

Personal business plan

Taking control of your IT career

A number of factors have a bearing on the careers of IT leaders at all levels. These include balancing short, medium and long-term perspectives, the power asymmetry, the skill pyramid and, importantly, the personal business plan (PBP). With the rapidly changing nature of IT leadership at all levels, understanding how to anticipate, respond to and exceed the expectations of your organisation are important skills to master. For the individual, there can be no more important a judgement call than setting your own career direction. This direction setting should occur progressively through all stages of a career. The primary objective behind the development of a PBP is to get you from your current situation to a better situation while taking greater control over the evolution of your career. Expecting your employer to place your long-term career objectives ahead of their short-term objectives is probably not a good default strategy.

Here are a few key questions to ask yourself to get the process started in the evolution of your PBP.

What's my direction?

Having a carefully thought through career direction is probably your biggest asset. Do you see yourself as transiting through IT leadership to bigger and brighter things? Want to run your own business? Consider yourself an entrepreneur? Asking yourself why you are doing what you are doing should help in testing any assumptions you may have made about your overall future direction. Your direction is also

likely to change at various stages in your career; however make sure it is on your terms.

What's my career investment strategy?

As with any business, your career needs conscious investment in time, effort, and skill and experience acquisition. Once you have set a broad career direction, what concrete plans are you going to put in place to develop and keep your leadership, commercial, industry, technical or other skills relevant and current?

What am I good at?

Here, I'm not referring to your technical skills. Are your real strengths in managing people? Are you an excellent presenter? We all tend to enjoy doing what we're good at; however this approach may be self-limiting unless you push yourself out of your comfort zone by taking on, or seeking out new opportunities. Stress test your assumptions about what you think you're good at.

What is my value proposition?

Can you articulate your intrinsic value proposition to a range of prospective employers? Your value proposition is about what value you bring to an

employer, and has less to do with what you have done.

What's my risk appetite?

If you are risk averse, and seeking security in a role as an IT leader, the two may be mutually exclusive in the medium term. IT leadership is all about leading in a volatile and uncertain environment. It's what keeps us fresh, current and engaged. Enjoy the challenge, as few get to be at the intersection of many activities, processes and technologies all at the same time.

What is my real network?

Professional networking is a somewhat overused word and is clearly not just the exchange of business cards. In the context of your career, your network is more to do with peering and the exchange of value with a touch of trust. To develop effective networks, you need to get out and about outside of your normal environment. Once you see yourself as running your own business, and that is to work for one client at a time — your employer — the importance of taking control and ownership over your own career through your own personal business plan should become apparent. Enjoy the challenges and freedom that accompanies that perspective. **CIO**



Rob is a respected and experienced CIO, with more than three decades of industry and ICT experience. Over the last 16 years, he has held the CIO role at several multinationals, most recently Ricoh. He is the owner of Rob Livingstone Advisory and a fellow of University of Technology, Sydney. Rob delivers the Pathways Advanced and Business ICT Leadership programs in conjunction with the CIO Executive Council.