

How to Speak CIO: Four Lessons From Marcus and Anish

LESSON 1 Get engaged.

You can't help to shape a conversation you never enter. As a CFO, you're a strong strategic driver and partner to your CEO and the rest of the leadership team. It's a responsibility that requires you to be engaged in everything of importance. That includes technology. Just making it clear to the CIO that you're willing to educate yourself and get involved is the first step to future collaboration.

From Marcus

The way I see it, the CFO can't afford to be passive when it comes to technology. If, as a company, we're going to spend a lot of money on something, I have to be active in that discussion. That also means I have to understand enough to contribute at a high level.

There's so much that Anish knows and that I am constantly learning. I have to be willing to dive in, engage and start asking questions: Why are we spending this money? What's the return? What are the risks? What can go wrong? What are the key milestones? Who's going to report out?

When I started getting in there and put myself into the conversation, I think Anish understood I was serious about becoming a partner and an ally.

From Anish

The longstanding stereotype is that a CFO only wants to spend less and that the CIO and tech developers only care about building something cool. That kind of thinking puts the two sides in conflict. But when they make the decision to really engage with one another, it benefits both sides.

Ultimately, I think the more tech literate a CFO is, the better decisions they can make. And the more financially literate and business literate the technology organization is, the more we're equipped to make better decisions too.

To me, engagement should be a priority for both the CFO and CIO, and it's why I feel it's important for the technology lead to have a seat at the strategy table.

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The CFO can't afford
to be passive.” **Marcus von Kapff**



TIP: Start the conversation. Even if your CIO is not yet at the strategy table, you can still engage them at that level. Start by setting up a regular time to talk with the CIO about the important, obvious questions, like those Marcus outlines above, and to give the CIO an opportunity to engage with you as a peer.

LESSON 2

Learn the language.

Both the finance and the technology fields tend to have their own ways of describing complex challenges and solutions. Sometimes that language itself can become a barrier to partnership. Taking the time to literally learn the language your CIO is steeped in can help you bridge the gap.

From Marcus

I have to do my job in concert with my CIO. And that means I have to learn Anish's language—the language of his organization.

When he talks about “cloud,” I need to know what the cloud actually means, what it does. Why it's an important strategy. How we execute on it. Where we're operating now—on a scale of one to 10, are we at a three or a seven?

I need to know his people, know who's good at what and gather informed opinions on the talent of our tech teams. If I don't understand these things, I'm not doing my job.

From Anish

For me, “speaking each other's language” is as much about understanding the mindset differences as it is the vocabulary. For example, on the tech side, we tend to take an agile perspective and think in terms of products rather than projects. The continual investments that come with that mindset are very different from those in traditional project planning.

And there are many examples like that. Getting both tech and finance speaking the same language is hard—it can be hard for everybody. But it's absolutely necessary if we're going to understand where the other is coming from.

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TIP: Consider the world behind the words. When you run into unfamiliar jargon—and you will—dig a little deeper to think about the worldview and experience that created that vocabulary. Chances are, you'll learn more about how your CIO sees things as you learn how they speak.

LESSON 3

Build trust.

The roles of CFO and CIO have long been viewed as opposing forces. Evolving the relationship to one of healthy interdependence means rewriting that stereotype with understanding and trust.

From Marcus

I always start by accepting that my world is not perfect and Anish's world is not perfect either. To come to a place of collaboration, we need to understand each other's issues, problems and concerns.

He needs to feel comfortable with me—not see me as Big Brother questioning him all the time, not trusting him. I really think that for a partnership to work, you need to believe that the other party is operating with transparency, candor, humility—and then model those qualities yourself. Trust breeds trust.

That's the foundation you want to build on.

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From Anish

I've had a number of finance partners in my time at the firm and throughout my career. Generally, I've been able to categorize them into two types: those who believe their job is to police and those who believe their job is to enable.

The first kind of CFO believes, if left to his or her own devices, the CIO is going to spend all the money. That they have to stay constantly vigilant to prevent overspending by even a dollar. But that doesn't demonstrate trust. In turn, the CIO in that scenario feels that the CFO is always going to dismiss their ideas because they cost too much money. It's not healthy.

The second kind of CFO truly embraces their ability to enable and sell in what you're trying to accomplish. Without a doubt, Marcus is this type of CFO—and that's one of the reasons our relationship is so successful.



TIP: Remember to look for common ground. When you start to feel polarity in mindset and goals, take a step back and revisit the business objectives that you share. Trust that your CIO is working toward the advancement of those objectives, and ask yourself what you can do to enable, to support, to be that second type of CFO.

LESSON 4

Stay curious.

The opposite of progress is stagnation, and staying curious might be one of the best ways to fight stagnation. It's also how you'll continue to grow your CFO-CIO relationship.

From Marcus

One of the benefits of my perch as CFO is the ability to call up anybody at the company and ask them, "Hey, will you come spend an hour with me, pull your off-the-shelf materials and teach me about something?" I love to do that. And I do it often! It's how I gain deeper knowledge about subjects like the cloud or APIs.

I never know what I might need to know down the road. So I ask for tutorials and keep learning. It's a big part of how I stay ready.

From Anish

The number one quality I appreciate in Marcus is his curiosity. He's always trying to learn more, to understand more. Always asking questions. Always the one to jump in with, "Hey, tell me how this works."

His curiosity challenges me, and all of us, but in a very healthy way. He pushes us all to stay focused on the things that matter most and to really think through everything we need to do.

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TIP: Don't be afraid to ask. As a CFO, you likely have access to a wealth of avenues for insight and education from the experts already at your firm on your CIO's team. Take the time to tap their expertise and sharpen your understanding of tech and trends that can help you step in as an even stronger ally.

A Foundation to Grow From

As with any transition, stable changes to your CFO-CIO relationship will happen over time, not overnight. By starting to make the effort now, you can begin to set yourself up for a future of productive collaboration. And as the industry continues to move toward the digital space, a CFO and CIO in lockstep will prove an invaluable asset.