



# Wolf Calling

## 5 Key Strategies for Great Results from Your Technology Provider

Every business person has a love/hate relationship with his or her Technology Provider. Whether it's an entire department dedicated to providing technology services to a large organization or a single individual you go to when your computer crashes, the bottom line is that one of you is from Mercury and the other from Pluto. Communication can be treacherous with your disparate backgrounds, responsibilities and language.

Yes, your basic computer nerd IS speaking a foreign language. Even the Chief Information Officer, (a typical Lead Technologist title), finds it hard sometimes to speak in plain business language. This is complicated by the fact that many Business Managers know just enough technology talk to be dangerous. Many dimensions of computer technology have become friendly and intuitive, leading the average person to think that they have quite a good grasp on the beast. If it's so simple at the desktop, why does it take the Information Technology (IT) Department so darned long to make a change?

Sound familiar? What can you do to foster a better, more effective relationship with your Technology Provider? Here are five suggestions to help get you started.

**1) Always ask for a business result rather than a specific technology.** You may have tried, "Hey George, I need a database that has this stuff in it. Can I have it by Wednesday?" Yes, you can probably have it by Wednesday. But making it useful might take you another year.

Designing databases is both an art and a science. Crucial to success is the understanding of *how the data will be used*. The best way to get the ball rolling is to determine *why* you want the database and communicate that need to your IT Manager. It may be that you don't actually need a new database. Perhaps the data you want already exists somewhere and can be easily accessed for your needs. This could save you TIME and MONEY, not to mention you will be more likely to have an effective new tool for your business.

**2) Do let your IT Manager know the specific problem to be solved.** You may have tried, "Hey Jane, I need an imaging system for all these darned files that are taking up so much room in our area." Technologists love imaging technology. They will be happy to spend lots of your MONEY to use this sexy technology. They will image every single piece of paper you've got, including last year's tax return. But what was the reason you asked for this technology? Was it to cut file handling time and space? If you asked your technologist friends to analyze your file room and make solution recommendations, you may discover that much of that paper doesn't need to be kept in any form, saving you

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*Diane helps us keep our eye on our strategic goals and tactical tasks even as we are distracted daily with operational fire fighting.*

*This is very important to us.*

*- State Executive*

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MORE money. Keep your communication around the problem to be solved.

**3) Never refuse to pay for infrastructure.** “Hey Ralph, I’m not paying for part of your new Network upgrade. I don’t get any benefit from it”. Not today you don’t, but do you plan to still be online next month? And the month after that? Don’t make the mistake of thinking your computing is limited to your business application software. Your data exists in a complex environment. In order to be there, you may have certain overhead to support even if you don’t actually see the direct benefit. Think about your home and the infrastructure for which you pay your share: roads, sewers, water systems, schools, etc. In the long run, you are paying a small part of the whole. If you have to dig your own well, it will cost you more MONEY.

**4) Always include your Technology Manager at the Planning Table.** “Hey Susan, it’s not necessary for you to attend our quarterly planning session, we’ll let you know what technology stuff we want later.” This is a common mistake that comes from compartmental thinking about business and technology. Business should drive the technology but if you don’t have technology at the planning table, you may not be aware of the technology available to exploit. Or you may have the wrong idea of what certain technologies can achieve. Again, the closer to the front of the planning process you include your technology person, the more likely that you will optimize plans for your best business result. Optimizing

saves you technology MONEY. And a bigger bonus is that the experience will ground your technology person in your business goals and make him or her a more effective partner in your success.

**5) Don’t read magazines on airplanes!** “Hey Richard, I discovered this on the plane from Denver, (as you throw a magazine on his desk). We need this for our department.” Just because you are desperate for reading material there in coach class is no reason to think the results achieved by Citicorp for its billion-dollar investment in fingerprint technology will translate to your small department’s accounts payable function. Technology people are known to hide on the days when their customers come back from business trips. This is like impulse buying in the grocery store when you go shopping with an empty stomach. Major new technology directions should be driven by sound strategic planning. (See number 4 above.) Implementing technology which is ill-planned is a major waste of MONEY. So buy a nice paperback before you get on the plane and stay away from magazines. Or better yet, take your technology person with you to the business conference. You will have quality time on the plane to discuss your business challenges and how technology might be brought to bear on them.

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