

By Janice Ward

IT Managers can easily get caught up in day-to-day operations and activities and lose sight of important management behaviors. Whether you're a new or seasoned manager, the following suggestions can help you be a great IT manager.

1 Spend time (and money) developing your people. – IT is a constantly changing field and many IT workers love to learn about new and improving technologies. For many, learning is not just enjoyable, but is necessary to do the best job possible. IT Managers should budget for training and development and encourage staff to participate in events whenever possible. If your budget is tight, explore free regional presentations and workshops, set-up in-house training and get creative with your development dollars. Don't forget about cross-training exercises as well. Even in a large IT group, there are jobs which only one person does routinely. Make sure others know what to do if that person were suddenly gone for an extended period.

2 Get to know what your staff really does. – Although you don't need to master every task your staff handles (see Item 3), you should understand your staff's normal work routine. If you aren't already, familiarize yourself with each person's responsibilities. Ask team members to explain and demonstrate important tasks--such as data backups. I once had an existing IT employee transferred to my sub-group. Immediately after the transfer, I began working with the individual to learn their job role. One month after the transfer, during a key production period, the employee suffered simultaneous tragedies--a parent died and the employee developed pneumonia. With no direct backup, I jump in and accomplished the job with the knowledge I had learned during the first month and a great deal of help from others. As a result, I gained a great deal of respect from the employee who had previously suffered negative experiences with management. Understanding what your staff does not only increases their level of respect for you, but it also makes you more credible as a manager when faced with difficult situations or decisions.

3 Don't do it for them. – If you move from an “in the trenches” IT worker to a management role, avoid the tendency to take the reins too quickly. Your knowledge and skill level may exceed your employees', but you must help your staff learn and grow. There is a fine line between coaching and doing. A good manager will know the difference. While there may be an initial training period where you are more involved in doing the day to day work, use appropriate delegation and training strategies to move the work into your staff's capable hands. If you are new to delegation procedures, read Steven Watson's TechRepublic article, [New managers must learn what and how to delegate](#).

4 Know the business and make sure they know you. – It is almost cliché to say it, but all IT managers must understand the business they support and use this understanding to build services and infrastructure that support business goals. You should also show your direct reports how their work impacts overall business goals. You should also ensure that business administrators understand what IT does for them. Showcase your department's activities through annual reports, regular communications and frequent project updates. Check out TechRepublic's “How Do I” center for more [information on aligning IT with business goals](#).

5 Treat communication as a busy, fast-moving, two-way street. – Information is not a limited commodity to hold. Information should flow freely and easily between management and workers. If you sense that you are not getting important information, carefully consider ways to increase communication. Likewise, don't hoard information, unless it is absolutely confidential. What seems irrelevant to you, may be highly relevant for someone else. Reward information sharing between your direct reports.

6 Encourage everyone to work as a team. – The whole really is greater than the sum of its parts. Encouraging collaboration and teamwork helps remove silo-like isolation that often occurs in technical organizations. Cross-functional teams are extremely important because small changes in one area can have significant ripple impact across other IT units. Reward efforts that allow for collaboration and develop an environment where workers can feel comfortable asking and giving assistance to one another. Frustrations often result when one team member knows something that others spend hours working to resolve. Teamwork will fuel your communication vehicle.

7

Provide feedback regularly and let employees know what you want. – Some IT jobs make people feel like islands. They work on a project or assignment independently and may not regularly interact with their manager or co-workers. Be sure your staff knows what they are doing well and what needs improvement.

These can be casual conversations, formal performance reviews or public praise events. Check Robin Thomas' TechRepublic article, [Performance evaluations: More gain with less pain](#).

If someone isn't living up to expectations, be sure they know what those expectations are. Staff members may not realize that the assignment you gave them last week was a priority item for a high profile project. Be clear and direct when making assignments. When an employee finishes a job, make sure they know how pleased you are with the work they did. Geeks need love too!

8

Hire well. – If you have never hired before, ask for assistance and do your homework. Hiring poorly can be more costly than not hiring at all. Technical skills are only a small piece of the puzzle. You should know if person will adequately integrate with the team. It may also help to get you team involved in the hiring process, when appropriate and allowed. Your staff can help you determine if the applicant relates well to others and has the appropriate soft skills. Check out Abbi Perets' TechRepublic download [Seven Signs that a Job Candidate Won't Work Out](#) or the TechProGuild download, [IT Hiring Kit: Support Professional](#).

9

Understand best IT practices, but don't just make them buzz words. – [ITIL?](#) [Disaster Recovery?](#) [Service Oriented Architecture?](#) [Security?](#) If you don't have a technical background, these terms may be unfamiliar.

Learn and understand the best practices that apply to your environment and measure yourself and your department against them. Explore ITIL and determine if you should implement at least portions of it in your department? Ensure your disaster recovery plan is up-to-date and ready for action. Perform regular security assessments. Proceed with caution however, throwing buzz around words won't gain you any clout. You must truly understand the ideas, their application to your environment, and then plan and implement appropriate related changes.

10

Be a good project manager. – Did your last project creep suffer scope creep? Most projects, particularly IT ones, don't fail because the project itself was bad. Most failures are a result of weak project management. If you haven't had any formal project management training, find and invest in a good program.

Read and utilize resources like the following TechRepublic downloads:


- [Build a foundation for project success with this definition template](#)
- [Master these 10 processes to sharpen your project management skills](#)
- [10 things you should know about managing IT projects](#)

Don't fall into the trap that by simply having regular meetings you are managing the project. And since IT usually has more projects than people, be sure to train lead workers with basic project management skills so you can delegate specific aspects of the project or even entire projects to their control.



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