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[EMAIL](#)
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[RSS 2.0](#)
[ATOM 1.0](#)

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[Don](#)
[Spencer](#)
[Downloads](#)
[Events](#)
[Graham](#)
[Jones](#)
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[Industry](#)
[Perspectives](#)
[Interviews](#)
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[IT Manager Interviews](#)
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Ruth Morton IT Pro Advisor
 Microsoft Canada



[Interview] Part 3: Jon Bartol, CIO General Motors of Canada

This is the next blog in the [continuing series](#) of interviews with leading professionals.

In this blog series, we talk with [Jon Bartol](#) a top-ranking business technology leader and authority. Jon is the Chief Information Officer of General Motors of Canada. I had the pleasure of meeting Jon at the CIO and IT Executive Summit in Montreal.

Thank you and Enjoy!
 Stephen Ibaraki, [FCIPS](#), [I.S.P.](#), [MVP](#)



Jon Bartol, Chief Information Officer,
 General Motors of Canada
Top-Ranking Business Technology Leader and Authority

Stephen: Due to your senior leadership positions with Texas Instruments, Allied Signal, Mckers Inc., Footlocker and now GM, your insights are of great value to our audience. What are your top leadership and management tips?

Jon:

1. A major part of a senior manager's role is to grow people - through assignments, challenges, and / or job rotation. I think you have to learn, or have a knack to know, when to let someone work an issue, and when to delve into the detail with them. You've heard about the 5 Why's (asking Why at least five times to get to the solvable issue) - you have to practice them.
2. I think there has to be a mindset of doing a job right the first time, and when there is an issue, be ruthless in getting to the absolute root cause of the problem and attacking it in a manner that it will never happen again.
3. Sometimes there is too much emotion in decision making - meetings sometimes have tended to be governed by the most senior person present or dominated by the one with eloquent speech abilities. Facts and data should more often lead a discussion - a senior business manager I once reported to told me, I have my data, you bring your data and we'll talk!
4. I believe in common and standard and I believe in pushing and maximizing a global footprint. However, it must be done in a manner that appreciates where the work is executed.
5.
 - a) Clearly articulate a vision, a strategy, or the end goal.
 - b) Get / build the right people.
 - c) Build trust and confidence.
 - d) Put a control process in place.
 - e) Get out of the way and let the people perform.
 - f) Reward / recognize.
6. Remove negative emotions from people discussions. Don't have a discussion with a hot / upset head. Walk away - think about the issue or behavior, put your self in the other person's shoes - how would you want to be treated, think of alternatives / solutions, and then work with the individual.
7. If there is a technical problem; a system problem, Stop - think - act. To the 'think' part, I would add 'think logically and methodically'. Take each problem step-by-step - don't jump to conclusions - I have found that this art of problem solving, if followed, more times than not will shed light on the problem.

Stephen: What specific career advice would you give to business and technology professionals who are looking at continued



John Osley Director of Community Evangelism
Microsoft Canada



Archives

May 2007 (6)

April 2007 (20)

March 2007 (14)

February 2007 (21)

January 2007 (18)

December 2006 (4)

November 2006 (18)

October 2006 (16)

September 2006 (23)

August 2006 (28)

July 2006 (26)

June 2006 (38)

May 2006 (29)

April 2006 (30)

March 2006 (38)

February 2006 (41)

January 2006 (28)

December 2005 (28)

November 2005 (8)

October 2005 (8)

September 2005 (2)

August 2005 (7)

career growth?

Jon:

1. Every I/T professional should have a business expertise in some part of the business - finance, marketing, business services, engineering, etc. in the corporate world, I/T exists to enable the business.
2. Become a team player on the businesses' teams - participate with them in their world, talk in the language of business - not technology.
3. Don't let your skill set wane - keep challenging yourself.
4. Get global experience / learn another language.
5. Learn how to work in a multi-cultural environment.

Stephen: Looking back over your career, what stories and resulting lessons can you share that were most pivotal?

Jon: In thinking about that question, my mind focused on 2 events- that (a) I remember, and (b) I remember because they shaped some of my beliefs:

1. Technical people, left to their devices, will bury their head and work on a problem until resolution. God love them, you've got to have that, but you need an oversight / escalation process in place so that the business doesn't become impaired while I/T is deep-diving into a problem.
2. In one company where I worked, a great company, our business began to erode as the defense market was shrinking. As a result, like many companies in many industries, we had to down-size people, plants, etc. I was amazed that upon completion, and after an improved flow of contracts, we continued to operate, profitably, with fewer people. The lesson I use today is that regardless of the situation, there are always more productive, more efficient, and/or less costly ways to get work done. You might, though, have to become quite creative in finding them.

Stephen: What qualities do you feel CIOs of today need to have?

Jon:

1. Honest, integrity, and trustworthiness.
2. Good communication skills.
3. Business knowledge and sensitivity.
4. Global appreciation.
5. Know how to leverage ideas / solutions from anywhere.
6. Be good with people.
7. Have a technical foundation - know how to apply technology.
8. Be fact / metrics based.
9. Focused on delivering tangible / measurable business value.
10. Have a sense of humor!

Stephen: What do you consider the top 3 risks facing the I/T organization today?

Jon:

1. Finding the balance between 'bleeding edge technology' and proven solutions.
2. Talent pool development
3. Doing I/T for the sake of I/T - creating a solution for an unknown problem

Stephen: Jon, we are indeed fortunate to have your share you considerable insights with our audience. Thank you for taking the time to do this interview. We look forward to following your continuing contributions to the industry and within GM.

Jon: Thank you Stephen.

I also encourage you to share your thoughts here on these interviews or send me an e-mail at sibaraki@cips.ca.

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