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## Have Code, Will Travel For Nomad CIO

Dave Berry is not your typical CIO. On Monday mornings he boards a plane out of New York City and commutes to his job at TOMS Shoes in Los Angeles. Then he flies back every Thursday night to be with his wife and three children for the weekend. Come Monday, he does it again, just as he has every week since last September. Berry chose this lifestyle after fulfilling his contract at fragrance company Coty in 2010, where he was CIO for 12 years.

Since leaving Coty, he has served as interim CIO for three companies: teleconferencing software maker Polycom; software code conversion concern Smartshift; and TOMS. Berry, who in his long career has installed business software, managed budgets and dabbled in marketing, said he has learned a lot working for those three very different companies. He agreed to share some advice on how to manage temporary IT management roles.

First, Berry advises those interested in testing the itinerant CIO market to approach each assignment as if it's permanent. Some people who start temporary engagements come into companies determined not to get too close to their colleagues, he said. As a result, they often fail to command the proper respect of subordinates. "I get completely immersed in the organization so they don't look at me as 'oh, he's just the interim guy, we don't have to do anything about what he's asking us for,'" Berry said.

IT leaders interested in exploring temporary roles must also not discriminate by company size or industry type, Berry said. Exposure to different businesses is self-satisfying and will also make CIOs more marketable in an era where more software and services are moving to the web. "I got into high-tech. I got into video. I got into software. I got into the marketing side of things for software. I got involved in e-commerce for a non-government organization," Berry said.

Being a nomadic CIO isn't for everyone. People who are geared toward large companies with fully loaded IT staffs will have trouble adapting to the roving CIO role because they aren't accustomed to independent thinking and execution, Berry said. "If you're the type of person that requires a lot of structure and a lot of support around you, then the interim CIO role will be a difficult challenge. It's a recipe for failure." Berry has worked at large companies such as GrandMet Foods and Burger King, but he said he didn't have 350 engineers working on software for him the way some other companies do.

Berry's roving began in September 2010 with an e-mail from a CIO friend telling him he Polycom was looking for an interim CIO to manage IT while the company looked for a permanent CIO. He interviewed with then-Polycom CFO Michael Kourey, who was a little skeptical about hiring a CIO without deep high-tech experience. Berry told him: "You're either a CIO or you're not." Berry got the job.

At Polycom, Berry demonstrated his hands-on approach. When Polycom's sales team was doing a demo for a customer, the video software crashed. Berry and his team discovered that unstable software code was being put on the same hardware used to demonstrate products for customers. So the tech team changed its software deployment process. He stayed for four months, commuting every two weeks from Scarsdale to Polycom headquarters in Pleasanton, Calif. Berry then moved onto Smartshift, which converts older SAP software code to newer code. Berry also took on marketing duties for this Cambridge, Mass., company, explaining the complex technology to prospective buyers and at SAP's customer conference last year. He moved on last August.

TOMS, which has a business model based on giving away one pair of shoes for a child in need for every pair a customer buys, hired Berry to implement an SAP business system. This software is crucial for connecting the shoe seller to the computer systems of retail customers, such as Nordstrom and Whole Foods. With the implementation four months away, Berry has begun reaching out to those customers' CIOs to walk them through that SAP deployment to reduce friction.

To that end, Berry's specialty is in implementing on-premise business software from SAP, which is one of the main reasons Berry has been hired by GrandMet, Burger King, Coty and TOMS over the last two decades. Though Berry has gotten comfortable with SAP code, he doesn't eschew newer computing models.

Berry is a big proponent of cloud computing, and is using web-based human resource software at TOMS. He advises that companies running on-premise software should look at web software unless they have some competitive reason for keeping their technology in-house. "It makes a lot of sense for companies that don't want to run their own infrastructure," Berry said.

For those considering moves to the cloud, Berry said CIOs need to ask themselves whether they're good at running their own infrastructure, keeping it updated and current "without hiring an army of guys." If the answer is no, then the CIO must rely on someone other party. Some companies may even let others host their on-premise software. At TOMS, Berry is letting a hosting company run the company's infrastructure in a data center in North Carolina so he doesn't have to fuss with the gear.

Berry's contract at TOMS is up at the end of August and he is interviewing with other companies. He's said he's being selective, but he's open to either an interim role or permanent job; it all depends on the best fit. "I got to expand my horizons for 18 months that I never would have expanded if I stayed another 18 months at Coty," Berry said.

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