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Media Release

So You Want A New CIO Position – Do You Have What It Takes?

MIS spoke to leading executive search consultant Stephen Lennard, Joint Managing Director of Crown & Marks Executive Search, to find out what CIO experience and personal characteristics are on the scorecard when the senior roles open up.

Stephen narrowed the prerequisite criteria down to these ten points, which he says will vary in priority from case to case but will almost always form the basis of an executive search assignment to find the best CIO in the market.

10 - International Experience. Most of the high profile positions for Australian CIOs are with companies with a global outlook. Increasingly I am asked to find a CIO who can demonstrate an understanding of foreign markets and the cultural implications of doing business within those markets, particularly in the Asia Pacific Region.

9 - Ability to Attract and Develop Great Talent. Too often this is overlooked as an important role for the CIO executive. Leaders in any field need to be able to attract and inspire the best people. I am always impressed with executives who can qualify their ability to hire and motivate.

8 - Adaptable Experience Across Industries. In many of my search assignment briefs I'm asked to find an executive from the client's industry, for example banking, retail or insurance. However, often I suggest the client considers executives with similar experience from parallel industries - people who can bring to the position new ideas and ways of working. For CIOs particularly, this is becoming the best way to maintain a career path while broadening your experience.

7 - Ability to Embrace and Manage Change. In almost every search for a CIO the client is looking to instigate a process of change as apposed to just finding a replacement for the outgoing person. A significant number of these positions are also newly created or significantly upgraded where the organisation has experienced growth and expansion. Either way the client is looking for a person with new strategic thinking which might mean a change in the business' processes, efficiencies and competitiveness. Business process reengineering and continuous process improvement are on the minds of many CEOs, especially in these tough economic conditions.

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6 - Technical Vision. Obviously the CIO needs to be IT savvy but more important is their ability to use their skills to constantly add value to the business process by redefining the boundaries that help reduce costs and improve efficiencies. Knowledge in areas such as e-commerce, ERP, CRM, sales-force automation and data warehousing must be demonstrated but become less of a focus in the executive search process. At this level we are moving away from testing your technical abilities.

5 - Communication Skills. As the new CIO you will be required to join the decision makers at the top table which means you have to be able to share your ideas and thoughts clearly and concisely. As important will be your ability to listen, interpret, persuade and negotiate. The CEO will be looking for someone they are confident can represent the firm in all communications facets, including public speaking.

4 - Management Skills. Having hired the right people you will be under the spotlight for your ability to motivate and coach them while running the operation to budget and deadline. Clear project management skills are essential along with your ability to manage resources, suppliers and business partners.

3 - Culture Fit. The executive search process takes into consideration many factors relating to competency, however, at Crown we also work with our clients to find the person who fits the organisational culture. It is possible to match the individual's values with the corporate values to maximise the potential for a successful relationship. Today's CIO has to be able to build relationships with people at all levels. Even the most technically brilliant person can fail at this level if there is a breakdown in this area.

2 - Business Acumen. It is time to move from being a senior IT manager to a business leader and that means a whole new way of thinking. Imperative to your success will be your understanding of the industry in question and the company's business strategy, which the CEO has put in place. To add value to that business plan you will require a foundation in accounting, finance, marketing, sales and distribution to name just a few.

And the No. 1 prerequisite for a Chief Information Officer...

1 - Leadership. On almost every assignment I am looking for leadership and it is this quality that secures the deal. If you add up all the other qualities I have listed you are on your way to being a great CIO leader. Look around at the leaders you admire, they are almost always, passionate, charismatic, confident, helpful, principled, goal orientated and creative people. Leaders bring out the best in others and are respected for their ability to set the pace. There is no doubt; true leaders do rise to the top.

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