

WHAT EFFECTIVE IT LEADERS ALL DO RIGHT

Highly effective IT leaders all have the same traits in common. Aspiring CIOs and CTOs could do worse than adopting a few of them if they don't already have them.

Building Trust within the team

Successful IT leaders know the importance of trust and go out of their way to create a culture of trust. They understand that teams who communicate effectively with each other build trust quicker than ones who don't. Trust can be determined in several ways. How reliable is the person, can they be trusted to do as they say they will? How competent is a person can they complete the task in mind? Are you aligned in thinking do you share the vision for the outcome? How about good old fashioned honesty can the person be honest with their team? **Remember:** these few core indicators can identify the level of trust of a team member and an effective IT leader will be able to position them for the role or not.

Make good decisions FAST

More often than not IT leaders are faced with difficult decisions all the more compounded by pressing time issues. With this added time burden the less experience IT leader can falter and make a bad decision based on lack of information. How do you get the balance right between acting too quickly without all the facts, and losing momentum because you took too long to mobilize? Use the 80/20 rule with 80% surety being your cut off point and 20% uncertainty being the part that could stop you from making a decision. When time is of the essence, as it often is in IT, 80% is good enough to move forward. Allocate responsibility and encourage accountability within different departments that way a pre-ordained decision-maker is already at hand and when the final button has to be pushed this can save time as half the consensus has already been gathered. **Remember:** the best decisions are preventative ones, so get proactive and learn your biggest obstacles and threats so if and when they arise the decision-making is simplified.

Know how and when to delegate

Sometimes it can be hard to let go, but the most successful IT leader will know they cannot feasibly do everything and be everywhere at once, as this makes them increasingly risky points of failure in themselves and that is not a good thing for any organization. Surrounding yourself with skilled professionals who know more than you do is always key to letting go of micromanagement. This does not infer you have a weakness in particular area but that someone is infinitely better at that thing than you are so let them cast their magic. During hiring processes it is a good time to gauge inbound skill so any gaps in knowledge can be filled but don't duplicate. Similarly understanding what the innate abilities of your team are will help delegation. **Remember:** the more you know about the team the better. Finding the niche talent and creating a home for it is the job of a good IT leader.

Manage up

There is a great tendency to focus so much on managing direct reports that the converse can get overlooked. The key to success is after all strong communication and that applies in all directions. The most effective IT leaders realize this is a habit to get used to, and consistently let their boss know what he or she can expect from you as you simultaneously know what your direct reports can bring to you also. Think of it as a progress report during your one-on-one, your boss knows your longer term plan and is not bogged down by the details of it, they simply need to be aware of blocks and impediments and how they can help remove them. **Remember:** your boss holds your fate in their hands and reciprocating with good communication is part of keeping it, after all the more they know the better they can manage up also.

They set expectations

It is a given that business leaders demand results and quite often the pace of doing so is fast and pressurized. The best way to mitigate disappointment and potential threats to reaching goals is to be clear from the outset what you can deliver. This might not be the answer they want to hear from you but it certainly beats the ensuing failure that a little transparency could have avoided! Good IT leaders are not afraid to set the record straight and sit down with business leaders and colleagues to demonstrate their point with clarity and alternative solutions if need be. It matters more to them to get things done right than feel the sting of disdain of not delivering a product. They also like to prove they can do the job and encourage measurement of their progress. The suggest metrics on things they can control and are directly responsible this applies to team members also who report to the IT leader. The result is accountability for work and employee empowerment something the strong IT leader is keen to capitalize on. **Remember:** getting the balance right between being a 'yes' man and an 'action' man might be a fine one, but as the verb suggests, only one of them gets the job done and that is the bottom line.

Give timely feedback

Who doesn't like recognition for a job well done? Well respected IT leaders will know the value of this and encourage their teams to seek out opportunities for praise. A big part of this is measurement of with these values and the best time to do this is in one-on-ones and group catchups. Even using company town halls to recognize good work can foster a sense of wellbeing and trust. Being consistent with feedback is key to progress and learning and becomes something a team member can use to gauge themselves. Keep criticism constructive and refrain from making a person feel disenchanting, after all progress suggests forward movement not backwards or stalling. **Remember:** how you say things even when giving negative feedback, is critical to turning a situation round or nudging it along. Failure is not a dirty word and it too can motivate and encourage, it all depends on the language you use.

Know when to code

There is no doubt about it an IT leader who knows how to get his or her hands dirty in the code, is a valuable asset. It might seem like an obvious skill but sometimes it gets forgotten in the day to day task of working through heavy schedules and tight deadlines. The amount of time spent is naturally directly proportional to the manpower within a team. In smaller teams requires all hands to be on deck and this means lots of coding at the beginning of the company's growth plan. Startups are a perfect example of doing up to 80% of the coding, as they scale, this value goes down and the IT leader will find they are only coding 10 - 20% of the time. The forward-thinking IT leader knows they cannot become a bottleneck so they will try to reduce their coding time and enable other team members to learn the ropes and take on more responsibility, that way scalability is not hindered by one person. **Remember:** This is not a plan set in stone so the flexibility is there to adjust and tweak on a regular basis.

Take accountability

Being an effective IT leader is not just about being the boss of IT. It is about representing the best side of your part of the business. With this comes accountability and an innate understanding that standing up and saying you were wrong, is not a bad thing. In fact accountability is one of the most overlooked yet vital aspects of a business. It fosters ownership, collaboration and care for a product and team. It demonstrates humility and an understanding that everyone can learn and is striving towards continuous improvement as a behavior. Even more crucially it switches a crisis situation from dead panic and inaction to a decisive, corrective mindset. **Remember:** what better way can you demonstrate to your team that you are loyal to them, than by taking responsibility for your actions and supporting them fully?

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