

## What Do Internal IT Departments and Outside IT Vendors Have in Common?

THEY ARE BOTH LOOKING FOR A PROVERBIAL "SEAT AT THE TABLE."

MOREOVER, BOTH WILL TELL YOU THAT GAINING THIS SEAT IS NO EASY TASK!

The IT department and the IT staffing community are more similar than some CIOs and CTOs may think. First, consider how often IT is challenged to prove its value in order to earn a seat in the board room. Second, think about how often IT is (mistakenly) viewed as a cost-driver rather than a strategic business unit. IT staffing providers are frequently viewed through the same lens by CIOs and CTOs. They must differentiate themselves – proving their value – in order to secure any face time with IT leadership. Moreover, many IT staffing providers are seen as “necessary evils” rather than valued business partners, essential to maintain a competitive edge in the market place. Bottom line? Queue: “We are all in this together!”

### Similarity #1: Need for Business Knowledge

In my experience — working for an IT staffing provider and working with thousands of IT leaders daily — IT departments and IT staffing vendors must both do one thing very well to earn that coveted seat at the grown up table: Gain intelligence that positions them to solve business problems for their respective customers. Only by understanding the company strategy and operations they support can IT, and IT vendors, make a substantially positive impact.

I’ve found the following question to be extremely valuable in helping both parties gain this necessary insight: What’s the business challenge are you tasked with solving, not just the specific need in question? Whether you’re an IT leader or an IT recruiter, the guy or girl with the best answers rarely wins; he or she is too busy talking. More often than not, the person with the best questions has the advantage.

### WHY AN IT LEADER SHOULD WANT THE ANSWER FROM HIS/HER INTERNAL CUSTOMER:

To be a better partner, it’s essential that IT leaders engage in a business-first focused dialogue with their customers. What business challenge is my customer tasked with solving? The internal customer and IT need to develop a clear understanding of the business challenges so the technology solutions later employed actually facilitate the desired outcome. My experience shows that, all too often, the true business challenge is not understood until it is too late, if at all. In these unfortunate scenarios, technology solutions are built on partial understanding or even misunderstanding – a drain of energy and effort! The ability to really understand the end goal or desired business outcome is not always easy. In fact, most IT leaders have learned that what the customer directly asks for is not always exactly what it needs. Nonetheless, it is worth the effort to dig for the root issues at play. To be sure

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IT works toward building the right solution, they first need to be great at asking the right questions.

### WHY AN IT RECRUITER SHOULD WANT TO KNOW THE ANSWER:

The days of a recruiter making a placement within an IT organization without understanding the organization's business challenges should be over. Knowing the business challenges IT customers are tasked with solving enables recruiters to source people who have helped solve similar problems in the past. Clients frequently tell those in the recruiting industry that they need technical professionals to have the business acumen required to be productive and work collaboratively with end users. Knowing the business drivers behind IT initiatives, then, is critical when we screen our candidates.

Unfortunately, recruiters have become further and further removed from their customers' business over the years. The over-reliance on the "electronic exchange" has helped simplify the vendor management process, but simultaneously made recruiting top talent far less effective. Why? Because you cannot expect to receive the most qualified IT talent by providing nothing more than an electronic job description to your recruiters. This approach most often yields candidates with the right "buzz words" on their resumes – but not those candidates who are vetted through a tailored screening process, ensuring they are a business, technical and cultural fit.

**Talent is not a commodity. It's a valuable rarity organizations can leverage to obtain an inimitable, sustainable competitive advantage.**

Another reason IT recruiters should want this information involves respecting the experience of the IT consultant. The best IT consultants receive hundreds of calls annually about potential opportunities. Most of these calls last only a few short minutes because the inexperienced or mediocre recruiter quickly steers the conversation to an exchange of technical buzzwords. High performing IT consultants, however, want to engage in conversation around the business drivers behind the IT initiative their role would support. When recruiters are not equipped with this insight, many matches that could have been beneficial for all parties involved never get off the ground due to a lack of ability from the "messenger" to articulate the "whys" behind the need, or the full scope of the available opportunity.

### Similarity #2: Presenting Solutions

Clearly, once armed with the necessary business insight, it's critical for IT leaders and staffing vendors to build appropriate solutions. Equally as important, IT leaders and staffing providers should be aware of how they share their solutions.

In speaking with several of my friends in the CIO / CTO world, the ability to gain business buy in for a proposed technical solution has led many-o-IT leader to serious levels of frustration, to leave roles or even be asked to leave them. This doesn't have to be the broader reality, however. The fundamental roadblock many times is a matter of presentation.

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### A FRAMEWORK I'VE FOUND HELPFUL IN TEE-ING UP TECHNICAL OR NON-TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS IS AS FOLLOWS:

1. Landscape: Confirm the business — not technical — challenges driving the need and the business problems caused
2. Process: Discuss, in operational — not technical — language exactly how you will go about addressing those business challenges
3. What's In It For Me (WIIFM): State the qualitative and quantitative business — not technical — benefits as a result of your solution

### WHY THIS FRAMEWORK IS HELPFUL FOR IT LEADERS:

In most cases, the people from which buy-in is needed include the CEO, COO and CFO. With all due respect, these folks don't tend to welcome a lot of tech talk. Just as when an IT vendor calls on an IT leader, these roles typically ask IT two questions: How long is the meeting going to take; and how much is it going to cost me? If IT leaders respond with technical jargon or start off with all of the "process" information around workload and LOEs, they're finished before they've even begun. The Landscape — Process — WIIFM model helps to transition the dialogue from tactical and painfully obligatory to strategic and, dare I say, exciting with business-relevant possibilities.

### WHY THIS FRAMEWORK IS HELPFUL FOR IT RECRUITERS:

Any IT staffing provider can ask the question I shared earlier: "What's the business challenge are you tasked with solving, not just the specific need in question?" Only a select few are savvy enough, or listen enough, to be able to truly tailor a solution. An IT staffing provider able to use this three-pronged framework will ensure it understands the customer's challenge, has a process in place to address it and is working toward producing the ideal end-state according to the customer's definition.

### Conclusion:

I've witnessed the IT department at TEKsystems revolutionize its value by understanding the business and presenting its ideas within a business context. But don't take my word that this approach works. I encourage you to try it on for size. See how your customers respond. Meanwhile, start holding your IT staffing providers to these standards. Those that approach you by seeking business insight and presenting business solutions will out-partner and out-perform those that don't every time.



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[mmcsally@teksystems.com](mailto:mmcsally@teksystems.com)

410.540.7404