

CIOs - Is Your CEO Strategic?

I'm sick of hearing people go on about CIOs needing to talk business - yes, we know that and if you don't you shouldn't be in a CIO role and that is the CEOs fault for not understanding what a CIO is and putting you in that role. That being said, you can talk business until you're blue in the face but if your CEO isn't listening because of their perception of IT then you're wasting your time.

Yes, CIOs need to evangelise, learn to sell, speak business but it's a two way street and CEOs need to understand what a CIO is and the value that technology can be to their business operations, growth and profits. Where a CIO role reports to a CFO or has the code words "hands on" in the JD it doesn't matter what comes out of your mouth.

You CIOs who think you are so successful because you speak business with your CEO - you are only successful because your CEO gave you the opportunity. I've been in both situations and had great successes but also found myself talking to brick walls and yet I'm the same person. Not all eskimoes will buy ice, even if you are the best salesperson in the universe.

Indeed, progress is being made...slowly...and CEOs are starting to not only hear but listen but having worked across and consulted to multiple industries I remain shocked at the amount of egotistical CEOs who have made a lot of money in the short term through their core business (and being very good at it) but fail to recognise the longer term, strategic aspects of technology beyond PCs on desks and facilities to store documents. They look to spend as little as possible on technology because of this perception instead of truly understanding what technology can do and investing in innovation to improve service, be more competitive and...make more money and create long term sustainability.

How many times have you seen a great small company give excellent service and then watched them grow and experienced the almost inevitable decline of service quality - the very thing that supported their growth? The same lack of understanding and vision at the top is what prevents the openness to embrace technology as it evolves into a completely different role from the traditional 'keep the lights on'. CIOs cannot provide strategic input if CEOs are fixated on short term profits and returns and hence have their CFOs glued to their ears. CEOs and Boards need to change their attitudes at a much greater pace if they are truly interested in strategy and long term, sustainable business growth and profits.

Perhaps they're not, though, and this is the source of the disparity between those CIOs that have evolved into business leaders with a technology focus and their CEOs and Boards who they expect to be the same? Mix that with CEOs and Boards who do have strategic vision but get technology advice from senior engineers or IT Managers who are predominantly technically focused and perhaps we can start to see why the pace is so slow.

I believe that only by putting these views out there to provoke thought can we possibly enact or act as a catalyst to change.

Is your CEO truly strategic?