

IN SEARCH OF A NEW INFORMATION SYSTEMS LEADER

TWENTY QUESTIONS

Case Study: He's Gone!

A single sheet of paper lay face down in the centre of the otherwise bare desk of the Vice President, Corporate Resources. Arriving early as she usually did around 7:00 a.m., it was bound to catch her attention. Reaching out for the sheet, the experiences of a corporate lifetime told her what the document said even before she turned it over - the Director of Information Systems had formally tendered his resignation.

Reflecting back over the last few months, the signs had been there. After the last major confrontation, the Director of Information Systems had changed. His personal initiatives seemed to lack the normal energy. In other instances where one might have predicted a strong reaction, the response was neutral or accommodating. Their regular meetings had become less frequent and rarely contained any new projects or requests.

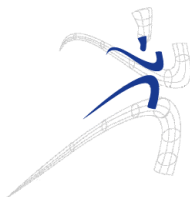
Although she was mentally prepared for this eventuality, the Vice President would have preferred to make it work. A staccato burst of thoughts stacked into the mental queue: "Maybe this is all for the best. The next one will be better. I must call Human Resources this morning. It is likely to take a few months to find a replacement"

The Need

Hiring a new leader for your information systems group represents a major challenge. This person needs to command the respect of a group of well educated and energetic young technical people. He or she needs to be able to leverage the organization's investments in information technology.

The right person needs to be an agent of change. Yet, the changes must be done at a pace and style that accommodates the existing organizational culture and infrastructure. Revolutionary change may represent too large a risk.

New ways of building systems must be brought to the systems organization. The contemporary challenge for the information systems function is to become more service



oriented and consultative. The work of the unit must be driven by the business need. A shift in focus may take time, patience and the right behavioural model.

In addition, the right systems person can play an important part of the executive team. To achieve this requires a management "fit". To secure business advantage through technology, the systems function must get close to the workings and needs of the strategic business units.

The following is a set of interview questions that has been designed to help assess how a potential head of the information systems group will function in a business environment. A mature business response to these issues will tend to indicate whether the candidate is a business manager first and a technical guru second.

Interviewing Questions

These are "seed" questions that can be used to initiate a discussion on each subject. In most cases, the questions are open-ended probes which require the candidate to provide an expository response. In some case, the best response may be clarification questions from the candidate.

Leadership

What do you do consciously to provide leadership for the systems function?

Management style

Is there a profile that characterizes your management style? How well has this been received by your staff, your peers and others?

Hardware strategies

Do you espouse a particular hardware strategy? What is your rationale for this?

Software strategies

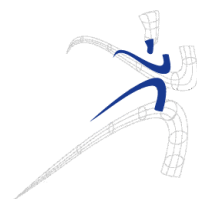
When do you choose a software package approach and why? How do choose the best solution?

Communications

What process do you use to evolve a telecommunications strategy?

Stewardship

How would you like to be measured on your performance as the leader of a systems function? How would you build these measures and put them forward?



Recruiting

Do you have an approach to recruiting that works for you? Explain? What strengths do you look for in systems people?

Unions

Have you ever worked in a union environment? Do you have a strategy for dealing with unions. How do you reconcile the "dual masters" issue and still achieve your objectives?

Controlling work

What is your approach to controlling the work of others? Has this ever failed you and why?

Budgeting

How do you approach the annual budgeting cycle? How do you prefer to handle capital expenditures?

Vendor management

How do prefer to deal with vendors? What is your approach in difficult situations?

Organization

Do you have a model of a systems organization that you prefer? Why?

Planning

What is your approach to planning - short term and long term?

Visibility

What means do you prefer to illustrate the work of a systems organization?

Innovation

What have you done to support innovation in systems?

Selling

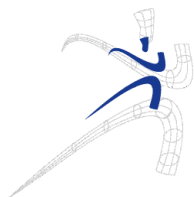
How do you "sell" the concepts and ideas that you strongly believe?

Support

How do you garner the support you need for critical resources and initiatives? Where do you seek peer support?

Motivation

How do you motivate others to achieve an important objective? How do you motivate yourself?



Conflict

Explain your approach to resolving conflict between yourself and others? Conflict between juniors who report to you? Conflict between seniors, one of which is your boss?

Crisis

What means do you employ in crisis situations?

Ethics

How do you handle situations that potentially involve ethics, conflict of interest, etc?

Negatives

What aspects of your management skills have not worked and why? What have you changed?

References

Name your single best reference and describe why it was so successful? Name the single worst reference you might obtain and suggest possible explanations.

Clouds

Describe in literal terms where you see yourself in five years - your surroundings, dress, the setting, the facilities.

Maxims

Do you have a group of maxims you follow that support your success? List them and suggest why they work.

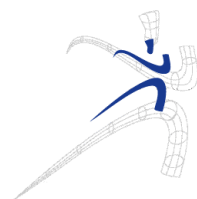
Consultants

What is your view of consultants and their roles?

Responses

For most of the questions, the interviewer should analyze the responses for management processes. Even good managers rarely know the answer to all of the questions. However, the best candidates have a process or method that will develop answers, options or alternatives.

The "cloud" question can sometimes provide an insight into the future career vision the



candidate holds. Often, the vision changes as they proceed but some candidates have difficulty in sharing a concrete literal "picture" of where they would like to be.

Conclusion

Recruiting for a new leader for the information systems function is a serious business. The exposure of making a mistake is as great as the potential of finding the right person. The questions you ask in the interviews can make a difference in getting at the person behind the technical requirements.

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