

# Quick Answer: What Interpersonal Skills Do I Need to Become a Successful CTO?

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Initiatives: [Digital Innovation and Enablement Function](#)

CTOs are usually appointed for their digital business and technical skills. But CTOs who aspire to be digital leaders must develop five key interpersonal skills to meet their organization's digital business needs.

## Quick Answer

### What interpersonal skills do I need to succeed as a CTO?

- **Emotional dexterity** — To become a compassionate, adaptive and resilient leader with integrity who can lead your team calmly through chaos and build strong alliances with other executives
- **Influencing skills** — To build relationships with key stakeholders and better navigate organizational politics
- **Negotiation skills** — To overcome political opposition to your initiatives, achieve agreement or consensus and resolve conflicts
- **Communication skills** — To ascertain needs and champion the benefits of technology, including actively listening to others and accepting feedback
- **Diplomacy** — To approach stakeholders with empathy and tact

## More Detail

As a CTO, you're the technology visionary of your organization. To succeed at this, you must be able to describe and communicate an inspiring vision of how technology will enable the business to execute its strategy. This requires five key interpersonal skills. Table 1 defines these skills and provides techniques and resources to help you develop your competence in each.

**Table 1: Top Interpersonal Skills for CTOs**

(Enlarged table in Appendix)

Skill	Definition	Techniques to Develop This Skill	Gartner Resources
Emotional Dexterity	The desire and ability to identify and demonstrate both personal and social competencies in engagements with others to advance communication, relationships and leadership outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Practice self-awareness by identifying and addressing your strengths and weaknesses.</li> <li>Regulate your emotions by identifying and labeling them.</li> <li>Empathize with others when you encounter conflict and identify common ground to build on.</li> <li>Practice self-discipline and self-regulation.</li> <li>Develop a growth mindset.</li> <li>Act with integrity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CTOs Must Build Skills in Emotional Dexterity to Succeed in the C-Suite</li> <li>Develop Personal Competencies to Strengthen Emotional Dexterity for CIOs</li> <li>Executive Role Impact Development Social</li> <li>Competencies to Strengthen Emotional Dexterity for CIOs</li> <li>Executive Role Impact</li> </ul>
Influence	The ability to affect the character, development or behavior of someone or something.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strive to position yourself as a trusted, enthusiastic champion of technology.</li> <li>Create a stakeholder map of people you like to engage with to increase your influence.</li> <li>Arrange meetings with these people to understand their attitudes and challenges and determine how you can help address them. Position yourself as an enabler of their goals, by leveraging technology to deliver quick wins that help them achieve those goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A Practical Guide to Stakeholder Management</li> <li>Stakeholder Priority Map (Worksheet)</li> <li>Actions for an Effective CIO Transition: Identifying Enterprise and Stakeholder Expectations of IT</li> </ul>
Negotiation	The ability to engage in dialogue between two or more parties in order to reach agreement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empathize with others to discover what will motivate them to come to an agreement.</li> <li>Build trust by listening effectively, preparing for negotiations, understanding the "what's in it for me" for the other party, leveraging informal conversations to identify any concerns or desired outcomes and offering options for resolution.</li> <li>Use negotiation "currency" such as values, relationships, motivation and productivity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to Prepare for Internal Resource Negotiations: A Checklist</li> <li>Negotiating Techniques for Success – Even When Your Leverage is Compromised</li> </ul>
Communication	The ability to convey your thoughts and decisions clearly to others, and listen to their reactions and feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage business executives to understand their pain points and propose how technology solutions and innovations could resolve them (where appropriate).</li> <li>Develop communication plans for major technology initiatives and digital product launches and for marketing water enterprise involvement to decision makers.</li> <li>Take these plans for specific audiences to work business unit. Ensure that each plan requires the benefits for the target audience and also lists how it can adapt to the impact of a new technology or digital product.</li> <li>Use storytelling techniques to communicate your technology vision and value proposition, explaining use cases for specific technologies and describing how they will improve operational issues, tackle challenges or enable new opportunities.</li> <li>Identify the types of information different groups of stakeholders need, how they need it and when. Deliver it based on these findings.</li> <li>Push your communication to the right level and to your audience, simplifying concepts where necessary.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective Communications: How to Develop a Communications Strategy</li> <li>Executive Essentials: Moving Storytelling to Income More Persuasive and Increase Engagement</li> <li>Tell How to Solve Science Fiction Storytelling to Communicate Your Vision of the Future</li> </ul>
Diplomacy	The ability to deal with people in a sensitive and tactful way.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empathize with the point of view of the person you're meeting with.</li> <li>Find a colleague/mentor who can engage in role playing to help you practice diplomacy in fictional scenarios.</li> <li>Practice diplomacy during negotiations. When you encounter disagreement, use empathy to see the other party's point of view, adopt a diplomat approach if you are unable to agree.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Navigate the Politics of Innovation</li> <li>How to Use a Verbal Diplomat When Under Political Attack</li> <li>How to Navigate a Political Attack</li> <li>Rules for Discussing Digital With the Board of Directors</li> </ul>

Source: Gartner (November 2022)

Like your fellow CTOs, you're likely to have become more business-focused in recent years, which has increased your need to develop strong interpersonal skills. Yet many organizations fail to emphasize this aspect of the CTO role. Most CTO job descriptions and job ads describe in detail the technical skills that the role requires, but they don't emphasize the interpersonal skills and desired behaviors that successful CTOs exhibit. <sup>1</sup>

A Gartner survey indicated that CTOs could improve their performance by building stronger relationships with their peers, colleagues and key stakeholders. <sup>2</sup> Solid interpersonal skills enable stronger relationships that provide insight into stakeholders' goals and in turn, ways to help realize them through technology. Investing heavily in developing these skills increases your chances of successfully championing the use of technology as a strategic asset.

Gartner's [IT Score for CTO](#) maturity assessment indicates that CTOs can do better at these four activities: <sup>3</sup>

- Sharing innovation ideas and success with executive leaders and staff
- Ensuring corporate communication of ideation, actions and success
- Encouraging business teams and leaders to innovate
- Communicating value propositions to stakeholders

We recommend that you use the five interpersonal skills described in this research to help you deliver better outcomes in the four activities listed above.

## Recommended by the Authors

[How to Demystify the Chief Technology Officer's Many Personas](#)

[The Chief Technology Officer's First 100 Days](#)

[CTO Insights: How to Build the Right Executive Partnerships to Scale Digital Business](#)

[IT Score for CTO](#)

[Infographic: Benchmark Data From the IT Score for CTO](#)

[Quick Answer: How Can CTOs Improve Their Performance?](#)

[Boost Your Relationship With Stakeholders to Become a Digital Orchestrator](#)

[Case Study: How EA Enhances Digital Business Competitiveness \(Johnson Matthey\)](#)

[Expanding EA's Posture to Include Risk Remediation \(CVS Health\)](#)

## Evidence

This research leveraged the following data sources:

<sup>1</sup> An analysis of 350 CTO profiles and 150 job descriptions that were publicly available.

<sup>2</sup> 2022 Gartner March Hot Topics Survey: This survey was conducted online from 1 April through 18 April 2022 to understand the following:

- Chief Technology Officer — Evolution and performance of the role of the CTO at your organization (n = 21)
- API Strategy — Organizational aspects of API delivery, API business goals and types of APIs being used at your organization (n = 50)
- Physical Security Technology — Approach to physical security technology strategy and procurement at your organization (n = 16)
- Digital Workplace Aspiration, Maturity and Leadership — Current state, future aspiration and leadership of digital workplace at your organization (n = 47)

In total, 90 leaders who were members of Gartner's Research Circle, a Gartner-managed panel, participated. Members from North America (n = 45), Europe (n = 31), Asia/Pacific (n = 8) and Latin America (n = 6) responded to the survey.

Disclaimer: Results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

<sup>3</sup> [Infographic: Benchmark Data From the IT Score for CTO](#)

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Table 1: Top Interpersonal Skills for CTOs

Skill ↓	Definition ↓	Techniques to Develop This Skill ↓	Gartner Resources ↓
Emotional Dexterity	The desire and ability to develop and demonstrate both personal and social competencies in engagements with others to advance communication, relationships and leadership outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Practice self-awareness by identifying and addressing your strengths and weaknesses.</li> <li>■ Regulate your emotions by identifying and labeling them.</li> <li>■ Empathize with others when you encounter conflict and identify common ground to build on.</li> <li>■ Practice self-discipline and self-motivation.</li> <li>■ Develop a growth mindset.</li> <li>■ Act with integrity.</li> </ul>	<a href="#">CIOs Must Build Skills in Emotional Dexterity to Succeed in the C-Suite</a> <a href="#">Develop Personal Competencies to Strengthen Emotional Dexterity for CIO Executive Role Impact</a> <a href="#">Develop Social Competencies to Strengthen Emotional Dexterity for CIO Executive Role Impact</a>

<i>Skill</i> ↓	<i>Definition</i> ↓	<i>Techniques to Develop This Skill</i> ↓	<i>Gartner Resources</i> ↓
Influence	The ability to affect the character, development or behavior of someone or something.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Strive to position yourself as a trusted, enthusiastic champion of technology.</li> <li>■ Create a stakeholder map of people you'd like to engage with to increase your influence.</li> <li>■ Arrange meetings with these people to understand their ambitions and challenges and determine how you can help address them. Position yourself as an enabler of their goals, by leveraging technology to deliver quick wins that help them achieve those goals.</li> </ul>	<a href="#">A Practical Guide to Stakeholder Management</a> <a href="#">Stakeholder Priority Map (MeadWestvaco)</a> <a href="#">Actions for an Effective CIO Transition: Identifying Enterprise and Stakeholder Expectations of IT</a>

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<b>Communication</b>	The ability to convey your thoughts and decisions clearly to others, and listen to their reactions and feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Engage business executives to understand their pain points and propose how technology solutions and innovations could resolve them (where appropriate).</li> <li>■ Develop communication plans for major technology deployments and digital product launches and</li> </ul>	<a href="#">Effective Communications: How to Develop a Communications Strategy</a> <a href="#">Executive Essentials: Master Storytelling to Become More Persuasive and Increase Engagement</a> <a href="#">Tool: How to Use Science Fiction Storytelling to Communicate Your Vision of the Future</a>

Skill ↓	Definition ↓	Techniques to Develop This Skill ↓	Gartner Resources ↓
		<p>for seeking wider enterprise involvement in ideation. Tailor these plans for specific audiences in each business unit. Ensure that each plan explains the benefits for the target audience and describes how it can adapt to the impact of a new technology or digital product.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Use storytelling techniques to communicate your technology vision and value proposition, explaining use cases for specific technologies and describing how they will improve operational issues, tackle challenges or enable new opportunities.</li> <li>■ Identify the types of information different groups of stakeholders need, how they need it and when. Deliver it based on these findings.</li> <li>■ Pitch your communication to the right level and to your audience,</li> </ul>	



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		simplifying concepts where necessary.	
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