THE TOP 10 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW
BEFORE YOU HIRE AN IT PROFESSIONAL

By Thomas H. Douglas

Every business in the world today is a technology company, whether you intended to be or not.

From the core systems that run our businesses to the way we interface with current customers and sell to new customers, and even how we manage the processes in our businesses... every business is a technology company. Because of this, organizations are faced with a decision around how to manage the systems within a business to ensure they are optimized, secure, stable, and designed in a way to keep people productive. For some businesses, this means the consideration of bringing on an IT person to help drive the business toward desired outcomes. There are times when this is the right thing to do, but **hiring an IT professional is a challenging decision to make, and it is one that requires a great deal of consideration.**

First, I think it is important to know what you are signing up for. Here are the ten aspects of hiring IT help that business leaders are most likely to overlook, and why these factors play such a crucial role in making the right decision for your business.

1 You will be hiring someone whose skill sets you may not know how to evaluate.

Because IT is like a foreign language to most people once you get beyond a surface level, it becomes very challenging to know if an IT professional really knows what they are doing. To do so, you have to have an IT person who knows more than the role for which they are hiring. This is true in any new role you may bring into a company; however, this one can cost you your business. There are a lot of people who "work in IT," but there are actually very few who are trained, skilled IT professionals who know the best practices, how to manage risk, and have the courage to speak up when they need help… and can also provide great end-user support. This is a very expensive hire that requires a very high amount of responsibility. Knowing if the individual is really good at their profession takes in-depth conversations to uncover the truth. There are many who can answer questions about IT at a high level because they understand the concepts, but it is totally different to know if they have actually done the things your business needs, and done them well.

2 You will be leading and managing someone who does work you likely don't understand.

Just because you come to the office in the morning, turn on a computer, and it works doesn't necessarily mean your IT person is doing their job right. There is a massive amount of analysis, log reviewing, alerting, security management, redundancy management, business continuity planning, testing, and vendor management to be done… and that is the short list of IT responsibilities! Because of this, determining success or failure is challenging. Additionally, IT professionals are traditionally not easy to lead. Their motivations are different than the average worker, and helping them solve problems requires a higher technical skill set than the average business leader has. When you sign up to hire an IT professional, know that it's a journey to get things right.

3 ▶ Managing a budget is an essential IT skill.

Knowing how to properly spend funds on IT requires ten or more years of experience. To run IT properly, there is a budget range that is right for every business. However, IT professionals normally go down one of two paths. They either try to show value to the organization by saving money, or they "geek out" and over-engineer a network. Both are horribly wrong. Let me explain:

● **Underspending:** When you save money in technology, it is most often done by cutting corners of some kind. This leads to risk in the business as well as a cost in productivity. This may be due to systems without proper redundancy, systems that have a higher failure rate, inadequate security, inadequate alerting/notification capabilities, inadequate warranty and replacement part availability, or even something as simple as a system that runs fine… until it unexpectedly doesn't, bringing the entire organization down.

● **Overspending:** Many IT professionals like to build a network that has all the latest bells and whistles with all the capabilities that a system supports. Many design a system like this just to prove that they can. However, just because a system can do something doesn't mean that it should. Time and time again, JMARK's engineers encounter IT environments and networks that have been over-engineered to the point of driving costs, complexity, and risk higher for the business. The more complicated a network design, the more challenging it is to keep it running, managed, and secure. Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication. Knowing the right balance of design, continuity, redundancy, and recovery is definitely an art and science.

4 IT professionals must constantly train and stay current.

The technology industry moves fast. At JMARK, we have a full-time technical trainer on staff to help our team stay current, expand their knowledge, and access the right resources to learn new skills. Continuing education is a mandatory part of an IT professional's career, and substantial time must be committed to ensuring that he or she is staying relevant. Knowledge stagnation is actually made worse when someone works on the same systems day after day, because they are not exposed to new environments that help them to learn different options and best practices. Isolation is a career killer in IT.

5 It is vital to know what is going on in the world of IT.

In addition to continuing education, being aware of the threats, vulnerabilities, new best practices or standards, technical bulletins, release notes, and other events and updates is a full-time job by itself. An IT professional must dedicate time daily, weekly, and monthly to ensure their vision is clear to all that is happening in the world of IT.

6 It takes a village to run IT.

It used to be that a single person could be a jack of all trades and master of "most." However, because of the massive number of new threats, changes, challenges, and design considerations, this no longer the case. IT professionals must specialize to truly understand the depth of each area of the network. The hard part is that there are specialties within specialties. There is server design, deployment, management, alerting, maintenance, continuity, updating, etc., etc... The same is true with workstations, firewalls, switches, and every other aspect of IT. When you budget to bring on an IT professional, you must also budget to bring on outside help to complete the gaps in that person's skill set. That may be in server replacement cycles or workstation replacements, or something else entirely. An IT professional who manages a network rarely knows the best practices or has the ability to deploy systems when they are running the day-to-day, which is a bit like fixing the engine when you are driving down the road.

7 ▸ You need to plan for turnover.

The average duration for which an IT professional stays with a business is four years or fewer. Therefore, about the time the employee settles in and things start going well, you have to start over with their replacement. Every time you hire a new IT worker, you will certainly know more and have the ability to hire better, but this constant turnover will be an ongoing part of operations.

8 ▸ You could end up in a "hostage situation."

Many business owners end up in a situation where they feel that the IT person is holding them hostage. What I mean by that is that the IT professional has the "keys to the kingdom" in the form of access to all the data and business systems, and thus controls the stability of the business. Over and over, JMARK has been brought in to help a business whose IT pro has gotten too arrogant, "too big for their britches," or is not willing to take guidance from the leadership within the organization. They simply say, "No," and that leads to a hostile turnover or reckoning, which is always a massive business disruption. To avoid this outcome, ensure that passwords are securely documented, configurations management is current, and diagrams are completed after every upgrade.

9 IT must report on network conditions, stability, security, and other metrics of performance.

Determining the success or failure of your IT systems is not easy (unless it totally fails). Therefore, measurables must be established, and reporting must be consistent. This reporting helps determine the health and safety of your entire business and, therefore, must be given adequate attention among all the competing priorities your IT person will face in their role.

10 Third-party validation.

All of the above leads to the last point, which is that you must have external validation that what is happening within your IT is being done correctly. An annual assessment should be performed to ensure everything the IT professional is reporting and sharing is correct. Think of it like a financial audit. The reason you have separation of duties is for checks and balances. This must exist with IT as well. The evaluation should include security, backup and recovery management, business continuity plans, disaster recovery plans, and best practices. This process also helps the third party have vision into the network should the IT professional become unavailable for any reason, allowing you to call them in as a backup who has some familiarity with your systems.

Hiring an in-house IT person is an important decision and requires a good deal of knowledge in order to get the process right. It is one of the most important decisions you will make in your business. Technology forms the foundation for all our modern business processes. The right IT systems set up and run in the right way can keep your business safe, help your workers be more effective, and make your business more profitable. Done incorrectly, IT can leave you stagnant with unwanted downtime and vulnerable to hackers or other disasters.

Business technology is highly complex, but you should not feel discouraged nor feel like you have to navigate this complex world with a single IT professional. In fact, **you can take the budget you would allocate for one single IT employee and use it for an entire company with over eighty technicians and engineers**—including specialists with all the specific expertise one single person cannot contain. This is the value that a managed service provider like JMARK brings to the table for small and medium businesses—access to enterprise-level IT solutions that can accelerate the velocity of your business.

To find out more about what JMARK can do for your unique needs, contact us at JMARK.com or call 844-44-JMARK.

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