

BIRMINGHAM BUSINESS JOURNAL

ALABAMA CIO^{OF THE YEAR} **ORBIE[®]** AWARDS



FROM THE CHAIR

Alabama's CIOs played a pivotal role as companies and organizations navigated the Covid-19 crisis.

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LEADERSHIP AWARD

When Covid-19 put UAB to the test, Curt Carver and his team delivered – and garnered national acclaim in the process. **PAGE 10B**



KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Fran Dramis said the focus for a great CIO isn't just the technology. It's also the people who use it.

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The 2021 Alabama CIO of the Year[®] ORBIE[®] Awards program honors chief information officers who have demonstrated excellence in technology leadership. Winners in the Large Enterprise, Enterprise, Corporate and Nonprofit/Public Sector categories will be announced live, June 4 at the virtual Alabama CIO ORBIE Awards.

CIO OF THE YEAR

FROM THE CHAIR

Recognizing the best and brightest CIOs in Alabama for 2021

Since last March, chief information officers everywhere have supported the largest work-from-home experiment in the history of the world. Thanks to these innovative technology leaders, most organizations have managed to continue operating through this pandemic disruption.

Technology has enabled our new virtual lives; provided access to entertainment, food, and products delivered to our homes; and connected us with colleagues, friends and loved ones. Technology has helped us adapt, adjust, and survive our new normal. Without the leadership, planning, and foresight of CIOs, conducting business would be impossible under these circumstances.

AlabamaCIO brings together leading CIOs of Alabama's largest organizations to help CIOs maximize their leadership effectiveness, create value, reduce

risk and share success. Through member-led, non-commercial programs, CIOs build meaningful professional relationships with colleagues facing similar challenges, solving problems and avoiding pitfalls.

Throughout this crisis, AlabamaCIO members have collaborated locally and nationally with CIOs from across industries. In any gathering of CIOs, the answer is in the room. The challenge one CIO is facing has likely been solved by another CIO. What was their experience? What did they learn? What would they do differently? How could other CIOs benefit from sharing their experiences?

There is no textbook for how to be a great CIO. The best way to sharpen your leadership acumen is to join a peer leadership network with other leaders working on solving similar challenges. The



industries and sizes may be different, but winning approaches to effective leadership and problem solving are transferrable. Every leader's perspective is valuable and contributes to the conversation – and everyone wins when leaders engage, share ideas, experiences and best practices.

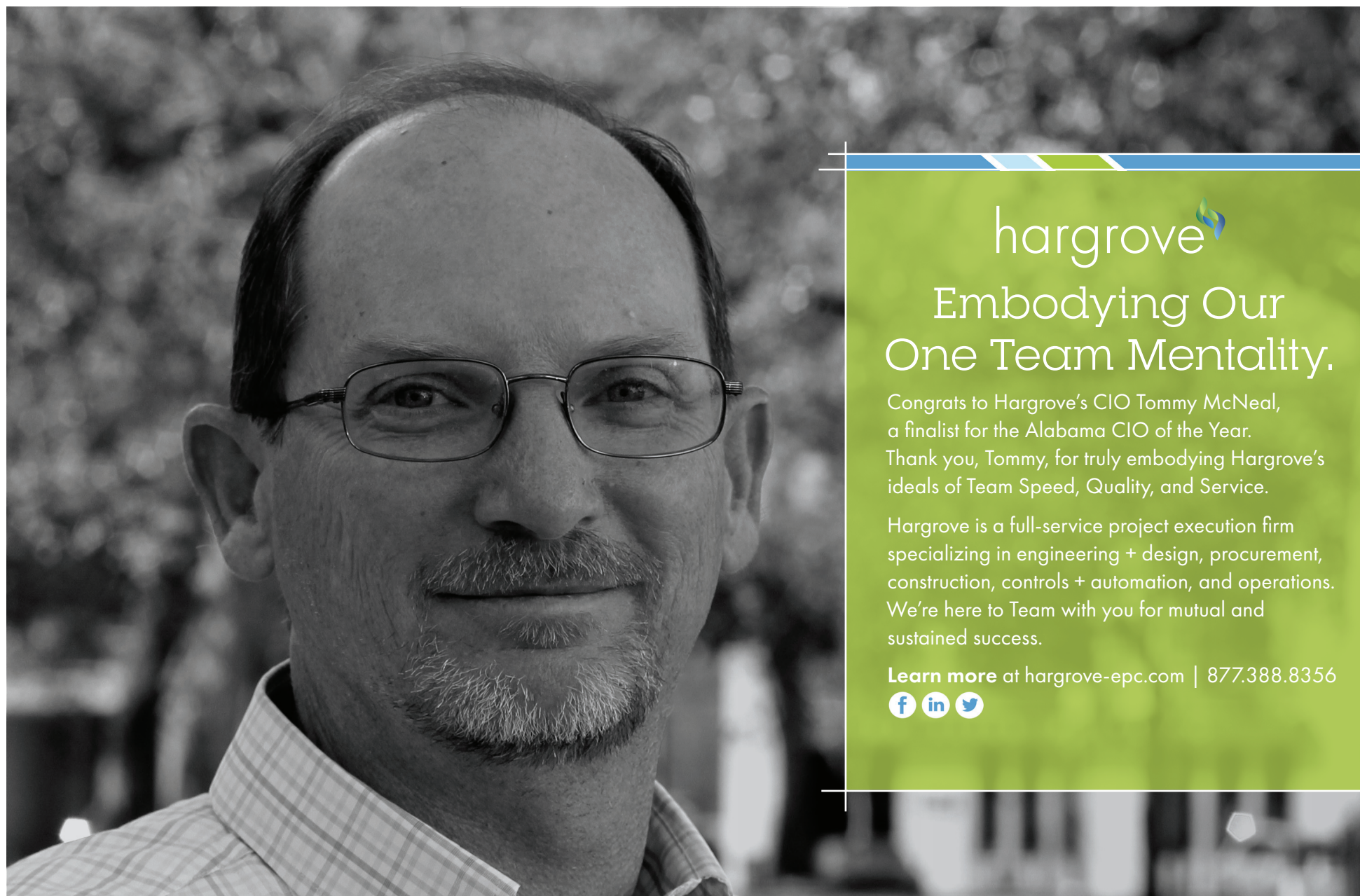
For over 20 years, InspireCIO has been inspiring CIO success through the annual CIO of the Year ORBIE Awards – but this is just the tip of the iceberg. By joining AlabamaCIO, technology executives take their leadership to the next level through year-

round, member-led programs and interaction. The power of CIOs working together – across public and private business, government, education, health care and nonprofit organizations – creates enormous value for everyone.

Together, we are transforming our organizations with technology and enriching our region and our world. On behalf of AlabamaCIO, congratulations to the nominees and finalists on their accomplishments and thank you to the sponsors, underwriters and staff who make the ORBIE Awards possible.

Sincerely,

CHRIS MORROW
2021 Chair, AlabamaCIO
CIO – Warren Averett



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CIO OF THE YEAR

LARGE ENTERPRISE

Over \$1 billion annual revenue



JOHN ENRIQUEZ
CIO
Wind Creek Hospitality

SUCCESS STORY:
“My greatest accomplishment at Wind Creek Hospitality is developing one of the greatest, most talented teams of IT professionals in the industry. We have been able to develop and mentor employees through proper training and certifications. We have created a culture of having a solid understanding of the company’s vision and direction and how we play a role in fostering collaboration with all departments. I am incredibly proud and privileged to work alongside the best IT professionals I have ever worked with.”



LYNN LOVELADY
VP & CIO
McWane Inc.

“During the past two years I have watched the information technology department make amazing progress toward our goal of becoming a more mature organization. Strong support from senior management throughout McWane has enabled IT to pursue our vision of becoming a trusted partner. Implementation of a comprehensive strategy supported by an operating model capable of executing that strategy has enabled our team of senior level technology experts to prioritize efforts toward initiatives that are most impactful to the overall business strategy. I am confident McWane is well positioned to achieve future success through the use of innovative technology.”



KEVIN MCMAHON
Senior EVP & CIO
BBVA USA

“My biggest issue as CIO was relationships at the executive and business leadership level. The technology department was not always seen as a good partner for the business. I put emphasis on areas that needed improved technology and operational support, changing the focus to business delivery. This changed the perception from the CEO and other executives, and confidence in technology grew. Employee satisfaction in technology rose. Effective implementation of technology and operations improvements followed, bringing improved SLAs, better business value and a 4% budget savings. My greatest success was creating a management environment for a successful and valued technology team.”



KEVIN RAY
Director IT
O’Neal Industries

“Building a foundation of best practice sharing and collaboration among our diverse portfolio of affiliate companies has proven to be a great value for our company. The IT leadership and teams at each of our affiliate companies is remarkable and their willingness to share and learn from each other is key to our overall success, both now and in the future. Our company values of innovation and entrepreneurial spirit are evident throughout the organization.”



BEN ROSEBROCK
Vice Chancellor of IT & CIO
Alabama Community College System

“While 2020 created unique opportunities and challenges for organizations across the world, information technology was challenged in ways that we have never seen before. ACCS shifted from providing in-person instruction for over 160,000 learners, supporting over 9,000 employees, and conducting weekly training for thousands of employees impacted by the migration to a new ERP platform to a complete virtual platform over a period of 30 days. While the transition was painful, the willingness of all involved allowed ACCS to be successful and continue to provide the public services we were created for.”

ALABAMA CIO OF THE YEAR
ORBiE
AWARDS

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CIO OF THE YEAR

ENTERPRISE

Over \$350 million annual revenue



TERRI BENTLEY
Senior EVP & CIO
Redstone Federal
Credit Union

SUCCESS STORY:
“Redstone’s most ambitious project to date was a partnership with Rural King (RK), a national chain of over 120 farm and home retail stores. The RFCU-RK partnership allows RK customers to become RFCU members while applying for power equipment loans (tractors, lawnmowers, UTVs) or a newly-created co-branded credit card, the Harvest Card. In order to meet the contracted deadline, we had to invest in new technology to avoid hiring a projected 79 employees needed using our current technology. Instead we hired 30 new employees, launched a new credit product, and established a seamless end-to-end digital process in less than six months.”



RAYMOND HARRIS
SVP, CIO
ADTRAN

“I’m currently leading a multi-phased digital transformation to move the organization to 100% cloud enterprise suite of business applications. However, when I think of my most successful project, I think back to the first IT roadmap I developed with my team. This occurred a little over 60 days after my arrival and the reason it was so important was because for the first time I felt fully connected to my team. I was not just the new guy, I felt a connection to them and knew we could succeed in transforming the the company. That success set the foundation.”



BILLY HELMANDOLLAR
CIO
DCH Health
System

“Health care IT can be more challenging than other industries, especially in the past 12-18 months. The IT infrastructure had to be agile and innovative to allow for a seamless transition to the move to work from home and telehealth. While other businesses could be afforded the availability to slow down/stop production, health care remained and actually ramped up our current workloads. Without the innovative planning and proper strategy, we would have struggled with the dramatic shifting to remote work but we did not miss a beat. I am extremely proud the team could take my vision and make it a reality.”



KENNETH MCCLAIN
Executive Director IT
Buffalo Rock
Company

“In taking a leadership role, learning how to delegate has been the most difficult yet most rewarding achievement for me. As a doer by nature, knowing something needs to be done and not doing it myself is not easy. However, when I involve others, not only do I get more accomplished, but I also learn more about my team’s strengths, which in turn enables them to find strengths they did not know they had. Also, seeing someone on my team recognized by other departments or leadership is much more rewarding than being praised myself.”



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CIO OF THE YEAR

CORPORATE

Up to \$350 million annual revenue



BEN BARNES
CISO | VP IT Services
McLeod Software

SUCCESS STORY:

“My role to organize, train, and mentor an internal IT team that provides infrastructure solutions to enable McLeod Software’s growth. We have become the leader in transportation management software while shifting from delivering our system in on-premise customer-owned infrastructures to over 50% of installations now hosted by McLeod and delivered as a cloud solution. This shift has helped propelled the company to rapid growth. Building a team that brings the right balance of technical expertise along with processes, policies, and cost controls to support this growth has expanded my knowledge, cultivated my leadership skills, and provided a rewarding career.”



KEVIN HICKS
VP IT
M. J. Harris Construction

“Over the past 16 years I’ve watched the company grow. I’ve observed transformational technology changes in the construction industry. I’ve built a technology team around me that I trust. I’ve worked with the organization to implement new and innovative construction technology solutions. But I cannot take full credit for these things. If it were not for my dedicated team and the willingness of people in our organization to step outside the box, these innovations would not be successful. I am truly excited for what the future holds for our organization and the construction industry as a whole.”



TOMMY MCNEAL
CIO
Hargrove

“The greatest accomplishments always begin with a great team. A frequent saying at Hargrove is “One Team.” We all work together with the goal of mutual and sustained success. I believe one of our greatest recent achievements was our IT team’s ability to transition 2,000-plus teammates from our offices to a fully work-from-home model within two weeks at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, ahead of government mandates. We enabled our team to seamlessly meet client expectations and stay engaged with projects while prioritizing safety by providing the right technology and IT support to allow for remote work.”



ROLF VAN RIJN
SVP IT
Red Diamond

“We have created several interfaces between different systems in order to streamline data transfers to our ERP system. We had to create an interface between our Custom Italian Roasters and our ERP system to capture the roasting/grinding/packaging process in order to determine the proper financials in our system. Another interface was created between our WMS and ERP system to properly flow the inventory between systems. This also affected our financials as well as streamlined our recall processes.”



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CIO OF THE YEAR

NONPROFIT

Government, Education, & other Nonprofit organizations



DAMIAN CLARKE

CIO
Alabama A&M University

SUCCESS STORY:

“Increased uptime and access to online resources by removing connectivity bottlenecks by increasing bandwidth, sourcing redundant internet suppliers, and installing new fiber optic cables between buildings, and copper cables and improved Wi-Fi within buildings. A 100GB backbone connects two remote data centers which were re-architected from an inefficient converged infrastructure to a smaller and easier to manage and less costly hyper-converged infrastructure with cloud back-up and disaster recovery. These pre-pandemic upgrades served as the foundation for all other computing systems which proved essential for the University to be able to seamlessly pivot to a hyflex learning environment during the pandemic.”



EMILY ELAM

Technology Supervisor
Decatur City Schools

“Like other K-12 districts, we were called on to reinvent public education in 2020. I am proud of our district’s agility and my team’s innovation to make the year a success despite the difficult circumstances. We provided every student in our district a device and home internet and we provided training and support for all our teachers, parents, and students. Our commitment to integrating technology in our district over the past five years made the transition to virtual easier and I’m proud of my team’s hard work, not just in these past 12 months, but also in the preceding years.”



RAND HARRIS

Associate Athletics Director, IT
University of Alabama Athletics

“Rand Harris has spent more than a decade leading the University of Alabama Athletics Department’s technology efforts, taking on an ever-expanding portfolio of responsibilities. In his current role serving as Associate Athletics Director of Information Technology, Harris has implemented solutions in applied technology ranging from daily business operations to in-venue fan experiences for one of the nation’s largest athletics departments. Because of his efforts the Crimson Tide has been able to set new standards in college athletics that are now modeled after us across the country.”



SCOTT ROSS

Director IT
HudsonAlpha Institute For Biotechnology

“As a husband and father of three, few things will ever compare to this level of personal fulfillment. However, being a part of HudsonAlpha’s nonprofit mission and learning from the leaders of our institute is the opportunity of a lifetime. Leading our talented IT organization and extending our shared love for technology to help solve the complex problems of genomics is a level of professional fulfillment that I’m so fortunate to have achieved.”



BILL STEINER

ITS Director
City of Huntsville, Alabama

“My greatest accomplishment has been restructuring and redefining the City ITS department. Years of stagnation were erased as I updated obsolescent job descriptions and created new positions appropriate to our vision. I removed outdated skill-sets, added relevant duties and structured these positions with a defined career path. My push to reform re-energized my employees. They now have a clear understanding of not only the expectations of their position, but also appreciate and value an outlined growth path within the city. The overall result is happier, better directed employees with a newfound understanding of their part in our mission.”

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Congratulations to Kevin Ray,
O’Neal Industries’ Director
of Information Technology
for being a nominee for the
Alabama CIO of the Year
ORBIE Awards.

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CIO OF THE YEAR

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MJ HARRIS



CONGRATULATIONS
KEVIN HICKS
CIO OF THE YEAR ORBIE
AWARDS FINALIST



PROUD TO HAVE ONE
OF OUR LEADERS AS
AN ALABAMA CIO
OF THE YEAR FINALIST



BEN BARNES
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CONGRATULATIONS
RAND HARRIS



THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
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CIO OF THE YEAR

LEADERSHIP AWARD

UAB's Carver tapped for Leadership Award

WHEN COVID-19 TOOK HOLD IN MARCH 2020, Curt Carver and his team sprung into action. Carver, UAB's CIO and vice president for IT, helped the school quickly transition to its remote environment while also providing the technology UAB's renowned health care system needed to combat a generational crisis. The efforts of Carver and his team ultimately transcended UAB and Birmingham. The school unveiled multiple tech-powered initiatives that helped keep students, staff, health care providers and the community safe during Covid-19, earning global acclaim in the process. Those are just a few of the reasons Carver is being recognized with the 2021 Leadership Award from AlabamaCIO.

You spent 27 years in the military. How did that lead to your eventual transition into a CIO role? My first assignment in the military was with the 82nd Airborne jumping out of perfectly safe airplanes. Then I went to Italy as part the NATO Response Force. I was handling the communications that went into those sites. So everything was on my back as we jumped in, then we got the technology set up to support those missions. I transitioned into running strategic data centers like you see in a James Bond movie, except multiplied by 10. I went to Korea to manage the technology for a division. Then I returned to West Point as part of the faculty and senior leadership, and I became the West Point CIO. So I've been involved with technology my entire career. It's been a part of everything I've done, just in different environments.

Was there a mentor along the way who gave you an important piece of advice? I've been blessed to have many mentors during my career. A lot of them went on to be three- and four-star generals in the Army. One was Gen. John Abizaid. When I was with him, I was a lieutenant and he was a major. I was talking with him (about a technology issue) and he said, "Curt, I don't understand anything you just said. If it works, you're a hero. If it doesn't, you're fired." That captures to a certain extent what goes on

in technology. We have to bridge that communications gap, but there also is accountability in what happens. Part of that is planning exceptionally well, and part of it is reacting to what happens. There's an old adage, "No plan survives first contact with the enemy." That's true with anything in technology as well. No tech plan survives contact with reality, and you have to be able to react to whatever is going on.

How did you and your team at UAB respond to the Covid-19 pandemic?

It was a multi-faceted response. We immediately had to triage as we transitioned our systems, and transitioned employees to remote work and students to hybrid education. That transition went close to flawlessly, just because there had been so much investment in IT in the preceding five years. We had built a lot of systems and infrastructure for a really smooth transition. Everything worked and we were able to move forward. As early as March (2020), a lot of our focus was on not only what was best for UAB but also for Birmingham and the state. We were pulled in almost immediately to build an app that supported drive-in Wi-Fi in some of our parking lots, and coordinating that across the state with the community college system and other universities and the Birmingham K-12 school districts. We also got involved with the HealthCheck app, which was used



across the state. We're the principal programmers and designers of the Exposure Notification app that was deployed statewide. We built the informatics system for all the Covid testing statewide, not just UAB. We rewired all classrooms at UAB to support student success, and built safe-occupancy spaces and sensors and student dashboards. And the list goes on. We triaged UAB, but really our focus was empowering a response not only in the city but also across the state. We've been really busy, and it's not slowing down. We're continuing to work very hard to strengthen all this.

How might Covid change the CIO role moving forward? A friend of mine said, "Welcome to 2025, five years early." We ended up cramming five years of innovation into one year. And the technology worked about as close to flawlessly as we could have hoped for. What that does is create new opportunities for engagement and collaboration, and for really enhancing education and research. So it has changed the role, because the environment we

operate has fundamentally shifted, which creates opportunities. There are now new opportunities to create competitive advantages.

What do you think the overall role of a CIO should be? You start by making sure the underlying technology runs flawlessly, but you're failing if you stop there. You should be an engine for innovation at the institution. My principal role at UAB is as a vice president. The CIO is a specialty. But my conversations with (UAB President) Dr. (Ray) Watts are about running the university, the same way he has other conversations with other VPs. Technology is just a particular area. We're strategic leaders. That's the role of IT. It's not to run the servers. That's just a given. What you're really trying to do is create a competitive advantage for the organization. That's what IT does. We're increasingly becoming agents of competitive advantage and innovation in the companies we work for. Every day, we wake up hungry to innovate and impact the lives of our customers in a meaningful way.

Dramis: The focus of a CIO should be on both technology and the people who use it

Fran Dramis got into technology as a career primarily because technology got into him. During the early days of computer programming, Dramis would delve into a project, then glance up from his screen to discover that several hours had surprisingly ticked away.

"I'd get pretty deep into something," Dramis recalls, "and then look around and think, 'Wow, where did the time go?' That's really how I started, and everything just built off that."

What Dramis wound up building was a career that included CIO stints at AT&T / BellSouth and the Salomon Brothers investment firm. He also has served as a board member for eight companies, and been an angel investor in more than 30 businesses.

Dramis currently heads his own technology consulting and investment firm based in Atlanta. He has received several honors throughout his career, including being named to CIO Magazine's CIO 100 and the Top 100 Leaders for the Next Millennium, as well as Computerworld's Premier 100 IT Leaders. In 2016 he received the GeorgiaCIO Lifetime Achievement Award.

Along the way, Dramis came to appreciate the importance of looking away from the computer on occasion, and focusing instead on the people who were working with and for him.

"A CIO's obvious role is to use technology to produce products and services," Dramis says. "But there is a secondary role, and that's to become educated as a leader so you can effectively lead in technology. The challenge is making a large group of different types of people be super productive. It's about reaching people who are in different stages of their life and careers."

"I built my early career by working as an individual contributor. I was doing well technically, but I didn't have some of the leadership skills that I needed."

That began to change not long after Dramis joined the old BellSouth Corporation (now AT&T) in 1998, when he was selected to oversee one of the company's call cen-



ters. Suddenly, instead of speaking the same language with fellow programmers who were his peers, Dramis found himself supervising employees across a wide array of ages and backgrounds.

"To the people working in the call center, I was senior management. So I had to learn what it meant to be the boss," Dramis says. "That experience really helped me understand some of the leadership principles that I needed in order to succeed."

One strategy that Dramis quickly adopted was to have individuals report directly to him with updates, suggestions, concerns, etc., instead of channeling such communication through secondary sources.

"That way, I could keep my finger on the pulse of where the technology was going," Dramis says. "As the CIO, if you don't have people reporting directly to you, then you can kind of get left out of what's going on. Doing it that way made me seem a lot smarter than I actually was."

Dramis presented many of these ideas and strategies in his book, *The CIO Handbook*, which focuses on ways to align technology with the

"A CIO's obvious role is to use technology to produce products and services, but there is a secondary role, and that's to become educated as a leader so you can effectively lead in technology."

strategic direction of an organization. That is important, Dramis says, in order to make technology a transformative part of a business instead of some sort of back-office entity that simply produces the basics.

For example, he points out that an oil company would almost certainly make sure to keep its wells operating with the most current technology. At the same time, many of them might not realize they have billing and accounting systems that are significantly out-of-date.

"Technology is a business asset just like anything else," Dramis says. "So you want to set up a technology roadmap in partnership with the business. This engages the business in the ownership of technology assets, and then points those assets in a direction where they can be a

differentiator in business strategy."

But in the end, Dramis says, it all comes back to working with other people, and understanding what they want to accomplish in their own careers. He used this concept to create what he calls the end-of-career paragraph, where employees describe how they want their careers to be remembered when they reach their final day of work.

"We as leaders have the opportunity to make every job meaningful, if there's an element in that job that is a stepping stone to the person's end game of their overall business career," Dramis says. "If we take the time to sit with people and talk to them about their end game, we can find something in the current job that is essential for them to get to that final piece."

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