

The Care and Feeding of Techies

ICCM 2012
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- Some of you are here because it's the management track, and it's the least intimidating of the rest of the session titles.

My Job

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- Present the facts.

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- Let the Holy Spirit do His work.

A Story

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- Ministries don’t inherently HAVE to hang around. Or do we believe that ministries are supposed to be eternal?

Salient Quotes

- Ask the management group to imagine doing their job and their mission with no phone, no email, no web access, no working computer on their desk and all records kept by hand. It's a different world now than it was even a generation ago before PCs and networks and instant messaging. As your admin I make sure that all works and continues to work and not skimping on infrastructure investment means it generally works better, longer and faster with significantly less down time

Survey Says ...

In June of 2012, I asked tech workers from within mission agencies and organizations to respond to several pointed questions. The results were surprising.

Spiritual Connections

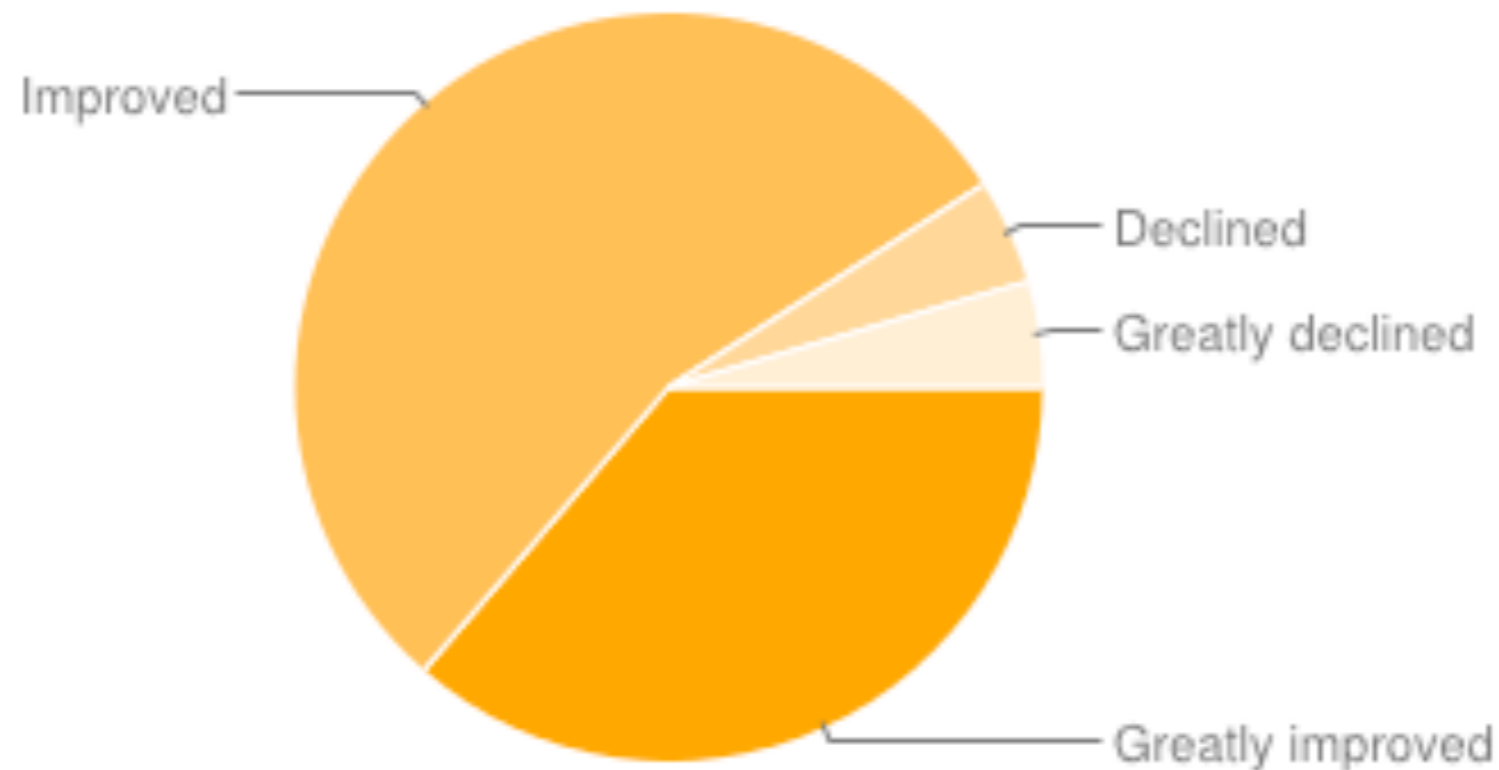
- I am valued as a fellow believer in my organization.
 - 52% - Strongly agree
 - 26% - Agree
 - 17% - Strongly disagree

Spiritual Connections

- I have a good personal relationship or spiritual connection between me and my immediate supervisor.
 - 52% - Strongly agree
 - 22% - Agree
 - 13% - No opinion
 - 4% - Disagree
 - 9% - Strongly disagree

Spiritual Connections

- Has your walk with Christ improved or declined since working with your current employer?



Details on Spiritual Walk

- **Has your walk with Christ improved or declined since working with your current employer ?**

- Daily prayer meetings with leaders.
- Able to talk about deeper spiritual issues with the people I work with. Most have a solid Biblical foundations, have attended formal Bible study at colleges etc and are mature Christians.
- Needed to trust more to get the money -> Living from what others give.
- Great environment for improved walk with Christ.
- I have been "following hard after the LORD." Thus, less to do with mission alone, and more to do with simply following hard in general.
- The Lord has placed me in a ministry that is a perfect fit for my abilities, interests, and with just the right amount of challenge. I do not have to deal with any crap. The environment is very scripture-focused, and I have a chance to reflect seriously on things.
- Have to trust for things that are beyond our ability.
- We have a chapel session every morning before starting the workday and our department prays together regularly
- Even though my work is technical in focus, I still end up spending more time in God's Word. Working in a faith-based organization, God's work in my life and the life of those around me more apparent. The struggles I have had to deal with - and they are many - cause me to grow in Christ.
- Two specific people in the organization took an interest in me and helped me develop spiritually for different periods of time.

- You learn more by doing and I have been doing and learning. Nothing takes the place of years of real life ministry.
- Some days are better than others... Great examples of faith, and encouragement.
- Well, I've been with them for over 20 years in various roles, so I hope my walk with Christ has greatly improved in that time or something is very wrong! :-) Most of my growth has come through life experiences (pain) outside of work rather than at work (although work hasn't been without pain either!). More to the point of what you're asking about, the office I'm in tries to get everybody into an accountability group, so that helps iron sharpen iron, and helps break down the natural barriers between executives and workers.
- Since working for the christian env. (3 years), I have gone through more changes compared to the 8 years I worked for a commercial company. The changes were also challenges for me, which deepen my spiritual life. Additionally there were private challenges. Perhaps the private challenges arise because of working in mission and someone does not like this...
- Not sure how much it has to do with my employer or just that fact that God has "forced" me :-) to grow in Him.
- I see too much inequality.
- Improved, but it has still been hard. I moved from a medium org to a smaller org, and I miss the greater variety of teaching and exhortation at the larger org. Also there seems to be less openness to stop and pray over anything and everything at the current org.
- I've been here so many years that all apply

Salient Quotes

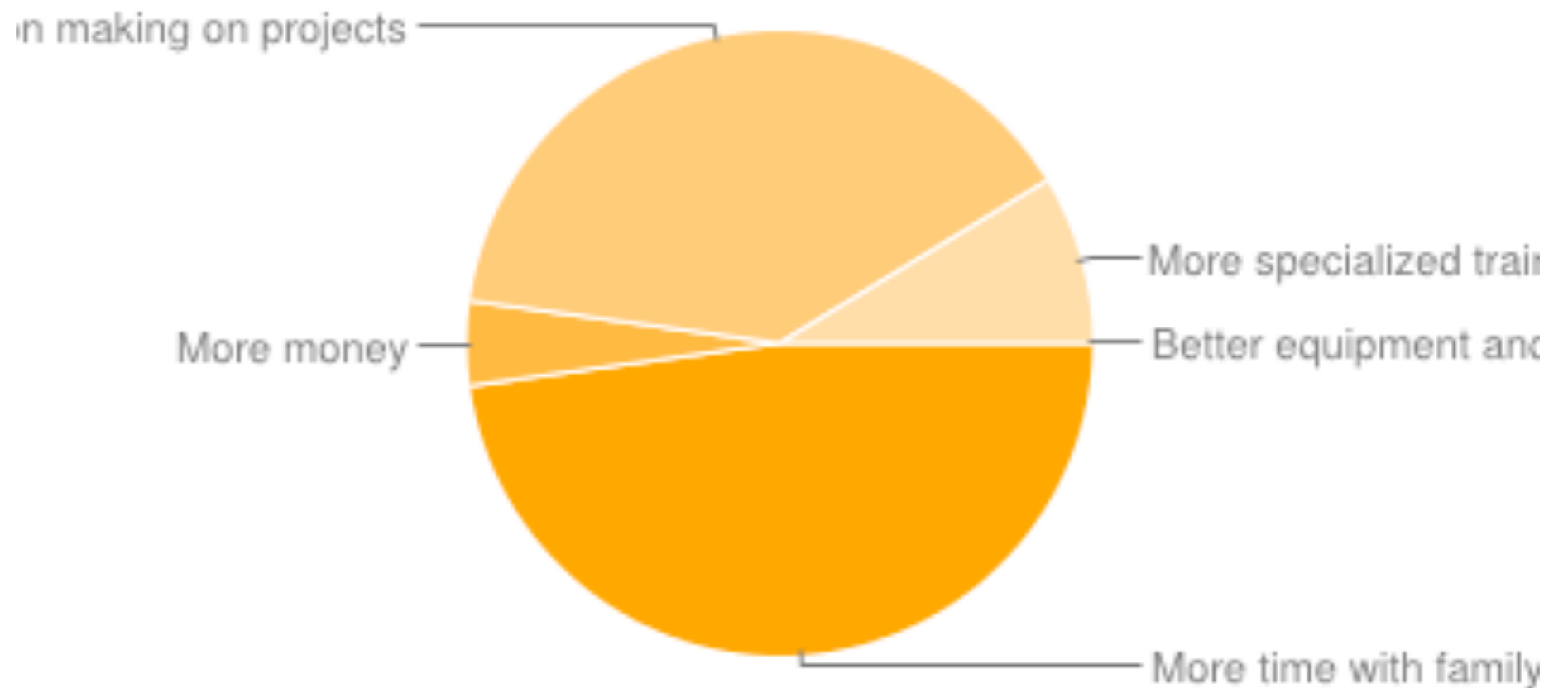
- In my view, in a lot of ways it could be ideal for the head person at the mission to be sleeping with the head IT person (man and wife married of course!). This is because ideally the level of access you end up giving your IT admin staff is somewhere between the love of your life and your best friend.

Cluefulness

- Upper management understands well the capabilities of the IT department in my organization.
 - 35% - Strongly agree
 - 30% - Agree
 - 13% - No opinion
 - 17% - Disagree
 - 4% - Strongly disagree

Motivation

- What matters most to you as an incentive or bonus?
 - More time with family
 - More money
 - More role in decision making on projects
 - More specialized training in IT/my field
 - Better equipment and resources



Listening

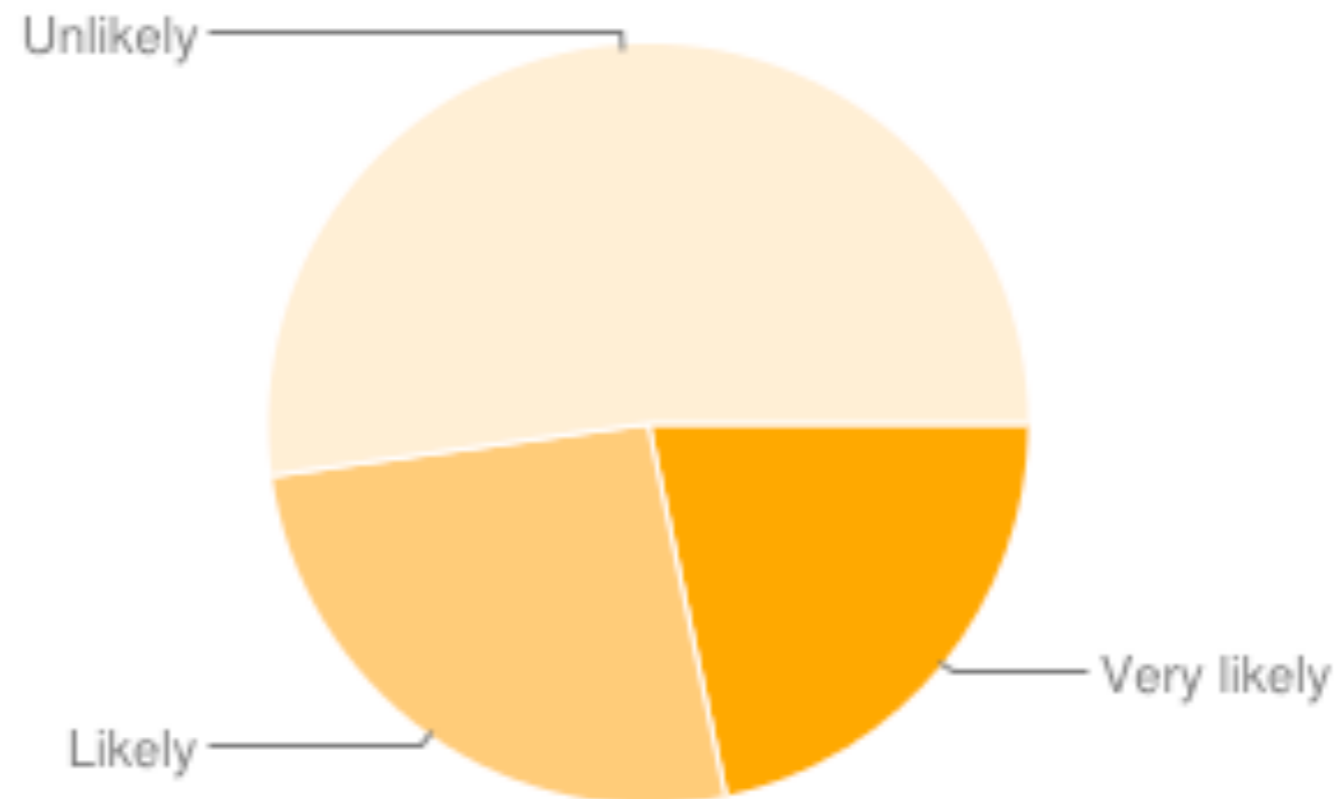
- If I see a problem in our organization, I believe management will listen to my thoughts on how to solve it.
 - 30% - Strongly agree
 - 48% - Agree
 - 4% - No opinion
 - 13% - Disagree
 - 4% - Strongly disagree

Salient Quotes

- Think of your average IT nerd... ahem, I mean admin. Yeah, the guy that you never notice until something critical fails at 3am Sunday morning. Then you ring his phone to fix it. Note: when you keep this guy happy, your entire organization will be happier because a happy admin is generally more motivated to have things just work. And even past that, a happy admin is much more likely to service and dispatch your little special requests and projects quickly and efficiently when asked. This is the factor of going over and above "just works" status to something akin to "just works better" status.

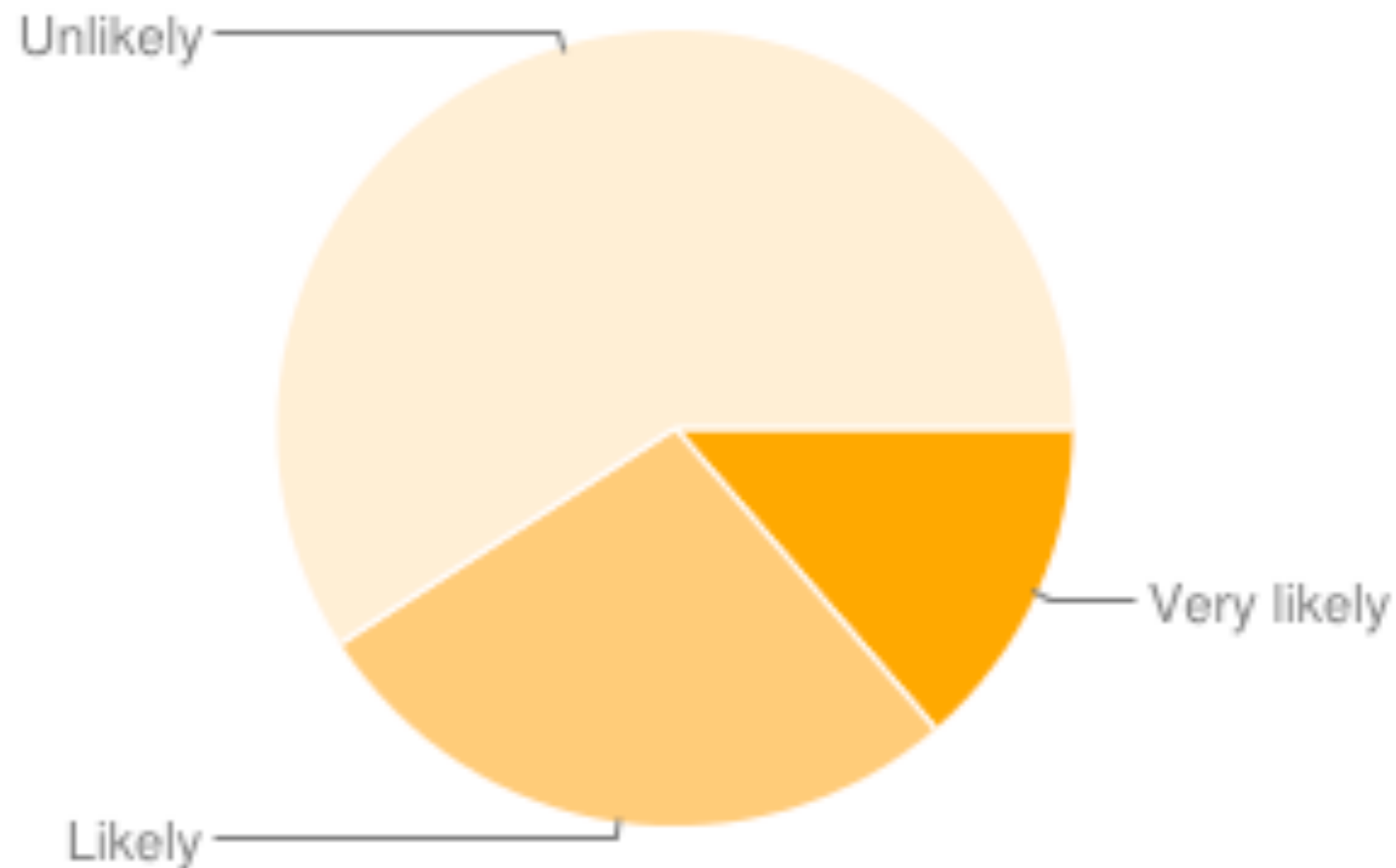
Commitment to Current Mission

- If another organization or mission agency offered you 25% or higher more money to work with them doing essentially the same job, how likely would you be to change employers?



Commitment to Mission in General

- If a for-profit company offered you "A LOT" of money to work for them using your IT skills, how likely would you be to take the offer?

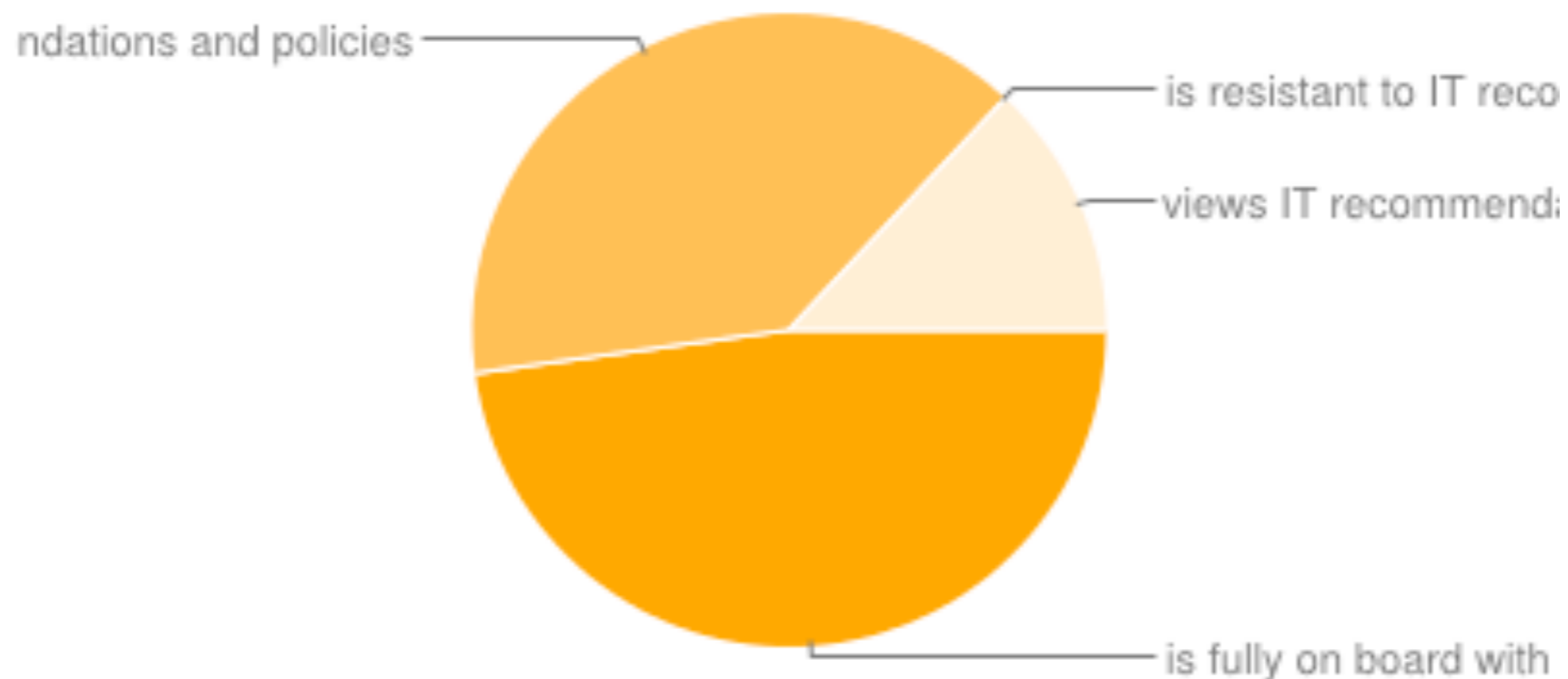


Salient Quotes

- Whenever you recruit a new tech worker, do you intend to just chew up and spit out whomever you hire?

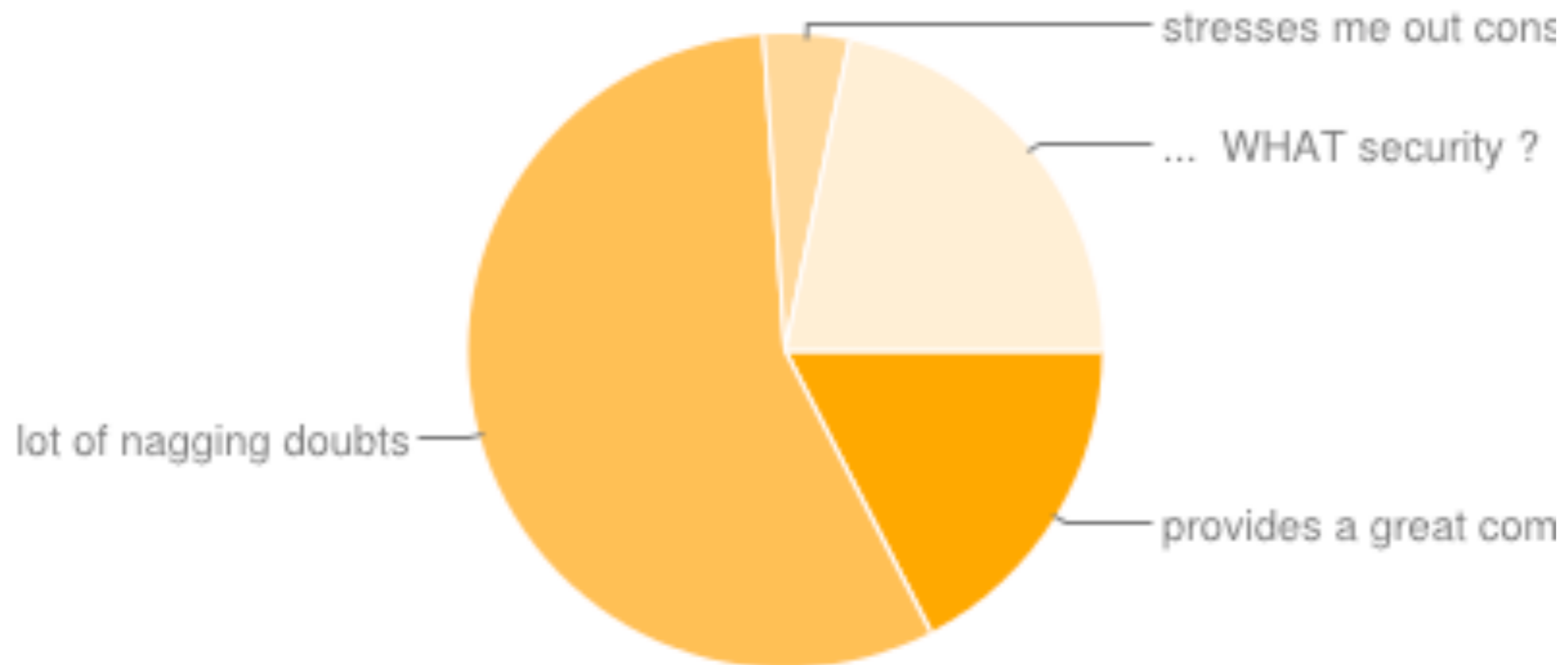
Mgt Support of Security

- Regarding security in my organization, management
 - is fully on board with IT recommendations and policies
 - does not understand much about it, but they generally approve IT recommendations and policies
 - is resistant to IT recommendations and policies
 - views IT recommendations and policies like Ahab viewed Elijah



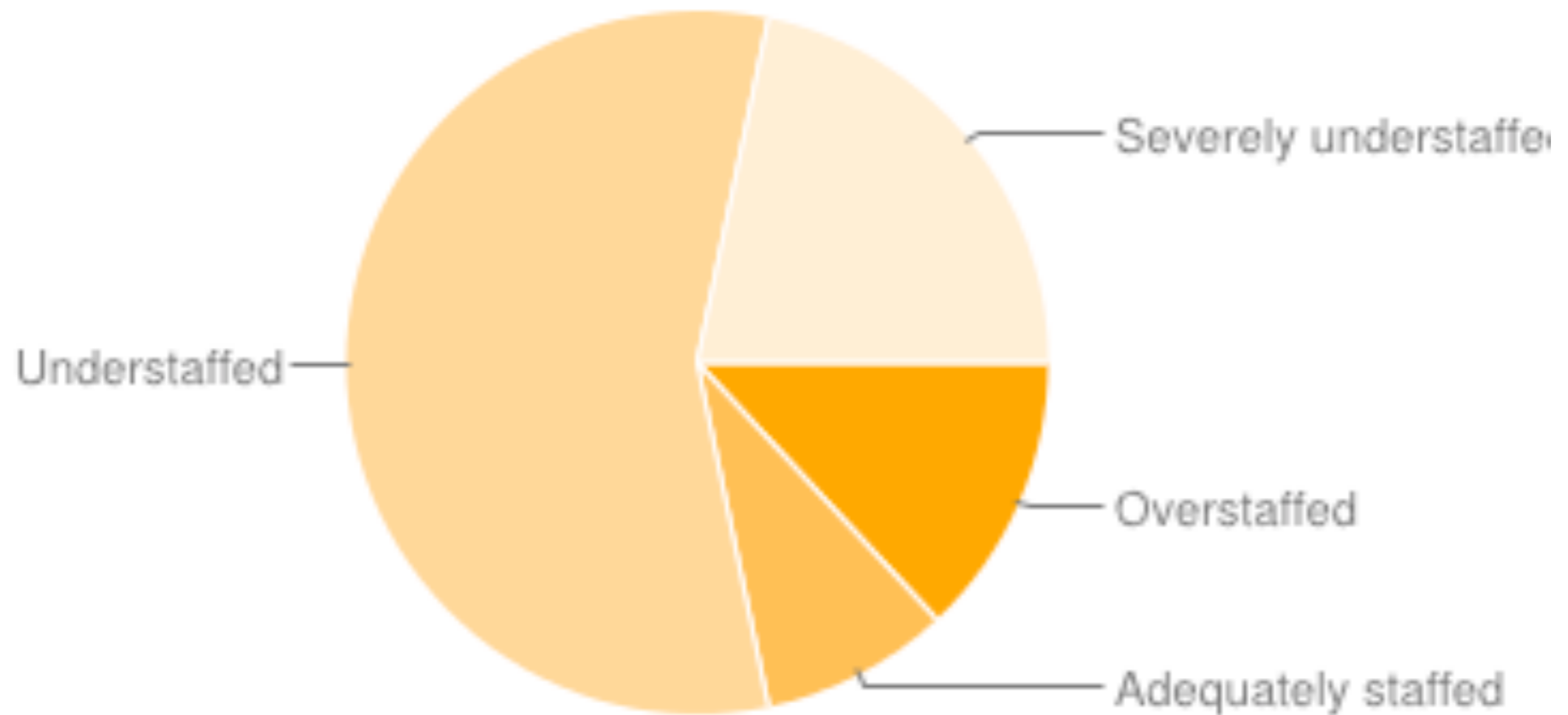
Bottom Line on Security

- My own understanding of how secure my organization's data is
 - provides a great comfort to my soul
 - allows me to work without a lot of nagging doubts
 - stresses me out constantly
 - ... WHAT security ?



Staff Levels

- The level of IT staffing at my organization is



Salient Quotes

- If you are trying to recruit a techie to come and work for your organization, stop and ask yourself the question, “Why should they come to work for us?”

Gold Star

- Awesome boss award. If your supervisor or management (past or present) is particularly excellent or great to work with, please list his/her name and organization. Then list a few concrete things which this person does which makes working so enjoyable. (4 TOTAL)
- He is more a friend than a boss and has an ear all the times I need it. On the other hand he is focused on getting the job done.
- Invites us over to their home for meals, understanding about needing time off for family medical matters (and doesn't count it as sick or vacation time), does his best to approve requested purchases, forgiving.
- He does not micromanage. He knows that I work best when working independently, and he lets me work that way.
- A manager who was a steadfast friend through illness and a long recovery process.

Salient Quotes

- Our personal finances are in shambles. We've had to ask the question several times, "Should we stay with this organization?"

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- knowing that my work is affecting the missionaries on the field and enabling more people to hear about Christ.
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- interacting with the people here.

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- the limited budgets and limited possibilities for personal growth, regarding responsibilities, deeper technological skills and wider area of support (physical area).
- that technology isn't valued enough. There is potential for our organization to lead and support so many in remote or isolated contexts, but lack of resourcing means intentions don't turn into reality.

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- Anything. We have great relationships and can be honest about anything without fear of reprisal. (rare response)

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- Because I believed that people would see first hand what we do and would support us. Being non-profit would give us a legal position of credibility. Not sure that was a wise decision but too late now to change it. I was not aware of the politics of religion (Christianity). Very disillusioned but God has been faithful nevertheless.
- I want my life to count for eternity, and I have a sense of calling that makes me seek to be where the Lord wants me to be and do what the Lord wants me to do on a day-by-day basis. Money is not a motivation.
- At this stage in my life, this is where God has called me to serve. I may not be paid what I'm worth, but I'm not doing it for the money. I'm investing in building God's Kingdom.
- I felt God's leading to be a missionary when I was 12 and have always focused on it. However, I'm beginning to look more at how business can be mission if the heart is right. Non-profits are loosey goosey and don't really know what they are doing (although they think they do). Many business people will donate but not invest money in a non-profit because they don't believe the leadership really knows what they are doing. They are pie-in-the sky people who have vision but not the real ability to carry it out. So they donate a little money instead of investing a lot of money.
- My wife and I wanted to serve the Lord in full-time ministry. The opportunity came up to do this and we felt that God was directing us in this direction.
- I wanted my work to directly impact the advance of God's kingdom. My spiritual gift is help, so working in development work was a good fit for me. I have a strong sense of calling to work in missions.
- I serve in both capacities, tent making skills plus working for a mission.
- God's call.
- It is my calling to be part of that organization. I do not live for the money, otherwise I would have chosen a career in the regular work world.

Please state in 1-3 sentences why you choose to work at a mission agency or non-profit versus a for-profit company.

- I fully believe in our focus on a particular people group.
- This is where God called me. And I want to use my life to make a difference for eternity, sharing the Gospel with people who have never had a chance to hear.
- I heard a great question which prompted me to leave the secular workforce to become a missionary. "If others can and want to do what you are doing right now, what is stopping you from using your talents as a missionary?"
- Money is not everything, and my abilities are needed in mission. When I do not my job, then nobody will do it. So I am able to be part of the big picture where I am.
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- I became aware of the needs the organization had and believed that God had prepared me to facilitate the meeting of those needs.

Detailed Survey #1

I am presently not working in missions. This survey details why. It's based upon my last missions experience. I had wanted to make a life of missions IT work. The experience however really soured my desire to serve in anything ministry related, especially anything that is non-profit, and where one essentially pays for the opportunity to work under such poor leadership where (1) I'm constantly micromanaged, (2) my knowledge and expertise in my chosen field of IT and telecom are constantly second guessed by those above me with little to no clue as to how this works or what it really takes to get things done and (3) needed delegation of authority is not given.

By definition of the job responsibilities of most network/sysadmin duties I likely have root and admin privileges on every electronic information appliance and full unfettered access to every electronic record, file, email, and voicemail held therein or in transit between such devices within the organization and with the outside world. If you don't trust your IT staff with the keys to your organization and can't leave them alone to make sound decisions in their delegated area of expertise then they SHOULD NOT be in that position. Trust in your IT staff and their wisdom is imperative.

Finally, where leadership is willing to allocate funding and resources and in what amounts offers to me a direct reflection upon just how much that area is valued within the organization. IT (and telecom) are rarely if ever areas that bring money and resources into an org. They stand as cost centers rather than profit centers on the books of the org and when it comes time to do budgets and funding, these crucial areas often get missed, mostly due to 90% of the users of this infrastructure taking for granted it's existence and the miracle at times that it even continues to function with what's given to keep it going. Often it's a thankless job! Only when things fail to work does IT/telecom get called or even noticed.

Lastly everyone needs to stand up and accept responsibility for their errors. If a problem arises, it needs to firstly be addressed directly between the parties involved.

I was run out of town with nowhere to go and before my agreed leave date. Then, leadership proceeded to slander my good name to a number of my close friends. Now you can see why I want nothing to do with this!

Presently I'm self employed. I call my own shots. People pay me well and respect my opinions of what needs done. I live and die by my reputation which is generally good with my clients. I like what I do, so much so that I'd love to give of it to helping anyone willing to support my basic needs working to fulfill the great commission. That said, with the leadership I've seen thus far I want nothing to do with this.

Please complete this sentence: My greatest joy in working for my non-profit is ...

Solving problems and making stuff just work. Now leave me alone, let me get my job done, and watch magic just happen.

Please complete this sentence: My greatest disappointment in working for my non-profit is ...

lack of trust and respect, being taken for granted, and being underfunded, underpaid, and unrecognized for my contribution.

If you could say anything to your management with absolutely no fear of reprisal, what would it be?

I'll leave that unstated, as it would not be nice! What I will say is that as an IT person and admin I need to be delegated the trust, authority, autonomy, and resources sufficient to get my job done without management inserting themselves into daily IT operations. Come to me when the infrastructure I manage needs to do something it does not do or needs to not do something it does. In turn, count on me coming to you with hard reality of what it's going to take to do so, and respect my knowledge, wisdom, and expertise in my area when I give you this hard reality. If I feel strongly about a solution which you tell me is not within the organizational budget, then let me go outside the organization to get it done. Let me rally my support base to support my department and ministry for the greater good of all.

Please state in 1-3 sentences why you choose to work at a mission agency or non-profit versus a for-profit company.

Because my heart is to help in fulfilling the great commission by both enabling and maintaining the communications technologies used as well as the support infrastructure that enables those on the front lines to be effective in their ministry.

Detailed Survey #2

My perspectives on the techie/manager relationship have changed somewhat since I left the mission I served. As a techie, oftentimes I *thought* that my manager (or executive leadership) was to blame for all of my "problems". Having been in both shoes, now, the "blame" question is far from clear, and is often unanswerable. A better question to ask is not "blame", but rather are there things we can learn from and do better next time?

One key area seems to be getting to know each other, especially in situations where there is a new relationship. One new manager I had jumped to some quick conclusions about me that were pretty far from the truth, and the disrespect I felt as a result of that was pretty demoralizing. He later apparently realized some of what had gone wrong, but didn't really take any steps that I could see to correct it. I don't necessarily blame him for any of that, though, since it's hard to know what you don't know - a person's impressions are that person's reality. A good question for managers to ask is, "Will you tell me about yourself? I know you're probably a pretty modest person, but please do tell me about your strengths."

Oftentimes, executive leadership has no idea how good their IT departments actually are, and IT departments can end up being out-of-touch with the organization, too. In many missions, there is no CIO, and the IT director is not on the executive leadership team. Instead, often the IT director reports to the CFO. That can work, but it is also very vulnerable to misunderstandings between the executive team and the IT group. The executives oftentimes see other technologies in a magazine ad, or when talking to fellow executives at other missions, end up suffering from "techno-lust," and wonder why their organization can't use that technology. The IT group on the other hand often is "sheltered" from the movement of the organization as a whole, gets in a "groove" that appears to be working, and so may not be "in touch" with the changing needs of the organization. That really sets the stage for major misunderstandings. One of the best ways the IT director can serve his or her IT staff (and the rest of the ministry, too) is to also be the CIO, or in a BIG ministry, to report to a CIO (who isn't also the CFO)! IT directors often hate meetings (IT is a "get stuff done" type of thing), and don't want to be on the executive team. They need to bite the "meeting bullet" and get on the executive team.

Regarding spiritual life, I know that the two biggest things that have hampered my own spiritual growth in the ministries I've been connected with, are (1) poor handling of stress (or too much stress), and (2) lack of priority of spiritual growth in the organization as a whole. When I first joined one organization, the spiritual life of the organization was emphasized a lot more than it was when I left. As the office staff grew, there were more and more people who became disgruntled at the amount of spiritual life stuff going on, so the leadership cut back on it, and team meetings became more "mechanical". Unfortunately that led to me (and many others) disengaging somewhat from the spiritual life of the organization because it no longer seemed genuine. But the result was that many of us were no longer being well-fed spiritually at the ministry, something that wasn't healthy for anyone involved. It would have been better if I (and others) had remained more engaged, regardless of whether things seemed genuine or not, and by far best if the organizational leadership had been more willing to invest in the genuine spiritual life of the ministry.

The Big Question

We've heard from the workers themselves.

The big question is, "What is God saying to you regarding your own position of service to the tech workers in your organization?"

What I've Heard During ICCM 2012

- Impressions from God
- Conversations with techies (burnout)
- A prediction ?

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- In the Spirit of John 13, whose feet do I need to wash?

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- Don’t forget the chocolate cream and pat on the back. Sometimes the simplest of things really speak the loudest.
- Pray daily for your techs. And ask God to give you insight on how best to serve them.

Comments / Questions