

# SIX-WORD LESSONS TO THINK LIKE A MODERN-DAY CIO

100 Lessons CIOs and Tech  
Leaders Must Embrace to  
Drive Business Velocity



**SIX**  
~ WORD  
LESSONS

**Jim DuBois**

Former Microsoft CIO

[6wordlessons.com/Jim](http://6wordlessons.com/Jim)

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## Chapter Ten

# It is All About the People

**P**eople are the most important asset in any company. I needed to start this book talking about culture to set up any transformation, so I made this chapter on people the finale. Attracting, developing and retaining the best people and then molding them into a team is the most important part of what any leader does. I believe these lessons are some of the most important I had to learn.

For seven years before I started at Microsoft, at the company now called Accenture, I worked in different industries, learning not just how to implement big IT projects, but how different company cultures impact how we work. While at Microsoft, I ran multi-national teams, living in Tokyo and London for two years each. Trying to move quickly to consolidate processes, applications and data centers, I learned the hard way about the impact of many diverse cultures at work.

## *Six-Word Lessons to Think Like a Modern-Day CIO*

Once in Tokyo, I had a great idea how to streamline the local helpdesk. My direct reports were spread across Asia, but the leader of the Japan team, Tatsuya Arase (Tats), brought his helpdesk lead in to discuss the idea. This person didn't speak English, so Tats translated my idea. I should have noticed his facial expressions, but Tats told me he thought it was a clever idea. I was thrilled and asked how fast we could make it real. The next day a team-building event called a *shinbokai* was scheduled for the whole team of people based in Tokyo. Soon after I arrived, Tats brought the helpdesk leader up to me, drink in hand. He'd figured out a bit of English, and told me, "Your idea for helpdesk? Not so good for Japanese people." I was stunned, but Tats explained to me the importance of respect for hierarchy in their culture, but alcohol is an accepted excuse.

I now understood the purpose of *shinbokai*, and determined to always find people for my team who would tell me when I was doing something stupid. I learned to value the diverse perspectives and cultures on my team, and how to set expectations around using judgment to do what was right.

That was just one of the lessons about people. It made me curious about how to bring out the best in people. My wife taught me that psychologists define performance as a function of ability, motivation and environment. This book is intended to stretch your thinking about attracting and developing people with the abilities to work at the new pace, motivate them with a vision and a sense of purpose, and create the environment (culture) for them to be their best.

# 90

People are your most  
important asset.

These lessons started with culture on purpose, and need to end with the people involved. As a leader, you are only as successful as the people who surround you. Invest in them as individuals, and as a team. For building healthy teams, I highly recommend following Patrick Lencioni's practices in his book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*.

# 91

## Every hire should be an upgrade.

Never hire someone who doesn't have the potential to pass you. Consider this with every hiring decision. Look for attitude, passion, and drive as more important attributes than the specific expertise that can be learned. When interviewing, ask them to describe situations where they've had to handle conflict. Ask what they liked most about their best boss ever and about the best company culture they've ever experienced.

# 92

## Find and develop learners not knowers.

Learning is better than knowing. As everything speeds up, the ability to learn is more and more important. The half-life of expertise is getting shorter, and the value of expertise is shrinking. To thrive, seek and grow people who can learn quickly and value learning over knowledge. Knowers slow you down by focusing more on who is right than on making progress.

# 93

## Find and nurture judgment and courage.

There is no substitute for good judgment. To successfully move fast, leaders will need the ability to develop rational points of view and make decisions, often based on weak signals. If they always look to you for answers, you are the bottleneck. Find people who handle ambiguity well and can apply good judgment to these situations. Encourage healthy debate to develop these skills.



# 94

## Find and reward people with grit.

Dr. Travis Bradberry, author and expert on emotional intelligence, defines grit as making mistakes, looking like an idiot, and trying again without flinching. It is trusting your gut, making calls you are afraid to make, keeping your emotions in check, giving more than you get, taking accountability for your actions, and being kind to people who are rude to you. Anyone can develop more grit with focus. Stronger teams will display grit.

# 95

## Build diverse teams to improve results.

I learned this lesson the hard way, early in my career. Teams that all think like the leader are at risk. They may seem faster at first but fall short by missing out on ideas and perspectives to improve outcomes for your business. Seek out people who will tell you when you do something wrong. Listen to all perspectives to improve the team value. Leverage individual strengths to balance team weaknesses or gaps.

# 96

## Interns and college hires bring energy.

Another form of diversity is hiring people who aren't stuck in legacy IT practices. College hires or professionals from outside of IT don't need to unlearn the way it has always been done. Their energy can also motivate the rest of the team if your culture supports it. A strong intern program helps you find the best college hires.

# 97

## Don't treat every person the same.

Make sure you are fair and respectful. Recognize unconscious bias to improve. But know that people are different. Differences are good. And this also means that not everyone is motivated by what motivates you. Ask what people are passionate about, and what makes them feel appreciated. Leverage their passions to motivate them, and show appreciation in ways that are meaningful to them.

# 98

Repeat for clarity.  
People hear  
differently.

You think you are clear, but everyone else heard what you said through a lens based on their own experiences. Sometimes they hear what they want. Often, they hear what they expect, which may be different than your intent. Understand this reality. Repeat your message to build clarity. Use different channels to build clarity. Ask others to repeat the message to build clarity. Listen to validate.

# 99

## Use judgment to avoid unintended consequences.

Leaders need to be clear on their intent. Anytime you design a process, or have a side discussion, consider what could go wrong. I remember someone stopping me in the hall to explain an idea. I told them it was interesting, only to find weeks later dozens of people working on the idea, “because Jim said to.” If it doesn’t seem right, it may not have been the leader’s intent even if someone claims it is. Encourage all to use judgment to avoid people doing something just because.

# 100

## Remember to re-recruit your best people.

While finding great new talent, don't forget to regularly re-recruit people you already have. In recruiting, part of the process is taking time to explain why they should want to come work with you. This isn't an activity only for recruits. Tell your people why they are valued, and make sure they understand why they should continue working with you.



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