

I was delighted to be asked to contribute an article on this subject. I have been recruiting at a senior level in the IT sector for over 20 years and as you can imagine I am frequently asked this question in one form or another by people who are actively trying to find their next role. And the honest answer is that there is only so much you can do to position yourself well at any one point in time. However, if you think about this in a longer term way (i.e. what should I be doing on an ongoing basis to maximise my career opportunities) a whole range of options open up. There are three main categories to consider;

1. Existing performance and contribution.
2. The power of your network.
3. CV presentation and interview performance.

1. This is of course is the key thing to focus on. Ask yourself these questions; *am I well regarded by my boss and my peer group?*
What would I need to do to become better regarded?
What would they say and what would I want them to say?
What would I need to do more of, less of or just differently for the wish to become reality?
How am I adding value to the organisation I work for?
What opportunities are there for me to increase this contribution.....inside or outside the scope of my current responsibilities?

Increasingly the most successful and effective IT Managers and CIOs I see are those who make a contribution outside of a pure IS role. Think about what this would mean for you and what opportunities may exist outside of your current environment. Check what your objectives are for this year. Do they relate to strategic business goals? If they don't, I suggest you would do well to revisit them with your boss.

Ultimately, in my experience, career growth is mostly about being good at what you do and you'll find that opportunities tend to present themselves on the back of this success....

2. Networking in a career context in my view has two main objectives; firstly, publishing your success and secondly getting yourself in a position to identify and be identified for interesting future career opportunities. It's about a whole combination of activities; attending and contributing to conferences and thought leadership events, nurturing important relationships and selectively staying in touch with ex-colleagues. Think also about people from your social network and other networks such as parents from your children's school.....old school friends...the list is endless. The internet is playing an increasingly important role here. Think about Friends Reunited. You should certainly look at Linked-In (www.linkedin.com) and there are a range of others.

3. CV presentation and interviewing. This is the final piece of the jigsaw. Your successes have been achieved, recognised by your peers and widely publicised within the market. Opportunities are knocking at your door; you've got the career equivalent of a great pass from Beckham and all you need to do is beat the keeper. Books have been written about this subject and we don't need to cover it here in any detail. But, as someone who has assessed hundreds of thousands of CVs and conducted thousands of interviews I do have a few hints and tips. Keep your CV to two pages; three if you really must. Avoid describing your role at length and focus instead on real, identifiable and quantifiable achievements. Avoid glowing descriptions of your inspirational leadership style.

Once in the interview listen intently, think carefully about what's behind the question and give concise, relevant answers. Don't waffle, go off the point or offer information that is not in response to a question. Do be honest; let the interviewer see something of the real you or they won't leave with a sense of what you are really about. Admit to weaknesses (other than working too hard!) It shows self confidence and self awareness. At the same time give the interviewer a clear sense of how you compensate for and overcome these weaknesses.

Most in-demand skill sets

In my experience there are four key skill sets that are most in demand for technology leaders. Despite management fashions and a changing technology landscape I believe these skill sets will continue to remain at the top of the CEO's list when he or she is evaluating the next IS Leader;

Relationships

Can you develop and maintain a wide range of trusted relationships across the business upwards, downwards and sideways. Do these relationships have strength....when the going gets tough do you still have their unequivocal support?

Results

Do you and your team always deliver? Do you have a consistent track record of doing what you say you will and can you demonstrate this?

Leadership

Can every member of your team articulate the organisation's vision and do they have a clear sense of how their work contributes to the realisation of this vision? If they don't you've probably got some work to do before you can claim to be a good leader or even manager.

Business empathy

Do you think first about great technology innovations and how the business might adopt them or do you think about where the business is trying to get to and then look for the most appropriate technology to drive, support and facilitate these aims?

Simon La Fosse