

## The I.T. Choice - With or Without Politics

Pat Talley stood and watched, with grudging admiration, as Carmelita Moreno worked the room. Sharp, charming, and armed with a personality that left an indelible memory, Carmelita at one moment had the ear of CEO Christ Bount and the next could be observed smiling and studying something on her iPad with the executive assistant of a major board member.

“She’s amazing,” Ken Schlain whispered to Pat as he handed him a cocktail. “I like to observe and learn. She’s real education in office politics.”

“We’re not in politics,” Pat answered somewhat defensively. “We’re in I.T.”

“Come on, Pat.” Kent tased, “Tell me she doesn’t worry you. Everyone knows she’s our main competition for the CIO job.”

Pat smirked, took a sip from his scotch and water, and said sarcastically, “I’m *worried*. Satisfied?”

Walking away from Kent’s mischievous goading, Pat’s usual confidence supered a fleeting twinge of fear. *No. I’m OK. I’m OK*, he thought. *I have more expertise than anyone, including Carmelita, and I’m not afraid to lay down the law to get project complete.*

After weeks of speculations, interviews, on-site visits by top execs, and endless waiting, a decision on the new CIO to be made and announced by CEO Blount this week during the annual meeting. Although Mansfield, Inc. boasted an extraordinarily talented I.T. group, company insiders and industry watchers agreed that the decision would come down to a choice between Carmelita Moreno and Pat Talley.

To this point, Pat carried the confidence of a sterling 20-year record with Mansfield. Technically gifted, he was one of the team members that designed and implemented the company’s original I.T. system and had been a major player throughout the years in guiding its growth and expansion. Task oriented almost to a fault, Pat built a reputation as a guy who relentlessly analyzed needs and then charged ahead until the job was complete-usually under budget. His special strength lay in the twin areas of digital security and risk management.

Pat considered technical expertise and competence to be *the* qualifications for the position as CIO, as he explained during a recent interview with executive and board members. “My job is not to schmooze and glad hand, I’m not running for public office. I’m running an I.T. division.”

Over the years, Pat maintained strictly defined areas of work and friendship and, in fact, could count on one hand the number of causal, work-related friendships he had developed over 20 years. He was proud of his ability to compartmentalize these areas so that personal relationship had no bearing on management decision. He considered this an important part of his reputation as a fair but tough leader. He demanded excellence and could be unforgiving in his attitude toward those with less technology interest or expertise.

The word politics was odious to Pat Talley, and he considered office politics a waste of time. However, at company gatherings such as this, he also carried a slight chip on his shoulder, aware that, despite his importance to the company, he was only on the periphery of this group—not *excluded*, but not really *included* either. The significance of this particular meeting—and now watching Moreno put on a clinic in office politics—only increased those feelings for Pat, making him defensive and uncharacteristically concerned about his future.

*Could office politics really play a deciding factor, he suddenly wondered. Carmelita knows her stuff. She does the research and stays on top of the latest trends and products in I.T. She can handle any situation, particularly those sticky people problems that arise within teams or with suppliers. Pat smiled ruefully. Heck, I've even brought her in a time or two.*

Now, as he stood and observed the activity in the room, he watched as his rival moved effortlessly among individual and various groups. *I feel like I'm watching "Survivor". Does the guy who trust his own ability win, or is it the one who builds coalitions and alliances?* He shook his head as if to shake off the imagery. *That was stupid. This is not a reality television show. This is corporate America. Do your job. I've built my reputation on that, and I'll stand by that.*

His attention snapped back as Carmelita handed him a fresh scotch and water. "You could use a fresh one," she said, smiling and pointing to his empty glass. "I guess tomorrow's the big day and I wanted to come by and wish you well. These are exciting days for the company and for I.T., and whichever way it goes tomorrow I look forward to working tougher. Cheers."

"Same here," he answered. Their glasses clinked together in a toast. *Dang, she's good,* Pat thought.

Questions:

1. Who do you think the CEO should appoint as the CIO? Why?
2. Is Pat sabotaging his career by thinking of relationship building as "office politics" that take the focus away from day-to-day work? What advice would you give Pat who is not a natural relationship builder?
3. What sources of power and influence do Pat and Carmelita seem to use in the company? Which person do you believe will be more influential as the CIO? Explain.