TIPS FOR WORKING WITH “THE BUSINESS”

Working with “The Business” is often a major challenge for technical people. And now the Apple-ization of the Enterprise is making things both simultaneously easier and harder.

On the positive side, business users are more knowledgeable than ever and are less afraid of adopting new technology than in generations past. At the same time, IT struggles to bridge the worldview differences between “geeks” (IT) and “non-geeks” (employees).

As personal and business technologies have become ubiquitous, it has never been more important for technical people to develop their skills in collaborating across organizational and cultural boundaries. The future of IT belongs to people who are able to translate business visions into technical realities.

IT pros everywhere should review this checklist on a regular basis to remind themselves of effective methods for working across the geek/non-geek divide.

- ❑ **When the planning phase isn’t going well, focus on the dependencies.** While non-geeks dream of a compelling future and IT focuses on solving problems, tasks and dependencies are the common language for collaborative planning.
- ❑ **Understand the essence of the vision.** IT is the hub of an organization’s technical expertise and needs to help business users translate operational and product visions into pragmatic plans. Thus, try to understand the primary objective of the request before determining the plausibility of any specific, technical solutions.
- ❑ **Use examples whenever possible.** Most people need stories to absorb technical details. Examples offer a chance for non-geeks to imagine themselves in relation to the facts IT wants to convey.
- ❑ **Look for logic in the intuition.** When speaking with business users, don’t immediately dismiss any provided insights that may seem irrelevant. In most cases, asking follow-up questions can help bring forward the experiences and wisdom hidden within them.
- ❑ **Don’t interrupt out-loud thinking.** When listening to the issue at hand, resist the urge to raise questions or objections until the thought is completed. Interruptions can derail concentration, regardless of whether one is speaking out loud or writing software.
- ❑ **Explain what’s important to IT.** For non-geeks, an absence of emotion can be off-putting, so when possible, IT should provide business users with an understanding of what keeps them up at night.