

ITMATTERS - EP15 MAIN 02

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SPEAKERS

Narrator, Ryan Lee, Keith Hawkey

- N** Narrator 00:07
Welcome to the IT Matters podcast, where we explore why IT matters and matters pertaining to IT.
- K** Keith Hawkey 00:16
Welcome to the IT Matters podcast number 16, where we give the spotlight to the unsung hero saving the day in IT one password reset at a time. Today our guest is Ryan Lee. He's the new appointed director of IT of allegiance group. And he started his intrepid journey as application developer in 2010 at Bobcat company. He's been a part of multiple mergers and acquisitions, which are always fun and challenging for the IT leader. Today we discuss how to plan and formalize a process when m&a arises. Ryan, welcome to the IT Matters podcast.
- R** Ryan Lee 00:53
Hey, Keith, thanks for having me on. Awesome to be here today.
- K** Keith Hawkey 00:56
Yeah, we're happy to have you on as well. But first, before we get into the fun details of m&a, we'd like to run something we call running discovery. So this is where I asked you three nerdy questions to test your chops. Are you ready for the challenge?
- R** Ryan Lee 01:14
Yeah, definitely.

K

Keith Hawkey 01:16

Okay, so question number one, what is the most innovative, in your mind, most innovative IT technology that has occurred over the past five years?

R

Ryan Lee 01:28

Well, you know, the obvious answer, there's always going to be artificial intelligence. Right. So that's what pretty much anyone's gonna pick recently. I'm sure it's overused and overplayed, so I will go that route. But in the last five years, to me, it's not so much about the technology really, as it is about the focus that people are taking just on learning and building out their teams in general. So it's no longer just a process of on the job training or trying to figure it out, when an emergency happens. So to me, really, the most innovative technology will be a platform of technologies from LinkedIn Learning to Udemy, to Pluralsight, to whatever other platform of choice you're using to just gain knowledge and skill set. So any other day, there's going to be an ever changing, just evolving ecosystem of systems and software that you're never going to be the expert on. But having some of those platforms to leverage to really learn stuff about them is to me what's making cutting edge changes in the IT group as a whole.

K

Keith Hawkey 02:33

That's great answer. It's not the technology. It's the people.

R

Ryan Lee 02:36

Yeah, exactly.

K

Keith Hawkey 02:38

And the focus. Okay, question number two, favorite video game growing up, if you've, if you have one.

R

Ryan Lee 02:45

This will probably date me quite a bit, but Mario World coming out. So I'll preface this by saying, I'm a second. I'm a younger brother. So I was always Luigi. But Mario World growing up was some of my fondest memories. So there was two games that we played just religiously, all summer long, I lived out in the country. So if you can imagine there's not a lot of opportunities for things to catch your interest other than using your imagination, or lots and lots of chores. Herding cows, you know, helping out in the field, doing whatever there is. So having some of those gaming systems at the house when you had some downtime was amazing. So we played Super Mario World, on the SNES, we never quite made it to the regular Nintendo system. We we banked for enough years. But finally, when the SNES came out, we were able to get that one. But myself and my brother played that for hours on end every summer, especially when the chore load was a little lighter. And we go through that we'd put hours and hours and

whenever it got hard, I always had to give up because I'm just not very good at video games. And that was where I focused on being the team player, if you will, letting my brother take over and say, "Hey, I need you to beat this higher part of the level". And then the other one that I really loved was Zelda. So between Mario and Zelda, those were those were games that I just, I'm still in love with today. There's a lot of nostalgia there. You know, the kids nowadays have whatever the newest Nintendo system is, the switch, and I make sure to buy all those games for them. Not because they ask for them, but just because I want to live vicariously through them these days.

K

Keith Hawkey 04:28

Yeah, right. Yeah, spending entire summers playing video games. Man, those were the days, those definitely were the days.

R

Ryan Lee 04:38

Lack of responsibility, all the free time in the world, and yeah, just that, just that ability to focus on that one thing to the exclusion of all else, very entertaining.

K

Keith Hawkey 04:50

I have a funny story about video games. When I was in middle school or high school, this is about the time that World of Warcraft was very popular, and the wireless router for our house was underneath my parents bed. So I got into the mischievous habit of sneaking up into the computer room in the middle of the night and getting some gaming in and instead of sleeping, flying into the sun, and then I go and go to bed and not be able to function the next day in school, but so my parents caught on to this, and they would turn off the Wi Fi, and they cut it off. And it's under their bed. So I would basically Mission Impossible style, sneak in the middle of night, sneak into the room, go crawl underneath the bed, turn the Wi Fi on, come out, do my stuff, and then turn it back off before the morning. This was my, this is how I learned to be a secret agent but,

R

Ryan Lee 05:52

Just doing the army crawl into the room, if the door squeaks, opening it a little bit waiting for the squeak to happen then make sure everybody falls back into a deep sleep and then proceeding again.

K

Keith Hawkey 06:03


It was heart pounding, but you know, you know, I guess it was I guess in my mind it was worth it to grind out four bars of XP and then,

R

Ryan Lee 06:15

 Ryan Lee 00:13

You got to work on, you got to make sure that your firemen more experienced with the best of them, right? What was your character of choice then or your? So I never played WOW, but most of my friends did, so I know a lot about it, I just am not super experienced personally in it. But what was your, it's not character choice, type your what

 Keith Hawkey 06:37

I was an undead mage. And I did that there were a couple of the classes I liked. But the mage gain the ability blink at level 20, which allows you to teleport might be 20, 30 feet in front of you. And that was the quickest way to get around maps because there are very few other classes that could move and you couldn't buy a horse or you couldn't do that until way later in the game. So I ended up just going with a mage because I could move around the map quicker. And I can just burst people down quicker and it just caught on. Yeah, lots of fun with that. Last question. Your funniest day in IT?

 Ryan Lee 07:22

There's a lot of those. Most of the days usually are one of those, well we've been here for the last 30 hours straight because of some emergency and everything that's funny is likely only funny to us because we're sleep deprived, we have more caffeine and nicotine than we know what to do with and we're, you know, on a adrenaline high from being stressed out on some production system being down for hours and hours. But let's see, as far as the funniest, let me think on that for a second. So as far as the funniest story that we've ever had. Okay, so not extremely appropriate, I won't give you the details on what I was labeling, but anyone that knows me and has worked with me, knows that I like to have systems and standards in place, right? So I come from a manufacturing background, obviously, my first job at Bobcat really taught me that there's a there's a five best strategy, you know, straighten, sort, standardize. I'm missing a couple of them, they'll come to me in a little bit. But essentially, you know, everything has a place and everything should be in that place. And so labeling is a big part of that. I like to label things. When I'm working late at night on a project that's been going on for a long time and I work with a lot of people that I'm really close with. Sometimes I might pull a few pranks on some of the different folks I'm working with. So I have this label gun going, I'm on a conference call with Microsoft, we've been on the phone for I don't know, three hours at this point as they're troubleshooting certain things relating to an exchange failure that was happening. And so I'm proceeding to label stuff just because I have free time and I don't need to focus 100% on what I'm doing. So I label, you know, my stapler area, my tape area and all that stuff and box it all off like we like we do, and eventually I ran out of things to label so I start labeling just humorous things. So I walk around everybody's desk and everybody's mouse gets labeled as mouse. Everybody's keyboard gets labeled as keyboard, which in and of itself isn't super funny, but when you come into work the next day and literally everything that you own has been labeled with the very obvious thing that it is, so this is my mouse, my keyboard labeled as keyboard or, you know, Joe's keyboard. I had yeah, there was some other items that I gave maybe more inappropriate names to or but label all those for everybody in my immediate vicinity. So they come back in the next day and there's just giggles for the next probably four hours of the workday as people are opening a drawer and finding a pen or a bottle of hand lotion or something that's got whatever humorous label I put on it.

K

Keith Hawkey 10:18

That, that does sound funny. That's something you'd see in The Office show.

R

Ryan Lee 10:25

I very much took a lot of inspiration from that show over the years.

K

Keith Hawkey 10:31

Did you ever put a stapler in jello?

R

Ryan Lee 10:33

I never was motivated enough to do it. But I often thought about how much fun that would be along with other practical jokes and pranks throughout the years.

K

Keith Hawkey 10:44

Yeah, speaking about practical jokes, well, so you had let's say you have meeting with with one of your business leaders, and the the next thing they say is "Well we're acquiring a new company, and you're in charge with integrating all the technology associated with said company and this merger or acquisition." Can you tell us, tell me a little bit about your exposure to mergers and acquisitions? I think you have a lot of knowledge to impart upon IT leaders that are struggling with this process. Can you tell us a little bit about your background in this area?

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Ryan Lee 11:25

Yeah. So when I started back in my time as a solutions architect, so one thing that I'll say to any one of those getting started in the IT space is if you haven't had a chance to work at an MSP or some kind of consulting firm, community services firms of some sort, take that opportunity if you can. There is nothing better for quickly growing your skill set for getting 10 years of experience and knowledge dropped on you in a period of a year or two, just from the sheer quantity of things you're doing, right. So you're going to, for example, I work at a large organization and how often do you upgrade firewalls? Every five to seven years, right? So you work there five years, you might, if you've been there at the beginning, might see one new firewall put in in your time there, unless they build out some new offices, even then it's only integrating with what's already existing, you're not planning it out from scratch or anything. At an MSP, you're gonna be doing one a week. Like just the sheer volume, repetition, you learn those things so well, that it's phenomenal. So a big thing that we did was a lot of merger and acquisition work for different customers. So that's kind of where I started with that. Once I left the MSP going into an engineering firm, we bought a few companies over the years and got to find out not from the consulting side, but from the business side, what's all involved, and there's more pieces, there's more financial planning, there's more discussions to be had with

business leadership, not just IT leadership, and just a whole host of things at DW Wiley, where I worked at my last company before my present one, they had a parent company that had gotten just lots and lots of transportation groups. And we're in the process of trying to merge all these together. So I got to see firsthand how a lot of things didn't work well, and introduced a lot of the experience I learned at the MSP and at the engineering firm to help you find that strategy and to integrate those systems, processes, and people a lot more easily. So that's the background on me and my experience with merger and acquisitions. I've overseen, I can't even keep track of how many companies I've helped to merge and integrate, whether it's through natural merger and acquisition, building out a new vertical that didn't exist before, essentially, in my mind, it's almost like a startup, but they all have very similar processes and functionalities. So from that point, I basically have a framework that I like to follow. I've mentioned that before, right? That it's not the IT systems, it's a lot of times the people and that's usually where everything starts, right. So when you're looking at any kind of merger, acquisition, a new vertical that's getting spun up, startup company, anything like that, everybody in IT is going to come out and what they're gonna do is they're gonna Google it first. "Hey, how do I deal with a merger or acquisition," right? And you're gonna get the same kind of advice, you're gonna say, "Here's your due diligence checklist, here's a mid integration checklist that you work with, and then here's post integration activities." To me that doesn't really encompass what a merger and acquisition is going to be. There's going to be a lot of pre work that needs to get done long before you ever even hear whispers or a merger or acquisition type activity. And right away what that starts with for me is relationship building with your senior leadership team, and the rest of your IT group as a whole. So, some of the first things that I always hear from different groups that I come in to, or some of the kind of common sayings that you'll hear is, you know, "Leadership just makes these decisions and doesn't tell any of us about it", or, "Wow, that sure would have been nice to know, you know, before they made that decision." And to me, that's honestly just kind of a cop out attitude. So I don't know if you've ever read the book, or multiple books that he has out, but anything by Jocko Willink?

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Keith Hawkey 15:34

I haven't read his books, but I've listened to his podcast.

R

Ryan Lee 15:37

Yeah, so yeah, okay, the podcast is a great example of who and what Jocko is as a person. He's an extreme individual, so one of his most famous books, called Extreme Ownership really encompasses a lot of my mentality on how to really function in the IT industry as a whole. So a lot of what he teaches is, is that you need to control anything and everything that you have the ability to control, whether it's your responsibility, whether it's in your scope of influence or not, there's a lot of things you can do if you just take ownership for those things. So, to me, building relationships with your senior leadership team is something that should have been started long before there's ever a discussion of a merger or acquisition. And that is showing the value of IT early in any discussion that they have, that's making sure that you have that relationship so that you're able to have a seat at the table, when those senior leadership meetings are happening, when strategic discussions are happening, that you can inject ideas right at the very beginning of that process, instead of after the fact or trying to play the catch up game. And then really, it's been known as innovator and enabler, to getting the business to the next

level, so that they are wanting to include you in those discussions right away. A lot of times, there's the idea that IT is difficult to work with, they're a roadblock, you know, they just want to put security in place and keep things from happening and they don't understand you know, how to grow the business or how to drive that. And honestly, a lot of people aren't wrong when it comes to that. A lot of places I've walked into that's exactly the mentality and mindset, IT has taken is, you know, we already are overworked, there's already too much going on, we can't add this to our plate. And it's just no, no, no, instead of yes, but. You know, and that, yes, but makes a huge difference when you're trying to build this relationship and when you're trying to have these discussions. So yes, we can do that, but we're going to have to extend the timeline of this other project, or we're going to have to reduce the SLA on maybe our daily operations for our tickets. Yes, but this is going to cost money because we're going to need to bring in an MSP. And instead of saying, No, we just can't do that going, here's how we actually find the path forward to do these things that you're looking at doing, and talking in terms of financials and the personnel and the things that make sense to business leaders. So that to me, is really where everything starts with is that relationship building, making sure that you have that foundation with your leadership team. The next piece is this is where I think a lot of IT people are going to be doing really well. This is the stuff they're learning this is the podcast, they're listening to the training that they're taking, is having like a really robust SOA or service oriented architecture built out so that they can really handle some of the discussions from the very beginning. So there's a whole lot more involved around SOA than what I'm going to cover. But there's kind of a few key pieces. So the first one to me is a portfolio of services and systems. What do we do? How do we do it? What do we use to do it with, right? And if you have that built out ahead of time, when that discussion comes up, it's going to help you in every aspect of not only this discussion, but IT in general. It's going to help you with the planning roadmaps, you're going to have a skill set of matrix of staff so you can see gaps that you might have and where your training needs to evolve to next. You're going to have intelligent, data driven discussions on these abilities and projects. That can happen because of the current staff or technology that you have in place and then where you might need to buy or change that direction of that. And then of course, it's going to help you with your m&a activities as well.

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Keith Hawkey 19:27

That brings up a an excellent point. How do you, in joining a new organization like you are, indicate that you are very much in the mindset of innovating, the IT and the business technology segments of the organization without calling their baby ugly, and without bringing dismay and any kind of embarrassment to the existing IT team or maybe someone they had hired before that didn't work out? How do you navigate that conversation of it sounds maybe more of a creative wording problem than a logical problem. But I'm sure that this is a common thread. And a lot of new newly hired IT leaders might step on the toes of who they're about to lead, in a way, and they don't realize it.

R

Ryan Lee 20:30

So there's 100 different ways to do it and they're different in every scenario. And even that answer probably alludes to exactly what my answer is, is you got to play the politics. So you need to know the culture, the history of the organization, you need to know how they got there, why they got there and come from a place of empathy, really. So what I've always told people and I always have these conversations right away to kind of lay the framework, the groundwork

of who I am as a person and what I think and feel and that I'm not coming from a place of judgment, but I'm coming from a place of improvement. So harking back to my manufacturing days, there was a phrase that Toyota was a market leader in manufacturing there, they're the gold standard. They call it the Toyota way. But you ever read that book, it'll, it's mind blowing, if you work in the manufacturing world, and you haven't read something like that yet, or you're at a company that follows a lot of their processes. But anyway, they have a slight tangent there, they have a very common phrase called Kaizen, it's, I don't remember exactly how it's spelled, but the essentials of it is continuous improvement. So it doesn't, you don't need to get perfect on day one, like you don't need to think about like the Agile method in software development, or even more, following some kind of Scrum framework or something like that. But very much, it's you don't need to get it perfect on day one, you need to take what you have and improve on it daily. And you're going to be lightyears ahead of where you were, if you had spent a year planning this project, or you spent every day improving incrementally this project, you will be so far ahead at the end of the year, than you would have if you had just planned out everything from the get go and never made a move to actually implement anything. And that's where I like to introduce that mindset right away into the group and say, I'm not here to judge or to degrade what has been done in the past. Or I'm here to take an accurate assessment of what we have to come in and look at where we're trying to get to and to collaboratively figure out with you what we need to do to get to the next step. So, and I'm super clear right away, if there's one thing that I like to do is be very transparent in all of my conversations with my staff, with my management team, and with any of my peers to say, look, my goal, my ultimate goal is to make the company more effective to make money for the company because a company that's making money that's more nimble, it's more agile, it's more effective, is a company that's not doing layoffs, it's a company that's gonna give up big bonuses, it's a company that's going to continue to have market leading salaries, things like that. So anyone that says, you know, we're not interested in doing those things is clearly lying, or doesn't want to be at the company in the first place because the ultimate goal of every business, right is to make money. Yes, there's people, there's fun things to do, there's a mission, there's values, all of that, but the underlying cause of any business in the world, the the very fundamental thing that exists is money. So if you can have that discussion around the fact that, yeah, I don't want to sound like some kind of money hungry.

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Keith Hawkey 23:58

Well it matters, yeah. But that's, that's the Language of Business. And that's what, that's what keeps people employed. And that's what keeps people with their jobs. And I don't think that I don't think it's entirely void of ethics and some of the perceptions that's tied to money. It's very much rooted in a means of living. Yeah. So yeah, I think that's

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Ryan Lee 24:24

I couldn't agree more. And that's where I come with. So that's when I came with that conversation is, that's what I'm looking at, that's what I'm talking about. I'm not here to judge or tell you that you did a terrible job. I'm here to go, here's our app today, where's the next level that we want to get to and we should all want to get there. And then what do we do? Sometimes that might be scrapping somebody's baby, right? That this is a system, a piece of software, an ERP platform, a custom developed, program that you made, for whatever that no longer has the value that it used to, and isn't meeting the needs of the business that it used to.

Having kind of that open frank discussion of, hey, here's what the business needs and letting them help come to that same conclusion to say, you know, this isn't what the business needs anymore. So how do we repurpose this system or reintroduce a new system that you can now manage and maintain? And that's scary for a lot of people. Change is scary. Learning new systems is scary. Wondering, Hey, am I going to be obsolete along with the system? And trying to ensure everybody that's on your team to know, No, I'm going to, we're just going to pivot. We're not going to just cut you off and say, you're done we don't need you anymore. We're gonna pivot, you're going to learn new things, we're going to continue to grow and adapt as a company. And as a team.

K

Keith Hawkey 25:43

Yeah, I think even the term pivot sounds less scary than change. Even just the word smithing? Switching gears here, with with your experience, I'd like to get your opinion on, maybe this has to do with manufacturing, maybe it is general to to IT, but what technology have you been exposed to in the last maybe year, couple of years that has changed the business that's had the most impact to could be manufacturing, could be in general. But what technology should IT leaders that haven't evaluated up until now, take a look at to see how it might impact the bottom line and it might change the evolution of what the organization is trying to do.

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Ryan Lee 26:41

So I'm gonna sound more and more like a politician every time I answer a question here, but the colloquial it depends, right? So it and what I mean by it depends, is it's going to be every stage of a person's career and the company itself. So to me, things that have really changed when I was an individual contributor, when I was an engineer working on data centers and things like that was virtualization, right? That was huge. So the ability to consolidate just from a physical footprint, the ability to dynamically adjust resources to know, hey, I can no longer need to plan out everything perfectly, because I'm buying a system that I need to support for the next seven years to go, hey, I can buy this big beefy host. And I can adjust the Amazon there as needed to throw more around, throw more CPU, to add storage, reduce storage to migrate off of that platform to a new one. That kind of stuff was huge to me, but then coming in as an IT manager, coming in as a supervisor, looking at the overall direction of the department, that technology isn't big to me anymore, what is a lot bigger, to me, is the same fundamental piece of nobody's gonna plan perfect, nobody's gonna know what's coming in two years to the business. And things are gonna get introduced that you never expected whether that's buying a new company, whether that's a pandemic that nobody expected, that's going to completely paradigm shift the way business is done the way certain markets even have demand for your service or product that you're providing, or just the working environment of the group as a whole. So to me, it's, it's things that introduce adaptability. And where I see that coming almost more than anything is cloud services. So anyone that knows me knows I'm a big fan of what the cloud can provide from a adaptability standpoint. So people talk, you know, there's, there's cost savings, there's all of these things. And there is sometimes if you're really good at planning, if you're expert level knowledge in say Azure, and you can define exactly what size systems and everything that you need. But a lot of times that's, that's not the lowest hanging fruit on the tree, as far as what's transformational. It's, it's just that adaptability, it's the ability to come in and say, Hey, I don't need to have a five year plan for hardware anymore. I need to have a growth plan that can address any change in the business needs and I can respond to what that

cost is going to be almost immediately. So if we go hey, we're, we're hiring another 500 people today, we have a big VDI environment built out, I can tell you, it's 100 bucks a user per month for every new person you hire. And we can plan out from a financial standpoint exactly how that's going to impact business operations. I can say, for every 10, 15 people, we need one more load balanced server for our web application or for our whatever this ends up being. And that's the kind of stuff that you can model out and have tabletop exercises. have scenarios that will allow you to plan for really any environment, and really allows you to show the value of IT in general to the rest of the business organization because they can ask a question and you can immediately have an answer instead of saying I have to get back to you in seven weeks, you can go, you know, once I get quotes back from a vendor, you can go, nope, this is the cost anything you do, let me plug in a new headcount, let me plug in a new, whatever. And that will dynamically adjust that cost back to that services and technology portfolio I'm talking about, if you have that catalog of equipment of whatever it is, you plug in a headcount number, and you tell your CFO exactly what it's going to cost to get to the next stage.

K

Keith Hawkey 30:41

It sounds to me or reminds me of earlier in our conversation, where you express the value of "Yes, but." That almost sounds like you can switch this phrase to "Yes, and."

R

Ryan Lee 30:56

Yeah, exactly.

K

Keith Hawkey 30:58

Yes, and this. Yes, and we can work remote and we don't have to plan for that. Yes, and if you want to open the new plant in Malaysia, it's not a problem because we have vendors that can support it, because then we don't have to worry about importing equipment, we don't have to worry about the on prem contracts. We're not tied, we're nimble now. So much of the conversation, like you said earlier, if you speak to cloud vendors, they speak, they talk a lot about about the savings and if you look at those, sometimes there's savings, but if you dig into the details of their forecasts, they are planning, they're assuming that you are spending absorbent amounts of money on your existing technology. So more times than not, it's not savings, the savings come from the opportunity costs of not being able to change.

R

Ryan Lee 32:00

And the intangibles of what you've missed out on because yeah, exactly what you said the opportunity cost is, that's a huge piece that is hard to quantify and it's something that when you build those relationships, when you establish that trust, build that political and relationship capital with the rest of your group appears. That's the kind of stuff that people see over time where they go, Hey, this guy is making changes but I haven't noticed a difference. As long as you're not making a negative impact on the budget, on the timelines on the whatever, right away, awesome. You're doing everything you should as a leader, and it's that down the road stuff where they go, you know, I remember all the time needing to put in tickets, and I wouldn't

get responded to in a week, right? These projects would go so much longer than I ever thought possible and now my expectations are so unrealistic at how quick they're gonna get done because what IT has proven to me. Honestly, sometimes it sucks for the next guy that comes in that might not have that same experience on adaptability to go, Well, you know, the old guy used to do this or you know, used to do that in a week, why is it going to take you a month? Well, that's what experience buys you a lot of times.

K

Keith Hawkey 33:09

Yeah. No, yeah, I completely agree. What do you see with cloud adoption? Everyone talks about cycles of, well, we're moving to the cloud now and we're going to move back to on prem, in the future, it'll be maybe a small form factor. It'll be, there'll be some invention to make it more feasible. Maybe it's latency, maybe it's, you know, the edge and the footprint the edge presents when, particularly when it comes to manufacturing, maybe its security of what brings it back. With all the investment data centers today, I don't see us moving back unless there's some AI reinvention to move back to on prem. But do you see a cyclical nature in this, what would be the drivers of us to move back because I hear this from everybody. That everything in IT is cyclical, including moving toward a Managed Cloud, Managed hosted environment somewhere else.

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Ryan Lee 34:21

So a lot of times what you're going to see in scenarios like that is kind of a drastic change in the business needs or in the market or industry that you're looking at, or more often than not, it's going to be some sort of requirements, compliance requirements. So you're following some sort of GDPR, if you're following some sort of PCI or PII compliance piece that requires this, or a framework that you need to follow that you used to need to, some sort of DOD requirements is the typical one where I see that happening, but really, if you haven't just followed the latest trend or the newest fad in IT just to say I want to get on the bandwagon because everybody else is doing it and haven't planned it out, you're not gonna see as much of that cyclical nature that you're talking about, just in general in the IT group. So to me, I kind of balance out everything like I hate, I just absolutely hate going all in on something. Like I hate going, companies that look at, you know, oh, we want to outsource all like all of IT and we just want somebody to manage the MSP and it's gonna give us resources. Or somebody saying, we want to go all cloud, I don't want to ever see anything on prem again. Or somebody saying, you know, I'm a Mac only shop, or I'm a Windows only shop, and there's no possibility of bringing anything else into the environment. To me like that's, that's the kind of reason that you're going to see a cyclical nature and if you plan out your implementation, your approach, and your strategy just from a business standpoint, first, and not from a tech fad standpoint, you won't see nearly as much of that cyclical nature, you might see shifts left or right. But you won't have a complete paradigm change of one environment to another and the reason is, so we'll take cloud as an example, if I come in on a cloud environment, and I say, we want to start leveraging the cloud because it doesn't exist at this company today. I'm not going to go, I want you to cut everything off and move over there. What I'm going to do is, I want a planned approach to move certain strategic applications that need a global footprint, for accessibility, or for latency, or for whatever. A lot of times reliability is the big one for me on why I make that change, why I make that shift, because Azure is gonna give me better uptime than anything I can buy in house at any company I've ever worked for. I've worked for billion dollar companies,

they're still not investing the same amount of money that Azure is putting into its data centers or planning it out. And I'm not planning out my data center as well as they are. And I built out quite a few data centers over the years, there's no way I'm planning it out better than the experts at Microsoft, or Amazon or Google, for their data centers. I've just not, it's not going to happen. So what I'll do is I'll move strategic applications over and I'll have a hybrid environment. Everything kind of in moderation, right. So I have a hybrid environment on my cloud footprint, I'll have a on prem footprint for certain things that makes sense, or to extend out the useful life of a non critical system. So say I need just a myriad of VMs that are for a certain project, I can throw those on some old legacy systems. And if the host dies, the host dies. I'll restore from backup, I only need it once a month, whatever, I'm not paying as much of that runtime fee that I would be on some sort of cloud environment instead of just paying electricity. And at the end of the day, if it really goes south, then I can move it to the cloud, because I already have, say, Azure disaster recovery set up or something like that, where that VM already exists, and I can just spin it up there and go, Okay, our costs are going to fluctuate slightly on a per month basis, but that's about it.

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Keith Hawkey 38:16

Yeah, it reminds me of the business side, the CIO approach, or the CEO approaching the CIO and saying, we need to move everything to the cloud and the CIO, learning to say, "Yes, but this," "Yes, but this application, I don't think it's, I think it's going to cost us more in the cloud because of this reason or that reason." We're running up on toward the end of the podcast and one thing that I like to do is give you a chance, Ryan, to if you could present a message to every up and comer, middle of the road, end of the career IT professional and leader, a word of advice, or what I actually think is a little bit more interesting, a word of don't do this. Don't, don't go about your business in this way, It'll cost you. You can approach this either way you'd like yeah, you can say this is my advice, or this is something that you should avoid. But what would your message be? If suddenly it was on a billboard everywhere in the world, and only IT people would see?

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Ryan Lee 39:38

So there's a couple pieces to that and it depends on where a person's at in their career. So a lot of very advanced senior level engineers, sys admins, software developers, whatever, have reached a place in their career where they know a lot and they feel like there's not a lot more growth for them to be had. And I think that is just a really poor approach and a really poor attitude to take on the IT journey as a whole. So when you're far along in your career, my biggest piece of advice is to just always be learning, always be humble, and always be willing to adapt, and to change and find new things. So just because you're a Cisco engineer for the last 20 years, and you love and know Cisco CUCM, or something like that, that's not the way of things anymore. Like there's still environments where that makes sense, there's call centers or super large companies, but a lot of times, you're going to look at some sort of cloud platform, whether that's 8x8, or RingCentral, or Teams Calling whatever that is. That's the new way of things, so be willing to learn, find out what those systems are, and don't be stuck on the past, when that just doesn't fit a lot of the small to medium business size environments anymore. For people young in their career, the biggest pitfall that I've seen over and over and over again, is you're young, you're hungry, you're kind of green in the environment and you get out at a company you love, and you have a great attitude, you start to learn things, and the God

Complex takes over. So all of a sudden, you know more than the end users do, because you're in the backend of the system, you get all of this privileged access that nobody else is getting and it starts to affect your attitude. And the reason you were hired in the first place, it's not because of your skill set, you don't have any when you come on as an intern or an entry level employee with zero years of experience out of college. You came on because of the attitude that the hiring manager liked and because of the capability or the potential that they saw on you. So where you start to go south, where you start to burn that relationship with that manager is when you start to get that God Complex, or you start to be degrading of the end users and say, Well, you know, they don't know, you know, how dumb could they be that they, you know, set this password, or they didn't know what to click on this thing? Or do whatever? And my always answer that is I'm like, yeah, that person doesn't know how to make some sort of change on their endpoint, or you know how to add email to their phone, or whatever it is. But on the same token, you know, say you're in the medical industry, that person knows how to reattach some nerves in your spine that allow you to walk again. So maybe let's have a little bit of empathy for what it is that they are good at, and not expect them to know everything there is to know about IT, because that's your job, they have a different job. We have functional skill sets that we focus on to get economies of scale. Let's worry about that kind of stuff and not bring the attitude into the environment as a whole. But stay humble, stay hungry, let's stay energized and willing to help. And those are the kinds of things that are gonna allow you to succeed. When I'm hiring staff, there's a make or break it decision that happen right off the bat and that's attitude and certain soft skills that the employee displays. If they pass, then there's a next set of, you know, fruit on the fruit tree that you're reaching for, which is, you know, the the minimum skill sets to actually do the job perform the function that is you're looking at performing. But if I can see on your resume that you have 30 years experience, managing whatever environment, but you come in with a bad attitude, you're immediately ticked off the list. I'm never going to consider you. And that's the kind of stuff that people need to be aware of is that the attitude is the make it or break it thing. The skill sets are after that, on a lot of places, a lot of my peers, a lot of hiring managers what they say, that's what they're looking for first is attitude. So come in humble, stay humble, stay hungry.

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Keith Hawkey 43:46

That's beautiful. Man, I gotta say, Ryan, I've been thoroughly impressed by the wisdom and the your overall philosophy not only in tackling IT challenges, but the human elements of the IT department today. All great advice. Speaking of that, how can people find you?

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Ryan Lee 44:03

Yeah, I'm usually very active on LinkedIn. So that is, to me, the non political, non religious, non controversial, it is still, but I tried to limit as much controversialness out of LinkedIn as I can. But that's where I go to learn. So my peers, the people, I follow the companies, I follow everything on there, they're going to repost new articles, they're going to be some of the first people to alert me on what new vulnerabilities in the in the environment that's coming out, you know, whether it's a zero day or whether it's a new architecture, whether it's a new set of requirements for some sort of framework that you're following. That's where I see a lot of the stuff very first and so I am usually very active on there. Reposting articles I've seen that I think will help out my connections, my peers, and then just finding out people that are going to add some value to my life, whether it's the inspiration that they provide, whether it's the knowledge

they provide, or just the camaraderie that they provide. I've had people that I've made friends with on LinkedIn, purely because of either content they're posting or that I'm posting that I find really speaks to me that I've never met in real life and we chat regularly. I exchange emails back and forth with different IT managers, directors, VP's that I've never met in real life and we just have a really shared set of interests. So, LinkedIn's the main place that you can find me, that's where I'm going to be the most available. I have all of the other social media platforms, the Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, whatever, not super active on them. I follow them for the food videos, I follow them for the funny cat videos, you know. Twitter, honestly, the only thing I use it for is checking out images from Microsoft or Cisco or any of the big providers there because that's usually one of the first places they'll post. Look at a second on whatever their actual outage notification page is or is it down.com, whatever, but Twitter's where I see a lot of that first. So, as old as that makes me sound that's literally as nerdy as that makes me sound, that's why I'm on Twitter and some of the other platforms.

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Keith Hawkey 46:14

If it works, it works. So yeah, we'll post your LinkedIn and again, Ryan, thank you immensely for joining the podcast. I certainly found the actual conversation valuable. And that's it, folks. We'll catch you on the next one.

R

Ryan Lee 46:28

Awesome, well thanks for having me and look forward to connecting with anyone that hears from me on here and I'm happy to connect and stay in touch and give advice if anybody's looking for it. So have a great day.

N

Narrator 46:39

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