
The CIO To CEO Leap



According to a recent Billian's HealthDATA study, the CIO career path generally does not lead to the corner office. The study evaluated 384 hospital executive personnel changes in 2014 and found that there was only one CIO who was promoted into a CEO role.

Laura Musfeldt, Vice President of Senior Executive Search at healthcare-focused executive recruitment firm B.E. Smith is not surprised with these findings. "We're just not seeing it," she says. "Other people are making that jump, CFOs or CNOs are becoming CEOs, but not really CIOs."

According to Musfeldt, one of the major reasons why CIOs are not promoted to CEOs is because they are considered to be technology executives first and healthcare executives second. Most CEO candidates are expected to have experience across all categories while CIOs have experience and background in technology and learn the clinical side later. In addition, since there is an abundance of candidates who already know the clinical side of the business, the potential opportunities for CIOs diminish.

Dr. Yousuf Ahmed started his career as a software developer. He then moved into healthcare and held CIO roles at Group Health Associates and Mercy Health. In order to attain the CEO position, Dr. Ahmed had to return to school to acquire education that would help him make the CIO to CEO leap. His strategy worked and he was promoted to CEO of Mercy Health.

However, Dr. Ahmed highlights that his CIO experience and background have proven useful in his new role as CEO. He has used data from a variety of sources to improve the decision-making process. "In both roles you get all this data from disparate sources and have to make it into intelligent information that can help you make a decision," he says.

He also points out that the CIO has his work cut out for him. CIOs are running major functions that cannot fail such as payroll, billing, clinical systems, etc. These systems need to be functional and need to stay online. According to Dr. Ahmed, it is not that CIOs lack talent and that is why they are not becoming CEOs. It is mainly because they have a lack of interest in running a hospital. In addition, many technology executives want to keep their options open and want to stay industry-agnostic so that they can move into another industry if required.

Russ Branzell also supports this point of view and believes that CIOs are not becoming CEOs because they enjoy their current roles, especially since this role is now becoming increasingly important. He also reiterates that CIOs do not lack skills and are well-equipped to work with different departments, manage staff and build support for new projects or systems.

"They're just looking at what CEOs have to do, and they don't often desire it," says Mr. Branzell. "As crazy and high-stress as it is, they like the lifestyle of a CIO."

Source: Becker's Healthcare

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