# Unspoken truth About Successful Management of Geeks

Author: Nyasha Ziwewe .  March 2020

Geeks are smart and creative, but they are also egocentric, antisocial, managerially and business-challenged, victim-prone, bullheaded and credit whoring. Understanding why geeks appear to act the way they do makes working with them the easiest job in the world. Here are some few tips on how to manage geeks biased in Information Technology (IT).

## It is all about respect

Few people notice this, but for technical groups respect is the currency of the realm. Those whom they do not believe are worthy of their respect might instead be treated to professional courtesy, a friendly conduct or the acceptance of authority. Gaining respect is not a matter of being the boss and has nothing to do with being likeable or sociable. The amount of respect a geek pays someone is a measure of how tolerable that person is when it comes to getting things done, including the elegance and practicality of his solutions and suggestions. In particular, IT geeks always and without fail, quietly self-organize around those who make the work easier, while shunning those who make the work harder, independent of the organizational chart. This self-ordering behavior occurs naturally in the technical world because it is populated by people skilled in creative analysis and ordered reasoning.

While everyone would like to work for a nice person who is always right, geeks will prefer a jerk who is always right over a nice person who is always wrong. Wrong creates unnecessary work, impossible situations and major failures. Capacity for technical reasoning trumps all other professional factors, period.

## The elements of the stereotypes

**Ego-** Because technical geeks' education does not emphasize how to deal with people, there are always rough edges. It is not about being right for the sake of being right but being right for the sake of saving a lot of time, effort, money and credibility. IT is a team sport, so being right or wrong affects other members of the group in non-trivial ways. Unlike in many industries, in IT, colleagues can significantly influence the careers of the entire team. Correctness yields respect, respect builds good teams, and good teams build trust and maintain credibility through a healthy projection of ego.

**The victim mentality -** IT geeks are sensitive to logic that is what you pay them for. When things do not add up, they are prone to express their opinions on the matter, and the level of response will be proportional to the irrationality of the event. IT geeks complain primarily about logic, and primarily to people they respect. If you are dismissive of complaints, fail to recognize an illogical event or behave in deceptive ways, they will likely stop complaining to you. You might mistake this as a behavioral improvement, when it is actually a show of disrespect. It means you are no longer worth talking to,

which leads to insubordination.

**Insubordination -** Good IT pros, whether they are expected to or not, have to operate and make decisions with little supervision. Therefore, when the rules are loose and logical and supervision is results-oriented, supportive and helpful to the process, geeks are loyal, open, engaged and downright sociable. Micro-management, illogical decisions, inconsistent policies and the creation of unnecessary work will elicit a quiet, subversive, almost vicious attitude from otherwise excellent IT staff. From the outside, nothing looks to be wrong and the work still gets done. However, internally, the IT group, or portions of it, may cut themselves off almost entirely from the intended management structure. They believe they are protecting the organization, as well as their own credibility and they are often correct.

**Credit whoring -** IT pros would prefer to make a good decision than to get credit for it. What will make them seek credit is the danger that a member of the group or management who is dangerous to the process might receive the credit for the work instead. That is insulting. If you have many credit whores in your IT group, there are bigger problems causing it.

**Antisocial behavior –** It is fair to say that there is a large contingent of IT pros who are socially unskilled. Like anyone else, IT people tend to socialize with people who respect them. They will stop going to the company picnic if it becomes an occasion for everyone to list all the computer problems they never bothered to mention before.

## How we prompt the stereotypes

What executives often fail to recognize is that every decision made that impacts IT is a technical decision. With IT, you cannot separate the technical aspects from the business aspects. They are one and the same, each constrained by the other and both constrained by creativity. Creativity is the most valuable asset of an IT group, and failing to promote it can cost an organization literally millions of dollars.

When you understand the mission of IT, it is not hard to see why co-workers and supervisors are judged severely according to their abilities to contribute to that process. If someone has to constantly be taught Computers 101 every time a new problem presents itself, he cannot contribute in the most fundamental way.

## How to fix it

Therefore, if you want to have a really happy, healthy and valuable IT group, you must take an interest. IT pros work well for people they respect, so you need to give them every reason to afford you some.

You can start with the hiring process. When hiring an IT geek, imagine you are recruiting a doctor. If your IT group is not at the table for the hiring process of their bosses and peers, this already does a harm to the process.

Favor technical competence and leadership skills. Standard managerial processes are nearly useless in an IT group. As I mentioned, if you have managed to hire well in the lower ranks of your IT group, the staff already know how to manage things. Unlike in many industries, the fight in most IT groups is in how to get things done, not how to avoid work.

When it comes to performance checks, yearly reviews are worthless without a 360-degree assessment. Those things take more time than a simple top-down review, but it is time well spent.

Finally, executives should have multiple in-points to the IT team. If the IT team is singing out of tune, it is worth investigating the reasons. Periodically, bring a few key IT brains to the boardroom to observe the problems of the organization at large, even about things outside of the IT world. A good IT pro is trained in how to accomplish work; their skills are not necessarily limited to computing.

**Nyasha D Ziwewe is a Business Consultant and Systems developer at Industrial Psychology Consultants. Email: [nyasha@ipcconsultants.com](mailto:nyasha@ipcconsultants.com). Mobile 0783462251. LinkedIn: Nyasha D Ziwewe.**

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