

Overcoming IT Dysfunction

*The Bad News: We Scare People and Frustrate Them—
The Good News: We Do It Well!*

By Nick Nicholaou

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) has a reputation. Frankly, we scare people and we frustrate people. Those dubious accomplishments haven't been our strategy, of course! Rather, our communication and actions have gotten the best of us. Let's look at some issues and see how we can overcome them. In fact, we can change our reputation to that which we truly are: servant team members.

How did this happen?

While it isn't true of everyone in IT, the general pattern of those who work in our field is that of abrupt communication. We often tell people what they can't do, which causes some to feel belittled. Those who are intimidated by computers fear us because we know so much, and those who aren't intimidated by computers are frustrated by us because we won't let them do whatever they want!

My daughter likes to tell me that recognizing the problem is half the battle. (Yes, I'm the parent of a teen....)

Here are two ways we have earned our reputation:

Support. We've helped many on our team, keeping them up and running effectively. This is important because their mission is an important part of building the Kingdom. Sometimes because time was short, or

because we felt the explanation was beyond the easy comprehension of the one we were supporting, we just reached around them and did a few keystrokes to get them past the issue that was confronting them.

Policy Enforcement. We are often confronted by team members who think they have a better way to accomplish things. Sometimes it's software, sometimes hardware, and sometimes configuration. We've learned over time, however, that the larger picture is often not considered by these helpful team members, and that their solutions often cause problems that can reach throughout the entire system. So we're adept at saying "no"—especially when talking with newer team members, or with someone who obviously knows less than we do.

How can we fix it?

Well, like my daughter says... awareness is half the battle. Monitoring ourselves when we interact with those outside of IT can help us to develop and help others to see how much we really care about them and their needs.

Support. When providing IT support to team members, communicate at their level. While this may sound demeaning, it isn't. It's merely adjusting our communication content and style to match the ability of the one we're helping. Done thoughtfully and with care, this will not feel patronizing.

Think of how you talk with a child. You adjust your content and style so the child can receive what you have to say and grow. You don't talk down to children, you bring yourself down on one knee so you're at their level, then you love them through their need. That's what Jesus did for us! That's how we can best serve those whom we're supporting.

Policy Enforcement. This is a battleground that is difficult to win in ministry settings. The challenge is twofold:

■ Many in ministry sense a call of God

to their mission. That is a highly motivating factor that gives many an entrepreneurial drive to accomplish the mission regardless of what roadblocks get in the way. Many feel that your IT policies are roadblocks that need to be skirted.

For these team members, it's important to communicate that you want to fully understand their needs and their role. Once that's done, you can respond by pointing them towards solutions already in place, letting them know why these tools were selected and what the larger picture is regarding the organization as a whole. An example might be the easy exchange of files and data between ministry areas or the synergy of a single database.

■ Many may have home computers running more current operating systems (OS) or software than is currently licensed in your organization. Some have come from other organizations where different software was used. In both situations, they have invested all of the blood, sweat, and tears necessary to use those other OSs and software solutions.

For these, an empathetic understanding of their fear is important. Help them build bridges between the way their other solutions work and the way your solutions work. Establishing a training program for your team will help here, and is a budget item that will more than pay for itself in increased productivity.

Adherence to established IT standards minimizes cost and stabilizes team productivity. Responding in empathetically caring ways to those whom you support and to those who challenge policies will help the entire team to accurately assess the true heart of ministry IT. We want to be servants who are driven to keep the team as productive as possible, avoiding known pitfalls that would frustrate team efforts, and having an impact for the Kingdom that fully honors our Lord.

ONLINE HELP

CMA Management Resource Center
CMAonline.org/mrc



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Information Technology Section Resource Commission. For more resources on information technology, go to CMA's Management Resource Center at CMAonline.org/mrc. Email or call the volunteer members of this Section Resource Commission, or contact:

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