

DNA OF A CIO INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

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Lester Hightower is VP and Chief Information Officer of the Florida East Coast Railway, a regional railroad with 351 miles of mainline track that runs along the east coast of Florida, between Jacksonville and Miami, and that offers the most direct and efficient north/south option for transporting freight to and from South Florida. FECR interchanges with CSX and Norfolk Southern in Jacksonville. FECR serves five intermodal terminals on the FECR network and two off of the network, and provides full-service truck drayage at all of those terminals.



What technical skills are integral to the role?

I often describe my job as “playing IT chess” and I am sincere in that description. A good CIO is always looking ahead, and sometimes quite far ahead, and is always working to influence today and tomorrow towards the future that he wants to see in the years ahead.

What soft skills/characteristics are integral to the role?

The ability to communicate articulately is probably the most important skill. With that comes a requirement to be able to boil often complex and highly technical subject matters down into easily understandable, lay concepts.

How important is it to be exposed to all areas of the business?

In the CIO role, understanding the business that you work for, and as many facets of it as humanly possible, is an important part of success. Not only does that allow you to provide the most value to the company, but being able to demonstrate a sound knowledge of the business buys credibility with leadership across the organization.

In your opinion, how important is social media for networking/helping one achieve their career goals?

Investing time and effort into having an up-to-date and complete LinkedIn profile is helpful in short-cutting professional introductions. It also allows those whom you meet professionally to refer to it and remind themselves about possibly important details of your professional past.

Compared to 5 or 10 years ago, how would you say your role has evolved?

Today, my role is more strategic and leadership-oriented than ever. I enjoy the tactical parts of my job, and I am good at them, but most of the demands, and most of the value creation for the enterprise, come from strategic thinking, planning, and leadership.

What advice would you give to the next generation of professionals aspiring to become an IT leader?

Find a mentor who has achieved a level of success that you aspire to, even if it is in a tangential department or field, and learn from them. My mentor taught me the following quote, and it is one, of many, that I live by: “Bought experience is the best kind, but listening to someone who already knows is a damn sight cheaper.”

What are you doing to keep growing your career?

The same things that I did to get to where I am -- being inquisitive, always seeking new opportunities, and always trying to prioritize the future over the past.