Aspiring and Residing IT Leaders: A Legacy for the Future

By Keith W. McIntosh

any people think there is a quick road to leadership success. Those who want to become IT leaders—that is, aspiring leaders—often think: “If I just do my job well, I will rise to a leadership position.” Those who are already IT leaders—that is, residing leaders—often think: “If I just do my job well, I will leave a lasting legacy.”
Doing a job well is necessary, of course. But it’s the minimum. People are hired to do their job well. In addition, both aspiring and residing leaders need to ask themselves: “What am I doing to help other people perform their job well? What am I doing to help grow my organization?” Leaders must get involved beyond what they are asked to do in their current or primary role.

Whether aspiring or residing, leaders need to do more. People often ask me what steps to take to become a leader and also what actions to take to develop leaders in their professional community. The way I would summarize my answer to both questions is to repeat what my father, James L. McIntosh, used to tell me: “Get involved beyond what you’re called to do.”

Aspiring Leaders

An aspiring leader is someone who wants to be or could be a future IT leader within an organization, community, or institution. To advance in the higher education IT profession and cultivate their leadership skills, aspiring leaders should take three steps: (1) complete a self-assessment; (2) create a plan or roadmap; and (3) work the plan.

Step 1: Complete a Self-Assessment

Aspiring leaders should become self-aware and recognize their personal strengths and weaknesses. They can do this by asking questions, completing tests/assessments, speaking with others (peers, trusted allies, senior leaders), and taking time to reflect. The following are some critical questions to ask:

1. What motivates me?
2. What part of my work do I enjoy most?
3. What part of my work concerns me most?
4. How am I developing myself?
5. What are my professional skills?
6. What do I need to improve?
7. What is my most significant professional achievement?
8. What are my goals for the next three to five years?
9. In what areas do I need support?
10. What do I not know?

In addition, various tools are available to aid with self-assessment, such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (http://www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics/), and the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) Assessment Suite (http://www.ccl.org/leadership/assessments/assessment360.aspx).

The one that I am most familiar with is a tool I used while participating in the CIO Executive Council’s Pathways Leadership Development Program (http://council.cio.com/pathways.html). I began the program sixteen months after I started working at Pima Community College. I was fortunate that my boss at the time, Kirk Kelly, supported my professional development endeavors.

One of the first steps in the program is to use the Future-State CIO Executive Competencies Assessment Tool (https://www.cioexecutivecouncil.com/survey/pub_csuite.html) to complete a self-assessment. This in-depth tool focuses on nine key competencies for CIOs and other C-level leaders. My own assessment showed that I scored lowest in three competencies: commercial orientation, market knowledge, and external customer focus. As a result, I was able to target my professional development toward improving my performance in those areas.

EDUCAUSE also has a suite of management and leadership programs (http://www.educause.edu/ProfessionalDevelopment/EDUCAUSEInstitute/Management/and/10285). I have firsthand knowledge of the quality of these programs and the caliber of the instructors. I completed the EDUCAUSE Institute Leadership Program in 2009 and look forward to attending additional EDUCAUSE professional-development events. Attending EDUCAUSE regional and national conferences can also offer a wider picture of higher education information technology beyond our individual institutions. Finally, the contacts made and relationships started at these meetings are key to broadening professional networks.

Step 2: Create a Plan or Roadmap

With the self-assessment completed, deficiencies have been revealed and the areas that need work are clear. Now these need to be laid out and put down on paper. It is time to prepare and document a plan. What needs to be accomplished in year one, year two, year three, year four, year five?

I am a very goal-oriented person. Just as organizations prepare strategic plans, I believe that leaders should have a personal strategic action plan and vision looking three to five years ahead. This personal action plan should lay out a strategy to purposely and coherently move toward achieving stated goals and objectives. These goals could include improving competency weaknesses, studying IT leaders, seeking leadership challenges, finding a mentor, establishing a peer network, volunteering in professional associations, contributing to industry publications, and/or continuing with formal education.

Not all of the goals will be achieved. I’m a perfectionist. One of the things that I’ve had to learn is to loosen up just a bit. Because in the past, if I listed ten goals and achieved seven, I called that a failure. I’d be worried about those three things that I didn’t get done, rather than focusing on the seven things that did get done. So now I gauge my success based on how far I’ve moved forward during the year. I can reassess midway and...
ultimately, it is each person’s own responsibility to move forward with his or her action plan.

I believe that the relationship between a residing leader and his or her direct reports has much to do with how staff are allowed to grow, their willingness to grow, and how inspired they are to grow. As Philip J. Goldstein noted in an EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research (ECAR) survey and study on leading the IT workforce: “A sizeable proportion of respondents ... reported lower levels of satisfaction with the quality of their interactions with their supervisors. The quality of these interactions appears to have a bearing on how satisfied respondents are with their jobs, how motivated they are to perform them, and how long they plan to remain at their current institution.”

To improve these interactions, prepare the next generation of IT leaders, and leave a lasting legacy, residing leaders should take three steps: (1) get to know staff; (2) provide staff with opportunities and challenges; and (3) give feedback, encouragement, and support.

**Step 1: Get to Know Staff**
I am a fan of the leadership speaker and writer John C. Maxwell. In his book *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, he noted: “People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” In his book *Everyone Communicates, Few Connect: What the Most Effective People Do Differently*, Maxwell stated that more than 90 percent of all connecting occurs one-on-one. This is something that I always have to work on, because I’m a very quiet person by nature. (Of course, if you get me jazzed up about a subject, I can talk your ear off.)

By talking one-on-one with a direct report, carving out time to discuss professional development on a regular basis—and I do this with my direct reports on a bi-weekly basis for about forty-five minutes to an hour—a supervisor can really get to know that person, and vice versa. Once people know that their supervisor cares about them, they’ll be more willing to share their hopes and their dreams and what they aspire to do.

I’ll give an example. When I first got to Pima, I had one person on my staff who said, in our one-on-one meetings, that he (I’m using a generic “he” here) didn’t like information technology and didn’t even want to work in the field. I said: “Really? Well, why are you doing it?” He answered that he was doing what he had to do to make ends meet. I then found out what this person really did want to do, so our dialogue became less about the IT areas and more about where he wanted to go. I’ve also discovered that other people want to remain in the IT organization but on a different track. I’m willing to help them do that, even if that means they leave me to take a position somewhere else.

The residing leader needs to ask staff questions, listen to them, learn their backgrounds, find out what their goals and dreams are, and assess their capability. The residing leader needs to care more, connect more, communicate more.

**Step 2: Provide Staff with Opportunities and Challenges**
In “Taking Control of Your Career,” William F. Hogue and David W. Dodd, two residing higher education CIOs, wrote: “Effective leaders ask their followers to stretch, to achieve goals that are challenging and seemingly out of reach.”

Before I moved into my current role, my boss put me in charge of our LMS replacement project and selection team. I had the opportunity to work closely with faculty for the first time. This was a slight challenge for me, but it was also a great opportunity: I ended up learning a great deal from the faculty members on the team.

Every time that I’ve grown in my career, it has been when I was pushed beyond what I was accustomed to doing. It’s sort of like working out with weights. If I work out with 25-pound weights for six months in a row, I’ll be used to that weight. But if I want to increase my muscle strength and endurance, I have to start using heavier weights or do more repetitions.

I believe in giving people small, medium, and large opportunities and challenges. Start small and progress to larger ones. Provide people with access to...
observe others who are leading medium and large opportunities. I also believe in giving them room to fail. Some projects have no room for failure, of course. But wherever possible, I think it is necessary to allow staff to grow by offering them opportunities in areas where failures are not going to affect the institution as a whole but are going to allow them to learn. Because they can learn from their mistakes just as well as they can from their successes.

I don’t ever want to set somebody up for failure. Staff simply need to know that they have the latitude to fail. In my career to date, if I had known that I simply could not, 100 percent, fail in a project, I would have been inhibited and would probably not have taken risks. I am much more likely to take a risk if I know I have room to fail.

Getting out of our comfort zone is where growth happens. We have to be willing to do those things that are uncomfortable, uneasy. Residing leaders can challenge their staff in various additional ways:

- Define clear expectations for the future
- Ensure that staff develop professionally
- Send staff to training
- Help staff develop both hard and soft skills
- Provide exposure to senior IT leaders
- Help staff find mentors

The EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research (ECAR) offers the following:

- Expose potential leaders to institutional functions and priorities that senior leaders must understand.
- Encourage potential leaders to take advantage of professional networking and leadership development opportunities offered by organizations such as EDUCAUSE.
- Act as mentors and encourage qualified aspirants to pursue the CIO role.3

**Step 3: Give Feedback, Encouragement, and Support**

Step 3 closes the circle and returns to step 1: get to know staff members. Be sincere. Truly care. A lack of connection, a lack of trust, damages the supervisor-staff relationship. Staff need timely, genuine, honest, specific, and respectful feedback. They need to hear: “Hey, you did a great job.” Feedback reinforces their confidence, helping them to move to the next level. Ralph Waldo Emerson said: “Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be.”

Residing leaders need to focus on improvement and the future; they need to be coach, cheerleader, critic, and mentor; they need to encourage staff to find the time for important projects and priorities; they need to communicate their high expectations of and belief in their staff; and they need to instill confidence. This is the responsibility of the community of higher education residing IT leaders: to proactively grow the next generation of leaders.

A residing leader should identify two or three people who may not even know they have the potential to be future IT leaders, and then provide the opportunities for them to grow. Wherever they are, they can start right there and move forward. In “Leading the IT Workforce in Higher Education,” Philip J. Goldstein stated: “Arguably, the legacy of a leader is his or her ability to prepare others to assume positions of leadership…. In turn, the sustained success of a professional community is a direct result of the collective actions of existing leaders to nurture a pipeline of future leaders.”

**Summary**

I have one statement and one question for aspiring leaders and one statement and one question for residing leaders.

**Aspiring Leaders**

Remember that what you do today will determine who you’ll be tomorrow. You can’t wake up in five years expecting something magical to happen if you haven’t done the planning and the work now.

Where do you want to be in five years?

**Residing Leaders**

Remember to believe in your staff. Try to treat everyone like a 10, because that’s their potential, and help them get there.

What is your leadership legacy—what have you done to further the IT community within higher education?

**Notes**


© 2012 Keith W. McIntosh. The text of this article is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License ([http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0)).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMX—EDUCAUSE Gold Partner</td>
<td>1-800-222-2893</td>
<td><a href="http://www.amxcampus.com">www.amxcampus.com</a></td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apogee</td>
<td>1-877-478-8858 x333</td>
<td><a href="http://www.apogee.us">www.apogee.us</a></td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Bang—EDUCAUSE Bronze Partner</td>
<td>1-414-369-5225</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ui4you.com">www.ui4you.com</a></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Management—EDUCAUSE Gold Partner</td>
<td>1-866-397-2537</td>
<td><a href="http://www.campusmanagement.com/uoOttawa">www.campusmanagement.com/uoOttawa</a></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDW-G—EDUCAUSE Platinum Partner</td>
<td>1-800-767-4239</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cdwg.com/datastorageredreport">www.cdwg.com/datastorageredreport</a></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Datatel—EDUCAUSE Platinum Partner</td>
<td>1-701-968-9200</td>
<td><a href="http://www.datatel.com/educaes">www.datatel.com/educaes</a></td>
<td>outside back cover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean Evans &amp; Associates—EDUCAUSE Bronze Partner</td>
<td>1-800-440-3994</td>
<td><a href="http://www.dea.com/edu">www.dea.com/edu</a></td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epson—EDUCAUSE Gold Partner</td>
<td>1-800-927-8439</td>
<td><a href="http://www.epson.com/higherED">www.epson.com/higherED</a></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hobsons—EDUCAUSE Bronze Partner</td>
<td>1-617-492-9099</td>
<td><a href="http://www.jenzabar.com">www.jenzabar.com</a></td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenzabar—EDUCAUSE Platinum Partner</td>
<td>1-800-985-8933</td>
<td><a href="http://www.laserfiche.com">www.laserfiche.com</a></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laserfiche—EDUCAUSE Bronze Partner</td>
<td>1-866-224-3721</td>
<td><a href="http://www.longsight.com">www.longsight.com</a></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longsight Group</td>
<td>1-888-298-8222</td>
<td><a href="http://www.navisite.com">www.navisite.com</a></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NaviSite</td>
<td>1-800-428-4466</td>
<td><a href="http://www.pearsonlearningsolutions.com">www.pearsonlearningsolutions.com</a></td>
<td>inside front cover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson—EDUCAUSE Platinum Partner</td>
<td>1-800-444-8031</td>
<td><a href="http://www.realnetworks.com/helix">www.realnetworks.com/helix</a></td>
<td>inside back cover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RealNetworks—EDUCAUSE Bronze Partner</td>
<td>1-877-789-7987</td>
<td><a href="http://www.sonicfoundry.com">www.sonicfoundry.com</a></td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spectrum Industries</td>
<td>1-800-237-1262</td>
<td><a href="http://www.spectrumfurniture.com">www.spectrumfurniture.com</a></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steelcase—EDUCAUSE Gold Partner</td>
<td>1-800-359-9939</td>
<td><a href="http://www.steelcase.com/collaborate">www.steelcase.com/collaborate</a></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VeraLab</td>
<td>1-650-990-0860</td>
<td><a href="http://www.veralab.com">www.veralab.com</a></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workday</td>
<td>1-925-911-9000</td>
<td><a href="http://www.workday.com">www.workday.com</a></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>