

The **11** **Secrets** of Highly Influential **IT** Leaders

The critical path to
accessing and succeeding
in the executive suite

Marc J. Schiller

THE 11 SECRETS OF HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL IT LEADERS

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succeeding in the executive suite

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*For my namesake, Mordechai Schiller—and all the Mordechais
before who shared the calling to teach and counsel.*

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FOREWORD

Before you get started on The Journey

There are a few things that you should know.

My primary goal in this book is to reach out to IT leaders—today’s and tomorrow’s. Although many of the stories and lessons reference the CIO, *The Secrets* apply equally to IT managers still working their way into the upper echelons of IT management. In fact, the earlier you learn *The Secrets* the better.

Much of this book deals with the relationship between the IT leader and his/her colleagues within the organization in which they work. Since the vast majority of my experience has been in the commercial world, I often refer to this organization as “the business.” However, from the experience I have had with non-profits, I have yet to find any meaningful differences in the organizational dynamics as it relates to the role of the IT leader. As such, although I may use the term “business,” everything in this book applies equally to not-for-profit organizations.

Unfortunately, the majority of the stories in this book refer to male CIOs. There are however a couple of wonderful exceptions. And while more women are slowly making their way into the senior ranks of IT management, it has not traditionally been an area that has drawn a lot of women. That’s unfortunate, because as a general rule, I have found the women IT managers with whom I have worked to be particularly strong, and I look forward to seeing more women in IT leadership roles. I believe the profession will benefit greatly from it. In the meantime, please forgive the overuse of the male pronoun. It reflects an imperfect reality, not a personal bias.

In comparison to most books on IT management and leadership, this book is “small.” This was done very much by design and was the product of hard work. As you will shortly see, a key theme of this book is debunking conventional wisdom as it relates to IT management practices. Conventional books on IT management often contain pages and pages of confusing diagrams, frameworks and so-called methodologies; the value and use of which is pretty dubious in most cases. You’ll

find none of that in the pages to come. No complex drawings with stacks, pyramids and arrows galore accompanied by long-winded explanations. Just what I hope you will find to be crisp and highly useful insights.

Stories

Nearly everything contained within this book is in some way attributable to what I have learned from other people. In some cases, particularly when I use case studies and real-life stories, it's easy to credit the appropriate people and I delight in doing so by directly naming them and their companies at the time. In the cases where I am unable to use real names, I instead use a changed first name followed by a changed last initial. Any similarity between my chosen names and any real people with the same first names and last initials is purely coincidental.

Citations

This book is not, however, only a collection of stories. In addition to my personal experiences, a great deal of research was undertaken to support the publication of this book. The research spans numerous primary and secondary sources. In an effort to provide proper attribution without cluttering the text with a complex set of qualifying footnotes, I have employed the following citation practice: At the end of the book I provide a comprehensive list of references. It contains a list of all the books, articles, studies, essays, blogs and websites mentioned, or in any way consulted, as part of writing this book. Accordingly, when you encounter the mention of any article, book or survey in the body of the book, you can be sure to find it in the references section.

Finally, direct quotes obtained during the course of my years working with clients or via primary research are fully attributed in the body of the book as are any surveys or other primary research materials mentioned herein.

Acknowledgements

My deepest thanks and gratitude to the many people who have made this book possible. First and foremost to my clients, colleagues and industry friends across the world. Without you, there would be no stories to tell, no lessons to teach.

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The Journey | THE MAN FROM MARS AND IT LEADERS

Shortly after the “pooper scooper” laws were passed in New York City, a late-night comedian noted that, “if a man from Mars came to earth and saw how we walk our dogs and pick up after them, he would naturally approach the dog and say, take me to your leader.”

It’s a funny joke. And it works because it exposes an incongruity—an irony of sorts. Here we are, supposedly the “superior” human race, and yet we are the ones picking up the dog’s poop.

I like the man from Mars test. It’s a quick and easy way to analyze a situation with a basic question: Does this make sense? If a man from Mars came down and looked at this situation, would it make sense to him? When the answer is “no, it wouldn’t,” then I know, despite all the explanations in the world, that there is probably something wrong in the situation. The incongruity expressed by the man from Mars test points to something bigger at play. (That, or we have another good late-night joke.)

This brings me to the basic question that underlies this book: If a man from Mars came down with a mission to report back on the state of IT leaders on planet Earth, people like you and me, what would he say about us and about our professional lives?

After browsing hundreds (maybe even thousands) of professional websites, magazines, journals, blogs, podcasts and YouTube channels, and then perusing the agendas and abstracts of a few dozen industry conferences that touch on issues of IT leadership and management, his report would probably sound something like this:

“IT leaders (sometimes called IT managers, directors or CIOs) are under assault. Everywhere I look I see articles and stories about the serious problems

they face. Undermined by their peers at every turn, their value and contribution constantly questioned by their superiors, they are in perpetual search of “alignment” with the stakeholders they serve in the hope it will save their job from the dreaded outsourcing trend.

Leading academics and researchers in the field publicly declare that “IT no longer matters,” and they are counseled by journalists to develop all manner of business and relationship skills to avoid extinction. It is of little surprise that so many of them report such a low level of satisfaction with their careers today and their prospects for tomorrow.

Still, they are a brave group. They fight on in search of answers to their existential questions—questions like:

- What to do for their opinions to be respected and valued by their colleagues?
- How to be invited to participate in key decision making forums and contribute to their organization’s strategy?
- Is there a path that leads to the senior leadership ranks of their organization?

In light of the above, I suggest we avoid getting too close to this group, lest we be labeled “geek lovers”. I fear it could negatively impact our relationship with the rest of human society on earth.”

It’s not really that bad ... Is it?

That’s what you’re probably thinking right now. It’s not really that bad, is it? I know, it’s hard to believe; but it’s the truth. At least that’s the story we keep telling ourselves.

If you’re going to take the man from Mars test, you have to be willing to see things with unbiased eyes. And unfortunately, I think that’s exactly how a man from Mars would see things, because there is lots of data to support this view.

A quick review of what’s being written about in leading IT leadership and management publications reveals what’s top of mind for today’s IT leaders:

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| • Do CIOs Still Matter? | • Why CFOs and CEOs Hate IT |
| • Proving IT’s Value to the Business | • IT Leadership: Building a Business Case to Save Your Job |
| • Battling Lack of IT Understanding | • How to Communicate ROI to the Business |
| • IT Does So Matter | • Why CIOs are Last Among Equals |

These items appear in leading publications because they reflect the issues and concerns of IT leaders. Clearly, something is going on.

It's not just the media

It's not just journalists and industry commentators who point to these issues. CIO peer groups, technology industry associations and other professional groups present a similar picture of pain and suffering but with the additional credibility of an insider.

Take for example the CIO Executive Council, a peer group of over 500 CIOs. They conduct a variety of programs and meetings geared to serve the needs of their members. During 2010 the council identified a number of built-in challenges or paradoxes inherent in the role of today's CIO. These paradoxes then became agenda items for council meetings across the country. Let's look at a few of them:

- “You were hired to be strategic but you are forced to spend most of your time on operational issues”
- “Your many successes are invisible; your few mistakes are highly visible”
- “IT can make or break a company, but you are not a member of the corporate board”
- “You run one of the most pervasive, critical functions, yet you must prove your value constantly”
- “You are intimately involved in every facet of the business, yet you are considered separate and apart from it”

These paradoxes may indeed exist for many in IT. But if you look carefully at them, you can also see that they express a feeling, a desire for a different reality and less of an objective truth.

With that in mind, take a second look at these “paradoxes” along with my translation of them—gleaned from dozens of interviews with, and hundreds of survey responses from, IT leaders. This translation illustrates beautifully (and painfully) how IT leaders really feel about their roles.

| CIO Council Paradox | Translation |
|--|---|
| “You were hired to be strategic but you are forced to spend most of your time on operational issues.” | Many IT leaders like to think they were hired to be engaged in strategy (usually not the case). They feel frustrated at not being invited into strategy forums and blame operational necessities for their absence at the strategy table. |
| “Your many successes are invisible; your few mistakes are highly visible.” | IT leaders don’t feel like they get much recognition for their work. The public discussion always centers on their mistakes or problems. |
| “IT can make or break a company, but you are not a member of the corporate board.” | IT leaders want “a seat at the table” and are searching to justify it. |
| “You run one of the most pervasive, critical functions, yet you must prove your value constantly.” | IT leaders don’t feel valued. Their budgets, plans and value-add are constantly questioned. |
| “You are intimately involved in every facet of the business, yet you are considered separate and apart from it.” | IT leaders feel separate and apart. Many don’t know how to be part of their organization. |

What I hope you can see is that these paradoxes point more to the mindset and emotional disposition of IT leaders, and less to the inherently conflicting demands of the job.

But there’s more

To combat these challenges many IT leaders have tried to market their way out of the problem. This response is so pervasive that the CIO Executive Council produced the “IT Internal Marketing Benchmark Study” to help members share best practices for marketing IT internally.

From this study we learn that the leading reason for undertaking internal marketing initiatives was “to better relationships with the rest of the organization,” so that:

- “Internal customers seek out our assistance and don’t work around us”
- “Technology projects are viewed as sound investments”

- “IT’s importance is recognized and publicly acknowledged by executives”
- “IT is viewed as a source of innovation and thought leadership”

Leaving aside the obvious fact that you can’t market your way to thought leadership, innovation and sound investments, the above listed desires are indicative of the pain being felt by IT leaders and their organizations.

Back to the man from Mars

So it seems that in fact the man from Mars isn’t crazy at all. He sees quite clearly. And that brings me to the central question this book seeks to address: Why is this the case? What’s going on?

- Why don’t IT leaders feel appreciated and valued?
- Why are IT leaders often absent from critical decision making forums?
- Why don’t IT leaders have a seat at the executive table? And most importantly,
- What can be done to change this situation?

After 20+ years of working with some of the finest and most successful IT leaders on three continents, it is my firm conviction that the root cause of the problems faced by IT leaders in terms of access, respect, and value can all be traced to one key factor: INFLUENCE.

It is influence, or more accurately stated, the lack of influence, that is the root cause of so many of the management problems and frustrations expressed by IT leaders. It is a lack of influence that keeps IT leaders out of critical management forums. It is a lack of influence that prevents IT leaders from achieving their full professional potential. And it is a lack of influence that has IT leaders searching for answers to questions like:

- How do I change my company's attitude toward technology?
- How do I get more respect for the work the IT group does?
- How do I become more of an "insider"?
- How can I ensure my input and opinions are really heard?

Influence wielding – it's the IT leader's job

It's no surprise that influence is so important to IT leaders. To effectively do your job applying information technology to the needs of your company or organization requires that you influence your colleagues, peers, customers, stakeholders and bosses. That's what your organization needs you to do. That's what you are paid to do. And that's why it is so very frustrating for you to be without the influence you need to do a good job.

Think about it. You are constantly bombarded with ideas, suggestions, requests, requirements and needs of all sorts. You have to effectively influence your colleagues to make the right choices. Sometimes it is to invest in a specific infrastructure technology that only you understand. Other times it is to avoid a particular initiative because the associated implementation costs and time delays would exceed the anticipated business benefit. Regardless of the specifics of the situation, it's not hard to see the importance of influence for IT leaders.

This sense of the importance of influence to the job is echoed by many CIOs:

“Influence defines my job”

– Barbara Kunkel, CIO Troutman Sanders

“Without influence skills, CIOs are relegated to being order takers”

– Susan Cramm, Former CIO Taco Bell

“The influence I am privileged to enjoy with our senior management has helped our group accomplish a great deal.”

– Akhil Tripathi, CIO Harleyville Mutual Insurance

Time and again I've found that it is influence that really makes the difference in the success of an IT leader and his group. IT leaders with influence are appreciated by their peers. Their opinions and ideas are respected and sought after, even beyond the area of IT.

Influential IT leaders are invited to join the senior decision making forums of their organizations. They are called upon to represent their organizations beyond the technology area per se. For example:

- Gerry McCartney, CIO of Purdue University is a member of the president's strategic cabinet and one of three university executives who presents to the board on academic research.
- Dave Barnes, CIO of UPS is a visionary spokesman for UPS. He frequently leads industry seminars on supply chain integration, innovation and environmentalism; not the typical stuff of your average CIO.
- Ken Lawonn, CIO of Alegen Health, a nine-hospital, 9,000 employee health-care system isn't just the CIO. He is also Senior VP in charge of the hospitals construction projects and retail business.

It goes beyond title and scope

IT leaders with influence not only enjoy a more fulfilling and engaged career experience, they make a lot of money! How much you ask? Well, I can't share all of the personal details I may know, but I can point out a few examples that should get you thinking about what's possible.

Within the last 24 months the following IT executives pay packages were reported in their company's public filings:

- Anna Ewing, NASDAQ/OMG Group - \$2.8 million
- Steve Squeri, American Express - \$6.8 million
- Robert B. Carter, Federal Express - \$1.9 million

These executives may be at the high end of the scale, but they are an excellent example of what is possible. And from personal experience I can tell you that there are many IT leaders working in many different enterprises who enjoy very substantial compensation packages as a result of the value they create and the influence they command.

Net, net: There is great opportunity out there for IT leaders who know how to achieve and apply influence.

Why is influence missing for so many IT leaders?

The question you are likely asking yourself right now is why, if influence is so important, if it's the magic elixir to success as an IT leader, why isn't every IT leader out there working on this right now? Why is it so hard for IT leaders to build this competency?

Three substantial impediments have held back IT leaders from building the influence that is so important to them: They are:

1. **Awareness**
2. **Professional development gap**
3. **Aversion to the basic genre**

1. **Awareness.** Many IT leaders simply aren't aware they are playing a game of influence. They view influence as a skill, an important skill, but not as the central competency required for your success as an IT leader. (I hope I have succeeded in changing that a bit by now. Because shifting your awareness

regarding the importance of influence is the critical first step to addressing a lack of influence.)

2. **Professional development gap.** The second reason why IT leaders aren't well skilled in this area is because there isn't much relevant training or professional development to be found. Note—I said relevant. If you look at the training offerings in the area of influence building they tend to focus mostly on the sales roles or on personal development. There aren't any professional development programs on influence building specifically geared to the unique needs of IT leaders.
3. **Aversion to basic genre.** Third, and I think this is the most significant reason why IT leaders are not fully engaged in influence training, is that most IT leaders have an almost allergic reaction to the topic of influence building given the way it is often presented. And frankly, who can blame them? Most of the material feels very manipulative in nature. Take a look at the titles of some of the best selling books in this category:
 - *How to Win Friends and Influence People*
Dale Carnegie
 - *Get Anyone to Do Anything*
David J. Lieberman
 - *The Science of Influence: How to get Anyone to say YES in 8 Minutes or Less*
Kevin Hogan
 - *Maximum Influence: The 12 Universal Laws of Power Persuasion*
Kurt Mortensen

Just a quick glance makes professionally-minded IT leaders break out in a rash. That's because most of these books (and seminars) come across as being so self-serving; seemingly about getting your way with other people. And that sort of approach doesn't sit well with scientifically-minded IT leaders, who are used to letting their work speak for itself.

IT professionals are generally wary of fast-talking techniques and methods to prove value. That feels a lot like the vendors they have to fend off on a regular basis. They prefer to prove value by delivering value, not by giving a slick presentation (frankly that's a good thing).

IT people believe that it is systems and deliverables that are supposed to demonstrate value, not "persuasion" per se. It's therefore no surprise that they are not drawn to this type of material.

But it doesn't have to be that way. In fact, it shouldn't be that way at all.

How IT leaders *should* think about influence

There is another genre of influence besides the “what’s in it for me” variety. It’s the kind of influence that’s referred to when we speak to our kids and we tell them we want them to be “an influence for good”. It’s an influence that is rooted in a desire to shape or give direction toward a positive outcome—to have a positive effect on what people do or experience.

This genre of influence is not about “getting your way” but rather about having the appropriate sway to ensure that the right things happen in the IT realm for which you are responsible.

Sometimes that means using your influence to ensure that software standards are maintained to prevent run-away support costs. Other times you may need to use your influence to stop a project that you know won’t ever succeed, despite the enthusiasm shown by the user community. Whatever it may be, it’s about putting your influence to work in order to do the right thing in the IT arena. That is, after all, your job.

From creating a technology strategy and prioritizing between competing organizational requirements, to supporting a software vendor choice, nearly everything you do requires the ability to effectively influence your colleagues, peers, customers, stakeholders or boss.

It’s an appropriate and ethical influence. It’s exactly the kind of influence you need to do your job well. And most importantly, it’s the kind of influence you should feel very comfortable pursuing.

But before we get started on the journey through *The Secrets* that will give you this influence, I’ll address one more question...

Like many of you reading this book, I have a classical background in computer science and I spent many years implementing large-scale business management systems. I got my start writing code, performing analyses and then moved on to project management and oversight positions. I worked for a couple of different companies eventually working my way up to partner at PricewaterhouseCoopers, and then leading a global consulting practice area for IBM; before establishing my own boutique firm in 2003.

I first became aware of the importance of influence for IT leaders early on in my professional career. As part of a team charged with implementing large and complex systems, I was often assigned to work with the senior executive team. My role was to tease out the vision of the senior management and to ensure the project was well aligned with the company's goals and strategy.

Early on my peers and bosses pointed out that I seemed to have a knack for capturing and keeping the attention of the executive suite. Somehow, I managed to secure and keep the support of the senior executives for very complex IT projects. What's more, as a result of my interaction with the senior executives in one area of technology, they often spoke with me about other technology-related questions and issues. They were interested in learning about how technology could impact their business, and I seemed to have their ear.

Putting influence to work

It was at that point that my career really took off. Because I used the influence and access that I had with the senior executives of the company to support the needs of the CIO and the technology group who were my direct clients.

Pretty soon CIOs and other senior IT leaders were hiring me and my firm because they saw the access and influence I was able to acquire and they wanted to be able to both leverage it more broadly and learn how to get it themselves. And so my focus slowly shifted from gaining access and influence for myself and for my specific project, to helping CIOs and their teams build this type of access and influence for themselves to achieve their fuller agendas.

I noticed how critical this issue of influence was. And so I started to pay much closer attention to how people achieved influence. Not only did I pay much closer attention to my own tactics and strategies but I started to carefully observe and research the tactics and strategies of the many IT leaders with whom I came into contact.

At first I had little more than intuition to go on. But with time I noticed certain patterns of behavior emerging in critical IT management contexts, such as when an IT leader is seeking to:

- Promote an idea or project
- Deliver complex information or bad news
- Achieve agreement with an IT strategy
- Gain approval for a budget increase
- Build a strong relationship with a business colleague

In these, and similar situations, I started to notice that certain patterns of behavior turned out to be pretty reliable indicators of whether or not a particular IT leader would succeed in their endeavors and build influence or not.

The patterns ranged from the silly and symbolic (like not crouching under the conference room table and fiddling with the wires when the projector isn't working) to the esoteric and intellectual (like achieving external recognition to improve internal respect). Slowly a picture began to emerge. As I began to see more clearly, I placed more emphasis on noticing, documenting and testing out these patterns.

It started with projects

At first I put these ideas to work in a straight-forward project context by helping my clients to: (1) sell their ideas and projects more effectively and, (2) ensure their senior management stayed aligned and “in the boat” with them throughout the

course of the project. This worked well and I enjoyed watching my clients succeed not only with their projects, but with their careers.

A CRM rollout became less about a new customer management system and more about an opportunity to make an IT leader and his team shine. A chance to highlight the tremendous contribution the IT team was making to the success of the company. And a new analytics system became the vehicle for galvanizing the IT group into a high-performing insight delivery team, valued and appreciated by their marketing peers.

I was able to shift my focus from projects and deliverables to people and their achievements. Best of all, not only were the IT leaders doing better, but their companies were getting much better value from their technology investments. It was a real win-win.

From projects to strategy and leadership

It was rewarding and fun, but doing this work on a project-by-project basis was also tiring. Thankfully, it didn't take long for me to realize that there was a better way.

Rather than applying these ideas and concepts on a one-off basis, the more effective way to establish and grow the influence of the IT team was to weave the disciplines of influence into the very fabric of the IT group. In other words, build it into the core IT strategy and management disciplines. And that's exactly what I did.

Working with talented IT leaders from around the world (many of whom you will meet in the upcoming pages) I was able to hone and refine these ideas and techniques into a new arsenal of influence-building tools, techniques and approaches to the classical and persistent challenges facing IT leaders.

As my clients put these ideas and techniques to work within their groups, they began to see big changes in the outcomes they experienced. I had the opportunity to watch my clients, good, hard-working people, succeed in their careers. I saw my clients successfully win approval from their bosses, get promoted, secure raises, and take a seat at the executive table. Most importantly, I observed many of my clients experience an improvement in their personal work experience and how they felt about their role.

Reality bites

This experience was personally and professionally rewarding. But over the last few years several developments in the IT industry began to gnaw at me. I was pained, really pained by the way in which the world of the IT professional and IT leader was being painted:

- The steady chorus of voices proclaiming the diminished importance of IT in the corporate arena.
- Exaggerated expectations of outsourcing and the attendant notion that IT leadership is becoming less relevant.
- The proliferation of articles and surveys (like those I shared with you earlier in this book) pointing to the wide-scale feelings of diminished value and lack of respect felt by IT leaders.

I was (and still am) bothered by the persistently negative views of the IT community. But most of all, I was pained by the lack of satisfaction and self-actualization that so many IT leaders seemed to be experiencing.

I understood where it was coming from, but I also knew that conventional wisdom was dead wrong on this one; that it didn't have to be this way for so many people.

The particularly tough part for me was that while I heard lots of people talking about the problems, I didn't really hear any real-world, proven and workable solutions. A lot of pie-in-sky ideas, yes. But down-to-earth practical solutions were in short supply.

But I knew the reasons for the problems being felt by IT leaders and I knew the solutions that would help them.

So out of respect and thanks to the many IT leaders who have helped me along the way and as a small payback for all that I have gained from the IT community, I decided it was time to lend a hand and help fix things. I decided to write this book. To put down on paper all that I had learned and see work so effectively for so many IT leaders around the world.

Once I got started

I realized that I had a important responsibility and opportunity. Because as helpful and insightful as my experiences over the last 20 + years may be, they were still a

rather small statistical sample. For the information in this book to enjoy mainstream acceptance I knew it needed to be supported by up-to-date research and surveys. So that's exactly what I did.

For nearly two years, I worked with my research team updating our knowledgebase. We integrated materials from new publications and studies on the nature of influence. We reached out to IT leaders with whom we had no relationship to solicit their input, feedback and peer review. We conducted numerous surveys. We made sure we had the data to support our experiences.

And then finally

After all the research was done we had one final task before us: To assemble all the material, lessons, insights, teachings and stories into a truly meaningful structure, so that IT leaders like you could put it straight to work. After all, that's why I wrote this book: To help you right now, right away. Not to add a new volume of theoretical approaches to IT management for the academic community to review and discuss, but rather to put a real-world road map in your hands right now.

I wrote this book in order to give you the tools to dramatically change your professional experience. Not to show you a trick or two, but rather to expose you to methods that can fundamentally alter the way in which you operate in your enterprise and the incredible results it can bring.

It's my hope that if enough IT leaders put the information revealed in this book to work, not only will we see a new wave of positively-oriented articles appearing in the industry press, but there will also be a lot more satisfied and well-compensated IT leaders across the globe. And all of you, the professional managers who bring trillions of dollars of value to the world economy through the effective deployment, operation and management of technology, will start to enjoy the influence and respect you truly deserve.

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The Journey | THE 11 SECRETS INFLUENCE-BUILDING ROAD MAP

How *The Secrets* are organized

While researching and writing this book, I was concerned about how best to convey this information so that it wouldn't just come across as a list. I wanted the reader to be able to see the connections and dependencies between the different secrets. To get a sense of how all the individual pieces fit together and form a unified idea.

I wrestled with different approaches (such as by context or by subject area). In the end I chose to organize *The Secrets* in the form of a journey with a road map. That journey is made up of three parts. Each part contains a number of steps (*The Secrets*) that logically build one upon another. In this way, you get not only *The Secrets* themselves, but a clear pathway for putting them to work.

Part I, Influence Begins with Credibility teaches you the key activities and behaviors you need to set in place a foundation of credibility—the basis for influence. On the surface, the idea of credibility as a foundation to influence seems rather obvious. What *The Secrets* reveal however is that the path to credibility is often misunderstood by the very best IT leaders. Many devoted IT leaders work hard at delivering great systems, yet still find themselves without real credibility and influence. Part I explains (a) the common misunderstandings that give rise to this situation, (b) what you can do to avoid the traps, and (c) how to effectively build credibility.

Once you have implemented the key activities and behaviors contained in Part I (or if you are there already) you move on to *Part II, The Essentials of Influential Communications*. Part II clarifies the biggest area of challenge faced by most IT leaders. More importantly, it reveals a number of very unconventional secrets that you can use to quickly improve your standing and influence with your bosses and peers.

Part III, Game Time, focuses on the critical situations and contexts where you, as the IT leader, have the opportunity to shine. Part III builds on what is taught in Parts I and II and teaches specific tactics to use in order to be successful in these very important professional situations

The 11 Secrets Influence-Building Road Map

The road map on the following pages provides a visual guide to *The Secrets*. Beyond the obvious road signs, the road map contains a number of hints and subtleties about the secrets. As you become familiar with each of the secrets, you will find the road map a more informative and useful reference tool.

Before you begin your journey

If you want to give yourself the very best chance of successfully implementing the concepts in this book, before you set out on your journey, before you are exposed to anything new, take stock of where you are right now. Take a few minutes right now and do a rapid assessment of where your influence currently stands.

To help you with that assessment, I invite you to use one of our on-line assessment tools. You can find it here:

<https://www.marcjschiller.com/influence-assessment/>

The assessment score and the accompanying qualitative analysis will provide you with: (1) an initial benchmark against which you can measure your results over time, and (2) pointers and foreknowledge of the areas that will be most relevant and beneficial to you. This will support your journey through *The Secrets*.

OK, let's go.

The **11**
Secrets
Road Map



The **11** Secrets Road Map

Control
Vision

SECRET #9
Your Three
Signature Plays

SECRET #5
Say No

STOP

SECRET #4
Three
Communication
Traps to Avoid

Communication
Way

Credibility
Pass

ROUTE

11





Welcome to
INFLUENCE
(city limits)

SECRET #10
Get Your Team
to Really Play

SECRET #11
Take your Game
on the Road

SECRET #8
You Gotta Know
the Game

**Game Time
Highway**

SECRET #7
Practice
"Ne-ma-wa-shi"

SECRET #6
Be Skeptical

SECRET #3
Business
Intimacy

THE GATEWAY TO TRUST

Financial
Proximal

Process
Strategies

SECRET #1
Infrastructure
Really Matters

SECRET #2
Expect Projects
to Fail

DETOUR

TUNE UP

PART I

**INFLUENCE BEGINS
WITH CREDIBILITY**part*Secret #1:* Infrastructure Really Matters*Secret #2:* Expect Projects to Fail*Secret #3:* Business Intimacy – The Gateway to Trust

Rock-solid credibility is the bedrock upon which influence stands. In order to influence your colleagues, peers, customers, stakeholders, and boss, you must possess a strong degree of credibility with them. Without credibility, even the simplest of things can be nearly impossible to get done.

Part I opens a door into the unique perspective and approach taken by highly influential IT leaders on how to build credibility.

SECRET #1

**INFRASTRUCTURE
REALLY MATTERS**

“IT is a lot like plumbing. People don’t want to hear how it works or why it works; they just want to know that it does work.”

Christopher Barron
CIO, CP Energy

Influential IT leaders know that the absolute, foundational, number-one, most important thing they can do to establish and maintain their credibility—and thereby lay a foundation for influence—is get their core infrastructure and operations humming.

The common trap is to think that influential IT leaders are busy doing big, important projects—that the best IT leaders aren’t really worried about infrastructure and pipes—as if that’s for the “nerds.” Nothing could be farther from the truth.

I find that the most influential IT leaders recognize how critical infrastructure is to their mission and by extension to their credibility. They invest considerable time and resources to ensure that core IT services are delivered flawlessly. They carefully and purposefully overprovision bandwidth, server power, storage space, communications and support resources. In budget meetings, they fight tooth and nail for leading-edge infrastructure.

Bandwidth beats beauty

Take the story of Joanne Kossuth. She is the Vice President for Operations and CIO of Franklin W. Olin College of Engineering in Needham, Mass. She reports directly to the President of the College, is a member of the executive committee and in addition to her IT responsibilities she is charged with overseeing: campus services, conference services, dining services, facilities, human resources, planning and project management, public safety, and purchasing.

When the college was first being built, Joanne realized she had a unique opportunity to put in place a growth-oriented and flexible infrastructure. She knew that once the buildings and physical plant were largely in place, the costs and opportunities for opening walls and running new lines would be limited. So she decided to push the infrastructure investment to the limit.

Listening to her tell the story you get a sense of how clear her vision was about the importance of infrastructure.

“As an engineering and technical college I knew our professors and students would always be pushing the limits of technology. And even if I couldn’t exactly predict where and how the technology would be used, I knew it would be needed soon enough. So I pushed forward with major investments in fiber optics, physical plant wiring, communications and networking systems. We committed to VOIP long before it was a mainstream technology and assumed a nearly limitless appetite for internet bandwidth.

Sure enough, it wasn’t long before our budgets were being strained. But I knew that I had to have the fight now because otherwise the college (and IT) would pay the price many times over the coming years.

So I went to meet with the president of the college. He was very adamant about sticking to the budget. But I wouldn’t relent. I just kept emphasizing for him how critical the IT infrastructure was for the very mission of the college. That it went way beyond providing the basics necessary to run computer systems.

Finally he said: Joanne, we simply don’t have the money. For me to give you the money for these computer systems means I can’t put stone facing on the administration buildings. It will be very hard to convince our benefactors that the money for the beautiful buildings instead went into the IT infrastructure. I told him it was worth every penny and that the benefactors would thank him many times over the next few years. I can’t say for sure if they ever did. But he has certainly thanked me for pushing him on this.”

What's the big deal

On the surface the casual observer might wonder what's the big deal? Invest in infrastructure and run the systems well. Big deal. That's what every IT leader has to do. It's just part of the day-to-day operations. What's the big secret here?

The secret lies in recognizing three things: First, what it means to have well-running IT infrastructure. Second, where infrastructure matters most for your organization. And third, applying it correctly.

Unfortunately, we have grown accustomed to help desk delays, networking issues and other manifestations of poor IT infrastructure performance. As a result, the bar for well-run infrastructure has been lowered considerably in the minds of too many IT professionals. We have become too forgiving of IT because we know how technically complex all this stuff really is. But our user community doesn't know and doesn't care.

To understand what top-notch infrastructure really means you have to get into the mindset of your user community, in particular the senior executives at your company or organization.

Simply stated, they want everything to work perfectly all of the time. They want super fast internet connectivity wherever they may be. They want access to perfectly replicated email on their computers at home, in the office, on the road and their mobile devices (yes, multiple devices). And more than what they do want, is what they don't want.

They don't want to hear from their admin staff that the systems are slow and there will be a delay in sending them a file on the road. They don't want to hear from other senior executives that due to system downtime they had to pay \$200,000 in overtime costs to process orders. They don't want to hear that server overloads caused the website to go down for two hours the previous week (at just the time the new board member went to look at the company website.) And they don't want to have to call tech support—for anything.

Think about it. Do you think they ever want to talk to a tech support person? Does anyone? In the mind of your senior executives, top-notch IT systems should never break. I know that sounds crazy, but that is what your colleagues really want. ZERO problems of any sort. And if they do have a problem they want it fixed by an expert immediately. No explaining, no troubleshooting, no escalating, no callbacks, and no expectation management. Just their problem fixed right away, right now.

All of those pesky and so-called “unimportant” tech support calls for printers not working or SPAM problems with email are glaring examples of less-than-perfect operating infrastructure.

Too high of a standard? Too much to expect from technology? Absolutely correct. And, absolutely irrelevant. Because that’s how your user community thinks.

Highly influential IT leaders recognize that this expectation is unrealistic, but they never for a moment forget that this is the expectation. And so they apply as much high-end infrastructure as possible to shore up the systems and head off as many of these common problems as possible.

Why infrastructure and operations really matter

There are two big reasons why tending to matters of infrastructure and operations are so critical to establishing credibility and influence as an IT leader. First, is the fact that in the mind of your user community, you are the systems. Second, the very large dollars spent in this area.

You are the systems. For your user community your personal credibility is measured in direct proportion to the performance of the systems. If the systems and support are running well, then you are wonderful. If the systems are down and problematic, then you are a bum and an incompetent. This may be totally unfair, but it is absolutely the case.

This is especially true in the executive suite where they are totally clueless about all of the technical difficulties involved in running an IT shop, and where they are not exposed to the many “cool” systems you may have implemented to help the business. For the executive suite, it’s their personal experience of the most basic aspects of IT that often determines how you are perceived as an IT leader.

Christopher Barron, CIO at CP Energy sums it very crisply:

“For most people, IT is what they can see, touch, feel. We might be investing tens of millions of dollars in big ERP systems, but the most interaction the average executive will have with IT is with regard to his Blackberry or laptop. So all those things have to be really stable, and as cutting-edge as we can afford.

I never underestimate the value of desktop technology, smart phone technology, or anything else a person interacts with on a daily basis.”

The money. In addition to the day-to-day interaction executives have with basic infrastructure technologies and operations, the executive suite sees how much money is being spent on IT infrastructure. And if your IT department is like most, that infrastructure number is probably pretty big—often 80% or more of the IT budget. Accordingly, the executive suite thinks that if you can't effectively manage the big budget items (i.e., the infrastructure and operations that are under your control and provide crisp service) then how can you be taken seriously as a business leader?

Another mistake made by many IT leaders is that they believe the IT infrastructure budget line is viewed by the senior executives as basic company operations, like plant and building infrastructure. That the only real IT spending is the investment in new technologies and applications and that their financial and management focus need only be on this area.

Executives do expect technology to be as reliable and trouble-free as other types of infrastructure, but this in no way takes away from the expectation that the IT leader have very firm control over that budget. Any attempt to marginalize infrastructure, and its importance on how you are viewed as an IT leader is a mistake.

Not all infrastructures matter in the same way

Influential IT leaders recognize that the smooth running of core infrastructure/operations, and in particular those elements that touch senior executives, directly impacts their personal credibility and the overall credibility of the IT group. But it doesn't stop there. Influential IT leaders recognize that with limited budgets they need to carefully consider in which areas of infrastructure to invest most substantially.

For some organizations, it's all about the network and communications bandwidth. For others it's about security and disaster recovery. For one company, the key infrastructure investments are the huge server farms that host its web-based application service. For another company, it's dedicated tech-support services for highly compensated financial traders that matter most. Sure, there are basic infrastructure needs that are common to most organizations. But no company can go all out investing at the high end for every type of infrastructure.

So what's an IT leader supposed to do given this situation? What infrastructure investments provide good ROI in terms of building credibility and influence

without breaking the bank? Clearly it varies based on the nature of your organization and where your senior executives are most likely to bump into infrastructure issues. And while there aren't a set of hard and fast rules, the following guidelines should provide you with a good starting point.

1. **Over provision key services and technologies that directly impact user productivity.** Most common examples include: internet bandwidth, mailbox storage, and disk storage. But remember to be sensitive to your industry's unique needs. For example in the financial community traders and other screen-based personnel are given multiple, large, high-quality display monitors.
2. **Invest in user experience infrastructure.** Nearly every system has a user-facing component; typically it's called the user interface or the front end of the system. It's typically the last piece of the application that gets put into place once the "back end," guts of the system are working properly. And while the heavy lifting may be happening in the back end, it's the front end that the user community experiences. And that experience should be as friction-free and enjoyable as possible. Invest in whatever additional infrastructure may be necessary to deliver a highly reliable and pleasant user experience. Conventional wisdom says make sure the back end is right because the front end is easy to tweak. That may be the case, but while you're busy tweaking the front end and feeling like a success because the back end is rock solid, your colleagues are gossiping about the "crappy system" and all the front-end issues they have encountered.
3. **Provide high-touch user support as far down the organization as economically possible.** It may be common sense to make sure the CEO doesn't have email problems, but it can't stop there. All of the senior leaders in your company should be receiving VIP support for their personal computers. And it's probably a good idea to include their assistants as well. If possible, continue to extend this level of support down the organizational hierarchy. Maybe the ratio of support personnel to users increases, but at least there is a live desk-side person available within a reasonable amount of time, not just a voice on the end of the phone.

Here is a great example:

How Mike Saft saves the day (several times a week)

When I speak of infrastructure, I want to make very clear that I'm speaking not only about the core technologies themselves, i.e., the software and hardware that make up the systems, but also of the support services. In fact, in many cases it's the support services that matter more than the technologies themselves. Investing in the very best systems but skimping on the support personnel that run them is a recipe for disaster. On the other hand, thoughtful investment in high-end technologies along with the right support personnel can work wonders. The story of Mike Saft of Bayer Business Technology Services (BBTS) tells it best.

First, a little background. BBTS is the internal technology services provider for Bayer companies. Working alongside the IT leaders within the business units, BBTS provides much of the day-to-day operational services for Bayer companies. From network connectivity to SAP support, BBTS is the primary address to which Bayer employees turn for help.

Mike Saft is a warm and friendly technology maven with the rather unique job title of VIP Customer Support Specialist. His primary assignments: (1) To support the senior commercial leaders of Bayer Healthcare Pharmaceuticals, and (2) To ensure the smooth running of all projection systems and other AV equipment in the executive building in Wayne, New Jersey.

Mike is situated on-site with the executive team ready to respond to any technology issues they may have. What's more, he is on site to make sure that presentations, video conferences, training, town hall meetings, and any other gathering that uses the built-in audio visual equipment, comes off without a problem.

It's not that BBTS doesn't have comprehensive help desk facilities that could support the managers and executives at the Wayne location. Nor is it the case that the projection and A/V systems lack detailed documentation for self-service. Rather, BBTS has made a strategic decision to over provision support resources in these two critical areas. And if you have ever visited Bayer's Wayne, New Jersey facility and met Mike Saft, it's real easy to see what a smart decision that is.

Mike is the archetype support specialist. He knows the systems he supports inside and out and he really cares about making things work well for his colleagues. He is the consummate professional and he takes great care in not only making things work, but in how he interacts with everyone. Whether in a conference room with a meeting for three people or in the auditoriums holding hundreds of people, Mike is always at the ready to make sure things work smoothly.

Obviously BBTS can't invest like this in every area, but given the importance of the US pharmaceutical business, it's not hard to appreciate the wisdom of having Mike there for the managers and executives who run that business.

The result

When I look at the organizations of highly influential IT leaders that have put this principle to work, I usually find:

1. A generally more friction-free, information-processing environment. People tend to be more comfortable with their day-to-day use of systems and experience less tension about systems and their operations.
2. Users report greater productivity. Less time is spent dealing with common system issues. An ability to get to work and keep working without technology-based interruptions.
3. Users feel that IT knows what it is doing. They talk about a sense of calm and control and the ability to rely on IT to keep things running. Frequently they will cite examples such as quick laptop swap outs with no data loss or proactive system upgrades to make their point.

So what happens when you get it right? What is the pay off for IT leaders?

Larry Bonfante, CIO of the U.S. Tennis Association, spent a great deal of time and energy getting infrastructure technologies and services humming. As a result of this work he reports:

“Over the last couple of years we've been able to broaden our scope of influence beyond IT. We've taken on a number of other functional responsibilities, because we are seen as people who know how to deliver and support any kind of customer service-related function.”

One last challenge to conventional wisdom

It's not uncommon for the press or the so-called “experts” to rail about the non-strategic nature of infrastructure. Often we hear it said that to claim your place in the executive suite you need to leave that techie stuff behind and focus on more strategic items. Well, news flash: infrastructure is only non-strategic when it's working flawlessly. When it's not working flawlessly, all of a sudden it becomes a

critical item. And if the problems persist, it's a real credibility killer for IT leaders. So think 100 times before shifting investment and attention away from infrastructure because the "experts" are telling you it's not so sexy or important.

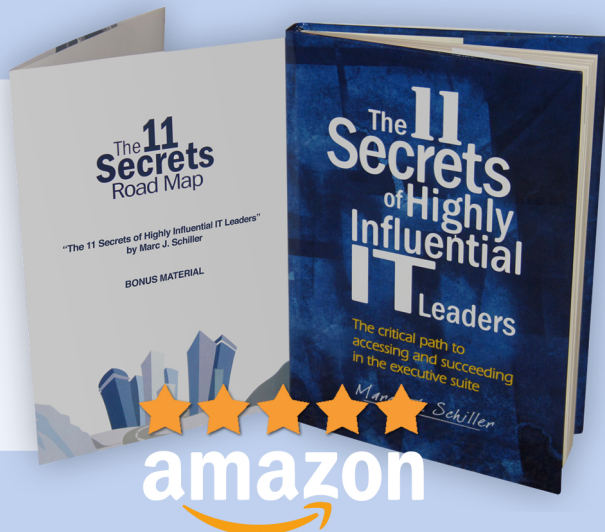
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Jim Korcykoski
Senior Vice President & CIO

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Lori Beer
EVP, Enterprise Business Services

Computerworld 100
Premier IT Leader



"I picked up the 11 Secrets to read on vacation thinking 'Here we go with yet another IT book.' I'm not sure who was more surprised at how much I enjoyed it, my kids or me. Suffice it to say, within a few pages I found myself underlining and dog tagging highlighting key messages and thinking 'this is definitely not the typical IT management book.' The unique value of this book, and the system Marc presents, is the tangible road map it provides for aspiring professionals and managers to follow in order to succeed in this demanding field."



Jonathan Reichental, PhD
Chief Information Officer

"The 11 Secrets get to the heart of what matters most for success in IT. In today's hyper-speed technology environment, IT managers need to accelerate their learning curve about what works and what doesn't. The 11 Secrets can get you to success faster."

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