



IT Support Best Practices



IT Support Best Practices

Essential Traits for IT Support Success

Introduction

Creating a high performance IT support culture for your organization is a critical component of any business, large or small. Whether you hire in-house IT staff or utilize an outsourced IT services provider, there are key characteristics to look for in IT support resources.

This paper provides an overview of essential traits that owners of small and mid-sized businesses (SMB's) should evaluate in order to ensure the right IT resources are in place for their business.

1. Experience with Your Technology Environment

When IT technicians are familiar with your technology environment they can resolve issues more quickly and more cost effectively. So if your office has committed to a Microsoft environment, hiring staff that is most familiar with an Apple environment is not a good idea, and vice versa. Ask questions before you hire.

2. Breadth of Skills & Knowledge Required

There are so many specialties in IT -- servers, desktop support, email, security, mobile devices, cloud technologies, Microsoft, iOS – just to name a few. Assess the breadth of technologies you use or will require and ensure that your IT resources have capabilities in all areas related to your needs. Given the need for such diverse skills is a key reason why a single in-house IT resource can be a problem for SMB's. This doesn't mean you have to outsource all of your IT needs - keeping an in-house IT resource has benefits. But understand their capabilities and complement them with external resources.

Your support team should bring a strategic mindset to your business. They should propose solutions that minimize your need for technical support that reduces long-term costs and maximizes employee productivity.

Critical areas of knowledge required include:

- Emerging Technologies
- IT Planning & Strategy
- IT Policies
- Mobile Technologies
- Security
- Servers, Network & Cloud Infrastructure

It's always a bonus when your IT resources are also familiar with the core software you operate your business with (e.g., accounting, workflow).

Armed with knowledge in all these areas, your IT resources can provide you with the right technology environment that can be supported efficiently.



IT Support Best Practices

3. Doers & Not Just Talkers

IT resources need to be knowledgeable, have a strategic mindset and think big picture. But they must also have strong execution skills to implement infrastructure and support it.

4. Style: Available, Quick to Respond, Committed to Resolve Issues

IT personnel are a lifeline to productivity and reducing employee stress. Their day to day job requires dealing with employees experiencing a problem or in crisis. Perhaps a sales presentation being worked on for the past 2 days went missing and the sales meeting is the next morning. Employees could be on the road and unable to access email creating communications problems.

Unanswered calls or the inability to resolve issues quickly is frustrating, and in some cases can damage bottom line results.

Ensure your IT resources:

- Have clarified who needs to be contacted when issues arise and how to reach them
- Can easily be reached with protocols in place to deal with emergencies outside of regular office hours
- Are competent and knowledgeable to resolve issues efficiently
- Have easy access to other IT resources if they have insufficient knowledge to solve a problem
- Possess a willingness to follow through on all support requests until they are resolved

5. Redundancy

Your business cannot rely on a single in-house IT resource or solo IT contractor – what happens if they're offline, sick or on holidays? If you have a "solo" resource, ensure they are backstopped by a services provider familiar enough with your organization to step in and solve problems should they arise while your IT resource is unavailable. And if you use a services provider, ensure they assign specific individuals to support your business who have the technical background to handle your requests.

6. People Skills Are Paramount

Excellent IT support requires more than just technical skill and know-how. IT staff with great people skills can defuse situations if an employee is panicking, or help to manage emotions if a problem cannot be resolved quickly.

What are some personal traits you should you look for in IT resources?

- They get to know your employees to relate on a personal level
- They talk in friendly, non-technical language that anyone can understand
- They have a positive attitude



IT Support Best Practices

IT personnel who exhibit these traits are more successful and your employees know they can be counted on for assistance. Established rapport between employees and IT resources means both groups can work together effectively to resolve issues in a positive manner.

7. Systematic Management

IT resources juggle many issues simultaneously; disorganization leads to unresolved issues and slower response times. Look for IT resources who demonstrate they are organized; keep updated network documentation; and have a system in place to help them manage support requests.

An effective system links to IT-related contracts, contact information for employees, network documentation and an inventory of all your network equipment. The system also tracks support requests and allows IT resources to identify outstanding issues so they can follow up until a support request has been completed. This ensures no “ball is dropped” when a handoff occurs between technicians resolving an issue.

8. Consultative & “Root Cause” Oriented

Great IT resources act like consultants. Rather than just fixing problems they seek to understand and identify their root cause. They try to spot trends and can flag recurring issues; helping to raise visibility of an issue and its impact to your business, and able to propose solutions to eliminate the reoccurrence of a problem. This consultative approach will ensure customized solutions that are right for your business are implemented.

Moving beyond a reactive, troubleshooting oriented approach requires your IT resources to spend time learning your business, which requires:

- Continuity – the same IT resources are consistently working on your business
- Longevity – minimal/no turnover of IT staff
- Familiarity – they know you, your business, and your staff

9. Automated Backups & Verification Routines

Your IT resources should automate the critical tasks of backing up your data and they should configure routines that verify if backup processes are functioning properly. Alerts can then be triggered if a problem emerges, ensuring more rapid response.

10. Local Matters

Not all IT issues can be resolved remotely. And it’s harder for IT resources to build relationships with your employees and learn about your business. Ensure your IT resources can make on-site visits without needing to hop on a plane. This seems intuitive but this is not always the case. Check to make sure.



IT Support Best Practices

11. Accountable

Are your IT resources willing to be held accountable for their work? Establish performance metrics with them that can be monitored and reported on. Good IT staff will help you identify what those metrics should be.

Some common areas to measure include:

- Disruptions – analyze how much downtime your network has due to unexpected disruptions
- Number of unresolved support issues
- Recurrence of issues
- Employee satisfaction with IT support
- Response times for support requests

A Note from Tech To U

In writing this white paper, Tech To U leaned on our experiences of working with clients over the past 17 years to create a summary of the essential traits we feel lead to successful relationships between an IT support team and the business people they support (whether they are in-house or external to the organization). We've strived to adopt these traits ourselves. This is why we're still in business today. Should you have any questions about IT support related topics or you wish to inquire about our services, please email us at info@techtou.com or phone us at 403.207.0997.

What This Means For You – The Business Owner?

Now that you've learned some of the essentials of an effective IT support team, take stock of your situation. Review the checklist of "23 Questions to Assess Your IT Support Performance" on the next page. Answering these questions will help you rate your situation and indicate if major changes are required or if you just need to address a few areas to improve performance.



IT Support Best Practices

IT Resources Checklist: 23 Questions to Assess Your IT Resources & Their Performance

	Yes/No
The Big Picture	
Do you feel you are experiencing too many IT issues that require support?	
Is the frequency of IT issues increasing?	
Have you had severe IT disruptions which financially harmed your business?	
Have you expressed concerns about security that hasn't been addressed?	
Performance of Technicians	
Are response times to IT issues prompt?	
Can you reach the right technicians quickly and have issues resolved on a timely basis most of the time?	
Do they consistently follow up on issues until they are resolved?	
Is a system in place to manage support requests?	
Do they address root causes of issues and report back when they are fixed?	
Have they automated data backups?	
Have they implemented verification systems and processes to ensure routines are running properly and data backups function properly?	
Have they created and stored up to date network documentation?	
Resource Skills & Knowledge	
Are your resources unable to resolve problems due to technology you use to operate your business?	
Can they offer advice/guidance on effective IT policies?	
Do you have an IT strategy & plan?	
Are your IT resources talking to you about emerging technology and how can benefit from them?	
Do you feel your IT strategy was tailored to your business needs?	
Do your resources add value by recommending technical solutions to help you resolve business problems?	
Intangibles	
Do you feel you receive value for your investment in IT support (staff costs and/or services provider fees)?	
Are your employees satisfied with the IT support they receive?	
Do you enjoy working with your IT resources?	
Do your resources communicate in a manner that is easily understood?	
Are your IT resources on site when required?	

Using the checklist: When answering the Big Picture questions; responding with "Yes" implies a negative situation. For all other questions, responding with "Yes" is positive.



IT Support Best Practices

About Tech To U

Tech To U provides IT services to Small & Mid-Sized Businesses headquartered in Calgary. Since 1997, we've helped clients minimize business disruption and increase their operational efficiency to:

- Reduce long term IT costs
- Maximize employee productivity
- Achieve a competitive edge with technology

Core Services

NETWORK AND IT MANAGEMENT. Building secure, reliable computer networks, creating disaster recovery plans and providing responsive IT support with local professionals.

CUSTOM BUSINESS APPLICATIONS. Software designed to fit how you work so that staff is more productive and you can manage your business better.

HOSTING AND CLOUD SERVICES. Minimize risk and benefit from modern cloud infrastructure, hosting and online productivity services.

IT CONSULTING. In-depth expertise in networking and cloud infrastructure, Microsoft Technologies, virtualization, collaboration and business productivity solutions.

Tech To U is here to help resolve your immediate IT-related challenges. We encourage the building of a long-term partnership so you embrace technology instead of being frustrated by it. Contact us for a complimentary consultation to get started.