

# THE **ENTERPRISERS** PROJECT

37 award-winning CIOs  
share essential career advice



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# Introduction

Sometimes the right advice finds you at the exact right time, and it has the power to change your life for the better. Whether it's words of wisdom shared by someone you admire, a lesson that helped you solve a problem you were facing, or a quote that changed your worldview, the best advice tends to stick with you, impacting your actions long after you heard it.

We asked award-winning CIOs to share one such piece of advice that had an impact on their careers, and they delivered a variety of insights on leadership, strategy, career development, and more from teachers, mentors, parents, and colleagues. Read on for advice from past InspireCIO ORBIE Award winners, all finalists in the 2022 National CIO of the Year ORBIE Awards, and consider how these words of wisdom could help you and your team.

# On career development and mentorship

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## Anita Klopfenstein

**CIO, Little Caesars Enterprise-Ittich Owned Companies**



"I grew up in a poor household. I wasn't considered very smart and quite frankly the concept of going to college was not in my future. In freshman speech class we had to give a speech about ourselves. Afterwards the Speech Teacher, Mr. Siefert, gave me a piece of paper which stated, 'Great job! Come talk to me about Speech Team.'

That one act ignited an enduring flame of hope and confidence. It was the first time I had been told I was good at anything. I joined the speech team and many other teams. I loved learning and I was the first person in my family to attend and complete college. I still have his note

and when I have moments of self-doubt I read it to remind me of the incredible life adventure I have been living."

# Kristy Simonette

## SVP of Strategic Services and CIO of Camden Property Trust



"I attended an executive challenge program that was pivotal for my career. I learned about 'possibility thinking' and the 'power of the word.' I cannot pick one concept over the other mainly because they are intertwined; both concepts have been instrumental in my professional success.

First, I want to talk about possibility thinking. Embracing this concept means I do not limit my options by what I know. It gives me the freedom to think BIG, see possibilities, and not limitations. Since learning about possibility thinking, I have developed a muscle to help me see the future state

without knowing how to make it happen yet.

The second concept is power of the word. Words shape action, create energy, and make things happen. You have to say it (put it out there) to make it a reality. Grab hold of what you say, commit to it and manage it into existence. I specifically remember getting this advice and how I put it into action. I first told a co-worker that I wanted to be Camden's CIO; it set the wheels in motion. I was mentored and developed to rise to the occasion and proud to be named Camden's CIO within a few short years of joining the company.

Words, in addition to work, create change and innovation. Creating a breakthrough environment with possibility thinking is an investment for growing a high-performance team. Managing the integrity of what you say, your word, and then standing for it leads to innovation, creativity, and possibilities."

## **John Lambeth**

**EVP & CIO, Maximus**



“Always remember that there is someone out there who, in their own life, has some experience or wisdom that is greater than your own. Discover what that special something is and remember it. The next time a complex problem comes up, forget individual heroics, humbly lean on that person and solve the problem in a fraction of the time.”

## **Cris Ross**

**CIO, Mayo Clinic**



“A boss long ago advised me to seek out important problems and good people. That advice has never failed me.”

# Darryl Maraj

**CIO, GA Telesis, Digital Innovation Group**



"One of my early bosses and mentor, Marcia Waite, saw my frustration one day while working on multiple ill-planned conversion processes for the university. She politely calmed me down and gave me a small piece of advice that has helped me grow my career tremendously.

Marcia said there's always opportunity in chaos and rather than run from it, embrace it because it is the best way to develop and showcase your skills and expertise.

Marcia also emphasized that active listening was an important component of finding those opportunities in chaos. Making a conscious effort to understand the other party's point of view is essential.

Later in my career, another one of my great mentors, Kimberly Gramm, turned me on to the value of trust and helped me understand relationships founded in trust allow for better communications, easier collaboration, faster decisions, and ultimately swifter results. I used the first lesson to accelerate my career and the second to build amazing long-term relationships, break barriers and deliver exceptional results."

## Tara Long

### Head of Technology, MMUS (MassMutual United States)



“Some memorable advice I received throughout my career that still guides me today is to remain focused on continuous growth and learning, intentionally pushing myself into new experiences, and purposely leaning into discomfort.

I always try to keep that advice at the forefront, especially when I am taking on a new role. When I'm feeling uncomfortable, I remind myself that is the feeling of growth as I stretch myself. This keeps me sharp, broadens my skillset and capabilities, and ultimately keeps me relevant.

Another piece of advice I always try to follow is to surround myself with the best, brightest, diverse and inclusive team members. You can have a diverse team, but if you don't establish and sustain an inclusive environment, you can't draw upon the power of that diversity. That is something I take to heart, and I always try to build diverse and inclusive teams to harness the power of different experiences and perspectives to deliver exceptional results.

Last but not least, is to make sure that I always make time to do things that I enjoy and find fulfilling. We spend so much time at work, and we can take our success to another level when we are doing things that we are passionate about and enjoy.”



## Sharon Kennedy Vickers

**CIO; Director, Office of Technology & Communications, City of Saint Paul**



“Growing up, my parents modeled the power of being in service to others. Working on our family farm, I saw the power of individuals working collectively to meet each other's needs in order to accomplish great things together.

Guided by this example, I found myself drawn to leaders who exhibit the same people-centered mindset. I've observed that leaders who are focused on caring for one another and who value the individuals on their teams achieve excellence. As a leader, I also tried to model this people-first mindset.

I believe being centered and focused on people, the people you serve and the people you serve alongside, makes the work you do worthwhile. I work alongside my team members and ensured they feel valued and cared for, which results in amazing outcomes.”

# Dr. Curt Carver

**VP & CIO, UAB**



“My first 28 years of professional life were as a soldier and Army officer. I was told to do everything I can for the soldiers under my care. I could do no more and they deserved no less.

As I transitioned to lead technology organizations at universities, I have strived to follow that advice and did everything I could to mentor and develop my employees. They are the future of technology leadership.

After more than forty years of public service, my greatest achievement and greatest source of pride are these future leaders who will change the world for decades to come. If I did it the right way, they will embrace that people are our most precious resource and continue to mentor and develop future leaders to achieve extraordinary results.”

# Melanie Kalmar

**Corporate VP, CIO, CDO, Dow, Inc**



"I will never forget the day a leader came into my office and asked whether I wanted the good or bad news first?

The good news was that I was getting assigned to a major project that came with a lot of travel. It was a huge opportunity with new challenges and much more responsibilities. I won't go so far as to say it was a dream job, but I was thrilled to have the opportunity.

And then came the other shoe. In this moment of great excitement and recognition, this same leader in the same conversation told me that this was probably as high as I would get in the company, and that I should get comfortable at that level.

After a few moments of shock, frustration and disappointment, I harnessed my motivation to prove him wrong. And, of course, as I sit here today in the role of Chief Information Officer and Chief Digital Officer for Dow, I most certainly did just that. While this wasn't something I would classify as advice, it's something I've carried with me as a leader ever since. Those words changed my entire outlook on leadership. This advice taught me that I'll never tell someone they can't do something. As a leader, I always set the bar high and see what the team is capable of. Chances are, they'll surprise you, but they'll probably surprise themselves too."

# Michael Zahigian

**SVP & CIO, Amgen**



“Master yourself first. Discover what motivates you, and what drives you.

Once you've got that squared away, it's much easier to help other people.”

# On leadership

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## George Marootian

**EVP, Head of Technology, Natixis Investment Managers – US**



“If you want to lead, then be a leader. To do this, first you need to be humble. You do not lead for accolades. You lead because you intrinsically believe you can successfully guide a team into the future and make a difference in your organization.

Second, lead by example. Your team is constantly reminded about how to execute because they emulate you, and how you accomplish things.

Third, write a list of everything you see in other leaders, and emulate the positives and avoid the negatives. This list should always be growing, and you should revisit it at least every 6 months to make sure you are following it, and potentially even recognizing that some things may have changed.

Finally, always be certain that your team's benefits outweigh their costs and be able to deliver that message on a moment's notice. I have referred back to this, time and time again, for the past 20 years, and it has always been a great reminder of the effort required to be an effective leader.”

# Jyoti Lynch

**CIO, European Wax Center**



“Character matters. Always stay humble and respectful. My parents instilled this principle in me, and this advice has guided me in my career and personal life. I came to America for college and have achieved far more than I ever dreamt.

Being an immigrant and a female in a male-dominated field brought its share of judgments and challenges in my career. With many great mentors along the way, one of the most important lessons I learned is that leadership is a privilege and that leading is about service. Being respectful, building and nurturing a great network, and caring about people

authentically have been significant factors in my career growth and success. I quickly understood that it's all about people and treating others with the same respect you'd like to get yourself.

My leadership philosophy is to be personal! I am accountable for the success and livelihood of many people, and my decisions and actions impact everyone around me. I want people to know my team beyond their title, role, and the workplace. Knowing my team members and showing a genuine appreciation for their personalities, wants, needs, and work styles helps me to build a sense of trust and loyalty that leads to higher productivity and better morale. Take care of your team, and they will take care of what matters most.”

# Anthony Bobos

**EVP, CIO, Vitalant**



“Throughout my career, I had only one true mentor but numerous coaches have defined me as a leader. I have been in Information Technology for a long time and have seen many technology implementations over my tenure. Early in my career, I met many leaders. There are good ones and there are not-so-good ones. But I learned to pay close attention to their styles and inherit actions I found positive and meaningful.

I always planned to lead one day so when given a chance, I carefully began to form my own leadership style. Working with technology can be challenging. I suppose that is why it is categorized as Computer Science. The science is working through issues with your vendors, customers, teams, and peers. You must be a continual learner in this field as the knowledge you experience through trials and tribulations prepares you for the next big initiative.

When I am asked what piece of advice was most helpful and how it guided me in my career, I always refer to a CEO who promoted ethics early and often. The message was to always remain ethical in how you treat people and in your professional analysis and judgment. It is the most important trait that will define you as a leader and your brand.”

# Brian Gabbard

## SVP of Global Shared Services & CIO, Ball Corporation



“In the early 2000s, I was challenged by a mentor to come up with tenants of leadership that I aspired to model. I borrowed five tenants from James M. Kouzes and Barry Posner, from their work on Exemplary Leadership. These five tenants have underpinned my leadership journey ever since.

**Encouraging the Heart:** Take the time to know your team members their passions, career aspirations, strengths and opportunities. It is about fostering a culture of vulnerability, trust, and appreciation.

**Enabling Others to Act:** Speaks to the importance of a being a Situational Leader. A Situational Leader can provide the right directing, teaching, and coaching based on where a team member may be in any given situation. It is about making others feel capable.

**Challenging the Process:** This means creating an environment where others are encouraged to challenge the status quo, to take risks, and to give and receive constructive feedback.

**Inspiring Others to a Common Goal:** You need to be clear and inclusive in answering framing questions like, Where are we going? Why are we here? What is our current reality? It is a head, heart, and hands approach. The "what" helps with understanding (head), the "why" helps with purpose (heart), and the "where" drives intent (hands).

**Modeling the Way:** At the core of this realization, actions speak louder than words. Are we encouraging the heart, enabling others to act, challenging the process, and inspiring others towards the way?”



## Rich Gilbert

### SVP, Chief Digital Information Officer – Aflac US



"Every experience throughout my career has taught me something new, shaped me as a person, and helped me grow. Along the way, mentorship has been a powerful influence in guiding my career journey.

A great quote from Isaac Newton goes 'If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.'

Early in my career, my first mentor spent time helping to shape my thought process, particularly around what it meant to be a leader, and that true leadership starts with a people-first mindset. He cared about his team and was not

shy about sharing that. He told me, 'People don't care about what you know until they know how much you care.' He also informed my shopping cart approach to leadership traits.

Throughout my career, I've met various types of leaders, noticing traits I loved, and those I did not. My lesson was to only put the traits I most admired into my 'shopping cart' to carry forward and leave the rest behind. This mindset helped me become a successful leader with the traits I most admired. I see that in the leadership of Aflac as well. Aflac's commitment to helping others stems from a founding culture of compassion, authenticity, and transparency. Aflac Chairman and CEO, Dan Amos, says it best, 'Caring about others isn't just a business decision. It's the right thing to do.'"

# Edward Wagoner

**EVP & CIO, Digital, JLL**



“‘Be the Change’ was H. James Dallas's inscription in his book to me after the InspireCIO keynote he gave, which influenced me to undertake a life-changing personal and professional transformation.

Sometimes we spend all of our time thinking about how others should change when we need to be the change that our people and our organizations need.

This advice, coupled with his presentation at the 2018 ORBIE event set me on course for transformation that resulted in a redefined role. It also enabled me to step up to

the challenges presented during the pandemic when clients, the company, media and virtually everyone with a workplace wanted to discuss how technology could enable their evolving workplace and hybrid strategies.

This keynote and advice was the catalyst for me. Without it, I would not have been able to meet the challenges of the last several years.”

# William Fandrich

## SVP & CIO, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan



"I made a conscious effort in my career to understand the breadth and depth of skills needed to be a successful IT executive. This included being a business executive leading a P&I and operations and an entrepreneur with my own companies.

One piece of advice I received from the chairman of the board of one of my successful startup companies was along the lines of, 'You are doing an amazing job, but remember one thing. There is not much distance between the bottom and the top. Today you're a hero. Tomorrow they will be

calling for your job.'

Don't get caught up in the highs or lows. Believe in yourself, follow your dreams, use good judgment, be humble, and self-reflective on everything you do. We all can do better, and we can always learn.

If you make a mistake, so what? Deal with it and move on. If you have a big win, appreciate the things that contributed to your success. Success is about longevity and perseverance and showing that no matter what happens, you can and will do the right thing."

# Todd Inlander

## SVP & CIO, Southern California Edison



"When I was in consulting, my boss gave me extremely useful advice to stay connected to work but resist the urge to focus too much on the details. Because the work gets done through the people, focus on the people. It took me five to 10 years to finally find my balance.

My engineering background helped me a lot. I'm now comfortable only occasionally rolling up my sleeves to dive into the details, but I don't stay there long and quickly come back up.

When I get dragged into the details, it's easier for me to step back, lean on the team members and empower them to focus on the details as they are closer to them on a day-to-day basis.

Eventually, I learned this approach is a win-win situation. It's not just about me focusing on the right work. Delegating the work helps us both with our career development. It helps me look at the big picture and empowers my team members to find the solution. The trick was to find my own balance, that point at which I feel I know enough about the project and can add value to empower others to find the right solution. This reminds me of a Teddy Roosevelt quote I love, 'People won't care how much you know until they know how much you care.'"

# Thomas Murphy

**University CIO & SVP of IS & Computing, University of Pennsylvania**



"Hire people smarter than you and free them to do what they do best. Get out of their way and give them the space to do what you hired them to do. My dad often quoted this when I spoke with him about challenges early in my career.

He pointed out that many leaders he knew hired brilliant people and then hamstrung them with policies and bureaucracy, didn't listen to their ideas, and over-directed their outcomes.

The best leaders have the confidence to surround themselves with bright, energetic leaders and trust them to lead outcomes. The best leaders provide guidance and support, not the answers to everything. I think about this all the time."

# On soft skills

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## Sue-Jean Lin

**SVP & CITO (Chief Information and Transformation Officer), Alcon**



“It's not about the slides you present, it's the story you tell.’ This advice was shared with me more than 2 decades ago when I was a regional CFO. I had to learn what mattered wasn't just facts and figures. It was the way that I came across and how I said it.

Storytelling is about delivering the message to the targeted audience with the right tone, attitude and energy level. People's attention must be earned, and people's buy-in can't be taken for granted just because we got the facts right. To this day, I remind myself of this often.”

# Bridget Collins

## Chief Transformation Officer & CIO, Cerence



“One of my uncles is a retired executive in the automotive business. When I was in college, he told me, ‘90% of life is just showing up’ and while I think the context was initially some form of encouragement to show up for class, that statement rings true many years later. Showing up to me means being present physically, even virtually in today's world.

Show up to the conversation, the meeting, the challenges, even the successes. Bring your best. Be humble. Be inquisitive. Seek always to gain knowledge and expand your horizons. Recognize that you don't have all the answers, but you've shown up to learn from the collective knowledge in the room.

Show up for your people, team, coworkers, and even the conflicts that inevitably arise. Try to look at situations from other's perspectives. Support the employee or team member who may be struggling to find their place. Build relationships within your own team and encourage relationship building across all functions. Recognize you all have a common goal, and challenges are just the scenery on the journey.

Showing up is leadership. And while that advice probably saved me a grade or two in college, it truly guided my career. I have been lucky to learn from many incredible colleagues, expand my knowledge of technology and business, and support many team members over the course of my career. I still have a lot to learn, so I plan to keep showing up.”

# Jeanine Charlton

## SVP & CTDO, IT, Merchants Fleet



“The piece of advice I was given early on in my career that has stuck is ‘always be true to your authentic self’ (and your authentic intelligence, voice, and passion). When we are different people at work than we are at home, we may experience insecurity, anxiety, and burnout. We don't trust ourselves or our work because we are always performing and a daily performance is hard to maintain. When we are true to ourselves, we are better able to feel confident in our participation at work.

There is no hiding or shrinking into the shadows. We are authentic, living in the full expression of what we are capable of. I had to work at not competing with others or comparing myself to an impossible ideal. My authentic voice was enough.

The pandemic has accelerated digital transformation and emphasized the need for innovative voices in technology. There are more opportunities than ever before, but tech remains a space many women feel uncomfortable entering. After spending my entire career in this field, I know it doesn't have to be this way.

Women are invaluable assets to Tech companies, with unique skills and perspectives that will advance the progress we've made thus far. And while we may face discouraging statistics, we should not let them stop us from pursuing our passions. I learned to believe in the possibility of my success before I ever saw it come to fruition.”



## **BJ Moore**

**EVP & CIO, Providence**



“One piece of advice that has stuck with me over the years is the importance of investing time and effort in building a solid professional network. It is especially helpful to build strong relationships during good times so that we can lean on each other when times are hard or there is a crisis.

For me, this is one of the things I value most about ORBIE's recognition and the ability to be part of the amazing community of CIOs they gather across the country. I benefit as I get to learn from others and build connections that will help us all.”

## **Rob Dickson**

**CIO, Wichita Public Schools**



“Early in my leadership journey, when considering hiring for a position, my mentor Mark Evans said to me, ‘You rent talent. Understanding that the person could give you a few good years and go on is still a success. It is better to grow leaders than to bog staff down to retain them.’

I have held on to that conversation throughout my leadership journey. As a result, I have enjoyed watching my leadership network grow as I see my staff grow to do bigger and better things.”

## Colleen Berube

**CIO & SVP Operations, Zendesk**



“Quite early in my career, I was at an event where a woman CEO was speaking. When asked about how she managed being a CEO while raising her children, she shared that she thought of work-life balance as a batting average. Setting a goal of striking balance all the time is not realistic.

Sometimes work will be demanding, and require focus, and your family will need to support you. Other times you will need to focus on your family and work will have to give. It's important to be honest with yourself and make conscious decisions in both work and life. By looking at my career

through this lens, I have found that it gives me power and confidence in making those choices and makes the day-to-day work a lot more realistic, manageable, and meaningful.”

# Christopher Desautel

**SVP & CDO, Berkshire Hathaway Homestate Companies**



“In my career, I have had the good fortune to learn from many great leaders. In both words and actions, this influence has helped shape the leader I am today. One piece of advice, or perhaps a realization based upon many experiences, was the importance of gratitude and using two very powerful words ‘Thank you.’

This may sound trivial, but these words give others energy and are a force multiplier. In my experience, everyone has had help in achieving their success as a leader, regardless of their field of endeavor. There is no such thing as a self-made man or woman. Recognizing this, and ensuring you express your gratitude to the many individuals who help you with an idea, a project, a new perspective, a late night of work, or even constructive criticism, is a key part of being an authentic leader.

A piece of advice I have often passed on is, ‘Every day, find someone to thank.’

They are there. You just need to look.”

# Phillip Ventimiglia

**Chief Innovation Officer, Georgia State University**



“The most important advice I ever received is to smile and introduce myself when walking into a room.

Early in my leadership journey, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to take a rigorous 1 week leadership class.

I was the youngest in the class, with seasoned leaders from every industry represented in the program.

Given I was young and relatively inexperienced, I was very quiet at the start as I was extremely intimidated. I was shocked that the feedback from my peers was that they

thought I was calculating and manipulating when they initially met me because I was not talking.

However, once they got to know me their feedback was the exact opposite. When I returned home from the week long class, my team said the same thing. They all said that when they first met me they were afraid of me! From that experience, I learned to smile and introduce myself whenever I am in a new situation which has helped me tremendously to build bonds within new teams and people quickly. Today, I get extremely positive feedback about my approachability and ability to collaborate. That would not have happened if I had not received that tough but real feedback.”

# Shelia Anderson

## EVP & CIO, Corporate Functions, Liberty Mutual



“Some of the best advice I've ever received was from my dad. He encouraged me to treat all people with dignity and respect, help others, to focus on my abilities, and be a giver. This advice was given to a 13 year-old girl growing up in the South. Stereotypes and biases were rampant and girls were not encouraged to complete a higher education.

This was a time when I was faced with my first significant obstacle, a scoliosis diagnosis. I focussed on how different my life would be and on all the things I wouldn't be able to accomplish. These imperfect moments have shaped me as

a leader. This taught me to pivot my focus, be optimistic, get out of my comfort zone, and learn new skills. It also taught me to have empathy for others as I experienced what many people with disabilities faced.

I grew up in a lower middle class family, with deep values focused on serving others. How you show up in the lives of those around you matters. I believe that giving returns to you as a 10x factor.

My legacy will be a builder of people, their careers, and exceptional teams, yielding exceptional business results. Connection and authentic leadership leads to higher engagement overall. I spend considerable time focused on coaching, mentoring, and investing in the next generation of our global and diverse workforce, sharing these life lessons along the journey.”

## Robin Brown

**CIO, Protein North America, Cargill**



“Early in my career, I was given a great piece of advice from a leader I admired and respected. His advice was to ‘Be your authentic self at all times.’ Always be confident in who you are and what you stand for. We all encounter situations where we are challenged and sometimes it can be very uncomfortable. But it’s in those situations we have to remember to lean in, be curious and ask educated questions to provide a different perspective.

Your voice matters, so use your voice and stand up for what’s right, even when it’s not the popular stance. You will always feel good about the outcome when you stick to the facts, keep emotions out of it, present the best version of you and never stray from your values.

Culture and values are vital. Culture starts with your leadership and the example you set for your teams. Commit to the culture you want and be intentional in setting expectations for your team. When something changes and your values no longer line up with the culture, you have a decision to change the culture or move on to a new opportunity. But never change your values!”

# On strategy

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## Dr. Edmond Mesrobian

**CIO & CTO, Nordstrom, Inc**



“The most memorable piece of advice I was given was, ‘Have a plan or you will be part of someone else’s plan.’

At its core, it fosters an empowerment mindset to be proactive, to lead from the front, and to bring people along the journey. The alternative mindset is to be passive, to wait to be told, and not be curious. I have been fortunate to internalize this mindset to help several companies through their transformations across different industries and continents.”

## Kim Hales

**SVP, IT, NRG Energy**



"I remember hearing early in my career that efficiency and effectiveness comes from 'people, process, then technology—in that order.'

I have internalized and used this advice all the time, from my dedication to the development of the people on our team, to making sure that the team focuses on our internal and external customers, it's people that make our organization work.

I also learned that when people try to push technology as the answer to a problem, without working it through people and process first, that it will very likely fail. Without people driving the solution, there's little hope for them to understand and shape the processes that should be driving the design and implementation of the technological solution.

I have seen systems fail that should not have because they didn't employ strong organizational change management. I've seen mediocre technology success because it was rolled out in a people first manner where they were invested in the success of the new processes and technology. Putting people as the top priority of any challenge has always led to my team's success. If in doubt about a problem, decision, or direction, think about how to make people successful first and you cannot go wrong."



## Mark Brooks

### EVP & CIO, Centene Corporation



"On April 7, the world lost Michael F. Neidorff, long-term Chairman and Chief Executive Officer for Centene. A true visionary, Michael was committed to making every community he could better, either by providing accessible healthcare coverage to vulnerable populations, donating to the arts, and ensuring employment opportunities existed in communities that might otherwise be overlooked.

A huge part of Michael's legacy, that often isn't shared, is how much he truly cared for Centene employees. To me personally, he was a mentor who took a chance on a farm boy from California, and some of the greatest advice he gave me was that it's more important to 'play the long game' instead of making short-term decisions. In other words, it will pay out in dividends to build foundational partnerships with other leaders to encourage collaborative decision-making. This gives all of us a wide-angle view of the organization's strategy and a better chance that the decision at hand will lead to long-term success.

Michael taught me that the world is one of fast-moving change, where technology organizations have to prepare not for what's next, but for what's only beginning to emerge. As a leader, you must be able to quickly and confidently make the right decisions that best benefits your organization's long-term vision.

The insight Michael shared with me has helped form not only my career, but shines a light on the importance of confident leadership. That light, for me, will never be dimmed."

# Bernie Gracy

**SVP & CDO, Agero**



"In the early 2000s, a former divisional president (Brian Baxendale) of another B2B2C company like Agero, drilled into me and my colleagues his passion for clients and their customers. "The ONLY moral authority is a client. We create shareholder value when we help our clients help their customers."

That simple phrase has been the guidepost for my career. So many in technology are insulated (or disintermediated) from clients, customers, and users by sales, account management, or product management. I have grabbed every opportunity to listen and learn from, and then create and deliver value for clients of all sizes, whether internal or external.

I have cascaded this philosophy in all of my organizations as I have progressed in my career because it drives the following:

1. Client and customer centricism: from ideation through 7x24x365 support.
2. A moral sense of purpose: a culture of service-oriented leadership to your internal and external clients.
3. Talent and career development: mastering technical competencies is not enough. Develop client, partner, prospect, and customer listening and communication skills. Have the ability to 'solution,' to meet needs. This is critical to career progression.
4. Value creation: the understanding of how value is created and realized for clients and shareholders. Technical professionals must understand the fundamentals of economics in their designs as well as meet the functional and emotional needs of clients and their customers.

Brian's advice literally changed the arc of my career. And that same advice has been cascaded to hundreds of others in my charge."

# Rachel Lockett

**CIO, Pohlad Companies**



"I worked for Matt for a couple of years when I began to recognize a pattern in our interactions. Knowing he loved PowerPoint, I would bring a brief slide deck each time I needed to propose an initiative or major purchase. I would keep the presentation concise, while including all the pertinent information I thought he might need to make a decision. But every time, Matt would ask some deeper follow-up questions for which I did not have a ready answer. He would send me back to do more research and tell me that we would discuss it the following week once I had

gathered the additional information.

When the next week came along, I would be prepared to review the proposal, including the new information he had requested. And I would be even more certain of the importance of moving forward with my proposal. I would sit down in his office ready to launch into my updated presentation. Invariably, before I could finish the first sentence, Matt would raise his hand and say, 'That's fine. I approve. Go ahead and get it done. Keep me posted on the progress.' I would sit back, feeling both deflated and jubilant at the same time.

As I began to recognize the pattern, I eventually asked Matt about it. 'Why do you send me back to do all this additional research, and then never even listen to it once I've done it?' His answer was short and impactful. 'Measure twice. Cut once.'"

## **John Pelant**

**EVP CTO, CWT**



“Business and Technology is a team sport. I truly believe in the strength of the organization. Its ability to adapt and move forward at pace is a result of the collective organization coming together for a common purpose. Working together and for each other makes the difference between an organization with goals and an organization that reaches its goals.”

## **Aaron Gwinner**

**SVP & CIO, Reynolds American**



“Leadership is about creating a vision of where you want to go that your team can own and rally around. Your job is not to tell them how to get there. It's to ensure nothing gets in their way!”

## Ted Ross

### CIO & General Manager, City of Los Angeles



“Debra Grant, my supervisor at the Los Angeles Airport Department, once told me ‘what’s measured will improve’ (quoting Peter Drucker). At an early stage of my government career, this advice was very memorable to me both as a manager and when making career choices.

First, for every new job, I work hard to synthesize what it is we actually do. It is amazing how many organizations have a rough ‘feeling’ about the services they perform and the products they deliver. I have found this to be a very useful question during a job interview to better understand the

company I am seeking to work for. Their response will inform you about the environment you may end up working in.

Second, identifying and using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) transforms business or government. If the KPIs have a real relationship with desired performance, then those measurements will improve organizational behavior and investments. This becomes essential in fighting for budget, competing for projects, and holding ambitious colleagues at bay.

Third, measurements allow me to demonstrate results during my career personally. KPIs that were established and improved during my tenure as a CIO, allow me to demonstrate my leadership for future career opportunities. In other words, measurements not only improve the organization I am working for, but they improve my career opportunities and the doors that are open to me. Thank you again, Debra. I sincerely appreciate your insight and mentorship.”



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