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## Three things to know when you step up

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**You've just been promoted from senior IT engineer into management. Up to now, you've had the opportunity to complete many tasks and lead projects and groups. These experiences have taught you technical skills and given you a keen business sense. But has it taught what you need to know to sit in the management chair? If you remember these three important items when you move from the top technical position to an overseer position, that chair will be much more comfortable.**

You've just been promoted from senior IT engineer into [management](#). Up to now, you've had the opportunity to complete many tasks and lead projects and groups. These experiences have taught you technical skills and given you a keen business sense. But has it taught what you need to know to sit in the management chair? If you remember these three important items when you move from the top technical position to an overseer position, that chair will be much more comfortable.

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- \* It's about more than just the technical metrics now.
- \* Not all the people whom you interact with and report to speak "tech."
- \* You need to be always thinking about how what you do will impact the business's ability to do business.

Uptime isn't everything

The first thing to remember is that you are going to have to expand your horizons when it comes to metrics.

Engineers are very comfortable with technology metrics. We understand throughput and capacity. We can rattle off statistics on storage space and processing speed without having to think twice. But when was the last time you worried about total time and cost to set up a remote office location? Or the aggregate cost of the monthly cell phone usage for everyone in the company? The business metrics that tie into IT management are a whole new set of measures that you need to learn how to navigate. You will not impress the other managers by talking about your up-to-date systems or how many virtual servers you are running. That is now the part of your job that just needs to happen. When the boss asks you about what the IT area is doing, what he wants to know is how you are helping to move the company forward with its strategic initiatives

Unless there is a significant problem that needs to be resolved or a large change that is about to occur, upper-level management assumes that you have the day-to-day activities of your area covered. Start gearing your reports toward a higher level of key performance indicators. Here are a few to start you thinking:

- \* Time required to boot up a new employee
- \* Cost differentials on various new technology options

\* R&D prospects

\* Total-system cost vs. return on investment

'What does dual-core mean?'

The second important thing is the way you communicate.

Believe it or not, there are still plenty of people out there who do not speak fluent tech, much less any of its geekier dialects. For many people on the operational side of the house, their computer equipment is just a tool to get the job done. Worse, there are still a good number of senior-level management members who will rapidly move from misunderstanding, through frustration, and straight to anger if you are too technical in your explanations. Yes, we live in a highly technical world, and more and more management-level employees are comfortable in the technology arena. But you need to remember that your focus has now shifted from the deeply technical areas of your company to the business needs of your company.

When explaining a project or a problem, it is natural to want to give your listeners a full sense of your grasp of the situation by describing it in great detail. But you need to save those deep technical discussions for the team that reports up to you. When you're talking to other managers, both at your level and above you, you are going to have to pass your explanations through their business filter. Be aware of your audience. And always ask yourself, "How does this project or problem impact the business?" Your answer will guide you to what you need to be reporting to senior management.

It's not personal, it's business

The third important thing is to be always thinking about the ways in which your decisions and actions impact the business's ability to do business.

That's always, as in constantly. You may have noticed that in discussing the first two points, I mentioned the need to consider the business angle. That's because, as a

manager, you can never separate the question of business impact from any of the things you do. Your focus needs to be on what your team does to affect your company's ability to perform its daily functions. How can you help the people in the field perform more efficiently? How can you help the other functional teams reach their goals? How can your team push the company higher in the industry? How is your work affecting the performance of the company?

When you step up, you must also take a step back. You can now see, at every level, how your business flows through the technology artery. You are in a position of seeing how all of the various employees and units within your company conduct their day-to-day activities. This should enable you to anticipate their needs and empower you to be always looking for more efficient ways to do what your company does. A routine exercise that you should perform is a 360-degree overview of what your IT group is doing to enhance the business and what your business will need you to be focusing on in both the short and long terms. Do not let yourself get perpetually stuck down in the weeds.

None of this takes into account the possibility that your IT team is also a profit and loss center. If you have those responsibilities, in addition to maintaining the internal operations of your company's technology, then there is an entire additional set of headaches, pitfalls and skill sets you will need. But even if that is not the case, you are still responsible for thinking about how your team can help the company achieve its strategic objectives.

What kind of an impact, directly and indirectly, can the IT team have on everyone else in the company's ability to do work? Answer that effectively and you will have come a long way.

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