

Thoughts on Leadership

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Most CertMag readers are enthralled by IT. They've always held a certain fascination with hardware, software and systems, and they enjoy both working with these tools at the office and toying around with them at home. As much as they love technology, though, many of them aspire to move beyond it professionally.

This is not to say that they'll get sick of it or that they'll ever completely stop using it, but several techies aim to develop into managers and leaders — the people who sit in the corner offices, sign the checks and call the shots that impact their organizations.

KNOW THE PEOPLE

Personalities, life experiences, specialties, aptitude and other dimensions will vary considerably within even small groups of people. Leading a collection of individuals compels you to take the differences of each into account when you manage them. Because you want to foster both idiosyncratic creativity and collective harmony, you'll have to find the right blend of management and leadership styles, and continue to adapt these as the composition of your staff changes over time.

Additionally, in a leadership role, you'll probably have to deal with heads of other departments and might even have some client-facing interactions. These will require you to become a master communicator, fluent in the many languages of business. In these dealings, be mindful of potential barriers to communication (jargon, tone, etc.), and always consider whether the medium is appropriate for the correspondence.



As you embark on your climb up the corporate ladder — a greasy flagpole might be a more apt metaphor — toward that CIO, CTO, CISO or other c-level acronym, keep the following points in mind to make the journey as easy as possible. ☺

KNOW THE SITUATION

During the Korean War, Col. John Boyd (USAF, retired) devised a way for air force pilots to make snap decisions that led to successful results. He called it the OODA (Observe-Orient-Decide-Act) Loop model, which broke down as follows: You quickly observe the situation to find relationships and patterns, orient yourself to the overall system, make a decision according to your findings and knowledge, and then act on that. The cycle is repeated until the desired objective is achieved.

Of course, the OODA Loop isn't the only model of this kind: In the medical profession, several doctors and paramedics use a similar methodology call SOAP, or Situation, Observation, Analysis, Perform. It doesn't really matter what you call your decision-making system, provided you have one that enables you to identify obstacles and take the right steps to overcome them.

KNOW THE ORGANIZATION AND INDUSTRY

Being a successful leader comes from understanding how to navigate — and occasionally circumvent — the bureaucratic tangles, political intrigues and struggles for limited resources to get things accomplished. And it almost goes without saying that you severely limit your career prospects if you don't learn anything about your industry beyond mere technical issues.

KNOW YOURSELF

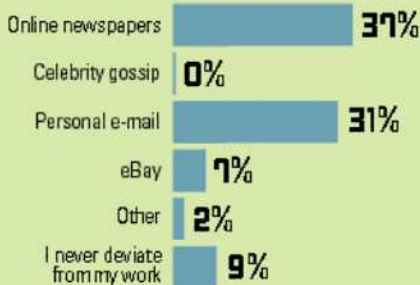
The biggest piece in the puzzle is you. To thrive in a leadership role, you'll have to develop an intellect that spans and integrates many different areas of expertise, most of which aren't technical at all. You also should cultivate a calm yet courageous disposition to face the inevitable crises that will arise.

In addition, and this is even more true in the post-Enron age, character counts in leadership. Cynicism might tell you that — just like a stagnant pond — only the scum rises to the top. And I won't lie to you: It's true that bad people sometimes reach the highest echelons of power, but they rarely ever stay there long. Sustained leadership requires honesty, evenhandedness, wisdom and self-control. Through these qualities, you can build a relationship of mutual respect and trust between you and your employees.

WEB POLL

Infosnacking, or grabbing the occasional tidbit of data from the Web, is similar to regular snacking: Almost everyone does it, but the information/food you partake of is largely a matter of personal taste. Here's what CertMag readers grab from the Internet when they've got the mental munchies:

What guilty computer pleasure do you treat yourself to at work most often?



View other Web polls at www.certmag.com.

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