



The Mythical Man

Reviewing the Skill Requirements of the School IT Manager

by Brett North, National Manager - Operations & Services - Computelec

As the use and diversity of IT in schools has grown over the years, so have the requirements of the IT Manager. But have the expectations of the IT Manager grown beyond the capabilities of mere mortals? Are schools now looking for the mythical man?

There is no doubt that schools, like most organisations today, are dependent on their IT. Between private schools, IT is often an area in which schools look to distinguish themselves from others. Maintaining these boasting rights can often put pressure on the IT department, and increase the importance of the IT Manager. But beneath the bravado, what are schools actually achieving and what can schools reasonably expect from their IT Manager?

Personality

What most schools want is:

Someone that is very approachable, who also takes the time to research and evaluate trends in IT and their implications for the school.

Someone that is always available, but who also ensures that important projects are planned and implemented on time and budget.

What schools can reasonably expect is:

An intelligent individual that organises their time to balance the conflicting demands of the long term planning and implications of IT with the day to day requirements of a demanding user community.

Organisational Skills

What most schools want is:

Someone that can manage all of the IT operations so well that they can take it for granted that it will always be available to them and that they are future proof.

What schools can reasonably expect is:

Someone that understands the IT demands of the school, including the seasonal peaks and troughs, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the IT staff and suppliers and organises these in a way that delivers maximum benefit to the school for minimal disruption.

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Depth of IT Knowledge

What most schools want is:

Someone that can fix any IT issue that might arise, particularly if the IT staff member that normally does it is away.

This includes all aspects of end device support, network infrastructure, servers and core applications and the user errors of senior staff.

What schools can reasonably expect is:

Someone that understands enough about IT issues to know who is the best person or supplier to resolve it and how big a job it will be to fix.

People Management

What most schools want is:

Someone that attracts great IT staff and inspires them to do remarkable things for the school at minimal cost.

Someone that willingly gets involved in the educational and administrative meetings at the school and understands enough about their issues and priorities to proactively find ways of getting IT to assist in resolving them.

What schools can reasonably expect is:

Someone that is engaged in the broader school community, is approachable and knowledgeable, and a respected leader of the IT team.

Project Management

What most schools want is:

Someone that accurately assesses the relative merits and interrelationships of IT projects and prioritises them accordingly.

Someone that can define and plan projects to ensure they run on time and budget without impacting on the rest of the school or using any external resources.

Someone that can instantly recover a project that has gone off the rails regardless of the cause or circumstances.

What schools can reasonably expect is:

Someone that is able to coordinate their team to manage and deliver on multiple projects simultaneously and communicate the progress and impact on the broader school community appropriately.

Clairvoyant

What most schools want is:

Someone that accurately predict all future IT trends, including how they will specifically impact on the school in years to come.

What schools can reasonably expect is:

Someone that keeps up to date with IT trends and directions and can assess how these broader trends may impact on the school in the future and incorporate these possibilities into today's IT decisions.

Summary

While it is unreasonable for schools to be expecting to employ the mythical man that meets all of their requirements, there is no harm in individual IT Managers reaching toward it. Both schools and IT Managers should also accept that nobody is perfect but a team can be, and consider what combination of staff and suppliers will provide the best combination for their needs now and into the future.

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