Twelve Revealing Questions Answered From my Most Recent Role at Canoga

IT Manager / Network Administrator
Canoga Perkins Corp.
Sep 2018 – July 2021 (2 years, 10 months)
Chatsworth, CA

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

I was approached by an agency through Linked-In (Tek Systems). I was just about ending a short-term engagement to build out a new data center for a local probiotics company in Thousand Oaks and agreed to an interview even though the assignment was not quite finished. I was somewhat shocked when they made an offer almost on the spot (well, the next day anyway). I advised my current employer, and he agreed my replacement I had trained could finish the job of supervising the final build-out. I came back for the actual data center move day a few months later to make sure the project was fully completed.

Canoga Perkins is a privately held $25 million electronics manufacturing company located in Chatsworth CA that makes a new kind of switch for 5G TSN networks that is time-sensitive and designed for high-saturation IoT environments. We also make standard 4G carrier backhaul fiber network devices. Our main customers today are most of the major carriers like Verizon, Bell Canada, Frontier, AT&T, Lumen, Motorola, General Dynamics, the US Air Force, L3Harris and a host of other companies that need reliable fiber networks managed from Canoga View, our industry-standard network device monitoring product.

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 manage the IT function at Canoga Perkins. I ensure the network meets the needs and all computing capabilities of a staff of highly technical design engineers as well as the supporting administrative staff. I manage a staff of two – one who responds to the majority of end-user helpdesk support tickets, another who assists us in supporting our specialized but antiquated ERP system as well as developing software for automating business processes. My job is to keep the electrons flowing. I ensure that the switches, firewalls, servers, and workstations are performing optimally. I also maintain the VM environment, the access control system, the building security systems, phone system, copiers, printers, Wi-Fi, you name it.

The biggest challenge in accomplishing my daily job is in managing the absolutely overwhelming number of requests for user assistance, system modifications, network troubleshooting or general computing support. Each member of the team has dozens of tickets open at any one time, some of which require extensive research into a poorly or non-documented system or platform. We work with antiquated technology, a mandate from management to "make do" with the older systems we support and an ever-growing project list that requires extensive time and effort to manage, along with expectations from management to support our existing technology almost exclusively with internal knowledge and skill.

My proposed solution to management is to engage the outside service and expertise of an array of IT vendors who both sell us the new products and services we need as well as ensure what they propose is what we need and will meet our expectations. In short, I continue a three-pronged approach to my job – 1) serve my co-workers as best I can with the knowledge I have gained over the years, 2) Supervise, train, and encourage my team to do the same, to be resourceful in solving the myriad of IT issues we face every day and 3) Manage the vendors who are providing new equipment, services, or expertise.

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

I believe my greatest accomplishment in my two and a half years with Canoga Perkins was to upgrade the VM Infrastructure from 5.5 to 6.5, to add a third host

for the VMs, to increase the memory, core computing capacity and available SAN space by two hundred percent. I basically tripled the capability of the IT department to host additional VMs as needed. All this was done with next to no budget. We had apparently purchased the 6.5 license before I arrived, but nobody had bothered to perform the upgrade. I was also able to add the third host by piggybacking it into a request to increase our Veeam repository.

I think I am next most pleased by the working relationship I have built with my team, my supervisor, my co-workers and, to some extent, with the CEO. We are in a high-pressure environment. The company is in a major transition phase. The amount of work increased dramatically when the old executive staff retired, and the new president began to require changes without explaining the vision behind them. I had a co-worker leave due to the change and have salvaged the contribution of another co-worker who management felt was not pulling his weight. He simply needed coaching and mentoring to succeed.

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

I believe my work ethic has allowed my employer to keep our staff smaller than companies with a comparable number of employees to support. At one time I was the sole IT department employee. I simply started my day earlier and continued working longer into the evening from home. I also made sure we were prepared for the pandemic and lock down by implementing a faster and less expensive Internet connection (from 100M to 500M) and consolidating all Telecom expenses with one company at reduced rates. In addition, I ensured we had sufficient capacity and planning for remote VPN workers.

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?

Although the IT Department does not normally negotiate or manage the marketing website, I used my skill in this area to bring an extremely inexpensive website vendor to the company and managed the development process entirely

from start to finish. Our website visits more than doubled. I personally managed the website inquiries until we could get a sales team on board (we have had NO sales staff for the past year and half since the new president took over and started retooling the company). I used my skill in website development and management to ensure our website is maintained once implemented.

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?

The IT department in most companies is looked upon as a cost center. Ours is no different. However, I have used my analytical skills to examine fixed costs and negotiate reduced amounts to match the service levels we now require. For example, our head count reduced dramatically yet my predecessor had not made any effort to reduce licensing fees for the software tools we use. In one year with one product, I was able to cut our annual licensing expense in half simply by ensuring our reports were accurate and that the ERP vendor was made aware of the need to reduce their annual licensing fees.

Another specific area that decreased costs for my employer was to negotiate with alternative suppliers for new servers requested by the engineering department as they tooled up for development of the new 5G product line. I was able to purchase, install, configure, and integrate two new SANs and three new VM host servers all at less than half the price of new by purchasing one-gen behind equipment that had seen less than three years of service. I also configured the upgrade to the latest version of VMware (at the time) by performing the upgrade myself instead of hiring an outside company to perform the labor.

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

When I joined the company, we had one other network engineer. Sadly, he was burned out and made it clear he was looking elsewhere for employment. He even took on Uber and Lyft engagements on his lunch hour that sometimes ran three hours or more. I believe I could have managed the department by myself without

his help (I was not the IT Manager at the time). I have always monitored and maintained my network from home using VPN and RDP technology. My co-workers in the department, even today, are not so driven. I have always felt an IT Manager needs to be available 24x7x365 and still am today.

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

Besides filling the standard role of taking care of network adds, moves, and changes, I have proposed and have managed several infrastructure upgrades such as our phone system, our ISP, and our VM environment, including bringing on open-source VM alternatives, greatly saving on licensing fees. I am a proactive employee, always looking for ways to make our network better, more reliable, robust, and flexible. My skill and experience in Active Directory and Exchange Admin have saved the company from having to outsource the IT support function. I believe I am profoundly responsive to user IT needs.

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

I think this question is geared more toward large companies with multiple locations. I work for a small business with less than eighty employees in a single location. Most of my career has been in similar environments – small companies with less than four locations and never more than 400 employees. I suppose if there is anything I have tried to model for others, it is a work ethic or responsiveness to IT support requests. I do not believe a co-worker should have to wait for days just to find out if someone in IT can help them. I pride myself in that I am responsive to requests, usually within a very few minutes.

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

I provide a weekly written one-page bulleted summary report for my boss to make sure he is informed of the status of open tickets and ongoing projects. I make myself readily available to my boss and my peers. They know they have

multiple ways to get ahold of me including email, Slack, text message or my own personal cell phone number, which I have always shared and used in my work environment. If my boss or a co-worker is experiencing frustration with technology or need immediate help to complete a project and can't get the technology to work as they feel it should, I respond as quickly as possible.

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

As far as I can tell, the president and my supervisor are pleased with my performance, to the point that after two years, they made me the IT Department Manager along with a healthy raise. That was not my title or role when I was hired. I feel I have a friendly and helpful working relationship with my staff. We work well on assignments and projects together. My co-workers, some who have been with the company over twenty years, have told me multiple times they have never experienced such a responsive and knowledgeable IT tech. I attribute that to having performed the IT support function for many years.

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

I have often heard from the IT Vendors I work with on various projects that they enjoy working with me because I take responsibility for the project instead of dumping everything on them. There are always some differences in what is proposed and what is actually deliverable. I have been told I am easy to get along with, wiling to accommodate changes and that I take great care to see that my network is run effectively and efficiently. When I build a data center or even rack a server, I have been told that my efforts to make it look right and easy to service are greatly appreciated. I believe I am well organized.

I also make it a habit to complement my vendors when they do a good job, especially when working with junior engineers that may be concerned about doing the job right and making a good impression on their first job, such as a new website build, or an update to a firewall or a tweak of an email server. I have received unsolicited favorable reviews and feedback from vendors I have engaged

for IT services. My customers are the employees. I receive numerous compliments from my co-workers exclaiming how pleased and satisfied they are with my knowledge and my responsiveness, my willingness to help them.