CIO Interview Guide

How do you interview a CIO candidate?

You know how to ask about leadership style, management experience, and budgeting acumen, but how do you assess a candidate's skills in architecture? How do you know if a CIO is up on Agile development, cloud technologies, and all of the next-gen approaches to IT operations? Sure, the candidate can say "microservices" and "DevSecOps," but have they used these approaches to benefit the business?

The CIO role involves a unique combination of leadership, vision, business acumen, and technology depth, which can make for a challenging interview. To help you, Heller Search has created this CIO Interview Guide.

LEADERSHIP

✔ Tell me about a transformation that you led that had a positive impact on the business.

　🔊 **What to listen for:** *Business outcomes as opposed to "on time" or "under budget."*

✔ What are your most important relationships in your current role, and how do you maintain them?

✔ Tell me about a time when you've had to exert influence over your company's executive committee? How did you do it?

✔ What is your approach to change management?

✔ What is your leadership style?

　🔊 **What to listen for:** *A thoughtful, clear articulation of a leadership approach, as opposed something vague and common.*

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IT STRATEGY AND ROADMAPS

✔ Describe the IT strategy that you developed and executed. What were the elements of the strategy?

🔊 **What to listen for:** *Clear links between the IT strategy and the company's business strategy.*

✔ What was your approach to seeking approval and funding for the strategy?

✔ What part of the strategy was the most difficult to execute? How did you do it?

✔ What was the impact?

✔ How do you define "the cloud" and how have you applied cloud solutions to your business?

🔊 **What to listen for:** *Experience not only with cloud applications like SalesForce and Workday, but for cloud infrastructure services as well.*

An acknowledgement that a cloud strategy requires architectural planning, not a "lift and shift" of applications to the cloud.

✔ What is your approach to making build versus buy decisions?

MATURING AN IT ORGANIZATION

✔ On a scale of 1 to 10, how would your current business community rate your IT organization? How do you know?

🔊 **What to listen for:** *A concrete methodology for determining customer satisfaction, and clear metrics.*

✔ How have you structured the IT organization, and why?

🔊 **What to listen for:** *An org structure that aligns to the way the business is structured.*

✔ What is the culture of your IT organization? Is that the culture you inherited? If not, how have you changed it?

🔊 **What to listen for:** *Concepts like customer centricity, business outcomes, and collaboration*

✔ How are you developing "blended" IT leaders who have deep technical skills, but also have an understanding of the business context in which they are working?

🔊 **What to listen for:** *Real commitments made to investing in team professional development, and programs in partnership with HR.*

✔ What is your experience creating a culture of innovation in the IT organization, and across the business?

✔ Have you implemented Agile development in your current organization? How did you do it?

🔊 **What to listen for:** *Approaches to bringing business users into the Agile process since IT cannot be Agile alone.*

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TECHNICAL SKILLS

✔ What is your approach to creating a flexible, scalable architecture?

✔ What the architecture you've developed to leverage data effectively for your business?

✔ How do you assess the skills of the technologists on your team?

✔ In this industry, what are the most impactful new technologies coming onto the market?

✔ How important is it for a CIO to be a strong technologist in his or her own right?

VENDOR MANAGEMENT

✔ Tell me about a vendor management problem that you've turned around?

✔ What are the elements that are key to making an outsourcing relationship successful?

BUSINESS ACUMEN, ENGAGEMENT, AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT

✔ What are the key KPIs you track in your business?

✔ What do you believe is the right IT governance model for a company of our size and structure?

✔ How do you ensure that projects are delivered on time and on budget?

✔ How do you ensure that your company's IT investment dollars are being spent on the right initiatives?

> **What to listen for:** *The concept of IT investment decisions being business decisions, which the CIO facilitates but does not own. A CIO claiming full responsibility for all IT investment decisions is a red flag.*

✔ How do you establish transparency with your business partners?

✔ What organizational structure allows for the best relationships between IT and its business partners?

More CIO hiring tools from Heller Search:

[The Ultimate CIO Job Description](#)
[Definition of a CIO](#)

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