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Top skills for IT managers - Part 5: Coaching and mentoring

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In this six-part series, Joseph R. Czarnecki, project management specialist and senior consultant at [ESI International](#), identifies six top business skills at which every IT project managers needs to excel.

It is no secret that people tend to absorb only 10% of their knowledge from formal training, 20% from working with role models and 70% from on-the-job experiences. In other words, people learn best by observing a master at work, then applying those same skills on the job. A mentor is to an IT manager what Yoda is to Luke Skywalker. We learn the most from those who've been before us.

The trend to adopt coaching and mentoring programs is on an upward swing. According to research conducted by the [Chartered Institute for Personnel Development \(CIPD\)](#), 82% of learning and development practitioners in 2010 use coaching within their organisations, a huge leap compared to 69% in 2009.

At an organisational level, 'succession planning,' the cornerstone for organisational health, ensures corporate knowledge is retained and transferred to those that need it.

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Every IT manager must have the ability to teach others what they know themselves. As IT professionals pass on their knowledge to less experienced colleagues, they can attend to higher priorities. As more pressure is placed on high-performing IT professionals, it becomes critical to broaden the pool of expert individuals to carry the workload.

To ensure this pool of experts is always available, the transfer of knowledge and skill from one individual to another - on the job - is crucial.

Organisations hoping to consistently keep and promote their most talented workers must focus on, and invest in, continuous learning. For many technically based professionals, the art of transferring skills and knowledge to another person is a difficult one to master. Yoda certainly had his moments with Luke.

So how does mentoring work? This is one area in which the organisation and the IT manager need to work together. First, the organisation must define skills levels and a clear job description. Next, the organization and IT manager have to identify key factors to establish a high knowledge transfer climate - one where information sharing and 'helping each other out' is the norm.

Whether the trainee has just come from a course or completed some on-the-job training, the work climate has an enormous impact on whether what the person has learned gets fully absorbed and applied. If the training itself is incongruent with the overall company's needs, it's a waste of time for everyone. As an individual enters a department, he or she should be assigned (or choose) a mentor to shadow. Later, as the individual transitions to an IT manager and gains experience, he or she should share knowledge with the next generation of workers. Coaching and mentoring is about offering the proper tool kit to prepare workers for the projects of today and tomorrow.

In this article series we have learned that crucial business skills such as establishing a business mindset, communication, critical thinking, financial literacy and the ability to tap into one-on-one mentoring to transfer knowledge are a part of that arsenal. The final skill every IT manager should have calls on all of these and more: organisational change management, which we will discuss in the final article. Only when IT managers fully recognise and adopt their role as change agents can the force truly be with them.

 [Part 1: Establishing a business mindset](#)

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