

Twelve Questions Answered About my Role as IT Manager at Avjet Corporation

IT Manager / IT Director / Infrastructure Manager

Avjet Corporation

Feb 2005 – Feb 2017 (12 years)

Burbank, CA

1. How did you get this job? What does the company do? Who buys its products or services?

Once again, I was approached by an agency because I had experience and specific skills in managing the IT function. The agency knew my work from a previous placement and recommended me for the position. I was asked to come in and interview on a Sunday afternoon, was asked to return the next morning early to meet with the CEO and be prepared to start work on the spot, which is exactly what happened. They fired my predecessor the moment he walked in the door.

Avjet was one of the world's largest BBJ and Gulfstream air charter organizations in the world with 1.5 billion in managed assets and \$75 million in annual sales. They cater to the rich and famous of the world, those who wish to travel in comfort and style, while remaining anonymous. Every employee was required to sign an agreement when hired that they would not disclose the identities of the clients or the owners of the jets we managed. Avjet was considered the best.

The company ceased to exist when it was purchased by Jet Aviation, which in turn is owned by General Dynamics. I stayed with the company for over twelve years, starting as a single IT employee, being promoted to IT Manager, then IT Director. I managed a small staff consisting of a desktop support specialist and an individual whose primary focus was supporting the 800 iPads used by our flight crew in the place of lugging around suitcases full of aviation maps. I was given the title of Infrastructure Architect when Avjet was purchased by Jet Aviation.

2. What are your major responsibilities? What have been the biggest challenges you faced in accomplishing them? What did you do, and how did it turn out? What resulted from your actions?

I managed the entire IT role at the company. I was responsible for the design and support of the data centers, the refresh of the technology every few years, managing the staff, resolving issues that are inherent in a growing company that is implementing new technology (VMware was new for us in 2009), and making sure that management did not have to worry about the network or computers. I reported directly to the CEO or alternatively to the CFO in alternating years. If it had a network cable or WiFi signal, I was responsible to make sure it worked.

The biggest challenge I faced in implementing my duties was in managing employee expectations. Our clients made high and occasionally excessive demands of us and some of our employees would treat the IT staff with a similar amount of direct “attitude” as in, “how could you let this happen?” or “Isn’t this something you should have taken care of before it became a problem?” Helping employees get used to accessing our network through the VPN and RDP was a major challenge for those who had never done it. I introduced this technology.

My method of dealing with this problem of impatience and seeming intolerance was to promote a culture of service to the company, something my predecessor did not do, and which got him fired. I made sure the department heads had my full attention when they made requests for new technology or to comply with some new regulation from the FAA or NTSB. As a result, the IT department gained a reputation of being the most helpful and focused on the core mission of the company – to provide excellent customer service that goes beyond expectations.

3. What are you most proud to have accomplished in this role?

I think the build-out of the second data center as part of a planned disaster recovery and business continuity is one of the things of which I am most proud to have accomplished during my tenure at Avjet. I made sure we could survive the failure of an entire rack, and in fact, plugged the plug once and then created a loopback to take one of the racks out proved the efficacy of the plan. We had six

hosts, running VMware enterprise ESXi 5.5 Enterprise (top of the line at the time). We were able to lose three hosts and still provide the computing power, network availability and storage (RAID 10 mirrored on two SANs in two different locations. In short, I tried to make the data centers bulletproof in case of earthquake or in case one of them was taken out by a direct hit from a plane crash at the airport.

4. How have you saved your employer time or increased productivity?

My goal was 99.999 percent uptime and I always met it every year. I had redundant ISPs in place and increased bandwidth every few years while lowering the price of the telecom function. I replaced the phone system with a hybrid digital and VoIP system, ensured workgroup printers were placed appropriately, introduced the concept of the VPN for home workers, insured our IPSec tunnels to our remote sales offices functioned as needed, and in short, did everything I could to ensure the network, the servers and the workstations were optimized to meet and exceed the computing needs and expectations of the company.

5. What have you done, to increase sales or revenue for your employer? How did you go about doing it? What tools, skills, knowledge, or software did you utilize?

6. What have you done, and how did you do it, to decrease costs or expenses for your employer? Again, what tools, skills, knowledge, or software did you utilize?

7. How have your accomplishments in this role stacked up against others in your department, company, or industry?

8. Why is your employer better off because you were hired?

I brought a service-oriented attitude to the company that was not previously evident by the IT staff. I don't care how ridiculous the request is, co-workers and especially department managers deserved to be treated with respect and given

an answer that satisfies their request. I helped Avjet grow during the twelve years I was in their service. I managed the installation of infrastructure in buildouts as the Charter department grew and needed to accommodate more employees. I made myself available 24x7x365, something my predecessor had never done. I even installed and maintained the home network of the CEO and went out of my way to provide extra special service to the CFO and department heads.

9. What did you start or set up that became a model for others to copy in other locations or companies?

10. How did you make life easier for your boss, your peers, or others with whom you worked?

I made it easy for my boss, my peers, and vendors to get ahold of me. I made myself available and prided myself in returning calls and answering emails quickly. I tried not to get too technical when resolving issues for my co-workers and would honor their request if they wanted an explanation or just wanted something fixed. I made sure I was available to supervise my vendors, be it a wiring contractor or a network specialist who needed access to some obscure part of the airport, some parts of which were over sixty years old. I knew my environment and maintained it in a condition that anyone would be proud to show it off to authorized visitors.

11. How are you viewed by your boss, peers, and those you supervise?

Based on the promotion from IT Manager to Director of IT and finally being given the title of Infrastructure Architect, I would say I earned the respect of my employer and my peers. My staff gave me glowing reviews when asked to provide references and my employer (the owner who sold out) still called me for years for advice with his new company and the networks in both his homes.

12. What is your reputation among your vendors, customers, or clients? Why do they have this opinion of you?