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**Jim Boomer** • Sep. 28, 2015



“Gaining a seat at the table” is an often used phrase in CPA firms and business in general. Technology, Marketing, HR and every other functional area of your firm is striving to have their voices heard and ensure that their strategy aligns with the overall firm vision. And rightfully so. However, one long-held belief is far too common in CPA firms; the belief that you must be a CPA to lead, manage and understand the firm.

This is simply not true and is costing firms a lot of time and money while reducing

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## **What IT Brings to the Table**

Let's look at five ways CIOs can provide you a strategic advantage and why they should be contributing members of your management team.

1. CIOs bring a different perspective than most partners. They see the entire firm and approach strategy from that viewpoint. They strive to break down barriers and eliminate siloes by improving integration. They are typically outsiders to many of the firm's processes and can more easily see opportunities for improvement. Gödel's Law states that to understand the system you are in, you have to get outside of it.
2. CIOs understand how technology can improve efficiency and effectiveness. They can provide innovative insight into firm and client strategies that will add value. Leadership, relationships and creativity create value. Some of the current priority areas are cloud/mobile strategy, digital workflow process/automation and business intelligence/ big data.
3. The firms with the best technology are those firms with strong IT leadership. CIOs often have to deliver news that client service partners don't want to hear – "we have to invest." Having a strong CIO on your team who supports the firm's vision and integrates technology is a strategic advantage. Great IT professionals will push firm leadership and management to excellence. Don't settle for mediocrity at any level – partner or IT.
4. CIOs have project management skills which are essential to the success of the firm. These are skills that most partners, managers and staff lack even though they would be extremely beneficial. Firms are requiring and demanding more production from fewer resources and this is only possible with engaged staff members who are highly motivated, well trained and can leverage technology. The CIO has unique abilities that can be leveraged in a team environment and should drive these skills in your firm.

5. One of the key roles of the CIO should be to assist leadership and management in

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1. Business Savvy
2. Marketing & Sales
3. Communication
4. Human Resources
5. Project Management
6. Budgeting & Cash Flow
7. Strategy & Planning

While your IT leader's sufficiency in all these areas might not be at an "expert" level, you need to look for potential. Do they show a willingness to learn new skills and a desire to develop beyond their current position? If the answer is yes, you likely have the right person and need to invest in development and training programs. You also need to encourage them to join a peer community and engage with other technology leaders who will push them to improve. If you answered "no" then you are better served investing your time and money in recruiting and hiring the right person.

Once you've determined that you have the right IT leader, invite them to join the management team. It will help your firm leverage technology as a strategic asset and accelerate your progress toward greater success and profitability.

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