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PROJECT

I.T. JOB SEARCHING
IN 2019:
A PRACTICAL GUIDE

I.T. JOB SEARCHING IN 2019: A PRACTICAL GUIDE

IT job searching requires patience and strategy. Our how-to guide shares advice from your peers who've overcome the challenges and won the plum jobs for IT professionals and IT leaders.

When the calendar page turns and the New Year begins, many IT professionals bear down on finding a new job. Perhaps you've made a resolution to take a concrete step toward your dream IT leadership role. Perhaps you've realized your career is in a rut. Or perhaps a toxic boss or stagnant culture has taken the joy out of your current job. The good news: You've already made progress by deciding to search and make a change.

At The Enterprisers Project, we are here to make it hurt less. We've gathered up the best IT job search advice from IT professionals, IT leaders, and recruiters, to make your job hunt as productive as possible.

These practical strategies will help you bolster your resume (page 11) and LinkedIn profile (page 24), show your emotional intelligence at interviews (page 28), negotiate your salary (page 33), and more.

Are you ready to say goodbye to that old job? Here are some essential articles to get you started.

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HOW TO KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME TO FIND A NEW I.T. JOB

BY CARLA RUDDER

At a crossroads in your career? Ask yourself these five critical questions to determine if you should stay in your current position or move along.

Should you stay or should you go? If you work in IT, you've grappled with this question at some point in your career.

Among all industry sectors, technology (software, not hardware) companies had the highest turnover rate in 2017 at 13.2 percent overall, according to LinkedIn data. (Retail ranks second, at 13 percent.) Within the software companies, the turnover rate climbs to more than 20 percent for user experience designers, data analysts, and embedded software engineers. About half of those departing employees took another job in IT, according to LinkedIn's data.

> " Nobody wants to be a principal engineer with skills that are valued as junior in other companies.

In a sector known for talent poaching and eager recruiters, increasingly competitive salaries and benefits, and emerging skills that are in high demand but low supply, IT career hopping is common practice. But that doesn't mean the decision to leave an IT job proves easy or straightforward. No matter the stage of your career, you'll find risks and rewards associated with changing jobs.

If you find yourself at this critical crossroads, ask yourself the following questions. The answers could help make your decision to leave the clear choice. Or they could help you find new meaning and sources of untapped opportunity should you decide to stay where you are.

1. Do I have freedom to experiment?

The concepts of failing fast, minimum viable product, and rapid prototyping have transformed the culture of IT in recent years, and forward-thinking organizations are embracing experimentation like never before. How do you know if you are in one of these organizations? Consider how much of your time is dedicated to "play," says Viktor Farcic, senior consultant at CloudBees.

"Most of us become engineers because we like to play with new technologies," says Farcic. "That not only increases knowledge and experience but also makes us happy. It may also lead to an 'aha moment' that returns value to your company because you discover a better way of doing something."

If you find that you are not getting as much play time as you'd like, or you are in an organization that shuns failure rather than celebrates it, that may be a good reason to move on.

2. What are my priorities?

It's uncommon to achieve everything you want in your career from one job or even one company. When considering a change, think about what's important to you right now and make a list of priorities, suggests Kitty Brandtner, director of major accounts at recruiting company LaSalle Network. For example, are you looking for a higher salary, the chance to make a meaningful business impact, or do you want to see through an implementation from start to finish?

"If a tech professional's only criteria in switching jobs is a higher salary or a more prestigious title, that may benefit them in the short-term, but probably won't allow them to achieve long-term job satisfaction and happiness if that higher salary or title doesn't also expose them to new technologies or programs," says Brandtner.

"Another reason employees leave is to learn a new language or have access to cutting-edge tools their current company cannot provide or chooses not to invest in. In this instance, it's smart to look elsewhere in order to gain new experience and grow your career," she adds.

3. Am I increasing my value?

When it comes to your career, be selfish, Farcic advises. If you are not building competitive skills and experiences in your current role, move on before it hurts you in the long run. Farcic says, "You should ask yourself a simple question: 'If I stay here, will my value on the market increase?'

The answer boils down to your company's ability to follow the trends and give you demanding tasks that will serve to improve your skills and knowledge, says Farcic. "If that is not happening, you might end up with 20 years of 'repeated' experience. That is not the same as 20 years of 'real' experience," he warns.

"Nobody wants to be a principal engineer with skills that are valued as junior in other companies. Unfortunately, that happens a lot. People get fired, and companies go under. Trying to find a new job and saying 'I have many years of experience with DB2' does not land you a good position."

4. Will my job be automated?

Wondering if robots will come for your job? It may be a valid concern, especially if you spend the majority of your time at work doing repetitive or manual tasks.

"In this IT world of ever-changing technologies, automation is gaining unprecedented popularity. If you are in a job that involves a lot of manual testing, you either know your job will be phased out one day in the not-so-distant future or you are in serious denial," says Meera Rao, senior principal consultant with Synopsys Software Integrity Group.

"If your company is moving towards more automation, you need to get up to speed, gain additional skill sets, and upgrade yourself to meet these new challenges. Otherwise, you will be left behind," she adds.

On the other hand, Rao notes, if you are up to speed on automation, but you're working for a company that's falling behind, you should start to look around, because these skills are valuable. "Once you find the right fit, the sky's the limit to achieve your career goals," she says.

5. How could I grow if I stay?

Sometimes deciding to stay in your current role is the harder choice. If you are experiencing friction or feeling stalled, throwing in the towel and starting over can be more appealing. But overcoming the obstacles in your current job can pay off greatly. "A person's natural fear of failing often allows them to miss opportunities to learn new things," says Daniel VanBeek, director of operations at Itential. "New opportunities are rarely presented with a shiny bow and polite encouragement to learn something new. Instead, new opportunities to achieve career goals and tap into your ultimate potential are provided in amorphous requests to solve a problem that has never been solved before. It's risky; it's scary, and most people do not realize that your current job is trusting you to solve a critical business issue. That is when you grow your skills."

Brandtner adds, "Before looking for a new job, have an honest conversation with your employer about where you see your career going and ask if there are ways to advance and grow in your current position. Companies everywhere are having a hard time attracting and retaining tech talent, so they may be more willing to invest in new tools or programs in order to retain you."

Read more at EnterprisersProject.com

IS YOUR CAREER STALLED?
7 TIPS TO GET BACK ON TRACK

BY CARLA RUDDER

Listen to the cold, hard truth from execs and career experts about that stalled progress of yours and how to fix it.

We are happiest at work when we feel inspired, have a sense of purpose, and experience chances for career advancement.

It's something we all want. A survey by Robert Half Technology found that advancement opportunities and the ability to grow and learn were among the top benefits tech employees want in a job. "If you aren't finding any of these in your career, you may feel like you're at a standstill," said Ryan Sutton, district president for Robert Half Technology, New York and New England markets.

> If you start having thoughts that you can do your manager's job, it's a major sign that you have to do something about it.

What are some warning signs that your career is in a rut?
- You don't see any clear or varied career paths in your department.
- Your skills aren't being used to their full potential.
- You dread going to work every day.
- You find your assignments boring and unengaging.
- Your hard work isn't acknowledged by your boss or colleagues.
- You haven't received a raise in the last year.

"If you also start having thoughts that you can do your manager's job, it's a major sign that you have to do something about it," says Robbie Abed, author of "Fire Me I Beg You."

But what if you are the manager or the boss? Feeling stalled can be especially challenging for IT leaders, who are expected to drive innovation for their companies. Martha Heller, CEO of Heller Search Associates, who specializes in recruiting CIOs and other technology leaders, describes how being stalled can sideline IT leaders, and keep them from reaching the innovation goals that are critical to their job. She shares some red flags for IT leaders:

"You are in maintenance mode and cannot generate funding for investing in new technologies," says Heller. "The business does not invite you to key strategic meetings. Your executive committee (EC) refuses to fund infrastructure modernization efforts, and does not buy your ROI analysis. Or you're on the CIO's succession plan, but the EC has ignored that plan and gone to the external market for your new boss."

These are all warning signs that your ability to make a meaningful impact is limited in your current job – and you need to do something about it. If any of these signs ring true for you, consider these tips that can help you get back on a path of forward momentum in your career. Explore these strategies:

1. Ask for help

"Get a mentor – perhaps a seasoned CIO from outside your company or a business leader within your company," suggests Heller. "Have a frank conversation with your boss about your interests in taking on more responsibility, and listen carefully to the feedback you receive."

2. Expand and refresh your network

"The best way to get out of a rut is to start taking coffee meetings with other people in your industry," says Abed. "It's important to get other people's thoughts on your career path and get an external point of view on what you can do next."

3. Learn what motivates you

"If you dread going to work, you will not be motivated to do good work," says Dr. Larry Pfaff, executive coach, Pfaff and Associates. "You need to determine what it will take to get you excited about doing your job, then adapt or find a better fit." A career coach can help you analyze what motivates and drives you, and then help you decide what your next steps should be, says Pfaff.

4. Advance your career through education

Learning new skills can be a great way to reconnect with what inspired you about IT in the first place. It can also position you for more executive roles. "If you are a great technologist who struggles with finance and other business disciplines, get the education (and the networks) that will get you to the next level," says Heller.

5. Explore small changes, too

Finding greater happiness at work may just require some small tweaks, says Sutton, "like shifting your hours for better work-life balance or asking for a project that could bring new challenges. They could also be more significant, like asking for a promotion or raise or moving to a different department. Start by talking to your manager about your concerns and see what they can do to help you. And if you can't find a new, appealing option with your current employer, it may be time to begin looking elsewhere."

6. Leave your comfort zone

Jonathan Feldman, CIO of Asheville, NC, says sometimes people are just not honest with themselves about their willingness to rise to challenges. "How closely do you want to follow your boss's advice?" Feldman asks. "If your boss sits you down and says 'You need to do 1, 2, and 3 to advance,' are you listening? The people I promote listen, internalize, and they own it." To get there, Feldman says, "Ask clarifying questions about the steps you need to take, then take initiative. You have to go beyond your comfort zone into the unknown."

7. Know when it's them, not you

For innovation-minded leaders, the biggest limiting factor in your stalled job could be old-school thinking. Sometimes your career is stalled "because your company is afraid of change, no matter how much of a change leader you actually are," says Heller.

Sutton adds, "If you do decide to look for a new opportunity, aim to find an organization that cares about your professional development and helps you succeed. You'll likely be happier at a company that gives you challenging and engaging work, supports work-life balance, and recognizes your accomplishments with attractive compensation and benefits."

Read more at EnterprisersProject.com

7 SKILLS EVERY PROFESSIONAL I.T. RESUME NEEDS

BY STEPHANIE OVERBY

Communication. Political savvy. Emotional intelligence. Here's how to show these skills and 4 other must-haves in your IT resume.

When it comes to creating an effective IT resume today, forget about tasks: Think accomplishments and so-called soft skills. As organizations look for candidates to help lead their [transformational efforts](), with life-or-death consequences for the business, they're looking for not only knowledge of technologies themselves, but also the suite of personal and professional skills required to translate that technology into positive business outcomes.

"Things that were nice to have in the past have now become absolutely essential for CIOs," Suzanne Adams, research vice president on Gartner's Leadership, Culture and People team said during a [recent podcast](). "Developing advanced communication skills, being able to handle those difficult conversations both on the business side and within IT, learning how to deal with confrontation, and learning how to navigate the politics of an organization."

Even if you're on an aspirational path to becoming a CIO, these skills matter. You may find such capabilities difficult to illustrate in a bulleted list, but there are ways to ensure these key competencies are part of the CV narrative.

"Within your employment history, highlight three or four key accomplishments," says Jim Johnson, senior vice president for [Robert Half Technology](). "Highlight your soft skills within the information about accomplishments. Talk about your leadership ability and [show] that you're a good communicator, whether leading a team through a project or your ability to vet and coordinate with vendors. Bring these items to the forefront of your resume."

If you're beginning the hunt for your next IT or IT leadership role, make sure to highlight these skills:

1. Outstanding communication skills

This may seem like a no-brainer, but top-notch communication skills – involving a variety of media – have never been more important for IT leadership roles. "Effective leaders know how to gauge the situation they're in and determine what and how they need to communicate. They master their presentation style, their email, their negotiation skills, and even their water-cooler conversation because they realize that communication is a part of their brand and [it] sends a message about their ability," says David Foote, co-founder and CEO of Foote Partners.

Just as importantly, these leaders see communication as a two-way street and excel at listening. Wherever possible, IT leaders and aspirants should highlight their communication talents: their ability to talk tech with peers and also serve as skilled translators to non-tech audiences, to intelligently articulate a strategy, and to negotiate, persuade, or resolve conflict.

2. Political savvy

"This is particularly valuable when the leader is faced with the task of transforming the IT function to help the business compete more effectively in an increasingly tech-dominated market," says Kanak Rajan, partner in Mercer's human capital practice. "Large-scale transformation is a potential minefield."

Rajan shared some ways that IT leaders can highlight their ability to build and leverage political capital: Show how you secured investment in systems and technology that wasn't a lock to have an immediate or apparent impact on profits. Explain how you were able to retire legacy systems, or how you earned a seat at the business strategy table.

3. Relationship-building and collaboration

Gone forever are the days of the cloistered IT organizations. "Outstanding tech leaders are highly social business executives and are measured by their ability to create a culture of connectivity, productivity, and seamless collaboration," says Foote.

This is both a skill and a mindset, but it is still possible to demonstrate on a CV by explaining relationship building and collaboration – with not only internal stakeholders, but also customers, suppliers, and partners.

4. Emotional intelligence

"CIOs need to be more emotionally intelligent," said Bruce Robertson, research vice president and distinguished analyst in Gartner's CIO Research group, in a recent podcast. Emotional intelligence accounts for the vast majority of the difference between good and great leaders, adds Foote, who estimates that it's twice as important as IQ.

One way to highlight that on a resume is to talk about efforts to create a more inclusive IT environment. "CIOs must acknowledge and yet harness the diversity that is in their workforce that they control and also around the enterprise," Robertson said. "That means they need to understand the visible kinds of diversity, like gender and age, and also some of the less visible ones, like cognitive diversity."

Empathy is another valuable aspect of EQ to point to when job seeking. Leaders can display their empathy by highlighting how they used it to get buy-in, or created messages and strategies in ways that enabled others to believe in them.

5. Transformational leadership

Beyond change management, the skill to highlight is change leadership. Note efforts to create change in operating and business processes, the creation of continuous improvement organizations, and the ability to execute on a vision through challenges.

IT leaders can also make it clear how they have fostered a growth mindset in their organizations or the enterprise, or otherwise engaged and inspired others to get on board with transformation efforts.

6. Business and financial acumen

The most sought-after IT pros and leaders are able not simply to stay on top of the latest technology trends and digital development, but to "translate those into business impact or advantages for the enterprise," Adams said. As the mentality has shifted from leading IT projects to leading business products, understanding a company's financial and business strategy has become table stakes for IT leaders – and is important to note on a resume.

> **"A great IT leader is one who knows how to turn a cost center into a successful profit center or subsidiary business.**

"A great IT leader is one who knows how to turn a cost center into a successful profit center or subsidiary business," says Foote. "This requires in-depth knowledge of the industry served and the company's business strategy, the competitive landscape, and a foundation in the principles of accounting, finance, supply chain management, marketing, sales, and distribution channels."

7. Delegation and empowerment

IT leadership roles have expanded so dramatically that no one individual can possibly know everything required to succeed. That's why one of the more important competencies to highlight is the ability to create a highly competent team – as well as the willingness to let them do what they do best.

"An empowered team that believes in the organization will do great things, and their leaders are responsible for creating an environment or trust and positivity that encourages that," says Foote. "This requires a leader [who] understands team strengths and delegates tasks that play them up and that foster the autonomy that employees seek."

IT leaders who point to their team's accomplishments in their resumes will stand out in this area. "Great leaders always credit their teams when recounting their successes," says Foote.

Read more at EnterprisersProject.com

7 WAYS TO WIN THE CIO ROLE YOU COVET

BY STEPHANIE OVERBY

You're working hard to win a CIO role, but are you taking the right steps? Here's how to grow your appeal, stand out among candidates, and land that job.

So, you want to be a CIO? The top IT spot looks more attractive than ever for professionals driven to make a difference in the digital era. We've come a long way from "career is over:" The CIO in many organizations is a key executive, helping to chart strategy and oversee execution of digital transformation initiatives.

Of course, that means you'll have significant competition for the CIO role – not only from fellow IT professionals but also from up-and-coming business leaders who have their eyes on the position.

In addition, the qualifications and experience requirements companies seek in their new CIO hires are greater than ever. It's no longer enough to have toiled for a certain number of years in the IT function. Today's CIO needs business acumen, a deep understanding of the customer, and the ability to influence the larger organization – for a start.

If you're interested in this prominent role, learn how to better prepare yourself for that future and make your aspirations and experience clear in the market. Consider these seven to-do items for aspiring CIOs:

1. Get closer to customers

Smart CIOs have long been proactive about understanding the needs of their IT customers within the organization. But today's CIOs also have a vested interest in ensuring that the end customers – from whom all revenues flow – are happy.

In fact, "more CEOs are promoting their CIOs to become Chief Customer Officer or P&L leaders," says Katie Ross, a recruiting partner at Heller Search Associates, an executive search firm specializing in CIOs and other senior IT roles nationwide. "That means hiring managers ideally want someone with strong potential to grow out of the CIO role and be more customer-facing from the start."

Those who want to inhabit the CIO role must develop experience around customers, whether by developing key customer-facing applications, mapping out customer journeys with marketing and product teams, or meeting with customers to understand requirements and new products. "Back-office functions will always be important, but engaging customers with digital technology is the next game-changer," Ross says.

2. Find a CIO mentor and meet regularly

"Mentorship, especially when looking to transition to a C-level role, is integral to a professional's career development," says Randi Weitzman, senior vice president for Robert Half Technology. Would-be CIOs cannot rely on their own bosses alone to provide them with the guidance they need to advance their careers as IT leaders, particularly if they are reporting to a CIO or other leader with little interest in or time for grooming. "We tell candidates who are CIO-track to ensure that they have a CIO mentor, be it within or outside of their own organization, to meet with on a regular basis – we encourage monthly meetings – in order to roadmap their careers," says Weitzman. (See our related story: 7 habits of highly effective IT mentors.)

3. Take on the CIO role before someone gives it to you

Find the right assignments and projects, because practice makes perfect. CIOs need to stay on top of technology trends, particularly in the areas of data and security. They must be trusted business partners. They can oversee enterprise initiatives in their sleep. They can recruit and manage an IT leadership team. They contribute to the top and bottom lines. These are all capabilities that those with CIO aspirations must possess going into the job, says Weitzman.

For those hoping to advance to the CIO role, it's critical to stay abreast of broad technology trends, develop relationships with business leaders, have experience overseeing enterprise-wide projects that have saved either time and money or generated revenue for an organization; and be heavily networked within the community of IT professionals.

As Optima CIO Jason James recently advised aspiring CIOs: Your tech chops still matter.

4. Build your business acumen

"The best conversations I have with CIOs are when I forget that I'm talking to the CIO," says Chuck Gray, consultant and CIO practice group leader for Egon Zehnder. Anyone who plans to be a CIO must deeply understand the business and how the technology organization impacts it.

"For aspiring CIOs, it's important to remember that at some point, your ability to rise to the top job is less about your technical expertise and more about your ability to impact the business going forward," Gray says. "Do you understand the strategy? Do you know how to build a team and generate followership? As a CIO, you have to be able to influence and collaborate."

As ServiceNow CIO Chris Bedi puts it, any successful CIO must embody three personas: communicator, salesperson, and influencer.

5. Define your personal brand

If you want a high-profile role like CIO, you'll need to stand out in a sea of competitors. "Make sure you know and can articulate what differentiates you in the marketplace: What are the skills and experiences that you offer to a CIO role?" says Howard Seidel, senior partner at Essex Partners.

Replace abstract descriptions of leadership qualities with images of your unique skill set and experiences. It's critical to project a CIO persona in all communications including your resume, LinkedIn profile, and executive bio as well as your appearance, body language, and speech. "I have found that most candidates looking to gain a CIO role are really at the director or senior manager level hoping to break into the executive ranks, but they lack a cohesive brand message," says IT career advancement strategist Stephen Van Vreede. "Often, the story that they tell when meeting face-to-face does not align with the content they provide in their marketing documents."

6. Build a market strategy

"The key to that strategy is networking – but you also want to have an approach to getting to relevant recruiters, targeting companies, and seeking out published openings," Seidel says. Make sure your networking includes not only general contacts who may be able to help but also your champions who will advocate for you.

"Don't just approach the network about their knowledge of jobs. That's very obvious, but it can also lead to very short discussions if they don't know of any," says Siedel. "Ask for their advice on the market, on your resume, on working with relevant recruiters, on potential companies to target or other people with whom to connect."

While doing this outreach, avoid clumsy networking gaffes: See our related story, 6 LinkedIn etiquette mistakes IT leaders hate.

Up-and-coming IT leaders should also focus on how to get their resumes – or themselves – in front of people who actually make the CIO hiring decisions. "Most candidates make the mistake of putting all their effort into activities that do not enable them to engage with this audience, instead having to deal with gatekeepers," says Van Vreede.

7. Nurture your LinkedIn presence

First and foremost, get to know the LinkedIn algorithm, which considers more than just the keywords in your profile, advises Dave Denaro, vice president of Keystone Associates. A well-thought-out and active presence will increase the likelihood that you'll get the call when a recruiter is launching a CIO search.

Develop a network, taking care to include CIOs and CEOs, says Denaro. "Being a first-tier connection to the person doing the looking is worth quite a bit in a LinkedIn algorithm. Make sure your profile is complete, filling out as many information fields as possible. Then, get more involved on LinkedIn.

"Be active on LinkedIn by endorsing others, responding to questions posed by group members, and posting work-related articles yourself," Denaro says. "All of that is considered 'activity' on the platform and increases your relevance according to the system's algorithm." But take care not to harm your brand in the process.

Read more at EnterprisersProject.com

TOP SOFT SKILLS FOR I.T. LEADERS AND HOW TO MASTER THEM

BY KEVIN CASEY

Communication. Empathy. EQ. They're must-haves for IT leaders. Use these strategies to improve your soft skills.

IT pros, from the seasoned CIO to the developer fresh out of school, are bombarded with advice on the importance of soft skills to their career success. But the term suffers from a fundamental branding problem. Soft skills sound, well, soft: As in easy to come by, or more replaceable than "hard" skills.

"It's funny that we even talk about these skills as 'soft,' because they are very hard to master and are frequently the cause of more trouble than lack of 'hard' skills," says Anders Wallgren, CTO at Electric Cloud.

Take a trait like empathy: It's increasingly necessary in modern IT shops and digital businesses in general. But telling someone to "learn" empathy? That makes developing a "hard" skill like being able to code in Python sound pretty straightforward in comparison.

However, learning and honing new soft skills is not optional, as these qualities are increasingly in demand. We tapped IT leaders, as well as a technology recruiting and staffing pro, for their take on what soft skills really matter today, why they matter – and how IT professionals can build this part of their overall skill set.

Which soft skills matter most in modern IT?

Let's first drum up a general definition of "soft skills." The phrase typically refers to a wide range of characteristics and abilities that are valuable in many job roles, not just IT. Deep expertise in container orchestration (e.g. a hard skill) might make you a star in IT, but it's probably not going to do you much good if you work in finance or HR. Strong written and oral communication skills, however, matter to just about any role or department.

In the past, many IT pros could skate by – or even thrive – on their technical chops alone. But in the digital age, with the line between IT and "the business" all but gone, that's no longer true. Let's hear about the soft skills that IT leaders and recruiters say matter the most:

Anders Wallgren, CTO at Electric Cloud: "They are really crucial for any team, but software organizations especially need communication and openness," he says. He also points to curiosity and tenacity as two other critical soft skills for IT pros.

Kitty Brandtner, manager of major accounts for technology, LaSalle Network: "It really comes down to communication," Brandtner says. She adds patience and empathy as other soft skills that are increasing factors in IT recruiting and staffing decisions.

Mike Kail, CTO at Everest: Clear and concise verbal and written communication; empathy; emotional intelligence (EQ); situational awareness; and collaboration.

Why soft skills matter

Why are these skills so crucial? Sure, strong communication skills sound like a good thing, but what makes them really important for IT?
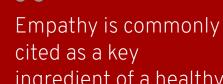
They're wholly necessary to help IT change from a back-office support arm to a strategic business unit. Back when "the business" was some separate, almost mythical beast to be supported in reactive, monolithic fashion, you didn't really need sharp communication skills or empathy. Maybe you didn't interact in meaningful ways with anyone outside of IT. Heck, you might have barely interacted with your colleagues in IT, thanks to the IT silos of old.

"IT is getting less and less siloed, and is bleeding into all areas of a company in this data age," Brandtner says. "Tech professionals have to adapt and be able to work across teams and departments, and explain the value they bring to different stakeholders."

This organizational shift enables some critical cultural, technological, and business trends: Think digital transformation, DevOps, automation, and more.

As Kail puts it, "I believe that all of the soft skills that I addressed [above] are important and meaningful in driving digital transformation, as well as adopting new technologies such as cloud, AI/ML, blockchain, and all other facets of modern IT teams. Having the ability to clearly communicate the 'why' to all stakeholders, for example, is paramount to success."

Consider empathy: It's commonly cited as a key ingredient of a healthy [DevOps culture](). If a developer can't put themselves in a sysadmin's shoes, for example, by doing a tour of pager duty or getting their hands dirty with infrastructure, then the team probably isn't going to click.

> " Empathy is commonly cited as a key ingredient of a healthy DevOps culture.

IT pros must be able to work – and communicate – with a much wider range of people and personality types than ever before. If you dream in Linux OCI runtimes and hybrid cloud architectures, that may be easier said than done. But it's absolutely necessary.

"For modern IT departments, employees are increasingly bridging gaps and communicating with non-technical leaders and others within the organization," Brandtner says. "Because of this, patience and empathy are important skills to hone in on."

Other soft skills are generating greater value in an era when IT departments are much more likely to be viewed as innovation hubs rather than support centers.

"Curiosity and tenacity are like gold," Electric Cloud's Wallgren says. "They really are the drivers behind many real improvements. 'Hey, why does that thing fail all the time? Can we improve that? I'm going to dig into it, and I'm not going to stop until it's better than it is now.'"

How to improve your soft skills

Let's say that communication – or any other soft skill – doesn't come naturally to you. It might feel like you're doomed; if you have a difficult time connecting with or understanding non-technical folks, for instance, there's not necessarily a course or a certification for that.

Nonetheless, you can develop any skill, hard or soft, with ongoing work and effort. Let's consider five strategies for building soft skills:

Don't expect quick fixes:

Just as you probably wrote some funky code en route to mastering Java or made some missteps during your first cloud migration, you can't expect to master soft skills quickly.

"How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice!" says Wallgren. "Perhaps some of us are more naturally skilled in some of these areas, but for us mere mortals, practice is key. You can read all the great books in the world, but if you don't try to apply, fail, learn, re-apply the lessons in those books, you'll never improve much."

Indeed, reading widely – and narrowly, when focusing on a specific skill – is also useful. But just as reading a book on Kubernetes alone won't make you an orchestration expert, reading up on interpersonal skills won't grant you magical powers. In both cases, you'll need to use what you're learning. Perfect doesn't need to be your goal: Practice will ensure you're always getting better.

In fact, from the leadership perspective, cultivating soft skills depends upon "making the process of strengthening them a continuous process, not an annual assessment," Kail says. That matches with his individual experience with regular practice: "I've also found that communication, both written and verbal, can only improve if you practice them, so I personally try to speak at events and write as much relevant content as possible."

Also, give yourself the necessary breathing room to improve incrementally in soft skills.

"The key for any IT professional looking to develop soft skills is to first and foremost practice patience," says Flint Brenton, CEO at CollabNet. "All of these skills are learn-able, but it certainly is not going to happen overnight."

Seek out honest feedback:

Just as IT processes often depend on particular feedback loops for improvement, so does soft skills development. Communication is a good example: Lots of people think they write or speak clearly and effectively, but that doesn't make it true. Find trusted feedback and be analytical (and honest) about it. In any area you want to improve, start by assessing your current state.

"Take note of how you communicate currently – do you use fillers (uh, um…) or go on tangents? How can you improve?" Brandtner says. "Maybe you can focus on being more concise, or use more analogies for non-technical folks to follow your thought process. Ask colleagues or friends and family you trust for feedback on how you present."

Find a new mentor:

"Having a great mentor is also valuable in getting another direct and candid perspec-tive of the areas that you need to focus on improving," Kail says. In fact, that mentor doesn't even need to be someone in the IT field, nor do you need to follow the conven-tional wisdom that a mentor is older than you.

Brenton notes that mentors can be particularly valuable when you feel stuck or need help in areas that are commonly associated with soft skills.

"Know that it is okay to depend on others from time to time and reach out to your circle of mentors or leaders to learn from their experiences," he says.

Make yourself uncomfortable

It's easy – perhaps easier than ever in the digital age – to stick with what we already know and filter out what we don't. Soft skills development depends on avoiding that trap. It's the soft skills corollary to the common IT career advice that you need to be continuously developing and redeveloping your technical knowledge.

"A couple of the core traits that I look for are the desire and ability to continually evolve and a high degree of intellectual curiosity," Kail says.

One way to spark that continuous evolution: Deliberately do things that appear, at their surface, to have nothing to do with IT.

"Get creative and step outside of your comfort zone," Brandtner says. "For example, taking improv classes or enrolling in Toastmasters to work on communicating in front of people can help to improve communication and impact how you present yourself professionally."

Interact more with people outside of your company

"Even if it doesn't come naturally, force yourself into social situations," Brandtner advises.

That isn't pat advice – it's strategic.

"Network with peers outside of the company to learn how they've overcome obstacles you also may be facing," she explains. "The goal [of developing soft skills] isn't to reinvent the wheel – many companies face similar challenges, so the more you expose yourself to different case-studies, the more opportunity you will give yourself to try different solutions."

One CIO we know has a rule for his people attending conferences: Don't let me see you sitting with people from our company. You're there to meet new people and learn. While he's most interested in growing knowledge of how other teams tackle problems, his people get a side benefit from the conversations. As you observe new people using their soft skills, you will grow your own.

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5 LINKEDIN TIPS TO STRENGTHEN YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

BY KRISTIN BURNHAM

**Take your use of LinkedIn to the next level, IT leaders.
Make sure your personal brand comes through loud and clear.**

On one level, merely keeping up with LinkedIn is frustrating: It takes time to navigate the interface updates and feature changes, maintain a current profile, and sort through the lingering invitations to connect.

For all its faults and frustrations, though, LinkedIn remains the top social network for professionals – and it's not just job seekers who benefit from cultivating a presence, says Sandra Long, author of "LinkedIn for Personal Branding: The Ultimate Guide."

If you are building your brand as an IT executive, you can't ignore LinkedIn. "Candidates, colleagues, and industry leaders are researching senior executives on LinkedIn every day," Long says. "Any senior leader who is interviewing, partnering, mentoring, and attending or speaking at conferences needs to create the right online impression to match their personal brand and values."

If using LinkedIn has you down, don't give up just yet. These five tips will help you take your experience beyond the basics and derive more value from the social network.

1. Rethink your professional headline

Your headline is the text that appears below your name on your profile. Unless you opt to customize it, LinkedIn will autofill this section with the most-current position from your profile.

Your professional headline also appears below your name when you show up in LinkedIn searches. For that reason, it's the most important part of your profile – one that many LinkedIn users overlook, says Melonie Dodaro, author of "LinkedIn Unlocked."

"You don't want your headline to just read, 'CIO at company name,'" she says. "Instead, you also want to include details that lend you credibility."

- To start, brainstorm the keyword searches you want to appear in; these might include words and phrases such as "strategic," "technology leader," and the industry you currently work in, for example. Keep it short, too – headlines have a 120-character limit.

- To edit your professional headline, click the Me icon at the top of your home-page, select View profile, then click the Edit icon on your introduction card. In the pop-up window, enter your changes in the Headline field, then click Save.

2. Add new work samples

Your LinkedIn profile doesn't need to be a boring blur of text. One way to make it more visually interesting while distinguishing yourself from others is by adding media samples.

LinkedIn supports a number of formats, including external documents, photos, websites, videos, and presentations.

"Many senior leaders have been interviewed or featured on YouTube by their companies for specific projects. Consider adding [these videos] to your profile, or uploading presentations to LinkedIn via SlideShare," Long says. "If you are a conference speaker, this is a great way to share your deck and extend the value of your content."

- To add media to your profile, click the Me icon at the top of your page, then select View profile from the drop-down menu. Click the Edit icon at the top of your profile to the right of your picture, and under Media select either Upload to add a media sample from your computer or Link to add it via a website. Edit the title and description as needed, click Apply, then Save.

3. Experiment with native video

In 2017, the company launched LinkedIn Video, a built-in tool that lets you upload vlogs and other clips to showcase your professional thoughts and experiences directly to the social network. Much like presentations and photos on your profile, these videos can give people greater insight into who you are as a professional, Long says.

- This feature is available in LinkedIn's iOS and Android apps. To record or upload a video, tap the video button next to the status update box.

- After you post a video, you can view audience insights such as the top companies, titles, and locations of your viewers, plus how many views, likes, and comments your videos received.

4. Better optimize your profile for search

LinkedIn uses proprietary algorithms to order the results users see when searching for people on the site, it says. LinkedIn determines relevance based on a number of factors, including your profile's content.

"There are many important things to do to optimize a LinkedIn profile to be found via search," Long says. "Some of the most-critical elements include uploading a headshot, using a keyword-rich headline and summary, including your industry and geography, generating a custom URL, completing three or more entries under your Experience section, and completing your Education and Skills sections."

Optimizing your profile is important for a variety of reasons, Dodaro adds. You want others to find you via search not only if you're in the market for a new job, but also if you're interested in landing more speaking opportunities.

- Make sure your profile includes sensible, related keywords to boost your LinkedIn search relevancy.

- Don't go too far. LinkedIn warns that users shouldn't try to game the system: "If you integrate an extended list of keywords into your profile, it's likely that your profile will be filtered out by our spam detection algorithms, which will negatively impact your appearance in search results."

5. Engage more with others

One way to up your networking ante is by engaging with other people's content, Long says. This includes liking and commenting on content that appears in your feed and participating in LinkedIn Groups, for example.

"Engaging with other people's strategic content is a great way to learn and network with your industry," she says. "The side benefit is increased visibility as you post, comment, or like specific content."

Conversely, consider publishing your own content inspired by your professional expertise, experiences, and anecdotes. They could be as short and simple as sharing an interesting article, image, or video with your network, or writing your own post – all of which can be done at the top of your feed.

To reach more people, LinkedIn recommends directly mentioning a user when appropriate, asking for responses and feedback, adding hashtags, and replying to users who comment on your posts.

"It's important to remember that your LinkedIn profile is your personal brand," Dodaro says. "Think about the message you want to convey and the first impression you want to give. [LinkedIn is] where people go to learn more about who you are."

Read more at EnterprisersProject.com

5 WAYS TO SHOWCASE YOUR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE ON A JOB INTERVIEW

BY CARLA RUDDER

EQ is one of the top skills hiring managers are looking for - use these interview tips to stand out.

If you are walking into an IT job interview with cutting-edge AI and data science skills, you are in a good position. But technical skills – no matter how high in-demand – will only get you so far. Today, hiring managers are looking for talent that brings more to the table. Often, that "special quality" they seek out and value in candidates is emotional intelligence.

In the latest World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report, emotional intelligence came in at No. 6 on the list of top job skills employers will require in 2020. In fact, they are looking for those skills already. A survey conducted by OfficeTeam, a Robert Half company, found that nearly all HR managers polled (95 percent) said that it's important for employees to have high EQ.

According to the OfficeTeam survey, HR managers are relying on reference checks as the best gauge of emotional intelligence in candidates. But outside of having a third party weigh in on the EQ capabilities of hopeful job seekers, hiring managers have to suss them out during the interview process. It helps to know what they'll be looking for.

The next time you're being interviewed, consider these five strategies. Besides simply being great advice from interview and EQ experts, these specific tips will help you showcase the emotional intelligence capabilities that today's employers value most. Highlight these skills as much as your technical chops, and you'll be a shoe-in for your next IT job.

Listen

The first tip to keep in mind is that you are not just there to talk about yourself. You're also there to listen – and there's a right way and a wrong way to do that. Halelly Azulay, author and founder of [TalentGrow LLC](#), says that job seekers should "listen to understand."

"There are so many distractions, especially during a job interview, and we're always trying to multitask," says Azulay. "Listening deeply means listening to understand instead of listening with the intent to respond, disagree, or to have our turn to talk. Most certainly, listening to understand is way better than tuning out or fake-listening, which is unfortunately common practice. Listen with a curiosity to learn something new or see things from a new perspective."

Rethink your canned responses

There are certain questions you know you'll be asked in an interview. These are the standard prompts hiring managers use, like "Tell me a time you've dealt with opposition," or "What are your greatest strengths/weaknesses." If you're interviewing for your second or third job, you might even have go-to responses to these common questions that have worked for you in the past.

It might be time to freshen up those canned answers to make sure your EQ competencies are shining through. Here are a few examples.

When they ask why you left your last job:

"Don't blame others," says [Sanjay Malhotra](#), CTO of [Clearbridge Mobile](#). "If you were let go from your previous job, for whatever reason, don't run down your employer. A great indicator of emotional intelligence is the ability to take responsibility for your mistakes. If you face this question in a job interview, take this opportunity to show your ability to handle and regulate negative emotions. More so, show your ability to channel a negative emotion and transform it into a positive outcome or solution."

When they ask you to share an example:

Preparation is key, suggests Jim Perry, vice president at [BTS](#). "Think about your work and life experiences, and be prepared to share a story or two of times when you have done great work, been part of a team that really clicked, or overcame a big challenge," says Perry. "As you respond to interview questions, don't pontificate or rehash business platitudes. Instead, tell a concise story that illustrates your point of view. Your stories should be very straightforward – give them context, narrative, and explain what you learned."

When they ask about your strengths:

Don't just rattle off your technical skills. They've already seen your resume. This is your opportunity to highlight your EQ capabilities and the soft skills that will make you a better fit for the job than the rest of the candidates.

Psychologist [Heather Stevenson](#) explains: "Having high emotional intelligence means that you are able to read people and situations and respond appropriately. Someone who has these skills would be able to talk about their ability to adapt to the needs of the company, for example through their flexibility and openness to change, or willingness to try new things and listen to the various needs of team members. Someone with good EI skills is also able to get along well with others and typically a great asset to a team environment or job that focuses on customer/client relations. Speaking to these skills is usually a great way to impress a potential employer," says Stevenson.

When they ask about a difficult experience:

"Be positive," says Drew Bird, founder at [The EQ Development Group](#). "Interviewers are much more likely to look favorably on a candidate that speaks in positive language. Even if you are describing a difficult experience, talk about what you learned from that experience and how you have been able to integrate that learning into your life."

Ask questions

When you are done answering these questions, it's your turn to ask some of your own. Besides getting the information you'll ultimately need to determine if the job is the right fit for you, asking smart questions is another great way to show of your emotional intelligence. Azulay calls this "being interested to be interesting."

"When you show interest, you become interesting," says Azulay. "A lot of us have an inner-judge that worries that the other person won't find us interesting enough, or that we won't naturally connect, or that we won't have anything in common. We need to stop judging and start actively seeking possible points of fascination. People don't get enough opportunities to be in conversations where the other person is sincerely curious and interested in them, so you're going to feel like a fantastic conversation partner to them. They'll not only enjoy the conversation during the interview, they'll remember you fondly in the future."

BTS's Perry says that being curious and exploratory is his No. 1 tip for interviewees. "Rather than trying to sell yourself as a fit for the position and ticking every box, do your homework so that you are not asking the obvious questions," Perry advises. "Prepare some questions around their business, the business unit and team that you would be joining, the values and culture of the organization, etc. You can also ask questions about what makes people successful in their culture and what are some common rookie mistakes. These all show that you are thinking about more than just getting the job. You are thinking about how to succeed at the job."

Pay attention to non-verbal cues

> "
> Remember that you are being interviewed as a human being, and so help them understand what kind of person you are.

There is a reason most interviews are conducted face-to-face versus entirely over the phone or email. In order to get the best read on potential employees, hiring managers are going to be just as interested in the things you don't say during your interview as the things you do say. Pay attention to non-verbal cues, and use them as tactics to show off your EQ skills.

For instance, one of the most powerful interview tools can simply be a pause. Dr. Neeta Bhushan, emotional health educator and author of "Emotional GRIT," says, "Most of the time on interviews, we are eager, we are excited, and we want to show how much we know. Rather, if we start each response with a pause and really take a moment to soak in the question, it conveys not only depth but also portrays humility."

Bird also emphasizes the importance of other non-verbal cues like body language and eye contact. He says, "The roots of our judgments of emotional intelligence in others are primarily based on body language and facial expression first. The words we use are important but somewhat secondary. Remember that you are being interviewed as a human being, and so help them understand what kind of person you are."

Bird's tips for interviewees include: "Be comfortable – everyone knows that interviews can be stressful, so do everything you can to be calm and relaxed. Sit in a comfortable position, but try and avoid crossing your arms and legs because interviewers may interpret that body language as negative. Make eye contact. However, there is a difference between making eye content and maintaining eye contact. Don't make it a staring competition. If there is a panel, make sure you make eye contact with each panelist, especially when answering questions," he says.

Be authentic

Finally, remember that self-awareness is a key component of emotional intelligence. When hiring managers drill you on your skills and experiences, it can feel like they're just trying to stump you. Rather, they are looking for how you respond when you don't have all the "right" answers. This, too, is a great indicator of a candidate's emotional intelligence.

Dr. Bhushan advises, "If you have a shortcoming, don't be afraid to say 'I don't have experience in this, but I'm more then ready to put 110 percent into this new role.' The more authentically you can show your own humanity, the more weight it gives to your character and your self-awareness. Sometimes we think we have to say yes to everything in an interview, but it's ok to speak up if there is something you are not comfortable doing. Be ok with a 'no' or 'no, that's not me,' because you are displaying your self-awareness."

Remember, emotional intelligence takes practice. The very best way to show more emotional intelligence on an interview, on the job, or in any other setting is to work on honing your EQ every day. Put another way, "people can smell fake from a mile away," says Azulay.

"Sometimes when we're trying to make a good impression, we can try to impress or be what we think others expect of us. But ultimately, you can't really sustain their interest for long when you're trying to be someone else," she says. "Focus on being yourself and your authenticity will be a differentiator."

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10 I.T. SALARY NEGOTIATION DO'S AND DON'TS

BY CARLA RUDDER

Get the salary you deserve for that new job. Follow this advice on how to prepare – and how to avoid mistakes.

Put yourself in this scenario: You're interviewing for a new job, and it's going well. You're on your third round of interviews, having passed the phone screening with flying colors and impressed your prospective new boss with your technical prowess and your soft skills. Now you're sitting in front of an HR rep, and you know it's coming – the salary discussion. Are you prepared? Maybe your palms are sweating because you've never done this before. Or perhaps you are in the majority of job seekers who enter the salary conversation unready – or unwilling – to negotiate. Only 39 percent of professionals even attempted to negotiate a higher salary during their last job offer, says a 2018 survey of close to 3,000 people conducted by global staffing firm Robert Half Technology.

"One reason why professionals often avoid salary negotiations is a lack of preparation. Being ready can give you the resources you need to feel confident in this conversation," said Jim Johnson, senior vice president at Robert Half Technology, whose firm creates an annual salary guide with data for over 75 positions in the IT field.

This lack of preparation can be costly. A study from CareerBuilder found that more than half of employers leave room for negotiation when making their first salary offer to prospective new employees. How much room? According to 26 percent of employers polled, the initial offer is under what they are willing to pay by $5,000 or more.

Both recent college graduates and seasoned IT professionals owe it to themselves to go into salary negotiations prepared. To help, we asked career experts to share their tips for making the case, overcoming the nerves, and sealing the deal on the best salary and perks you can get from your next job offer. Even IT leaders who've been to the negotiation table many times can benefit from these reminders and ideas.

1. Do: Set a respectful tone

"Be professional and respectful," advises Katie Ross, recruiting partner for Heller Search Associates. "Remember, you don't have the job yet! Your salary negotiation is a reflection of how you'll do business and maintain relationships in stressful situations. We have seen hiring organizations rescind offers because candidates became sour or communicated poorly during offer negotiations."

2. Don't: Wait to bring salary up

"Address the salary issue as early as possible," says Jeff Butler, host of the podcast "GigaNation." "If you are internal, you probably already know what salary is realistic. If you're external, I would bring it up early, because then you can see if the company even has the budget to hire you into their IT organization."

Make sure your recruiter or HR contact knows what you are hoping for, says Ross. "No one likes to waste time interviewing candidates they can't afford."

3. Do: Bring specifics to the table

"Job seekers should research local salary trends for their field and position prior to the meeting," said Johnson of Robert Half Technology. "Present this research to the hiring manager along with examples of how you believe you'll help the company based on your recent experiences and successes."

"Use the demand of your IT skills to your advantage," says Robbie Abed, author of "Fire Me I Beg You." "If you're great at Salesforce implementations, or Adobe marketing cloud, for example, make sure to use the demand for those skill sets as leverage," he said.

4. Don't: Negotiate a salary and then ask for more benefits

"Negotiate compensation and benefits at the same time for maximum leverage," says Abed. "Don't ask for more money and then, after they agree to it, ask for two more weeks of vacation. Ask for all of it at the same time."

Ross from Heller Search Associates echoes this sentiment: "Negotiating compensation in pieces gets confusing and prolongs the processes," she says.

5. Do: Understand your floor and ceiling

Know the range of acceptable salary as well as the number you will not go under, says Butler. If you're the one kicking off the negotiation, never start at your floor, Butler says.

6. Don't: Drag negotiations on for more than a few days

Keep negotiations under three or four rounds or days, says Ross. if they go beyond four days, "Hiring managers may question your commitment and excitement for the role." Beyond four rounds and you run the risk that "your future employer will feel they are being nickeled and dimed and get impatient. Truly understand what you'll accept and what you'll walk away from, and then be direct about it," she says.

7. Do: Remember to separate salary and benefits

Understand salary versus benefits. "Money and benefits are not equal, and there are a lot of things you can negotiate in benefits," advises Butler. In fact, he points out that those are often two completely separate budgets that add up to a bigger picture of your overall compensation.

"If the hiring manager's answer to a salary increase is 'no,' don't get discouraged," advises Johnson. "There are other non-monetary perks you can negotiate as well. Would a few more vacation days or a flexible schedule make you happy? What about working from home one or two days a week? Ask if these options are available, and if you accept the position, consider revisiting the salary discussion down the line."

8. Don't: Make apples-to-oranges comparisons of offers

Comparing your offer to your friend's recent job offer is a bad idea, says Carol Lynn Thistle, managing director for Heller Search Associates. "The role, company, and culture are usually not apples to apples, and shouldn't be compared as such," she said "You can get hung up on what someone else is getting in their offer, and ruin your chances at a good one because it doesn't seem to be comparable."

However, you should keep an eye on what people in your field and region are being offered by recruiters, on an ongoing basis.

9. Do: Respect the final offer

Know when it's time to end the back and forth. All good negotiations have to come to a decision eventually (See item #6). Ross says, "Remember that hiring managers have a business to run and a budget to keep. If they say it's the final offer, then it's the final offer."

10. Don't: Accept a lowball offer

"Be careful not to sell yourself short," suggests Johnson of Robert Half Technology, "as setting salary expectations too low can hurt your earning potential over your tenure with the company." Once you're in, dramatic salary changes become rarer.

Also, you may feel you've invested a lot of time and energy in the interview process – and you likely have. But you don't want to spend the first year feeling you were taken advantage of, either.

Bonus tip: Start smart

Don't rely on HR alone when applying for jobs. "If at all possible, get interviews through leaders (CIO, CEO, etc.) in the company and not through HR," says Abed. "If the president of the company wants to hire you, then he/she will do anything it takes to bring you on, even if it means paying you more."

Read more at EnterprisersProject.com

I.T. SALARY EXTRAS: 5 PERKS WORTH PURSUING

BY STEPHANIE OVERBY

Where can you sweeten that IT job offer? Recruiters share advice on 5 areas where you have power to negotiate.

Negotiating is always about leverage – understanding where you have it and using it appropriately. That's especially true when it comes to negotiating benefits for a job. "When there's high demand to fill a role, in general you should have more leverage negotiating because of the immediate need to identify top talent," says [Vicki Salemi](#), a former recruiter and career expert for [Monster](#). "And, as IT leadership roles continue to grow in importance – especially in the C-suite – it's important to know your worth and negotiate accordingly during the job interview process."

While many IT professionals focus on a new role's base compensation, health insurance, and retirement plan matching, there may be less wiggle room with those items.

However, you have more power to negotiate perks in other areas and sweeten your deal. Recruiters and other experts share five extras worth asking for before you sign on for your next post:

1. Bonuses and bumps

Once IT job seekers have negotiated their salaries, they should consider asking for a signing bonus – something that's becoming more common. A 2017 [survey](#) by [WorldatWork](#) and [Korn Ferry](#) found that 67 percent of organizations offer hiring bonuses. "I've seen senior leaders get a higher sign-on bonus and/or the timing was waived – where they otherwise would have gotten a completion bonus with a portion paid after the first 90 days, then 120 days," says Salemi.

Salemi urges IT job seekers to find out when they are eligible for a year-end bonus, review, or raise. "This is particularly important if you start working in the fourth quarter of the company's fiscal year and you will be excluded from the salary review process until the following year," Salemi says. "Your increase is technically 15 months instead of 12, and sometimes those additional three months of lag are not taken into account."

2. Flexible work options

One of the most popular benefits for IT leaders and up-and-comers is flexible and/or remote working arrangements, according to Andy Speer, president and Chief Delivery Officer with staffing and solutions provider [Randstad Technologies](#). The opportunity to work from anywhere or anytime is one where IT leaders have significant negotiating power. "Many companies and third-party sources have written about the positive benefits of allowing employees to work when and where they want," Speer says. "We found that [82 percent of IT employees said flexible work increases their productivity](#), creativity, and job satisfaction."

Speer advises first finding out from HR what flexible or remote working arrangements are already supported and negotiate from there.

"State how much time you'll save by commuting and, in turn, that could be time spent working from home," advises Salemi. "You may also want to suggest a trial period if they're not sold on the idea, set metrics or expectations with your boss, check in regularly to see how you're meeting them, and then re-evaluate at the end of the trial run."

3. Monetizing lost benefits

If you have a current job and somebody wants to "pull" you into another organization, your current compensation and perks establish a baseline," says Howard Seidel, senior partner with senior executive career advisory firm [Essex Partners](#). "The pursuing company has to make it worthwhile for you to make a shift." But what happens when your new firm can't replicate the particular perks that came with your old job? You can make a case for additional compensation to make up for them.

"Sometimes non-monetary benefits and perks can be turned into monetary ones – that health club membership supplied by your current company might not be duplicated by your new company but they can change the salary offer to compensate for it," Seidel says.

Candidates should pay particular attention to differences health coverage and costs. "A raise in compensation can be quickly be eaten up by additional health care expenditures," says Seidel, so IT professionals should be sure to point out the differences in coverage and consider asking for additional compensation to make up the difference.

4. Professional development

Every IT pro wants to ensure their skills remain current and this is the perfect time to make sure that happens. "Explain your end goal from the get-go," says Seidel. "Negotiate for training programs, job rotation, or a professional development budget – plus the time [required] for the continued learning. Find a way into roles that permit use of the most current systems, languages, and concepts. Also, ensure that you will have an opportunity to work on cross-divisional initiatives and forward-looking 'think tank' projects."

Speer says he's seeing many companies also offer student loan reimbursement, tuition repayment, and discounts on certification programs for continued learning. "For IT leaders who may have college debt or for those looking to learn new skills, these education benefits offer a chance for employees to gain new experiences and sharpen existing skills," he says.

5. Paid time off

Certain perks, like additional vacation, can be easier for IT job seekers to secure from the start. "If you're asking for an additional week of paid time off, that typically doesn't need approval from a host of people, including the department head, finance, et cetera," says Salemi. "Even though it's important to you, it won't really impact the department's overall budget."

If there are hard-and-fast PTO rules in place, IT professionals may be able to get around formal vacation policies with informal arrangements with their manager. "But be careful," says Seidel, " if that manager disappears so might that informal agreement."

Added extras

In addition to the above core perks, IT professionals can – and have – negotiated for everything from clothing allowances and car services to pet insurance and additional parental leave.

Those who want to increase the likelihood of getting to "yes" will prioritize their asks, know their worth, and make a clear case for the benefits. "Come prepared with data to back up the argument and make the business case for the addition of the benefit," advises Speer.

But don't ask for the kitchen sink. "Be reasonable," says Salemi, who suggests starting with compensation-related benefits and then addressing additional items of value. "Research the company you're pursuing to find out what they offer and then begin negotiations from that point," says Salemi. "Don't just ask for a $50,000 sign-on bonus without having a solid track record and insight into the industry and its compensation packages first."

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