



# **THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE IT ADMINISTRATORS**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In today's business environment, the network is the business. Without email, the Internet, IM, VoIP, and dozens of other technologies, effective business communication simply can't happen. For the people charged with selecting, implementing, and maintaining the networks and applications that support business goals, the challenges have never been greater. In this whitepaper, we take a look at the seven habits of highly effective administrators: those job skills and personal qualities that will allow IT administrators to build success for their careers and their companies.

## **HABIT ONE: BE BUSINESS SAVVY**

The savvy IT administrator is engaged with people at all levels and departments within the organization. It isn't enough to simply interact with your fellow IT department members; you need to engage with business line managers, product managers, and executives. By interacting with a more diverse group of coworkers, you'll get access to the business intelligence that's as likely to be shared during the company softball game as it is during a formal business meeting.

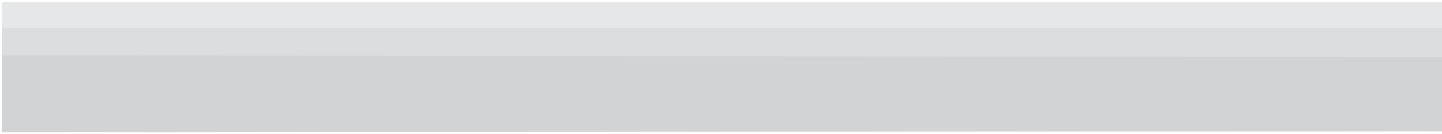
This intimate knowledge of what's happening in your organization will be invaluable when you're faced with the all-too-common scenario of deploying your resources to meet competing goals. By developing an understanding of who the players are—and who they aren't—you can more easily make IT decisions that will positively impact your company. For example, if you know that the sales and marketing organizations are planning to increase ecommerce initiatives, you can invest early in the research, acquisition, purchase, and management of the hardware and software this channel requires.

All of your internal customers are looking to IT to help solve their business issues. But how do you decide whether to implement a new collections system or a new contact management system? You'll likely start by evaluating the current solutions. Are they working as expected? Can small changes be made to improve performance? Are the systems effectively obsolete, making any further investment of questionable value?

You also need to evaluate the business environment. Which system is more urgent? Which will have a greater impact on the company's revenue and profitability? By understanding the business realities on the ground, you can position yourself to make smarter decisions. For instance, what if you knew that the business unit seeking a new contact management system was growing at 200 percent a year, and would be responsible for the company's next product rollout? This information makes your decision an easier one, but you can't always count on the intelligence being readily available. Only by playing an active and visible role in your company can you develop the business savvy that will help you succeed.

## **HABIT TWO: SET EXPECTATIONS APPROPRIATELY**

Everybody's an expert, right? How many times has a business manager come to you and told you exactly what technology solution she needs to solve her business issue? It's a critical part of your job to not only select the most appropriate solutions, but also to set expectations properly so that your users understand how much the solution will cost, how long it will take to deploy, and exactly what it can and can't do.



Too often, it's the IT administrator who takes the hit when a solution doesn't meet expectations. It's in your best interests to close the gap between the business side of the house and IT. When managers know up front what they can expect, your job is much easier. And when you deliver in line with expectations, you'll be putting yourself in a better position to meet the expectations of your internal customers and fulfill the requirements of your service level agreement.

### **HABIT THREE: BE FINANCIALLY PRUDENT**

In order to make effective decisions, IT administrators must understand common financial terms like return on investment (ROI) and total cost of ownership (TCO) and be ready to discuss them with business line managers. By understanding both the upfront and long-term costs of technology solutions, you'll be better able to guide your organization in making technology choices that will positively impact the business.

Managing your budget involves looking not only at expenditures, but also at expected returns. By working with business line managers to understand how they manage P&L, you become a partner who helps them achieve their business goals as you spend your budget wisely.

### **HABIT FOUR: BE A TECHNOLOGY REALIST**

It's probably not a stretch to say that you love technology. But as an IT administrator, you also need to be a technology realist. While you may admire the elegance of a new technology solution, you're realistic enough to know that what matters for your company is how that technology can be applied to solve business problems, improve processes, and increase sales. You have to be prepared to say no to shiny new software if it can't solve the pain points your company is experiencing.

By staying up-to-date on the latest technology as well as those coming down the road, you can separate the must-haves from the want-to-haves. And in doing this, you'll be looked at as a credible source for technology advice and roadmapping, increasing your strategic value and enhancing your career.

### **HABIT FIVE: BE CREDENTIAL READY, PRACTICE PROVEN**

You're working in a global community, full of people with top-notch educations and certifications. Employers are selecting candidates from this international talent pool, so you need to be able to compete. In this environment, certifications really do matter. Be sure to take advantage of employer reimbursement programs for training opportunities, but don't be afraid to invest in certifications on your own—you'll quickly realize the return on this investment in your career.

It's also important to have practical experience and not be afraid to get your hands dirty. Stay on top of emerging technologies, and take every opportunity to get involved with new implementations to keep your skills sharp and up-to-date. IT administrators who understand both the theory and practice of technology will see their achievements reflected in their salary and benefits.

## HABIT SIX: BE DIPLOMATIC

In your role as an IT administrator, you'll find yourself working with a diverse group of people in a wide variety of situations. From IT management to product managers, you'll need to develop diplomatic skills that will allow you to navigate smoothly through your organization. Keep in mind that you'll be called upon to explain technology to nontechnical employees and you should learn how to explain pros and cons in language they can relate to.

## HABIT SEVEN: CULTIVATE AN OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOK

The job of an IT administrator is a tough one. You're forced to manage dozens of demands, expectations, and realities from internal customers throughout your organization. You're the first person they'll call when something goes wrong, but you may never hear about it when things go right. When you come to work in the morning in a positive frame of mind, your day will fly by, and you're more likely to have a fulfilling career.

## THE RESULT

These seven habits of highly effective IT administrators are intended to be a useful guide to building your career. If you adopt them, the rewards can be high. You'll play a prominent role in your company, working directly with business line and product managers, presenting to executives and the board of directors, and dealing with customers and partners. You'll be contributing to the success of your company, not just operating a support function with little visibility and few rewards.

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