Getting The CIO To The Table

The lament echoes time and again, "The CIO should have a seat at the table." The claim continues that business cannot survive without the simplest of technologies. Then they provide evidence as if it would be the final nail in the coffin, "Just the other day, when email was down..." Raising my eyebrows in question, I ask, "So your email was down? For how long?" The question is like a scene from a horror film where the sudden realization is that the casket being completed is... your own. Gaining strategic respect is a long way away for those having trouble maintaining their tactical obligations. If your organization is having difficulty providing basic services, you will never have the privilege of being a partner with the business.

Get Your Affairs In Order

SIMposium 2012

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The first on your agenda is creating reliable, cost-effective operations. If your customer wakes up in the morning wondering if they will have email, Internet, file security, or access to their documents when they show up for work, they will never trust you enough to be part of their strategy. It is no different for them and their customers. Whether their customers (ultimately yours) are buying dial tone, electricity, or insurance, if their business operations keeps your customers awake at night, your company will never gain the respect to be a strategic partner... or even stay in business. IT leaders, like your company's leaders, must flawlessly provide the basic infrastructure as if it were the company's life support system. After all, it is.

This attitude goes beyond applications, servers, and computers. It applies to delivering initiatives, too. If your ability to deliver a project is either reckless or overburdened with bureaucracy, you will look equally incompetent. Lightweight processes staffed with business savvy, experienced professionals who can deliver solutions are a must.

Lose Your Baggage

Let us face it, networks, router, firewalls, storage, phone systems, computers, and the like are all commodities. So are email servers, CRMs, and other easy-to-put-in-the- cloud applications. Ask yourself why you still insist on having those in-house . Focus your time and energy on building what the business needs and forget the utilities. After all, does IT need to generate its own electricity? I would hope that the only need is emergency generators and those are under the auspices of facilities. In the early twentieth century, electricity was high-tech, as email, web-servers, firewalls, router, and sub-nets were in the early twenty-first—a mere dozen years ago. Today, all are commodities of the same degree. Treat them as such and free your technology shop to support the business.

Offer to Participate

You can uniquely provide value to your business by providing both technical and non-technical solutions addressing their strategic goals. Few, if any, outside vendors know your business better than you do. Once your customer accepts that you can reliably and efficiently deliver on your promises, you have earned the right to participate by using this knowledge to help them build their business. As mentioned in the past, there are no IT projects . Information technology supports the business. Start by forming delivery knowledgeable teams that can be involved in annual business planning. Develop guidance teams, some consisting of only a project manager and an architect, who are resident with the business throughout their planning cycles.

Everyone overestimates the benefits of technology while vastly underestimating the effort of implementing it. This is never more evident than during the excitement of innovation while creating great plans for the coming year. In the absence of implementation expertise, people attempt to create technical solutions—solutions that sound great, but are limited by lack of experience. The guidance team's job is to focus on understanding "how" to build a solution and keeping the business' spotlight on "what" must be built. This is a huge step in improving project delivery success by starting projects with teams aligned on strategic objectives and eliminating preconceived solutions.

Lead IT And You Will Lead The Business

Delicious

Leading the IT group, making it smaller, more agile , and focused on delivering business value is what opens the door to being at "the table." To take the final step through the C-Suite door, your organization must be able to stay ahead of the business in applying technology that will make strategic changes to the business. These are not simple changes, but paradigm shifts allowing them to pull ahead of the competition. Shedding the shackles of utility maintenance, perfecting initiative delivery, and building an architectural group to lead the company into the future (rather than implementing technical toys), will make your IT group one that the business invites to the table, ensuring they explore the proper strategic paths.

Tags: CIO, C-Suite, Leadership, Project Management

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