

Baseline

The First 100 Days on the Job

By Tom Pettibone

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A recent study says 35 percent of new managers either quit or are fired within 18 months. The reason is probably because they bypass critical steps at the beginning of their tenure—steps that will set them up for long-term success.

For CIOs, in particular, there is a temptation to start burrowing down into the IT infrastructure and root out inefficiencies. But doing that ignores an important reality: Perceptions about a new executive are formed within the first 100 days on the job, and once they calcify, they're difficult to change.

That's why a new CIO—whether promoted from within or new to the company—should do the following four things to set the tone.

1 Develop relationships.

Developing credibility and trust among both the C-suite and direct reports may be the trickiest part of a strong start as CIO. It's important to know these individuals on both personal and professional levels because that will give you insight into the company's politics and culture, which can mean the difference between your success and failure.

In my experience as both a CIO and IT consultant, I have often seen good plans fizzle because the CIO did not understand the boss's priorities and the organization's culture and politics. As a result, the CIO could not effectively evaluate whether his or her plan could work in that specific enterprise and therefore couldn't "sell" the plan or get support for it.

This holds true whether you're promoted from within or new to the organization. If you're new, you must build relationships from scratch. If you've had another position in the company, you must reset your relationships to reflect your new role and authority. I believe all new CIOs should spend 90 percent of their time cultivating relationships and building support alliances.

By building relationships early on, a new CIO can help manage C-suite expectations and come to a mutual understanding about the goals and what is needed to accomplish them. That will lead to a closer alignment between IT and business strategy.

2 Leave your office.

Go beyond the walls of the IT department and into the field—to other departmental meetings, on sales calls, to customer sites. If you've been with the organization previously, it's a chance to let people see you in your new capacity, and if you're new to the company, it's an opportunity to show that you want to learn how IT can serve the rest of the business.

You can boost your credibility by demonstrating your commitment to learning how the organization works, whom IT serves internally and externally, and how users feel about their experience with IT.

3 Get a second opinion.

The third component to a successful 100 days is getting a dispassionate, independent assessment of the IT department. Seeking input on what works and what doesn't from the current IT staff and other senior management is certainly important, but keep in mind that it can be biased.

Having an independent third party identify weaknesses gives cover to a new CIO—especially if he or she must rein in unruly staff, eliminate inefficient processes or identify which legacy systems are money-losers. Bringing in outside experts to deliver the unvarnished truth enables a CIO to establish a baseline and develop long-term planning.

4 Develop the plan.

This doesn't mean that a new CIO should jettison any planning during the first 100 days. In fact, the culmination of your first 100 days is your initial plan.

This plan, based on your internal and third-party assessments, should address the strengths and weaknesses of the current environment, make recommendations to improve performance and provide a timetable for implementation.

Finally, you should make a formal presentation to management to gain their buy-in for the plan.

If you resist the urge to bury yourself in IT minutiae until you've navigated the first 100 make-or-break days as a CIO, you'll have your IT vision, as well as the support environment in which to execute it.

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