

Transcript of EDUCAUSE 2012 Panel: A CIO's First Year

Chris Thomas: Good morning everyone. We'll get started after a little technical glitch, which never happens, as you know. My name's Chris Thomas, and I'd like to thank you all for attending this session. Can you all hear me? Volume? I think we need volume.

Better? Better? Yes, good. OK.

My name is Chris Thomas and I'd like to thank you all for attending this morning. I'd like to let you know that I'd also welcome the online audience that's currently watching this webcast from the United States, as well as numerous territorial locations, international locations. Excuse me.

Before moving to our speakers, I'd like to read a couple of reminders here, just so you all know the session is being streamed and recorded. We will have a question and answer period at the end of the session.

If you're attending in the room and have a question, please use the microphones located in upper, around the room. You can see them there in the center of the room. That allows the people online to hear the questions, so it's really important.

We'd finally like to encourage all of you to complete the online evaluation for this session, preferably on site. But the opportunity to evaluate sessions continues after the conference. A link to each session evaluation can be found on your session's details within the online agenda.

If you're participating online, you can also find a link within each session page on the virtual convention center. If you are going to be asking questions and you're an online person, please use the chat pod to the right of the webcast player to ask your questions.

Without further ado, I'll turn it over to Mr. Voss, who is head of our panel this afternoon.

Brian Voss: Great, thank you Chris. Welcome everybody. What we're going to do is, after I do quick introductions, each of us is going to take a minute to elaborate on that a little. Then we're going to handle this in panel format. I'm going to pose some questions and then each of us is going to take a chance to answer that, hopefully conveying some information that you may have a desire to hear.

As we get closer, as the time advances, we'll stop because we definitely want to take questions from the audiences. Let me quickly go. I'm Brian Voss. I'm the vice president CIO at the University of Maryland. Joanne Kossuth, who's from Olin College of Engineering. Bruce Maas, from University of Wisconsin, Madison. Ann Kovalchick, from Drake.

That's the quick intros. Let me start with Ann. Why don't you take a second and open remark for a minute or so?

Ann Kovalchick: Sure. I've been at Drake for two years and I am grateful for the opportunity to talk with this group. When we first got together thinking about this session, one of the names that we played with, was the first hundred years, hundred days. I kept thinking a hundred years

because...this is my first CIO experience. It does have the quality of a magical realism in it, in some ways. It really has been quite a journey. I've come to realize how challenging this job is, in ways that I would never have imagined. It's wonderful to talk with my colleagues and find out that that is a shared experience in many ways.

Bruce Maas: I'm Bruce Mass. I'm the Chief Information Officer, University of Wisconsin, Madison. This is my second CIO job. I've been in the position for a little over a year now, having spent the majority of my career in a variety of roles at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. The experience with the first job has really helped me with the second. I can say that unambiguously. It is amazing to be able to have a fresh start. You get to start over, in fact, with a new environment. You can forget all of those things that you made mistakes about in the first. You can think about the things that you need to do to be more effective with the second.

It's a wonderful thing being able to have that fresh start and people utilize what you learned before. The other thing I'd like to say is that, nothing has changed in my perspective about the importance of having humility in this job. It remains a very strong element of us being effective, is learning to have a sense of humor and appropriate level of humility because this is a difficult job.

Joanne Kossuth: I'm Joanne Kossuth. I'm the vice president for operations and the CIO at Olin College of Engineering. In addition to IT, I have the other fun jobs that nobody wants, like dining services, facilities, HR, conference services. Put a service in, it falls under my ballpark because we're a relatively small institution. I've had a number of experiences as CIO. Each of them has been really unique and different. What I've learned from all of them, is they're all an adventure. As Bruce said, the sense of humor is so critically important, as is a thick skin.

More so than that is listening skills and listening to what people are really asking for, as opposed to what they think they're asking for. There can be a difference in that.

They're all opportunities to really add value. I think that becomes more critical as we move forward in these days in higher education. They're an adventure, they're a challenge, but you'll never be bored.

Brian Voss: I'm Brian Voss from the University of Maryland, as I said before. To prove that we are unique snowflakes, I'll provide the counterpoint to Bruce's argument, which is that this is my second CIO stop. Just when I thought I learned everything there was to learn at LSU, I come to Maryland and discover I have a lot more to learn. Which was interesting, because I worked at Indiana. I thought I knew everything when I came from there and went to LSU, so had that experience.

One of the points that I'll try and draw out in my comments to the various questions we're going to answer today, is just this unique nature of the challenges that we face CIOs. Whether it's our first CIO stint or second or third. There is just this wide diversity in institutions and it really does play into another thing, in addition to good sense of humor, thick skin, and humility, is you have to be a quick learner and willing to learn.

With our opening statements out of the way, we chatted ahead of time about some areas we thought would be good to cover. The first one we came up with had to do with expectations.

Whenever you take a job, you have these expectations based on your past experiences. I would post to the panel the question was it everything you hoped it would be and, if it's your first job, how did that go? If it's not your first job, how did it compare with the first?

Let me start with Ann and ask your view on that.

Kovalchick: I still feel very much in the midst of figuring out if it meets my expectations because every day is so different. One of the things that I had to do very early is the expectations that I had were formed based on my past experience. I had to let that go because I was in a new place in a new institution working at a new level. I remember thinking to myself that I had to be very deliberate about working differently than I had at my previous institution where I had been in a deputy CIO position. Once I realized that, and that was probably three or four months in, that helped me shift lenses. So that the expectations I had could be reformed with the new experience and knowledge I had at Drake with my feet on the ground there.

I don't care how hard you interview and push for questions and understand institutions before you take the job, when you get there you get the other 90 percent of the information you need over a period of time. That really requires you to reset your expectations.

Voss: Bruce?

Maas: I had an advantage. I was already part of the university of Wisconsin system so I had many, many interactions with my colleagues at UW Madison when I was at W Milwaukee. There was very little that I hadn't seen of the issues through the years by being directly connected with my colleagues. In addition, during the recruitment process, the university made really clear to me what they expected for the issues that I would be dealing with. It was a very clear road map in my view and that is tracked very well. What surprised me was I was paired up, when I started, with a senior dean to be my care partner, which was amazingly beneficial to me. Jean Pierce from the College of Engineering was assigned to help me to learn how to navigate within this complex culture and to be there as an adviser to me and that was extremely beneficial.

He was very giving, and having a senior leader helped me be more effective. That was a surprise. I did not expect that. The other thing that was a surprise was a senior faculty member, fairly prominent in computer science, reached out to me and also helped, really, to coach me on how I could interact effectively with the faculty with regard to research computing. Those were not always easy conversations, I will tell you. The feedback that I got was pretty unambiguous at times, and I did not always go in with the right perspective from the point of view of this individual. What he did was to help me to navigate within the culture of the university, which I found extremely beneficial.

No surprises about the expectations and the culture, but big surprises at how willing senior level leaders were to work with me to help me be successful.

Voss: Joanne, what about your expectations?

Kossuth: My first CIO position I actually had written a thesis for my Master's degree on developing and implementing systems for small business and, to my surprise, the president had read it. Came and said to me, "You're now going to be called Director of IT and we're going to

computerize the college." This is in the late '80s. Sometimes be careful what you wish for and what you write that might be theoretical because you might actually have to do it. It was a great example of just putting the pedal to the metal and moving forward. There really were no expectations beyond you will do it and get it done. It was pretty wide open. I'll contrast that with my experience at Olin. Olin is a start-up institution. We just graduated our seventh class in May. It's all engineering faculty.

When I first started at Olin, I started as a consultant because they weren't going to need any IT people because the engineers could take care of it. The expectations were very different in terms of what would happen. When we talked, we talked a lot about standards and we talked about how to implement things and the network. I was like cool, we're all on the same page.

Then I started to do those things and they were like, "No, that's not what we wanted. That wasn't what we thought we told you." The whole communication piece and the expectation of it's not just what people say, but what's actually behind the scenes that you have to figure out in terms of the culture was a real learning experience for me at Olin.

Maas: From my perspective, and I turn this inward, the expectations were really back to what I said in the opening about myself. To be honest, I expected the job to be easier given it was my second time. It wasn't. It was as hard if not harder. This will dovetail us into this next topic that we'll talk about, our experiences, and Bruce touched on this a little bit. Sometimes when you move to your second or subsequent role and you have that expectation about how it worked before, that can really in some ways bind you and constrain you to trying to repeat that past experience as opposed to realizing that you've been put into a different situation.

The institution certainly met my expectations. I went into this job very much eye opened, the staff of my organization, the campus community. There weren't those expectational issues that weren't met, but the surprising thing was about myself.

Voss: We move onto the second topic, which is experiences. This is where Bruce mentioned the focus of this is really what was the most surprising thing that you had?

That can either be pleasant or unpleasant. I'll start with Joanne this time.

Kossuth: The most surprising thing that I had was the willingness, as Bruce said, of people to work with you, but the most surprising thing I encountered at a new institution was everybody brought their baggage from their old institution. For a period of months, when anybody started as a new employee we would hear at BU we did it this way, at MIT we did it this way. Those were always the best solutions. Not only was I bringing a perspective from a different institution with me, but everybody else I was dealing with at a new start-up environment was bringing expectations of their own institutions. The amount of work we had to do to get us on the same page in terms of creating a joint expectation for this new endeavor was a surprise. I certainly didn't expect to do that much work around building the culture and building the team.

Voss: Ann?

Kovalchick: Drake University is the smallest school I've worked at. It's about 3,000 undergraduates and 2,000 graduates. One of the things that I realized at a university that size is

how informal the communication is. What surprised me was the challenge of trying to create predictable, repeatable mechanisms institutionally to drive change that required communication without seeming to create a bureaucracy because people really push back on that. Having the balance that I would be able to leverage the informal communication mechanisms that were there, against something more structured because our work has so many levels of complexity. That was a real surprise for me, and not necessarily a pleasant one, because it took me a while to figure out that's what was going on.

On the other hand, because it's a small university, it's very easy to get access to the executive leadership. I am not on the cabinet, but I can get onto the cabinet fairly easily if there's an issue that needs to be discussed and I have easy access and e-mail and text with all the senior leaders. That was very pleasant because it helped me see how decisions were made in a very informal manner and then begin to build and execute those decisions operationally.

Voss: Bruce, you had touched on some of that during your last one. Do you want to elaborate on that?

Maas: Yes. What surprised me is that I was allowed to make new mistakes as long as I didn't repeat them. People made that pretty clear, that repeating the same mistakes was not a good thing. If you made a mistake pushing forward in a way that was viewed as advancing the institutional mission, that was accepted. However, I also learned about boundaries, and the boundaries at my new institution are different than the boundaries at my former institution. Here there was plenty of good feedback that would come in from the faculty, very polite, because it's Wisconsin. It's the only thing people know, but very firm and polite saying, "No. Faculty make those kinds of decisions and thank you for your helpfulness. But keep that in mind." That was surprising and it was really beneficial. In a way, that's a way of coaching that was occurring within the campus.

Again about helping, that when you come into an institution that's been in existence for 165 years there are just a few people who take a little bit of pride in the fact that it's been there that long and that there's a way of doing things. The willingness of people to give me that kind of coaching. The way it was delivered to me in a very nondestructive manner, it was surprising but it was very uplifting.

Voss: My surprising moment — and I see some of my folks sitting here, so they're going to keep me honest; they'll make me actually say this — was when you're offered during your interview a tour, a data center tour to look at the facilities. Don't go, "Oh, the only thing more boring than one data center tour is another." Take the tour. I discovered that that was going to end up being one of our major challenges that we're going to have to address is a facilities question. The major surprise had to do with my own situation and surprise that six-plus years at Louisiana State on top of 20 years at Indiana did not give me the answer to every question that I was going to encounter. I honestly thought I would have more answers than I did.

The lesson learned here is go in eyes open, especially about yourself. Again, Bruce is our canary in the coal mine leading our discussion forward. I've heard him mention culture, and we had an interesting conversation on this.

Ann, actually this is her academic discipline. I have to actually read this to make sure I get it right. She said we needed to discuss the concept of assimilation versus acculturation, which is do we fit or do we change the place? Is it the Borg or not?

[laughter]

Voss: I'm going to open this one. All universities are different and their cultures are completely different. What culture you had from one institution is not necessarily going to be what you find at the one you come to. Again, my folks know this. There was a point in this whole "Do I assimilate or do I change?" when I realized that my senior staff and I, after a few months, while learning about each other and working together, were still just not clicking. It suddenly dawned on me one day, on a drive to Annapolis, that it was this issue. That there was a frustration that my organization, to an extent the campus, was waiting for me to assimilate the Maryland [way] as the vice president of IT culture. When was I going to start acting the way they expected the IT leader to act?

Versus I viewed that I was hired by the president and brought in to change this. My frustration was, why wasn't my leadership team and my campus grasping that I was not going to do things the same way? That I was not going to trim those square edges off of my peg?

I do understand that you just can't come in and willy-nilly do things differently, that there is a culture, as Bruce mentioned. They've been successful for doing this for 150 years and who the Hell are you to change that? That said, it's incumbent, especially in our profession, for us to be agents of change.

With that lead-in, let me again go down the bench here. Ann, since this is your discipline, what's your view on this topic?

Kovalchick: As a CIO, or any technology leadership position, you're constantly trying to get the right mix of pushing for some change, then trying to sustain and bolster the things that are good about the institution that you're in. The best way to do this is to really build coalitions of folks. It takes time, so being very patient. As much as I like revolution, and I really do in most cases, this is a case where incremental change has a lot of value. You have to really pace the community through this process. I knew I had done that effectively when about a year after I was at Drake, I had to take some rather severe organizational change processes. Had to really use a lot of campus political capital. One of the members of the search committee, who also serves on one of the core governance groups, remarked, "I guess you are going to pull us into the future kicking and screaming."

I thought, "Well, that is a little of what you hired me to do." Sometimes I have to very deliberately, every time I make a difficult decision to push in a new, hard direction, I think, "What am I going to compromise myself on and accept as non-negotiable that is of value to the institution?" That keeps me very attuned, therefore, to what is unique about the institution.

Voss: Bruce?

Bruce: I'd like to build on that a little. You need to be pretty clear about what your core values and your core principles are and know where you don't bend, but within that I view it as I was

hired, really, to solve a simultaneous equation. That equation has three parts to it. I was hired to do certain things, and they are different than the way things have been done in the past. That's one element. Then I was expected to respect certain things. They're not mutually exclusive. Respect certain things. Then third is, I was mentored into how to get things done. You'll notice there's not a lot of precision in that. That requires some real thoughtfulness and thinking through how can you meet those multiple needs, but that's the expectation at this level, that with the experience we have we'll figure that out.

We'll figure out how to navigate, know where you push, where you need to push, and know when you need to back up, but all the while having a firm, and communicating a firm, sense of vision, principles, and values.

Again, one of the things that I just hadn't quite anticipated was that in the culture it isn't what I say to people, it's what people say to each other about the work that I'm doing, and it is amazing the level of interconnectiveness that I learned about who's networking and who's giving feedback to who and who the provost is hearing from about how I'm executing on certain things. That gave me a good awareness of the culture, how deep it is, and, frankly, how collaborative it is.

Kossuth: Olin, because we're new, it was a challenge in an opposite way, because the focus was on innovation and change. The core values were innovation and change. We didn't have a 150-year history of things to build on or the way we had always done things. What was challenging about that was we all interpreted innovation differently, so there was the faculty tribe, as the president called it, the staff tribe, and the student tribe. We had to figure out a way to build consensus among the tribes, because we were all interpreting innovation differently. The faculty were innovating in pedagogy, and they just assumed that we figure out what technology would support their pedagogy and they didn't have to give us some specifics around their requirements. The students were just moving forward.

The latest, greatest thing that came out two seconds later. IT was behind because we didn't keep up with the latest, greatest thing that came out.

[audio skips]

Kossuth: ...that we were supposed to be innovative. Really trying to set realistic expectations and explain to people what happens in an enterprise setting, things like security issues. We found we had to do a lot of education of the faculty, of the students. We also had to be educated by them in terms of what their core areas of focus were and where we could add value. This became a really ongoing exercise in attending faculty meetings, getting on agendas, having student working groups, but creating these ways to have input and also to hear back on a regular basis so that we could take what were essentially three separate tribes and assemble them in a way that we would all move the institution forward.

Voss: Chris, we started a little late. I want to keep this on time. I want to pose one more question to this group, and then maybe go to the Q and A with the folks here, as well as the folks online if you're starting to see some online questions. There are probably a number of aspiring CIOs in this audience. This is a relevant question giving all of us our, as I use the term, alien transplants. Under the broad rubric of, "Do I stay or do I go?" what counsel would you have for the aspiring

folks in the audience about this question of, can I be a prophet in my own land? Can I rise through the ranks of an IT organization or a campus structure and become the CIO? Or do I need to pack the bag and pick up and move and deal with this cultural assimilation or acculturation question? What's your view on it? We all did it, but why did we do it? I'll start with Joanne this time.

Kossuth: Depending on your institution and size — and team size matter — but you can stay at your own organization and work your way up. You need to look for opportunity. Opportunity to participate in the campus at a higher level, things like committees, working groups, ways to engage yourself in the strategic level of the institution, regardless of what your current position is in the institution. You can work your way up. There's also a point where you look at the opportunities and say, "This is going to take me 25 years if I stay here. There's these other opportunities elsewhere that I feel I'm qualified for. Now would be a good time to decide to go." If you decide to do that, the way you go and how you go about it leaves a legacy where you're currently at, so you have to be really careful about how you're perceived.

It's an either/or situation depending on your read. If you have a network in college you can trust [and] you have those conversations with, they can be really helpful with their viewpoints.

Voss: Bruce?

Bruce: I've done both. I stayed at one institution in a variety of roles until I became the CIO, and then I went to another institution, so I've done both. There are many opportunities — I would reinforce what Joanne said — to go through different roles in your institution. I had four major different roles at my first institution over 30 years, and only two of them were related to IT. Others were on the business side of the organization and the academic side of the organization. There are opportunities if you position yourself and others see that you're a person who's willing to work hard, listen carefully, understand what the true mission is at your university. You have the potential, I can also say through the experience of being at a second institution where I got a fresh start. I didn't get a fresh start at the first institution. You can be typecast, and the way people look at you may be from any of the various roles that you've held there.

I found myself bumping up against a ceiling more often because of perceptions of individuals who had known me in a prior role that I had been in. Feeling like perhaps I was overreaching, in a sense, even though I had this new role. It's amazing to me. I'm the same person, yet in the one institution I felt I was overreaching and now in my other institution I have people encouraging me to be more assertive. I like the second one. That's working pretty well for me.

Voss: Ann, you and I had the conversation, actually. Because Ann was at Tulane and I was just up the road so she and I had the conversation about this.

Kovalchick: I have moved quite a bit. This is a profoundly personal question, too. Your ability to pick up and go somewhere is typically dependent on your family environment and if that is feasible or not. You've really got to be sure what works there. Once you've made that decision, then I think if you go someplace else, and, again, I have been pretty consistent in moving because I don't really, personally, have a strong sense of place, you're always the outsider. You have to learn to leverage that outsider status. Related to the previous question, I think you,

therefore, make a lot of mistakes in integrating into the culture. As Bruce said earlier, you have to be humble and apologize and that's how you get a little more orientation.

If you're internal, it's harder to identify the opportunities to take risks and it's harder to take risks. The difference is really in the different tactics you might use to have an organizational impact.

Frankly, although I have moved a lot, it seems that within a year and a half of any new place I'm in, I've reached that status of not being able to be a prophet. Because you get two years of honeymoon and then the gig is up. Everyone knows your approach. You inevitably, while you may be an outsider, you've still lost the element of surprise. You still have to think about, "How am I going to move through this organization internally?"

Voss: I'll do this with a story. There are probably some Indiana people here. McRobbie, who's now the president, used to finally talk about when he arrived in 1997. He was talking to some of the leadership at the time. He said, "Yeah, there was this guy with long hair and a ponytail and wearing sandals and a Mickey Mouse T-shirt." He was referring to me. I did have long hair and a ponytail, never in my life have I owned a Mickey Mouse T-shirt, nor will I ever have worn sandals to work. But yet, that's the perception that was in that mind. You are often cast by something you may have done 20 years ago.

I'll amplify the point again. It's situational and it's unique. We just saw Erv Blyth honored for a leadership award. Erv Blyth, from the time he was a freshman cadet at Virginia Tech to the time he retired, he was at Virginia Tech. He spent his whole life there, very successful, and one of the true leaders in our profession.

My friend Brad Wheeler at Indiana University, same thing, was able to rise and do that. Yet, Dave Schwartz, our other award winner, and all of us, including me, realized we had to make that move. There's not a cookie approach here. There's not one right solution. It's you. It's what your characteristics and your history are, and what are the situation and the culture and the environment at the institution you're at, as to whether that's going to be possible, and whether you're going to be successful.

All right, Chris, we have chewed through some time here. We want to turn this over to any questions that the audience might have, so I'm going to let you moderate from here on.

Thomas: Well, and I'm going to let whoever has a question come up to the microphone right now. Do we have any questions out of this whole room of brilliant people?

Voss: I see someone heading towards the mic, someone else.

Thomas: Can you walk towards a microphone?

Voss: Either that or they're leaving. [laughter]

Thomas: There's a gentleman over there. Have to get to the microphone quickly. Yes, sir.

Male Participant: In the beginning of the presentations, you all spoke that you find the job to be difficult, and I agree. The job is very difficult, but I'm really interested in what each of you finds

to be the most difficult part of your job. Thank you. [laughter]

Voss: The most difficult part is determining what part is most difficult. [laughter]

Voss: The answer to that question is, "I think it's all difficult." Coming in from outside, the relationships that we've talked about, how do you establish those — that's difficult. Getting leadership of what can often be large organizations that have a diverse history, how do you get control of that? That's hard. Establishing your credibility with the key constituencies of the faculty, the deans, and students — that's hard. Dealing with what has been left behind by your predecessor, both good and bad, is hard.

I can't tell you what is most hard. I can tell you, it's all hard. But I think that's what these jobs are, and I don't want to scare... We had a big discussion about the pipeline from CIOs. We don't want to scare anyone out of that [CIO] pipeline. But realize, it's not easy, and this is a commitment you're making for your life. Anyone else?

Kovalchick: Yeah, the hardest thing is helping the campus community understand what I do. Helping my mother understand what I do is hard, because it's so broad. You don't want to present yourself as the biggest brain in the room, and the hero who has their fingers in everything, but essentially you do have your fingers in everything, and you're not the biggest brain in the room. I often feel like I'm going around asking people if I can come to their party. They think, "Well, why do you need to be there?" They realize why I need to be there, once I'm there discussing the implications from a technology point of view. But people don't really understand what we do until they have a desktop problem or a network problem, or the ERP doesn't function in some way. But that's such a narrow focus that that isn't really representative of what we do.

Voss: You asked to hear from all of us, but to speed it along, why don't we go ahead and take the next questioner here. Then Bruce and Joanne can have the chance to answer your question.

Participant: Hi, thank you for the discussion. During the discussion, you spoke about different challenges and learning, but what would you say was the most impactful learning, and how has that helped you in the future?

Kossuth: The most impactful learning also goes to one of the things that's difficult, which is managing yourself. When you go somewhere and you're new, and you're on your honeymoon period, everybody has all this pent-up demand. They have pent-up demand. They want to talk to you and they have the best idea. They want your attention. They're grabbing you in the hall. You're trying to give them answers because you want to look like you have answers. What I learned is, it's best to not provide answers in the hallway and let people grab your arm. It's best to say, "This is a really important topic and we should have a good discussion. Let's schedule something."

Otherwise, what'll happen is the perception piece. They'll hear what they want to hear [from] what you said, and they'll run with the ball, and before you know about it the whole community is talking about something you supposedly did that you never did. One of the challenges, I think, is to manage yourself and manage your own time and how you communicate, and that stands you, instead, moving forward regardless of whether you stay in your institution or move to another one.

Maas: It's combining this one with the first question, and that is I was thinking about what's hard and what's good, is you have to have a thick skin. The coin of the realm is respect. Operating in a way that builds respect, and however you do that. Listening carefully and not being glib in your responses is one way of gaining that. I just think you need to continually balance those things.

Voss: Next question.

Female Participant: I'm coming from a university where I spent quite a bit of time and I transitioned into a new university, because the opportunity to move up presented itself. I'm wondering. I have a number of people who I would consider confidants in my old university. People I can go to bounce ideas off of or rant or whatever I needed to do that day. I'm struggling trying to find that person in my new university. I'm wondering, how did you go about finding that confidant or that peer group that you could feel safe with?

Voss: I'll start this. I had a very unique situation at Maryland, and it may not be your situation, in that the senior management leadership team from the president through almost a complete set of vice presidents has turned over in two years, and there's a lot of other alien transplants in this group. Finding a confidant is really hard because Ringo Starr said, "Trust don't come easy." I've been able to find one of my fellow vice presidents who I've really just gone ahead, done the surfing off the stage thing. Decided to trust and we're seeing how that goes. You're right, because these jobs are so hard. Having someone to talk to is so critical.

Maas: If I were to give a piece of advice, until you really know that you've found that person use that old network from your old institution to bounce some ideas off of. So that you don't make a mistake of, as Joanne said, you're in a moment of trying to churn through something. You say something and suddenly that becomes an edict when you only meant to unload it. That would be my view of that.

Voss: I would say part of this is really it's an art. There's no formula for this. Whoever it is you select, it has to be someone you trust and it has to be someone who you can feel comfortable working with and you don't create other problems by misjudging along the way. Sharing something confidentially with the wrong person is a real ticket to getting on the fast train out. The other thing is what's safe is connecting at EDUCAUSE and other organizations and building confidants in your network. Oftentimes, having an out-of-university network to bounce ideas off of is the issue of fractured perspective.

Kossuth: Just one quick thing: It doesn't have to be someone in higher education. That helps because they understand the culture, but there's a lot of folks out there that you could build your network with that have similar CIO experiences in corporations and in other nonprofits. Surprisingly, the issues are all the same. They may be just a little [different] flavor. Never give up on building your network and look to expand it as much as possible because that always leaves you options in terms of feedback.

Thomas: Let's just take one more question from this gentleman here. I'm going to let us run three minutes over, since we got a little bit of a late start.

Participant: Sure. Edward Sigler from Loyola University, Maryland. My question for you all is in terms of the latest and greatest technologies that are coming out and being leading edge of the

adoption and rollout of such technologies. I'm not just talking about the latest and greatest gizmos from Apple. I'm also talking about new products that are being released from established prestigious partners that you have, vendors that you're working with, and they're recommending you go with one of these products. How do you handle that?

Voss: That's why I have deputy CIOs and officers to help advise me with that, because I'm not technical. Interesting question from a vendor at Axes, which is the Japan version of this, yesterday. He asked that question. My advice is, turn it a little. I want to make sure I have a problem to solve before I bring a solution to them. Someone may have a great solution to a problem, but it may not be a problem that is in my strategic list.

We just spent the better part of six months working with our community to build a strategic plan. One of the pieces of advice that we got from the community is, "See this plan? Do this stuff. Don't do other stuff."

It's broad-based, so we could probably fit a lot of new developments in. Chasing that new technology thing constantly is like playing Whack-a-Mole. My counsel is, figure out what your problems are. Work with the vendors and the immersion technologies to find solutions. There may be an emerging one that solves your problem like that. That's the one to go for.

Bruce?

Maas: We all have extremely limited resources at all our universities. The fact is, we have to focus, like the laser, on the core mission and anything that advances the core mission. Everything else is distraction and noise. Focus on what the mission is and what Brandon said about you're trying to solve a problem. First, define what that problem is, rather than, "Oh, isn't this wonderful?" If it's not in line with your advancing your mission, it isn't worth investing in.

Kossuth: I have one last thing to add, which is, use an external advisory board. I've had one since we started the institution because I didn't just want it to be about what I thought we were solving and what we really needed to have. Having that third-party voice that's engaged with you in your institution to really help you when it comes to A, giving advice on the various products, because I have folks from say IBM and HP and cabling companies on the group. We meet twice a year. We communicate in-between electronically, but it really helps to have those outside perspectives combined with what your strategic plan is internally.

Voss: Can I just say, we've talked about this, we've had the better part of 50 minutes. We could talk about this forever... [audio skips]

Voss: ...conversations that should go on here at EDUCAUSE. Whether it's in the CIO lounge for the CIOs, or in sessions or in the hallways or over coffees with your colleagues and new friends. These experiences are where we can share it, and that's the purpose of EDUCAUSE. Chris, I'm done. We're all done.

Thomas: Thank you very much to our panel for this... [applause]

Thomas: ...informative discussion. Thank you all for coming to this session and have a wonderful day at EDUCAUSE. Take care.

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