

Manage with Business in Mind

By Melissa Shaw

Network World Management Strategies Newsletter, 06/18/01

I had a chance to speak with a partner from an executive search firm recently and she gave me some interesting insight into what senior IT executives consider to be best practices for their managers. Renee Baker Arrington is a partner in the technology and e-business practices of executive search firm Ray & Berndtson, where she spends her time helping CIOs and CTOs find senior IT staff. Here's what she says senior IT management looks for in a leader:

* Understand your company's business, not just its technology.

" One of the things I hear all the time is it's so important to build solid relationships with the business community, " she says. " You really need to view your organization as a service provider to the business community, and the more you can understand the business of your company, the more you'll be well-received by the business leadership within your own company. " Remember, IT is not an island anymore. You know IT is vital to your company's ability to grow and compete, so why not work to understand what the other departments in your company do, what your company does and what your technology is really supporting?

* Let the business folks know how your upcoming project, request or technology can save your company's money.

" You need to master the art of communicating how technology can impact business issues, " she says. " This is particularly important in the board room. As a technical professional, you really want to master the art of communicating the technical impact in business terms. We need a business leader first and a technologist second, particularly with CIO and CTO work. "

* Surround yourself with superstars.

" You want to really surround yourself with people who have deeper technical expertise than you do as an IT manager, " Arrington notes. " Don't be afraid of that; those are the people who can make you shine as a manager. " She also advises keeping those super staffers motivated by giving them new projects or responsibilities every six or eight months and broadening their exposure within the company. " You can't be afraid to have people who are smarter than you working for you. That person could be your next best asset. "

* Start finding your replacement. Or as Arrington puts it: Build your bench strength.

" You don't want to be seen by the CEO of the company as the most bankable data warehousing guy in the world, " she says. " To your detriment, you're never going to get a chance to advance. It takes a little maturity or experience to do this. " If you find a couple of heir apparents in your department, you'll be viewed as an effective leader who leads top performers.

RELATED LINKS

Melissa Shaw is managing editor of Network World. She can be reached at mshaw@nww.com.