CHAPTER 1

First Things First: What Is Leadership?

Before we get into the "nuts and bolts" of what is involved in transforming an IT organization, we will spend some time defining some key concepts. Specifically, we will focus on the following concepts:

❐ Defining what I mean by leadership
❐ Comparing and contrasting leadership and management
❐ Reviewing common misperceptions regarding leadership
❐ Examining the critical roles that a transformational leader has to play

Defining Leadership

There are probably as many definitions of leadership as there are people who have an interest in the topic. Many of us have formed our thoughts and definitions based on the people in our lives from whom we have learned our lessons of leadership. For many people, the image of leadership comes along with formal power and authority. For others, it elicits a vision of eloquent orators who can inspire with their thoughts and words. Some may conjure up emotional pictures of military leaders or sports coaches who "fire up" the troops.

What we will explore in this book is the fact that there is no one approach or definition to leadership. Individuals bring their own unique personality and talents to their position of leadership. In trying to define leadership, perhaps a good place to start is to differentiate between two very important but different things—leadership and management.

Leadership versus Management

Before we begin our discussion on leadership, it is important to differentiate between the concepts of leadership and management. Many people will share that they think good leadership is more important to an organization's success than excellent management. This is akin to saying that speed is more important to an athlete than strength. The truth of the matter is that both are critical to success.

Over the almost 30 years I have worked in the industry, I have come to realize how rare excellent management is and how rarely it is appreciated and rewarded. In many organizations, when an individual contributor excels, he or she is promoted to a management position. The thought process is that if someone is proficient in a functional area, that person would naturally be able to manage others who are focused in that area of endeavor. Nothing could be further from the truth. Although some people clearly can make this leap, excellence in any endeavor and the ability to manage people in the same discipline are two very different sets of muscles. Working in the field of IT, it is sometimes painful to watch very talented technical people who entered the field because of certain skills and personality traits being asked to act in what can only be described as unnatural ways to try to manage the efforts of other technical contributors.

In my experience, there is a dearth of quality managers. People who can help teams execute and deliver results are a precious commodity. Many organizations do not value or reward

excellent managers. However, without these people, companies would never accomplish the results required to achieve success. Therefore, in our discussion of leadership versus management, I want to be clear that I value both capabilities. It's just that they are very different things.

Picture This

How many times have you seen this movie play out? An extremely talented technologist does a stellar job on a critical project. As a "reward" for his efforts, he gets promoted into a management role. Suddenly, this incredibly intelligent and talented person finds himself in a whole new world. Instead of being able to leverage his technical acumen and quantitative skills to get a job done, he is asked to manage people who just a week ago were his peers. Some of these people resent his promotion and his new role. He doesn't know how to relate to people who were colleagues but now are in his employ. No one has trained him on how to adapt to this new role.

Even worse, his introversion and quiet demeanor, which were assets up until now, are viewed as challenges as he struggles to communicate his vision for the team and how he hopes to execute against it. Being quiet and reserved is mistaken for lacking leadership qualities required to manage the team. He hasn't developed the relationships required to build credibility and confidence in the people above him in the organization. Months go by, and instead of delegating critical tasks, he tries to do it all himself. His people are disgruntled. His management is disappointed. He is frustrated. Finally, a year into his tenure, he is called into his manager's office and relieved of his responsibilities.

(continued)

3

(*Continued*)

Part of him is shocked—how could I have gone from being a star to being a bum in a year? Part of him is actually relieved to not have to fit into a role for which he was clearly not suited. He has to take his severance check and explain to his family that he is unemployed and has to look for a new job. Sound familiar? Could it happen to you?

To me, the simplest way to differentiate between leadership and management is to identify three questions that must be answered for teams to succeed. The first two questions are issues of leadership. The third is a question of management.

Question #1: Where Are We Going?

The first question that must be answered by a leader is, "Where are we going?" The essence of leadership is setting the direction for the organization. Leaders must work with their people to explain their destination. There is an old expression that if you don't know where you are going, you might not like where you wind up! The first responsibility of a leader is to know where you are going so you can communicate this direction with your team. Many books I have read on the topic of leadership stop there! They feel that the primary responsibility of a leader is to determine and communicate the team's destination. I think that there is a second related question that leaders are required to answer.

Through the Lens of the CIO—The Need for CIOs to Inspire

I can remember the first time I heard the idea of the CIO having to inspire the organization. It was at an industry conference, and we had a keynote speaker who suggested that leaders must inspire their people to greatness. Why is this a daunting challenge for most CIOs?

4

Let's think about where most CIOs come from. Many of us grew up through the ranks of the technology organization. Our skill sets were in areas such as business analysis, systems development, and process management. In school, we were more likely to be attracted to topics such as math and science than to subjects such as psychology and philosophy, which many of us probably viewed as "fluff" courses. (I will make the admission that I was a dual major when I got my undergraduate degree, pursuing both economics and psychology!) We are most comfortable with quantitative, hard-core, tangible items that we can see and touch. We are often binary in our thinking—after all, computer science is at its core based on ones and zeros! We count lines of code; we install and program switches and routers—no bull happening here!

All of a sudden, many of us are placed in positions where we have to lead and "inspire" people. Inspiration is the stuff of evangelists and football coaches, not managers of technology. But like it or not, people only perform at their greatest potential when they are inspired.

One of the big mistakes many CIOs make when attempting to inspire is to think that they have to come up with some magic words that awaken the greatness that resides in all of us. We have to know exactly what to say to light the fire in people. Truth be told, individuals have their own motivators that inspire them. All we have to do is figure out what those things are for the people we lead and find a way to align our vision and our mission to the things that drive people. You can call that inspiration. Motivation is really an "inside job." Our role is not to create the things that inspire people but simply to make people understand how what we are doing connects with what *already* inspires them.

Another challenge many CIOs have is trying to develop the *cult of personality.* Some of us (like me) happen to become

(*continued*)

(*Continued*)

extroverts over time. I started out an introvert, but based on life experiences and situations have become far more extroverted and comfortable in dealing with people than many CIOs are naturally wired to be. But what about those of us (and this is probably the great majority) who are introverted? After all, there is a reason we went into IT as opposed to sales or marketing. What do we do about the introverts? Remember that inspiration is about your people, not about you! What CIOs have to do is to be real, to be human, and to be themselves. People can smell a phony from a mile away. Therefore, trying to be a cheerleader if this is not your nature will most certainly backfire. Be yourself. Be genuine. Speak from your heart in a way that people know is true to who you are, and they will respect you for it. Don't try to be someone you're not. Be yourself—but be your *best* self and work to bring out the best in each of the people you lead. This is the true essence of inspiring people, not being some loud, fiery B.S. artist!

Question #2: Why Are We Going There?

Getting others to support a shared vision requires that they buy into what you are trying to accomplish. A big part of ensuring that this happens is answering for them why you plan to go in a stated direction. When I was starting out, the roles of management and labor were very clear. As a member of the staff, you were simply expected to do as you were told by your management. No questions asked! However, things have changed. Most of us lead "volunteer" armies! People can pick and choose among many opportunities and employers. If you truly expect to get people to rally around you and accomplish great things, you need to help them envision why you want to go toward your planned destination.

In setting the course and explaining why you are headed for your destination, every leader must be prepared to answer two parts of this question:

1. *Why are you as the leader planning to go in this direction?* Of all the places you could go, why is this the best place? What about this destination makes it special, different, important? What about this destination inspires you and energizes you to put forth the effort required to arrive there?
2. *Why should the people on your team want to go there with you?* This question might be even more important for the people you lead. What about this trip speaks to their needs, hopes, dreams, and desires?

We will explore both parts of the "why" question in this book. The bottom line is that most people want you to explain to them, "What's in it for me?" Unless you can create the same level of motivation and excitement in them that you must personally exhibit, at best you will get lukewarm buy-in and less than full effort. Great objectives require great effort and great passion. Getting people excited about the possibilities for them as individuals as well as for the team is critical to getting the required level of involvement.

Question #3: How Do We Get There?

Once a leader has articulated a vision of where the team is going and why the members of that team should be excited about going there, management must ensure that the team executes. It's the manager's job to help lay out the plan for how to get from where we are to where we hope to arrive. Management is accountable for working with the team to chart the actual course for the intended destination—identifying and planning the required steps needed to get from where we are to where we hope to go. Managers need to work with their team to provide

them the guidance, support, tools, feedback, motivation, and re-wards to ensure that the team can bridge the gap from the cur-rent state to the intended future destination.

Misconceptions about Leadership

Over the years I have met a number of people who aspired to positions of leadership for all the wrong reasons. First of all, leadership is not really about position. It is all about influence. In many organizations the people who truly lead by influence do not necessarily show up at the top of the organization chart. We will talk more about this is a little while.

Following is a list of the common misconceptions:

- *Leadership is all about the rewards.* Many people aspire to a position of leadership because of "what's in it for them." They see leadership as a destination to arrive at where they will receive the perks they feel they deserve. This includes financial rewards, recognition, having people do things for them, and more. They view leadership as a position of privi-lege. These "wanna-be" leaders do not recognize that lead-ership is a responsibility, not a privilege.
- *Leaders are served.* If you ever watch great leaders, you will see that first and foremost, they thrive on serving others. Their purpose is to help the team succeed. Their focus is on working to ensure the personal development and success of the members of their teams. Early in my career, I heard an expression that has stuck with me throughout the years: "When you are a leader, it's never about you!" A true leader is focused on the success, development, happiness of his or her people, clients and management. They are motivated by making a difference in the lives of others, not by accumulat-ing the accoutrements of power. Real leaders know that to lead is to serve, not to be served.

- *Leaders focus on achieving personal goals.* If you look at great leaders throughout history, you will notice a focus on helping others reach their potential—many times at the expense of making their own lives safer or more comfortable. Their entire thought process is about how they can help others achieve their goals. Great leaders know that there are no winners on a losing team. They know that the only success that matters is the team's success. That's why in most sports you rarely see a Most Valuable Player award given to a player whose team did not make the playoffs. If success is a team game, the focus cannot be on individual accomplishments.

- *Leadership means I've made it.* Ascending to a leadership position is not the last step of the journey but, rather, the first step to a new journey. Being promoted to a leadership role isn't an invitation to relax and enjoy the fruits of your labor. It is an invitation to roll up your sleeves and work to help your team chart a course for success. Leadership requires hard work and dedication but many new leaders think that they have arrived and can rest on their laurels.

- *Good managers are natural leaders.* As we've seen, leadership and management are two different sets of muscles. Being able to set a course and inspire people is a different set of skills than being able to work with people to plow the road that gets us to our desired destination. Both effective management and inspired leadership are required for success, but thinking one person automatically has both sets of skills is often a mistake.

Through the Lens of the CIO—The Peter Principle at Play

How many times have you seen someone who is incredibly talented at a position rewarded for their excellence by being promoted to a role for which they are neither prepared nor

(continued)

(*Continued*)

equipped? This is often referred to as the Peter Principle—in an organization, people get promoted up to their level of in-competence. Unfortunately, there is a particularly common and insidious version of this that happens to IT professionals.

Many IT professionals went into the field because of their personality types (often introverts) and the way they are natu-rally wired (logical, organized, curious, scientific thinkers). Their comfort with ideas, concepts, logic, and numbers far exceeds their comfort level with other human beings!

I had a person who I worked with, let's call him John. John was a brilliant technologist who was as dedicated and devoted as any person I've ever worked with. He was a tremendous indi-vidual contributor who was usually found smack dab in the mid-dle of many of the successful projects we ran as an IT organization. John's "reward" for this excellence was to be pro-moted into a management position. What the brilliant leaders and human resource managers involved in this decision failed to take into account is the fact that leading and managing people require very different sets of muscles than being a technical con-tributor. No great thought was given as to whether John pos-sessed the skills required to succeed in this new role. Furthermore, no great thought was given as to providing John the developmental opportunities, mentoring or support system to help him transition into the role of people leader. Many of the people John was asked to manage were peers of his in the orga-nization. Some of them were older and more experienced than John and were resentful that this "whiz kid" was ascending up the corporate food chain faster than they had. John had always been a "straight shooter" who spoke his truth. He didn't have experience with the tact necessary to persuade people to see or do things a different way than they may have been comfortable doing them in the past. John started his new role with a great many strikes against him. He was thrown into a new world

without a map of the terrain, a knowledge of the new language, or a plan as to how to do what seemed to him like a foreign set of responsibilities.

As we fast-forward the clock a year later, John's management was very disappointed. There were all kinds of comments made regarding his performance. "John had shown so much potential, I'm really surprised how badly he is struggling." "John has been a real disappointment; I expected much more from him." About 18 months after John had been promoted for being an exceptional contributor, he was let go from the organization. Very sad . . . let's move on!

Although John certainly contributed to some of the challenges he experienced, in many ways he was also a victim of the situation. He had been promoted into a role without any thought as to whether he had the temperament or abilities to play it effectively. There was no training, support, or mentoring provided to John, and his management, truth be told, were not effective leaders or managers of people themselves! There was plenty of blame to go around, but unfortunately the only person who suffered any fallout from this haste and poor decision was John! Have you seen this movie before? How many times?

In summary, leaders help their people understand where they are going and why they are going there and then empower them through effective management to figure out how to get there.

Leadership Roles

Every leader has to wear several hats. In order to effectively lead the process of change, a person must effectively play numerous roles at various junctures in the transformation process.

Business Executive

First and foremost, a CIO is a business executive. Anyone who has a "C" in the title is expected to function at an executive level and have the broad perspective of the entire organization when making decisions. Functional knowledge and experience is table stakes, not differentiators. Of course the chief marketing officer is an expert at marketing the products and services of the organization and understands how the company fits into the competitive landscape within which it plays. The CFO is expected to be able to master cash flow and determine how best to invest the organization's financial assets for both short-term liquidity and long-term growth. The CIO is expected to be able to leverage technical solutions and information assets to help drive the agenda for the organization. The real value added is when these business leaders can roll up their sleeves and pool both their collective business acumen as well as their specialized functional expertise to help strategize and drive value for the organization. First and foremost, if you want a seat at the table (an expression I can't stand), you have to know what to do once you get there!

Evangelist

A couple of years ago, I heard a presentation at a major technology conference at which I was speaking. The presenter stated that as a leader, it is imperative that you inspire the people on your team. *Inspiration* is not a word that most IT executives use that often. When we think of inspiration, we tend to flash back to fiery football coaches such as Knute Rockne, who exhorted his team to win one for the Gipper. Or perhaps you reflect back on the great charismatic orators of our time, such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., John F. Kennedy,, or President Barack Obama—people who can move others with their vision and their passion.

When I heard this presentation, I must admit that I was a bit intimidated at first. I consider myself many things, but *inspirational* is not necessarily one of the adjectives I would use to describe myself.

However, if you look up the word *inspiration* in Webster's Dictionary you will find several definitions. Here is one of them:

The action or power of moving the intellect or emotions.

Let's reflect on this definition and relate how it applies to effective leaders.

Leadership indeed requires moving the intellect or emotion. Leaders must convince, persuade, and influence people to devote their energies and talents to the pursuit of a worthy objective. Leaders must also reach into a person's emotional place to hit a chord that motivates them to give their best. Leaders are always working to influence the people around them and suggest approaches and ideas that they need others to embrace and pursue. When inspiration is put in these terms, it becomes a little less intimidating and a lot more practical to consider.

Therefore, I would submit to you that the first role that a leader must play is the role of evangelist. Leaders must inspire the key stakeholders within their sphere of influence to embrace new ideas, new approaches, new destinations and directions, and must somehow get the best of people's minds and souls to drum up the required enthusiasm, energy, and commitment needed to drive transformational change.

Captain of the Ship

The next role a leader must play is what I will refer to as being the captain of the ship. In Chapter 2 we will focus a great deal on the concept of creating and embracing a vision. Effective leaders, in essence, set the course for the vessels they are piloting.

They must get people to buy into traveling toward the stated port of destination at the exclusion of other potential destinations that might look more attractive at face value or seem easier to reach. Leaders must also keep people focused on the destination when the winds blow against them and the waters get choppy. They must ensure that the crew is prepared for the long journey of transformation and that there is enough esprit de corps to guard against any potential mutiny in the face of difficulty.

Teacher and Coach

I have seen countless CIOs frustrated by the fact that members of their boards of directors or their executive management teams *don't get it.* They bristle at how little their constituents seem to understand about technology and how it is implemented, and they somehow feel superior because they have a lexicon that others seem to not understand. They also get frustrated when their people make mistakes or fall into traps that may seem obvious to a more experienced person.

One of the critical roles of any effective leader is to be a patient and willing teacher. Consider these four factors:

1. You must be willing and able to explain complex technical ideas and solutions in laymen's terms.
2. You must be willing to educate key stakeholders not only on what you are trying to accomplish but also on why it matters to them and why your approach would be the best.
3. You need to make very accomplished and successful people feel more comfortable living in a world that seems foreign to them and where they may feel inadequate or even stupid.
4. You need to help mentor your people and allow them to grow and develop the skills they need to evolve into effective leaders in their own right.

When a person first learns to drive a car, there seems to be dozens of things that must be done at the same time—check your mirrors, step on the gas, hit your turn signal, check your speed, the list goes on and on. An experienced driver does all of these things without thinking about them. As a matter of fact, most of us drive to work and can't recall much about how we got from point A to point B, as if we were in a trance! But if you ever watch a parent trying to teach a teenager how to drive, you will quickly realize that the things we take for granted and can do in our sleep are things that need to be taught and explained. If you are a sports fan, you may have come to the realization that some of the greatest players often fail when they attempt to transition into the role of coach. For an extremely gifted athlete, it must be very difficult to understand why the young players he is trying to coach can't do the things he was able to accomplish with such ease. Often, the best coaches are those who were, at best, average players. They know what it's like to have to learn and struggle to develop a skill. They have more patience and a greater level of empathy and willingness to teach and explain basic principles to their players.

Part of being an effective coach is also knowing when to teach, when to correct, and when to allow people to fall down and brush themselves off. One of the hardest things to do as a coach or parent is to watch someone you care about make a mistake and stand by as they skin their knees. There is an overwhelming desire to say, "Don't do that! I tried it and it didn't work for me. It's a mistake, and it will cost you." However, part of teaching people is allowing them to discover their own truths and learn their own lessons. Feeling the emotions of short-term failure can be a powerful learning tool. There is a story of a young boy who was watching a caterpillar struggle to break out of its cocoon to become a butterfly. He watched as the tiny creature fought hard to break free from the chrysalis. Eventually, he couldn't take it anymore and made a cut in the cocoon for the

creature to break through. When it emerged, instead of flying away, the butterfly dropped to the ground. It was unable to fly because it lacked the strength in its wings that would have been developed as it worked to break through of its own volition. Part of being a coach and teacher is knowing when to allow your people to make mistakes, struggle, and strengthen their wings so that they have the wherewithal to be able to fly on their own.

Cheerleader

An often-overlooked role of great leaders is that of cheerleader. Most of us have grown up in a hard world where we are expected to be strong, tough, self-motivated adults. Perhaps we didn't receive a lot of accolades or attaboys from people in authority positions. People are often raised in a way that values independence and individuality. That is all well and good. However, many of us can remember a childhood experience where a coach or teacher said a kind word or recognized an accomplishment. How did that make us feel? Can you remember being really down and feeling you would never be able to accomplish an important goal when perhaps a friend or parent told you to hang in there a little longer and eventually the tide would turn in your favor? Being a cheerleader for your team simply means that you recognize their efforts, give them a pat on the back, and take the time and effort to catch them doing something right and recognize them for it. We all want to feel appreciated and valued. An occasional pat on the back or supportive word at a difficult time might mean more to a person than you can ever know.

Strategist

Part of being an effective business leader involves helping to develop and lay out the strategic direction for your organization. This includes not only understanding your company's stated

mission and direction, as well as its strengths and weaknesses, but also understanding the competitive landscape within which you play to see how to best position your organization for success. Today more than at any time in the past, technology and information are absolutely critical components to the strategy of any organization in any industry. Whether it is leveraging consumer knowledge to more effectively position your products or services or using social media to market and publicize your efforts, technology is at the center of how we live and do business. Therefore, the CIO not only needs a *seat at the table* but also the will to drive the strategy for competing in the twenty-first-century marketplace. IT is no longer a backroom function and a cost of doing business; if leveraged effectively, it can be a competitive differentiator that spells the difference between market leadership and bankruptcy!

Innovator

Now more than ever, the IT function is expected to help drive a company's innovation engine. Whether that means leveraging technology to market and communicate key messages, using business intelligence to help drive strategic usage of assets, or ensuring that your executive team is able to collaborate anywhere at any time, innovation is an expectation. It's not enough for IT to enable innovation. Part of our leadership role is to drive innovation and recommend creative uses of technology to help a company differentiate itself in a crowded and competitive marketplace.

Shop Foreman

Many IT executives bristle at the thought of IT as a utility. I agree that if all IT is to an organization is a utility, that organization has done a poor job of leveraging what can be a key value creator.

However, let's remember that in any hierarchy of value, the only way the top rung is reached is by solidifying the bottom steps on the ladder. Ignore the utility aspect of IT at your own peril! Let's see how many strategic conversations your executive team is having with you if e-mail is constantly down. No one will take you seriously as the architect of business strategy if you can't even keep the lights on in your own house. I am not suggesting that your focus should be on the tactical aspects of commodity services. I am simply stating that in order to earn the credibility required to add value at a strategic level, you need to ensure that the trains run on time every day. Running the IT factory so that services are consistently delivered on time, on value, and on budget is not very sexy. It is, however, an imperative; it is job one for a CIO.

Lessons Learned

In this chapter we have compared and contrasted the concepts of leadership and management. We have also defined some of the key roles that effective leaders must play in transforming their organizations. Let's recap what we've learned:

- Leadership and management are different sets of muscles.
- Leadership focuses on helping people understand where the team is going and why the stated destination has been chosen.
- Management helps people figure out how to chart the course to arrive at the stated destination.
- Transformational leaders are required to play many roles. These include:
  - Business executive—helping drive business outcomes such as revenue creation and expansion, process re-engineering, and cost efficiency for the organization

First Things First: What Is Leadership?

- Evangelist—inspiring your people and getting them fired up about the journey you are about to embark upon
- Captain of the ship—charting the course for success
- Teacher and coach—providing people the skills and tools they require to successfully complete the journey
- Cheerleader—pumping people up and keeping them motivated even when challenges occur and success is not in sight
- Strategist—developing the strategies required to complete the mission
- Innovator—working with people to think outside the box and develop novel approaches to addressing the challenges that stand between you and your objectives
- Shop foreman—the unglamorous but critical role of running the utility and keeping the lights on while you climb the value chain