   The **employee must realize** termination results if the problem is not resolved.

2. **Implement a formal Employee Improvement Plan** – This is a written document that spells out what the problem is and why it's an issue, specific examples that quantifies it for the employee, and a discussion of what must be done to rectify it. It is signed by both employee and manager and a clause stipulates employee termination results if not corrected within a certain timeframe.

3. **Terminate the employee** – Not much to say about this, , , you have tried your best to achieve a positive result with your employee to no avail.

The third step may leave a bad taste so let me dive into this a little deeper.

First of all, every manager's objective should be to help each and every employee succeed. After all, our team and we as managers will be successful when our people are successful – right?

You never want to fire an employee, , , that's absolutely the last thing any of us want to do.

However, you have an obligation to your company, your team, even to yourself to take care of problem situations. But guess what, , , and this might come as a shock, , , **your biggest obligation** is to the problem employee!

That's right, you have a real obligation to the troublemaker to address his or her problem.

You see, our responsibility as IT managers is to **help everyone on our team succeed**. But there may be situations where a person will not be successful on the team. If that's the case, we have an obligation to help that person seek a career somewhere else where he or she can be successful.

I believe very strongly about this. If it comes down to firing an employee because of behavior or performance issues, you are being the most fair to the problem employee.

Something in our work environment or something going on with the individual is preventing him from succeeding on this team. We are obligated to "free him up" to go somewhere else and be successful, , , not to do this is terribly unfair to the employee.

Here is what normally happens.

If you coach an employee and are direct, , , most employees will fix the problem.

When you place someone on a formal Improvement Plan (Step 2) and they know termination will happen if they do not resolve the issue, , ,

they either fix the problem or they will leave on their own.

Less than 5% in my experience actually get to Step 3 where you have to terminate them.

I've managed many organizations and have had several employee coaching situations but I've rarely had to terminate for cause, , , the employee will address his or her issue if you are direct and explain it is unacceptable.

Example

One of my favorite manager examples is a restaurant owner. George Ippolito owns and operates several Italian restaurants north of Atlanta, Georgia and he is a great manager that I've observed and watched on many occasions.

He pays attention to detail and he manages proactively.

I've seen him coach employees constructively to maintain high levels of client service and to show his clients he appreciates their business.

I've also seen him take care of a problem employee, , , although I wasn't in the room. The situation occurred when my wife, Dorine, and I were sitting at the bar about to have dinner. She asked the manager if she could have the special without calamari.

The manager said, "Sure, no problem."

Now, if the manager had said, "No.", , , it wouldn't have been an issue. Dorine would have ordered something different. Not a big deal.

We didn't realize it but the chef told the manager that he wouldn't fix the special without calamari. No one said anything to us, but in a few minutes George enters the restaurant, walks right by Dorine and me and heads to the kitchen.

Something is wrong with this picture because we are like family, , , George always gives Dorine a big hug and shakes my hand, , , but this time he walked by us without stopping to even say, "Hello."

Later, George comes out of the kitchen and greets us as he customarily does. Then he proceeds to tell us that he had to address a problem with his chef about not willing to prepare the special without calamari. You see, chefs don't make those decisions in his restaurants, , , managers decide how to take care of the client.

I'm confident he had issues with the chef before which is why he came in to take care of the problem, , , it wouldn't have mattered if it was us or a first time visitor to his restaurant, , , it was an issue he deemed important enough to deal with.

George supports his team and reinforces behavior that leads to great client service, and that's why he has an excellent business.

SECRET #13
Everyone needs to hear your IT vision

First, let me ask you a question, “Do you have an IT strategy?”

If not, , , why not?

No matter what level of responsibility you have, every IT manager should have a strategy in place for his team, , , even if it’s a team of 3 programmers.

Let me ask you another question, “When do most IT managers develop an IT strategy?”

Sadly, it is when their manager asks them to do it. Rarely does an IT manager develop a strategy for his team proactively, , , he usually waits until he is asked to do it.

There is a big difference in doing the work versus taking time to develop a strategy and plans to achieve it, , ,

big, , , big, , , difference

This is the second time we have looked at “IT strategy”. I talked about the need for an IT strategy to be driven by business need and issues in Secret #5.

This one is slightly different although just as important. It’s about breaking through an invisible barrier that exists in most of us, , , to **take action** in developing an IT strategy and communicating it with those who need to hear it.

The key here is that you can’t communicate an IT strategy unless you develop one.

Maybe you have seen or are even one of those IT managers who says something like,

“How can I develop an IT strategy
when we don’t have a company strategy?”

I’ve heard this question quite a few times from managers who attend my **IT Manager Institute**, , , and you know what, not having a company strategy is no excuse for you to avoid developing an IT strategy.

If you have management responsibility, it's important for you to determine what your people should work on and what you want them to accomplish as a team.

Failing to develop an IT strategy is lazy, , , or it could be that you don't know how to. Not knowing is more understandable, but if that's the case then you need to learn how.

I'm not trying to be mean or ugly, but I do want to get your attention so let me explain with an Example.

Example

My career took off in 1986, , , literally took off. I was in my mid-30's and had worked hard leading up to this point of my career. I also felt that I had learned a great deal and was fairly successful at IBM and another company I had been with prior to this.

All of a sudden, my current company began assigning me more and more responsibility. It seemed that every 6 months or so I would be given another IT organization to manage.

Along with the additional responsibility came more senior titles, higher salary and bigger bonuses, , , even stock options of the company.

In looking back, it is easy for me to see that 1986 was when my career really started to build momentum; and as I reflect on why, I think there are two key reasons:

1. I developed strategies proactively for my team and communicated them to senior management for their approval.
2. We delivered results.

The results we achieved would be far less if we had not developed strategies for these teams. When you simply take care of day to day support issues, you won't achieve nearly as much than if you map out a strategy to achieve some significant objectives.

Managers who develop strategies

achieve more success

Most people procrastinate, especially when it has to do with something new or that we don't understand all that well, , , like developing an IT strategy, for instance.

It's normal that most people are procrastinators, , , they wait until asked to do it.

However, there is some **good news**!

That's right, there is good news with all of this, , , and here it is.

Developing an IT strategy proactively, reviewing it with your senior manager(s), and gaining approval will set you apart from other IT managers. You heard me say this earlier with Secret #5 and it's worth repeating, , ,

sets, , , , you, , , , apart

The reason, , , others are waiting until their manager asks them to deliver their plan.

Remember my Example in this topic? I'm convinced it made a difference in my career and it can for you as well.

You may be struggling, and it's normal to procrastinate on things we don't have much insight into or don't know how to do. So, how do you develop an IT strategy if you have never done it before?

Guess what, , , there is a first time for everything. There certainly was for me, and I'm fairly certain my first IT strategy probably wasn't all that great. But, the more you do the better you get at it.

Here are options to help you get started in developing a strategy for your team:

- Seek help from a senior manager.
- Research "developing IT strategy" on the Internet and see what you find.
- Find a training class on IT strategy.
- Read **IT Strategy: align your IT vision for business value**

SECRET #14
Communicate your successes, , , no one else will

Let me start this one with an Example.

Example

Early in my IT management career I decided to hold an IT Kickoff Meeting for my team of 25 employees. It occurred to me that this would be beneficial because when I was an IBM employee we always had a big Kickoff meeting at the beginning of every year.

One of the things I wanted to do in my first official Kickoff Meeting was to discuss past year's achievements so I began developing a list of projects and key accomplishments we achieved the previous year.

WOW, , , was I surprised !!!

I was blown away by how much we had accomplished the previous year. It was significantly more than I had remembered.

I immediately recognized something.

I knew if I wasn't aware of how significant our accomplishments were, , , then it's certain my clients were not aware either. In fact, even my employees would not realize how much we had achieved.

From that point I began tracking my team's annual accomplishments. Here is a simple tool you can use to track your team's achievements.

Annual IT Accomplishments

#	Accomplishment	Date	Key Resources	Client	Key Benefits
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					

Communicating your team's achievements is not bragging. On the contrary you owe it to your people to promote the successes of your IT organization. They work hard and often lack the appreciation they deserve.

More importantly, you owe it to your clients to help them realize and be aware of the contribution the IT organization is making.

Something you may not have thought much about is the fact that your clients (senior managers and department managers of your company) have short memories. They don't remember what you did two weeks ago, , , much less two months or more ago.

What clients focus on is what they need from you today.

Clients have short memories!

So too will you and your IT employees. We all have short memories because the volume of work and issues that occur in IT support on a daily basis is enormous. We don't have much time to reflect on what was accomplished 6 months ago, , , as soon as a project is completed it is off to the races to work on the next major initiative.

Well, that's true but it's still important for your clients and employees to be aware of how much the IT organization is accomplishing.

Something else you may not have thought about, , , if you don't communicate these successes, no one knows about it.

That's right, , , no one will know, , , and this is a shame if you let it happen.

So, it's up to you as the IT manager to ensure everyone hears about IT achievements.

At a minimum you should provide an annual summary of major accomplishments. Better yet would be to provide a quarterly or monthly update listing key achievements and highlighting the benefits of these initiatives as well as key contributors from your team.

It's vitally important for you to keep everyone posted on the good your IT organization does for your company on a regular basis, , , maintains the positive image you need.

No one knows unless you tell them!

SECRET #15
Respect is earned, not given

It takes a lot to gain respect as an IT manager, don't you think?

Well, it does and it doesn't. Let me explain.

There are variations of respect:

- Organization respect
- Individual respect

Certainly, you want your IT organization to be respected as an organization that provides value and does what you say it will do. Likewise, we all seek to be respected as individuals and as professionals in what we do.

There are different layers of respect when it comes to you as an individual:

- Respect from your employees
- Respect from senior managers
- Respect from your primary client (department managers and users)
- Respect from your peer group
- Respect from outside your company
- Self respect

Each of these layers have differences but the respect you receive (or don't) emanates from the same basic things.

I'm going to "net this out" for you.

It's easy to earn respect within your company if you go about it properly.

The key is that **everything you do** needs to be tied to providing **business value** for your company, your recommendations are **cost justified** and provide **real benefits**, and you **do what you say** you will do.

You've been hearing this in some form or fashion throughout this book.

It's also important in how you go about your work, , , how you coach and critique, , , how you make recommendations, etc. A positive and constructive approach makes a huge difference so think about the impression someone gets from your actions.

Credibility comes from delivering projects successfully.

Respect is given to those who produce results and treat others with respect.

Respect and credibility is key for an IT manager, and it's there for the taking, , , but you have to earn it. It isn't awarded automatically, no matter what your title is or how much people like you or how long you have been with your company.

You have to earn respect, , ,
, , , and you earn it each and every day.

Let's talk more about the importance of respecting others.

Your people and the people you work with (clients) are smart and they are intuitive. People pick up on the fact when someone isn't sincere or who doesn't respect what they do. It's critical that managers gain a high level of appreciation and respect for what their people do to support the business.

Hard work and commitment should be respected and appreciated, , , and it is important for this to come from the management team.

It's one thing to say you respect and appreciate the hard work of others, , , it's more important that you demonstrate it with your actions and demeanor as you do things in your day to day management functions.

It's easy to say you respect your clients, but when your actions say you don't really care for them and you think their problems are trivial, , , guess what, , , your people and the client pick up on this.

You get back what you give out, , , tenfold.

If you want a high sense of urgency on your team when there is a system failure, you better exhibit a high sense of urgency as the manager.

If you want people to come to work and leave at appropriate times, you had better set the right example on these things. People will follow the role model you set, , , in behavior, professionalism, ethics, organization, punctuality, , , everything.

Example

I observe everything and try to learn from it. Believe it or not, you can learn a lot from a movie that applies to IT management.

In the movie **Gladiator** with Russell Crowe, the first 5 minutes provides a great scene and examples of respect.

In this scene as the Roman Army prepares for the last major battle after years of war, the General walks through his troops for last minute inspection.

In this scene, you visibly see mutual respect between the General (the highest paid soldier in the Army) and his Foot Soldiers (the lowest paid soldiers). That's right – **mutual respect**.

It's obvious the General appreciates and respects what his Foot Soldiers do for this army. Without them, he cannot be successful. Even though their skills or knowledge are not as strong as others, , , they are a valuable component to his army's success.

The General knows it, , , he shows it as he walks around, , , he demonstrates it as he stops to chat with one of the wounded warriors. You see it in everyone's eyes, , , mutual respect and admiration.

It's not artificial.

It's not subservient.

It's truly mutual, , , he respects his soldiers as much as they respect him.

The General earns respect by his leadership style and how he goes about his business. More importantly, he earns it by the results he achieves and how he treats others of all levels, , , with respect.

Are you convinced as I am that this applies to IT managers as well?

Give respect and get the results of what you say you will do and you will be a highly respected manager in your company.

SECRET #16
Reward desired behavior as well as successes

It's important to reward people for the successes achieved in your organization, but it's also important to reward the behavior you want from the team.

You see, what gets rewarded gets emulated by others who see these things being recognized and rewarded.

Want your people to follow-up better? Find a way to recognize a positive action of one of your people in this area and reward them for it. Make a positive example of it.

Need people to ask for help when they run into challenges with one of their project tasks? Show the project team it is an example of strength when someone asks for help early enough so we can do something and avoid putting the project at risk, , , reward someone for asking for help.

There are hundreds of things you can do to reward the behavior you want in your organization. The key is you need to stop and think about the behavior you need on the team to mold your people into a highly effective IT support organization.

Are any behavior traits coming to mind that you want to reinforce with your team?

Think about the following list, , , just a small portion of behavior traits to consider:

- Follow-up
- Strong communication
- Punctuality
- "Going the extra mile" for a client
- Helping a teammate
- Being organized
- Asking for help
- Making good recommendations
- Doing something to prevent support problems
- Escalating a problem issue
- Over communicating when needed
- High work quality or high productivity
- Positive handling of a client issue
- Positive recognition of a fellow employee
- Proactively working on a critical project task

Recognition needs to be for more than just for completing projects successfully. You want to encourage your team to be professional in how they go about their work as well.

An organization's professionalism and client service reputation is built on not only what you accomplish but also how you go about it, , , i.e. the behavior of your team.

An IT organization's reputation is solid only if the manager chooses to pay attention to it.

If not, your reputation will evolve based upon what's going on and how your people handle the support business. Take charge of the situation by encouraging positive behavior, , , you do this by recognizing and rewarding the desired behavior you want.

It's difficult to force people to do things, but they will follow examples of positive behavior when they see it recognized and rewarded by their manager.

Example

One of the things you want to teach your IT employees is what they call in the medical profession, , , "good bedside manner". I'm sure you can relate to a physician who has no tact or empathy as he discusses information with his patient.

People can be excellent technicians but if they do not know how to behave, , , the great technical capability they have is diminished substantially.

One of the things I discuss with my staff, especially my Help Desk staff and Desktop Technicians who touch your clients the most, is to refrain from using acronyms.

Our IT world is loaded with acronyms, , , an acronym for everything you can imagine. The problem is that your clients (and often your employees) don't understand what an acronym means and it intimidates them, , , not a good thing.

Teach your employees to discard the acronyms and use language the customer understands, , , it will be appreciated and improve your organization's reputation.

If this graphic looks confusing, it is exactly how your client feels about IT acronyms.

SECRET #17
Expect the unexpected

I tell all my IT Manager Institute students, “I coined this phrase.”

Well, I may not have actually created this phrase but it’s a very applicable one for an IT manager to understand and to teach his or her employees.

In IT, you need to anticipate what can go wrong and have a plan to eliminate or minimize the problem if it occurs.

Now, you can’t spend all your time worrying about thousands of issues that could happen. However, you do want to at least think about some of these issues and have a recovery plan you can execute quickly if and when it does.

What I’ve found is that organizations that are prepared tend to have fewer disasters. Those that are not prepared seem to experience more. I wonder if there is some kind of reasoning underneath why this happens, , ,probably!

Many things are in your control, , , some are not and will never be in your control.

For example, you can’t prevent a tornado from striking, floods to happen, , , or for the telecommunications company knocking out the electricity by cutting a major power line when laying new fiber optic cable. Some things are beyond your control.

On the other side, you can plan on what you will need to do if you have a major power outage, , , what your backup plan will be and how you will recover if it happens, regardless of whether it is tornado, flood, or a line that’s been cut.

One thing is certain in IT, , , **there will be surprises!**

And IT surprises usually cause some kind of pain.

IT surprises usually do one or more of the following:

- Create additional cost
- Delay project completions
- Create downtime or system unavailability
- Cause IT support headaches

Here are some examples where you need to **expect the unexpected**:

- Managing projects
- Budgeting
- Estimating how long it takes to do things
- Staff turnover
- User requirements

As you do, think about the recovery steps you should have in place when and if a problem occurs.

Better yet, think about ways to prevent the problem from happening.

As I mentioned, you won't be able to prevent everything, , , some things are simply not in your control, , , but thinking about potential problem situations can help you prepare.

One thing I've learned is, , ,

disaster occurs when you are not prepared, rarely when you are

Example

I first used the phrase, "expect the unexpected" in 1994 when having a discussion with one of our Senior Network Engineers and his manager. They were discussing a problem that occurred and the challenges it was creating.

My point to them was that we needed to "expect the unexpected" and anticipate what could go wrong in our IT environment and plan accordingly, , , to take control of the situation more by thinking ahead about what we would do if these type of problems were to occur. Both of them still remind me of this event almost 20 years later.

I may not have created the phrase but I've certainly used it many times.

SECRET #18
Follow-up is required to earn trust

You've heard me use the term "follow-up" many times in this document. The reason is because it is something that can either make your IT organization a winner or it can destroy your team's credibility.

Example

I was not the most technical or the smartest Systems Engineer when I was with IBM, but I was very effective and had great client relationships. The main reason --- follow-up.

That's right, , , my clients trusted me because they knew when I promised something to them I either delivered it or got back to them to let them know the status of the situation. I didn't "leave them hanging".

This follow-up communication creates trust.

Because of this, whenever I made a mistake they cut me some slack and were more forgiving than they would have been without a strong relationship and trust.

I learned early in my career how important strong follow-up skills can mean to you as an individual and to your organization.

OK, let's talk about how follow-up can help your IT organization or damage your reputation.

There are two types of people who touch your client more than anyone on your team. You probably guessed it, , , Desktop Technicians or PC Techs, , , and Help Desk staff.

These people interact with your client the most. As a result, they have a tremendous impact on IT credibility, , , and it can be very good, , , or not so much.

Something common about these two IT groups is that they are often some of your most junior and lower paid employees, , , they may not have as much experience as some of your other employees.

A key piece will be whether they have good follow-up skills, , , or even know that they need to have strong follow-up skills.

You can't assume they do, , , it's important to coach your entire team, especially these two groups, on the importance of following up and "doing what you say you will do".

A typical scenario of what can happen will bring this to light.

Let's say you have a PC Tech who goes to the CFO's office to work on a Help Desk ticket he has received, , , something to do with the CFO's laptop.

He fixes the problem and while he is there he lets the CFO know about a new software utility that the IT team has begun making available to the managers of the company. Your young employee asks the CFO if he is interested in using it and the CFO says, "Yes."

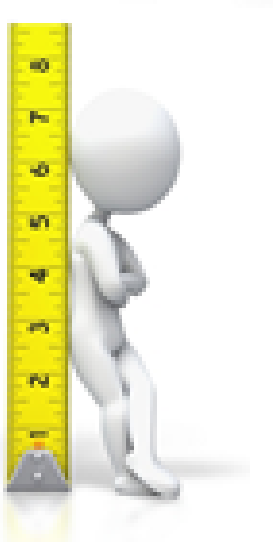
The employee doesn't have the software with him so he tells the CFO he will get it and load it onto his laptop that afternoon, , , the CFO says, "Great."

Now, what happens between the time your employee leaves the CFO's office and gets to his own cube or office which is on the other side of the building and two levels below?

That's right, he is a PC Tech so on his walk back to his office he is stopped by a couple of people asking for help or who have a "quick question". You know about those "quick questions" – right?, , , the ones that take 30 minutes or more and eat up productive time?

When your PC Tech finally arrives at his cube, his phone light is blinking, , , there is a sticky note from his manager stuck on his monitor to "Call me!", , , he has several new email messages, and he has new support tickets that need his attention.

He has real work to do! So what does he do? He starts working on them, , , what a great PC Tech he is!



But, what happens to your PC Tech as he gets buried into the real support work in front of him?

You got it, , , he forgets his promise to the CFO, , , and he may not remember it for days or even weeks.

Now, if he bumps into the CFO in the company cafeteria or sees him in a hallway, he remembers his promise immediately. The problem is that he may not run into the CFO for several weeks, maybe months.

Here is where the problem lies. Your PC Tech innocently forgot his promise, , , not intentionally, but because he got buried into real support work.

Who doesn't forget?

That's right, , , the CFO. He won't forget because the support issue he had may have been the only time he encountered someone from IT for weeks, even months. So, he doesn't forget the PC Tech's promise.

Maybe it wasn't a big deal, , , but that's really not the point.

The real issue here is that it reinforces with the CFO that "this is just another time someone in IT does not do what he says he will do".

Our IT organization gets **another black eye** for failing to follow-up.

What this means is that we have to make our employees aware of the importance of strong follow-up for the IT organization, , , it's a huge impact, , , certainly not trivial.

Every time one of your employees commits something and doesn't follow-up causes your organization to lose credibility. It's hard to create credibility, , , much easier to lose it.

Coach your employees to be conservative when making commitments, write them down, and be sure they follow-up to deliver what they committed or to keep the client posted on the status of their promise.

Follow-up, , , it's a BIG deal!!

SECRET #19
Find cost saving opportunities before they ask for them

It can be difficult for an IT manager to become a partner of a business manager or company executive. They view IT people as “different”, don’t really know what you do, and certainly do not understand you when you talk.

The good news is that there is a way to get a business manager’s attention.

Let me go back to Secret #1 for a second. This one is about the necessity for IT to do things that will create business value for the company. If you remember, we defined business value as something that:

- Increases revenue
- Decreases cost
- Improves productivity
- Differentiates the company
- Improves client satisfaction

Each of these items has a financial implication to the company. When you discuss your IT initiatives, try to obtain funds for new projects, or discuss what you are getting accomplished, , , it is important to **discuss them in business value terms**.

When you do, senior business managers hear and understand you.

OK, I wanted to reinforce the business value concept again because you need to keep this in the forefront of your thinking. Everything you do in IT should be doing something to enhance business value for your company.

We need to make a key point here:

The IT organization offers real leverage for every organization in the company.

No other organization in your company
has this much leverage!

What do we mean when we say, “IT offers real leverage.”?

Simple, , , your IT organization can do things that can **reduce the cost or improve the productivity** of every organization in your company. No other organization can do this.

The problem is that many senior executives don’t really know IT offers this kind of leverage. Instead, they view IT as a cost, , , possibly even a cost that’s not really needed. This is especially true in small to mid-size companies.

What we have to do is to change this perception. One of the easiest ways to do this is to find ways to reduce expenses in the company.

Every company has cost saving opportunities, , , no matter how well the company operates. Most of the bigger cost saving opportunities are in departments outside the IT organization because they have much bigger budgets and many more people.

Technology innovation and the application of technology can reduce expenses and/or improve productivity of a department.

Your ability to identify ways that improves company performance is a big deal.

Senior managers need managers who understand this and who contribute to helping the company improve, , , and become more successful.

Finding ways that will reduce expenses in the company does this. Instead of viewing your organization as spenders, they now start seeing you as a business partner who understands business need.

This leads to the key point of this topic.

Sooner or later your company is going to encounter financial challenges, and when it does the reaction of senior management is usually to implement an across the board expense reduction.

What they typically do is either stop or significantly reduce all expenses associated with:

- New hiring
- Travel
- Training and education
- Discretionary spending

Now, here is where this becomes very important.

If your organization truly starts providing leverage by doing things that will reduce expenses in the company or improve productivity, , , they don't see you as a cost center. You're viewed as an important investment.

Are you sensing a big difference? You should because it is a paradigm shift from what normally takes place in most companies.

Now, if your company needs to "cut back" on expenses, there is an opportunity they may actually invest more in the IT organization rather than have you cut IT expenses, , , the reason is because they understand the leverage potential you offer.

This is why you need to start identifying and doing things that reduces expenses now, , , before they come ask you to.

When they view your organization as a cost center management wants you to cut cost, but if they view you as a solid investment, they are interested in learning how you can help more.

Example

In the IT Manager Institute program, I discuss many ways an IT organization can reduce cost in a company. The reason is because I know that when an IT manager identifies initiatives that will reduce cost in the company, senior managers suddenly begin viewing this manager differently, , , more as a business manager than as a technical manager.

This is a huge difference and puts the IT manager in a much better position to become a business partner of the company's management team.

I've had two CEO's allow me to spend more money in tight situations because they understood the leverage our IT organization provided the company.

Find opportunities where you can help your company reduce expenses or improve productivity and you are likely to discover more opportunities for your IT organization.

SECRET #20
Everyone is watching you

Are you aware of the fact that everyone in your company is watching you?

Maybe not, , , but I can assure you they are watching the IT managers of your company. In many cases they are watching you specifically, , , in other cases they are observing your organization and how it conducts IT support.

Let's take a few scenarios so you get a feel for why this is the case.

A. Every time your team starts a new project that impacts a client, the impacted people are observing how well the project goes, , , and they are watching it with a critical eye to see if, , , the project is successful, , , it is delivered on time and within budget, , , and it meets client expectations, etc.
B. When a system or network failure occurs, , , or any downtime issue happens for that matter, , , clients are watching the IT support team to see how quickly and how effectively they respond.
C. When you have a problem employee, , , clients, other employees, and senior managers are watching you to see how you handle the situation. They all know the employee is failing or is creating a problem so they watch to see if you do anything.
D. Problem or unhappy clients are going to surface from time to time and your employees and others are watching to see if you can handle the situation to reach a positive result and support your people appropriately.
E. Senior management is watching to see if you achieve your budget and other commitments you've made to the company.

The point I want to get across to you is that you want your employees and yourself to be conscious of the fact that “eyes are watching”. Every act or failing to take action has a consequence, , , many are good and positive, , , some are not. The bottom line is, , ,

IT credibility is at stake!

Coach your employees to be aware that the reputation and credibility of the IT organization is based upon things that happen day to day as much as the big projects you work on. The “little things” can have major impact, , , things like:

- Arriving at meetings on time and prepared
- Communicating appropriately
- Completing tasks timely
- Following up on commitments
- Escalating issues when needed
- Dressing and looking professional at work
- Positive attitude
- Being organized and prepared
- Being courteous and helpful

The key to success is doing your work in such a way that creates a positive impression with those you support and others you report to.

It’s not all about technology which is what most of your people will want to focus on. In fact, I would venture to say your reputation and credibility is probably more about how your team goes about its work than how strong they are technically.

What I’ve seen throughout my career is that teams with great client service skills always outperform stronger technical organizations with weak client service skills. **Always!**

Example

I grew up playing a lot of golf and as a CIO I had the ability to play a lot of golf in some of the companies I worked for, , , but I rarely took the afternoon off to do it. The reason was simple, , , I felt like it created the wrong example for my employees.

As their manager, I need to lead by example and even though I may put in more hours per week than most people in the company, , , my leaving early is noticed and not always fully understood. When high detail people like our IT employees don't fully understand something they tend to think the worst.

You need to be aware that things like this make an impression on those around you, so you need to do things that will make a positive impression.

Another situation worth mentioning is that when I was with IBM I worked for a Systems Engineer manager named Bryan for three years before moving into sales and reporting to another manager. A month after I made this move, Bryan invited me to play golf after work at the club he belonged to.

I remember making a comment to him, "Bryan, I've worked for you for 3 years but this is the first time you've invited me to play golf with you."

He knew I liked to play golf but he had never invited me to play.

His answer made a lasting impression with me, , , he said, "And I never would as long as you reported to me. I would only invite you to a function where all my employees could participate, , , it's too easy to appear that you have favorites and that's not healthy for the organization."

I had never really thought about this, but I know he is right, , , a valuable lesson early in my career that helped me later when I became a manager.

The example here is something to think about. As an IT manager it's very easy to have favorites. Some people are more special and easier to like, , , you would enjoy spending time with them. Other employees are nice and do a good job for you, but you aren't going to want to socialize with them, , , I'm sure you know what I mean.

Think about the implications of things before you do them, , , it will work to your advantage.

SECRET #21
You need to have some fun

IT people are generally serious and focused on what they do, , , and we all know there is always a lot to do in an IT organization.

If you aren't careful, you can get so focused on the issues that come up day to day that you forget to have some fun.

Let's make a key point about this and why I think this issue is important enough to be listed in this group of Secrets. We all spend a significant amount of our time at work, and if you aren't having some fun, , , life can be pretty miserable, stressful, , , even unhealthy.

My take on this is that the manager has to create an environment where people can be successful, where they will be challenged, and even where they can have some fun.

That's right – **have some fun, , , at work**.

People who are enjoying what they do and are having fun with it are more productive and get much more accomplished than those who aren't enjoying it.

I know that in my case I can get so focused on day to day support that it is very easy for me to forget to have fun, , , I'm focused on what needs to be done. So, what I have to do is to put a couple of things in place that reminds me to have fun.

Let me reinforce this issue again, , , **life is too short** to not have any fun at work where you spend a majority of the non-sleep time of your life.

Guess what, your people can also get caught up in the day to day and find themselves not really enjoying their work.

IT managers need to create an environment where IT employees are appreciated, recognized and have opportunities to enjoy what they do. This is too important to miss.

Ask yourself a question, , ,

Have you had any fun today?

Example

I mentioned that I do some things to help me remember to have fun at work.

One of the things I do is that I hold a staff meeting with all my IT employees once a month. In each meeting, there is always a “just for fun” item filtered into the meeting in some way.

I’ve done a lot of different things, , , like the following:

- Putting $5 or $10 dollar bills under a few chairs before a staff meeting and surprising some people
- Passing out ice cream sandwiches during a meeting
- Holding a funny skit to loosen everyone up
- Showing a funny cartoon to interject some humor
- Holding a meeting on the deck of a houseboat to get the team out of the office
- Showing a video slideshow of the staff working with their clients
- Taking the staff on a bowling party
- Jabbing and having fun with my employees and fellow managers
- Provide some light hearted training on a key issue

The key here is that I look for a way to have some fun with the staff. They deserve it and so do I, , , plus it creates a stronger bond between manager and employee.

It’s also a way of simply showing appreciation for what your staff does each and every month.

IT support is serious business but it’s certainly not “life or death”. As a manager, you need to find ways to help both your staff and yourself have some fun from time to time. If you don’t work can be a real grind and life is too short to simply grind away all the time.

Someone once said, “You need to stop and smell the roses.” I would add that IT managers must make a conscious effort to do this as it is very easy to get lost in the day to day details of support.

If you don’t remind yourself to have fun, you may very likely miss out on what life has to offer.

Summary

Well, I've just walked you through 21 things IT managers need to be concerned with, , , "secrets" if you will. My sense is that you probably already knew about some of them, but I'll bet there are items you didn't think to be all that important.

I've been in IT for well over 30 years, have managed many IT support organizations, and worked with hundreds of IT managers. Even today, I'm amazed at some of the most basic things that are missing from many IT organizations.

Some of these issues can literally "shoot your foot" and impede your IT success, , , they are important to be aware of. In **21 Secrets Every IT Manager Must Know** I've listed and explained many of these key issues that IT managers should pay attention to.

Little things can and do make a difference.

Certainly, this is not an exhaustive list but being aware of and addressing the 21 issues in this document can help position you for a more successful IT management career, and that's what we are all about at MDE Enterprises, Inc.

For additional IT manager resources, check out the following resources:

- MDE Web site - http://itmanagerinstitute.com
- ITLever BLOG - http://itlever.com

Best of success,

Mike Sisco, ITBMC

21 Secrets Every IT Manager MUST Know

#1 - IT management is about business value, not technology
#2 - Senior managers do not want the detail
#3 - Delivering projects successfully is the key to IT credibility
#4 - To succeed in IT, you must be conservative
#5 - Client needs and issues must drive your IT strategy
#6 - Understanding IT staff capacity is critical
#7 - If there is an IT-Business gap, IT must close it
#8 - Teamwork must be developed
#9 - Training is a key motivator for IT employees
#10 - Client problems are opportunities in disguise
#11 - Strong support organizations over communicate
#12 - Deal with employee problems proactively
#13 - Everyone needs to hear your IT vision
#14 - Communicate your successes, , , no one else will
#15 - Respect is earned, not given
#16 - Reward desired behavior as well as successes
#17 - Expect the unexpected
#18 - Follow-up is required to earn trust
#19 - Find cost saving opportunities before they ask for them
#20 - Everyone is watching you
#21 - You need to have some fun

Mike Sisco was an IT manager and CIO for over 20 years before starting MDE Enterprises, Inc. in 2000 to focus on *"helping IT managers of the world achieve more success*".

21 Secrets Every IT Manager Must Know is Mike's 15th book along with over 500 articles, white papers and executive reports he has written on IT management.

His material is simple, practical and straightforward. Every tool and publication is based upon actual IT management experience, , , no theory or hypotheticals.

As a result, thousands of IT managers around the world use Mike's practical IT management processes and tools.

In 2003 Mike developed and began delivering the **IT Manager Institute** to address a critical need he saw to develop IT manager skills. He worked with Belmont University in 2005 to create the first IT manager certification to emphasize the importance for IT managers to deliver business value.

The **IT Business Manager Certification** (ITBMC) can be attained by attending the IT Manager Institute and passing a 5-part exam. The Institute program is available in classroom and self study.

21 Secrets was written to highlight key things that play an important role in whether an IT manager is successful or not, , , issues IT managers often discount or place very little value in.

As Mike often says, *"The little things can and do make a big difference in your IT management success, so you need to know what they are and pay attention to them."*

MDE Enterprises, Inc.
"helping IT managers of the world achieve more success"
http://itmanagerinstitute.com