

01 / 28 / 14



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Translating IT-Ese Into C-Suite-Speak

Remember that time when the CIO got on an analyst call? Neither does anyone else. There's a reason for that.

Research shows that a big reason why CIOs don't get the support of other c-suite executives is that they simply do not talk the right talk – at least, not the kind of talk that resonates with their bosses.

Is it hard to master CFO/CEO speak? Not really. Think and talk in units of money, not bytes, and you are already halfway there.

A 2011 report from consulting firm Deloitte found that 45% of the CFOs surveyed said IT directly reported into them. Another 25% had a dotted-line relationship with IT.

But CFOs, by virtue of their education and professional duties, are all about numbers and what those numbers mean for their company. Often, many CFOs told Deloitte, they simply do not understand what the CIO is talking about.

Partly, the problems arise from a CIO's professional background and training.

Research from consulting firm E&Y finds that 49% of CIOs have an IT degree, while only 10% have a business degree, and the majority of their career has been spent in IT. E&Y also found that CIOs have less than 1-in-5 chance of having a seat at the top management table.

That may be changing, though. Other research, outlined in a Harvard Business Review [article](#), shows a demand for "hybrid CIOs" with business smarts, a knowledge of analytics, and an understanding of how to align IT with business goals.

The hybrid CIO has to know how to both walk the walk and talk the talk. Communicating all this in ways other c-suiters understand is key.

Privately, a CIO of a Fortune 50 company offered a pointer: when he talks with his CEO, he never talks features. "I talk benefits, how what I am proposing will benefit the company and also our customers."

A CEO or CFO doesn't want to hear about the specs of a new processor, or how BYOD poses immense challenges to the organization's infrastructure and security.

They want to know what CFOs and CEOs always want to know: do the benefits outweigh the costs, including the cost of inaction, creating value?

A good first step in speaking the right language in conversations with other key decision makers: banish all tech buzzwords. They clog the ear and glaze the eye. Your fellow executives want to know how they'll benefit. Period.

For instance, in talking about virtualized data centers, dodge the mechanics and talk about the benefits of agility, nimbleness and cost efficiencies. Talk hard, quantifiable numbers. That's music to a CFO's ear.


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