IT Professionals as Full Business Partners

By Patrick Malone CSE

Over the years, much has been written about IT professionals expanding their business expertise in order to participate as full business partners in their respective organizations. Acquiring a basic understanding of other business disciplines such as finance, operations, marketing & sales, logistics and strategic planning has been mentioned as offering the IT professional advantageous credentials.

Unfortunately, simply acquiring knowledge is a good step forward, but relatively inadequate if one cannot use that knowledge skillfully. This is where *Leadership,* the ability to gain wholehearted followers for a given course of action, is essential.

Let's dispel some of the myths surrounding leadership. First, leadership is not the exclusive province of the CIO, CEO, COO or President. In fact, today's most successful enterprises encourage the skill of leadership at all levels and in all departments.

Second, leadership is not function of the intelligence. Most successful leaders have a higher Emotional Quotient (EQ) than IQ.

Third, people are born leaders. Nonsense! We all have the innate potential to lead. If you look back at your life, you will see many occasions where you led. The people who seem to be "born leaders" simply do it more often as a conscious competence. Your challenge is to tap into potential you already have.

So how do leaders gain and keep wholehearted followers for a given course of action. They do the following exceptional well:

1. *Establish a common goal for every leadership conversation.* They clearly articulate the goal and benefit to their potential followers. They invite others to look at, listen to and add/change/adjust their strategy for getting to the goal. Finally they acknowledge that the decision to buy-in to the goal and strategy rests with the potential followers.

2. *Read others in the head and the heart*. Leaders understand that important decisions are based on facts and feelings. They read others better because they pay more attention to "how" things are said rather than the words that are used. By reading head and heart they are able to identify their potential follower's degree of motivation throughout the conversation.

3. *They align or position their ideas in a way that makes sense to others*. They know that to get others on your side you must first get on their side. They are able to re-position their idea to any point of view without losing the integrity of the idea. This is an essential component of leadership without force.

4. *They inspire others*. They are able to raise their level of involvement throughout the conversation making it easy for others to follow. They know they cannot motivate others, so they make it easy for others to motivate themselves.

5. *They help others reach well-informed committed decisions.* Nobody likes to be sold. Leaders simply reveal their own motivation and close for the biggest decision they can get at that moment. It may be a decision to analyze the strategy more. It may be a decision to meet again. It may even be a well-informed committed "No". It is always the biggest decision the decision-makers can handle today.

As with many of our life skills, the process is easy to understand. But it's much more difficult to do it. The transition from knowing, to doing, to doing well, to doing well at will, requires a lot of hard work and practice. But I believe the skill of *Leadership* is absolutely essential if IT professionals intend to become full business partners in their respective organizations.

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