

CIO LEADERSHIP STYLES



The role of Chief Information Officers (CIOs) has changed dramatically in recent years. Once a tech-focused role, it's increasingly a business and innovation-focused one. As the role and the [state of the CIO](#) has changed, it's also important that individuals change the way they lead to meet new demands. Strong CIOs help to grow organizations, build a strong culture, develop the skills of their team, and bring about timely changes and innovations. While all leaders have their own styles and traits, there are a few common characteristics that can help CIOs be successful.

Amidst the ever-changing landscape of IT and systems, traditional leaders don't necessarily have the skill sets to be successful CIOs. Yet, experts assert that being a strong CIO is less about having certain skills and more about focusing on and developing a few key characteristics. This means that being aware of these key traits and working to develop them can ensure that CIOs effectively evolve with their role.

Characteristics of Successful CIOs

CPP, who publishes the Myers-Briggs Assessment, has compiled a list of seven characteristics that lead to strong CIOs in the current market. These key characteristics are:

Empathy

Leaders that try to understand their employees are more effective. A [personality expert from CPP](#) explains this, "CIOs who demonstrate empathy are able to get inside their employees' and

coworkers' experiences and try to imagine what they are thinking and feeling."

Dominance

Obviously, this trait requires some amount of balance, as being overly dominant can have negative consequences. However, CIOs that find the right balance of dominance and compliance can instill confidence and build trust among their team.

Self-Awareness

Research and experience indicate that leaders that are confident enough to recognize their flaws are more relatable to employees. Having self-awareness is a big part of building strong relationships among team members and gaining the trust of the team.

Flexibility

Effective leaders are willing to adapt to the ever-changing world and workplace. While too much flexibility can make a leader look inconsistent or even flaky, the most successful CIOs find the right balance of flexibility, making them more able to keep their team on the cutting-edge of technological advancements while positioned as industry leaders.

Insightfulness

Leaders that are insightful are better able to relate to employees and understand what motivates them. CIOs with this trait are able to build more effective and cohesive teams. This characteristic also helps leaders more effectively think strategically and develop long-term plans, both of which are important skill-sets for CIOs.

Independence

Research indicates that the strongest CIOs are collaborative but also independent. It's always important to work with team members and to not be an island, but the most effective leaders don't rely too much on others. Like many items on this list, it's all about finding the right balance.

Some Helpful Traits of CIOs

In addition to these seven key characteristics, there are a number of traits that help CIOs to be more successful. It's important to note, however, that while there are some common traits that strong leaders share, perhaps the most important characteristic of strong leaders is authenticity.

More important than any specific trait is being yourself, and leaders should first and foremost lead their teams authentically. With that goal in mind, they can work to further develop some key traits that can lead to improved performance and stronger relationships with employees. And, as CIOs develop those traits, they can find ways to personalize them, making them authentic to their unique style of leading. Helpful traits of CIOs include:

- **Being a strategist.** As discussed, the role of CIO is increasingly focused on being an effective business leader. This includes being a strategic problem-solver and visionary.
- **Having Strong mentoring skills.** The best leaders are able to effectively develop and bring out

the best in their teams. They're also able to build strong, meaningful relationships with employees. Leaders with effective mentoring skills are able to do this and to lead ever-developing teams.

- **Consistently focusing on the customer.** Organizations that remain focused on the customer are better able to prioritize tasks, manage time, work effectively with other departments, and develop a healthy culture. As a result, CIOs that model a customer-focus mentality and culture build more effective and stronger teams.
- **Prioritizing being a business leader first and an IT leader second.** As the role of CIO has changed in recent years, effective CIOs are changing too, developing the necessary skills to be effective in the growing role. Part of this shift involves focusing on being a business leader first, as opposed to being an IT leader first. This is a difficult shift for some CIOs that tend to default to being an IT leader, but it's an important change to make in the current market.
- **Measuring success based on business outcomes.** It's tempting for [CIOs and CTOs](#) to measure success simply based on completing a project, staying on schedule, or even staying on budget. The best leaders resist that temptation and instead measure the success of their team and all projects based on business outcomes. This can be a challenging and time-consuming shift, but it's one that will help to make leaders and teams more focused and effective.
- **Possessing high emotional intelligence.** Leaders with strong people skills are better able to relate to, motivate, and develop team members. As part of building strong people skills, leaders should focus on self-awareness, as the better you're able to understand yourself, the better you're able to connect with and relate to others.
- **Being focused on learning and exploration.** Strong leaders are always willing to learn alongside employees. They build a culture of curiosity, exploration, and innovation and model these traits in the way that they tackle problems and explore new opportunities.
- **Embracing change.** IT and systems are always changing. As a result, CIOs of the most cutting-edge and competitive teams have figured out a way to embrace that change and make it a part of their team's DNA. Rather than being resistant or afraid of change, the best CIOs embrace it and face it head on.
- **Prioritizing talent.** The strongest CIOs recognize that people are more important than projects, and they consistently prioritize human capital. Not only does this further develop relationships with team members, but it helps to build strong, talented teams. Prioritizing talent also means being willing to look for talent outside of IT. This can be uncomfortable to do, but effective CIOs are able to zero-in on the skill set needed, finding individuals with that skill, regardless of their current role or department.
- **Embracing a values-based culture.** Effective CIOs embrace organizational values in all that they do. Rather than developing a culture that is centered around products or projects, they develop one that is first and foremost centered around the organization's central values.

Every CIO has their own unique leadership style. While it's important for CIOs to first be authentic in the way that they lead, embracing some of the above characteristics can help to make them more effective. In the increasingly competitive market, the role of CIO has expanded and become more business-focused. As a result, it's important for leaders to make some shifts in their leadership style to remain successful and effective. Focusing on developing key traits can help CIOs to be stronger leaders and to build more effective teams.