

Albert Chou:

This is IT Visionaries, your number one source for actual insights and exclusive interviews with CIOs, CTOs and CSOs, and many more. I'm your host, Albert Chou, a former CIO, former sales VP, and now podcast host.

Isaac Sacolick:

You really have to take the chisel and really break down every single assumption and start asking questions, "Well, how can we do this differently, or are we doing the right things here at all?"

Albert Chou:

Asking the right questions is one of the signs of a good leader. Today on the podcast, we speak to Isaac Sacolick. He's the president of StarCIO and a bestselling author. He shares his expert advice based on his experience in digital transformation consulting, as well as ideas from his new book, Digital Trailblazer. Tune in to hear his insights into the market and his tips for CIOs. We dive into industries that are behind in digital innovation and we talk about leading companies that might be stuck in legacy thinking. Enjoy this episode.

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Isaac, welcome to the show.

Isaac Sacolick:

Thanks for having me be here. This is incredibly exciting. Thank you.

Albert Chou:

Listen, we're pumped to have you. For our audience who may not be so familiar with you or some of the books you've written, give us an idea of who you are, how'd you get into this field, how'd you start reporting on it, because I think a lot of them want to know exactly what you're all about. And then of course, we want to dive into the books, but if you could, tell us a little bit about yourself.

Isaac Sacolick:

Yeah. I mean, I've had a few different careers, some of them in parallel. I've been a startup CTO for about a decade, going way back into the '90s and into Web 1.0 world. I then pivoted my career. I became a CIO in companies that you would now say were in early stages of transformation, and I got to see media from a front row seat about the disruption that was happening in that industry. Learned a lot, bringing technology and data capabilities to different organizations there. And then, I'm in the middle of my third career. It's a company I founded called StarCIO.

We believe that every company needs a capability in data technology in both customer and employee experiences, but not every company can invest like a Netflix or a startup. You need your own way of working. We help executives through that process of learning transformation. Along the journey, somebody said to me, "Isaac, your startup isn't plugged into the blogosphere." I misunderstood that and started writing a blog in 2005 and flash forward today, I have over 800 articles published and two books. I speak at about 50 events every year around transformation topics. I'm happy to get into my books, my writing, what it's like leading transformation, anything you want to go, Albert.

Albert Chou:

Yeah, let's start a little bit about your experience. Give us an idea who are some of your typical clients and some of the problem sets they come talk to you about, because I think that sets the stage for like, "Hey, this is how you have the knowledge of what you know," because of course, you get to see problem to solution and you get to see all the steps in between and hopefully, someone doesn't have to repeat any of the mistakes that happened there.

Isaac Sacolick:

Yeah. Look, transformation is a journey, but my smallest client was a three and a half million dollar charity. My largest client was the largest brewer in the country that you would know by name. So, I helped companies everything in between those. Most of my clients and people I work with tend to be non-technology companies that really need that capability in data, in being able to build applications out and really make transformation, bring technology to change how their business is operating. That's really where I spend most of my time. I also see some technology companies that are growing. They're starting to put some larger practices in place and thinking through how to do agile as a way of working or how to bring DevOps to their organization. So, I do a lot of that work as well. Most of what I tell people is if you think about where a company is today and you look at three, five, seven years down the road, chances are what you're doing today needs to evolve considerably.

We do a lot of blue sky thinking in terms of what the future looks like, and then we do it over and over again. What I tell in my new book, Digital Trailblazer, is you have to get used to transforming the organization. You think back to where businesses were 2018 and '19 before the pandemic, they had roadmaps, they had multi-year plans that all went out the window and now, they're relearning it, right? We're in a world where there's inflation. We're in a world where there's hybrid working. We're rethinking what some of the newer technologies are going to mean to our business, whether it's AR or VR or the Metaverse. So, lots of things are always evolving and that's the nature of technology. We're constantly rethinking, who are our customers? What are they looking from us? How do we differentiate? How do we continue to bring value? What technologies are going to aid us in this journey? Most importantly, how do we bring leaders and cultivate leaders that can continue to evolve how we're running as a business?

Albert Chou:

That evolution you just described... I'm an outsider. I don't quite know because I don't work at big companies anymore. Of course, I work at small companies, but I'm a consumer of big companies and you just hit the nail on the head, which is post-lockdown, it feels like the world's not ready. The world is just not ready, right? Every industry seems to be impacted. Supply chain industry is impacted. Hospitality industry impacted. Transportation is impacted. Travel is impacted. Retail is impacted. No one seems to be able to throughput whatever it is they need to throughput to the demand of the customer. First, it was supply chain. We can't get enough product. Now, I just saw a report that the retailers say, "We're stuck with way too much product." Well, how did this happen? [inaudible 00:06:06] for one second?

Isaac Sacolick:

Where's EAI to tell you that you're going to end up with that problem, right?

Albert Chou:

Yeah, exactly. And so, you hit the nail on the head or you talked directly about it. But when I listen to it, I hear this word digital transformation and a lot of people think it's a project, like it's a timeline. It's going to be done from A to B. But in reality, it feels like we're just entering a new evolution of business where it's like, "Hey, you just have to be malleable. You have to now build your business to be able to just adapt really." That's really all there is to it now, because this change that happened in the last three years has taken people from... You know what I mean?

A 180 degrees oversupply, under supply. No travel, too much travel. We have too many pilots, we have no pilots. It's happening in the blink of an eye. No one seems to be able to forecast what's going on and therefore, it's like you have to train your muscles to be able to adapt to the change. I want to know what you're seeing and who are you seeing being able to quickly, I guess, embrace this or attack this, because I don't think it's going to be solved overnight. But give us an idea of what you're seeing in the market, because I know these businesses are feeling this pain.

Isaac Sacolick:

Yeah. I mean, look, there're things that are happening right now that are just hard to predict. You talk about what the airlines are going through and trying to figure out, do you overstaff and hold onto people or do you let people go and then restaff after that? Those are really hard macro decisions that all these airlines had to figure out. What's been most intriguing to me to watch, I did a bunch of work with hospitals over the last couple of years and you think about what hospitals have been going through over the last couple of years. Employee safety, new types of treatments and ways of handling COVID that have come in, and just dealing with the emotional strain that's done to everybody.

They're talking to me about patient experience through COVID. They're talking to me about it after. They're understanding that the way they were operating needs to evolve. They're looking at new technologies. They're looking beyond their medical record systems and looking at how they can put things in place, so that we're smarter before we even show up into the hospital, about what types of treatments might be applicable to us. Some of the things are obviously, we're booking things online than calling up before I can go and see which doctors are available. I want to change to a different doctor, so I can go see that person a little bit more faster than I would've otherwise.

So, you're starting to see some industries realize that we need to do things a little bit differently. Manufacturing, also very interesting. Used to be an industry that bought a lot of technology. Now, I hear a lot of them using low code platforms and really starting to think about getting into just-in-time manufacturing. One of the industries I did a lot of work in is construction. I used to do an article for a magazine called Engineering News-Record, really looking at what Gartner was saying and telling them they were the least invested industry in technology year over year and not putting money into really basic block and tackling types of technology, whether it was office technology or networking.

Now, I work with them in terms of how do we bring our ERP data, our CRM data, our project management software into one analytics software, so we could do some predictive understanding about which projects we're more profitable on, which of our project managers are managing projects better, which project should we bid more aggressively in. Pretty important, right? There's a lot more money going into infrastructure right now. So, it's just fascinating to see different industries look at the impact of where technology's going to take them over the next 10 years.

Albert Chou:

When I used to sell enterprise software, I remember me and fellow sales reps, I was a VP of sales in the company, we had over a hundred reps in just the sales department alone, and we would talk about,

"Well, this product..." We would FUD products. And then one day, I was just deep downside thinking to myself, "I think all the products are the same. I just think it's who implements it." How do you implement it, because tooling is just tooling. I started thinking about how that was evolving, because it really felt like there's a best of breed products bubbling at the top.

And so for a CIO, what is the major decision factor now? Is it the product now, or is it more about the people in place? Who is going to do this, because I feel like tooling has gotten to a really good place. Obviously, some companies are doing more with it than others. It feels like it's a people problem, but I'm curious, what are some of the factors you see separating companies embracing this change and successfully implementing solutions to better their experiences, to better their forecasting business ops, whatever the case may be? What's happening to those that are struggling? What is the problem for them?

Isaac Sacolick:

I'm going to say this first, and then I'm going to come back to it. I mean, your technology choices really do matter. They are really important in any single category. You can go look at the landscape quadrant. You'll see a million logos out there in any single category. There's a reason for that, but they are really important. It's not like you can go just pick commodity technology and get to the same place. Some are faster. Some are more productive. Some are easier to use.

But where I started from in my journey, and I've been doing transformation for a very long time, I actually think process is the most important place to start. The way we were looking at IT organizations 10, 15 years ago, they were back office. They were managing data centers. They were focused on end user computing and what devices people were working on. I used to joke around, "CIOs knew less about the data in their databases and more about what boxes that they were running on."

Seriously, and I think that's still true today. We knew how to service somebody's laptop, but if they had a question about a particular application, we didn't know how to go solve it. That was an application issue. That was the world of IT, and it's not that long ago. It's probably a decade ago. You look at where things are right now. I wrote about that in the first book, *Driving Digital*. I didn't know how that book was going to perform, but I said there are certain things I thought were truly instrumental in how to run technology, digital, and data organizations today.

They're about using agile as a way of working, so you're constantly evaluating where you are, what customer feedback you're getting, how to pivot and realign to what customer expectations are, how do you bring multidisciplinary teams in working together. That's the agile story I think that's really important. I think the data story is really important. It's not just about AI and machine learning. It's really about how to build data ops in, so you can continually bring in new data sources making your organization smarter with external data and internal data, but also citizen data science. You look back 10 years ago, again, what was the number one technology that every single business analyst had to do their analysis? They were using spreadsheets.

Albert Chou:

Yeah. I was about to say that spreadsheets are BI tools, but BI tools are just spreadsheets because they didn't think back then. I mean, I remember-

Isaac Sacolick:

That's true.

Albert Chou:

I remember, what is the difference between this and Excel? I have to put everything in.

Isaac Sacolick:

That's right. Not only that, in a BI tool, number one, you had to wait for IT to put it all in. You didn't have access to it as a business user.

Albert Chou:

That's right.

Isaac Sacolick:

Number two, everything was batch, right? Everything was, "Let's put all the analytics in. Let it run overnight. There's your data. You change the formula, we got to go read..."

Albert Chou:

"What's happening right now? I don't know right now."

Isaac Sacolick:

Exactly. So, we're very real-time right now. That's a very different mindset. We're not programming something to run overnight because we're in clouds. We can do things more efficiently. We're using different sets of tools. So instead of doing a manual spreadsheet, put it into a PowerPoint. I'm having business users create dashboards, creating the analytics around it, using that to do storytelling. It's a very different world. So, I'd start with process. That's really the big foundation that's changed organizations and says... When you say IT, it's part of the business and digital. It's part of the business. That's what we really mean. We're bringing digital and technology capabilities into a cross collaboration mode.

Now, the second thing is leadership. When you start building up your practices and you look at, what does a CIO need to be successful in their organizations today? Well, the CIO isn't spending their time figuring out cloud technologies or picking out data platforms. That CIO better be sitting in front of customers learning how they're using their products, learning how they're using technology. What are their struggles? What are their pain points? Talking to their business leaders in terms of profitability. Where do they see markets growing? What types of practices are going to make them successful going into the future? There's an entire executive mindset that needs to change as you bring new technologies in.

I remember bringing in CRMs 10, 15 years ago and CEOs asking me, "Why do we need this thing? We could just do this in a spreadsheet," and explaining what a pipeline was and what a sales process looked like when it was managed with a pipeline. So, lots of different changes there. If the CIO or the chief digital or data officer isn't the one planning or doing the implementation, the leadership that's living and working with them underneath them, their VPs of data, of data governance, of analytics, of applications, of cloud architectures, these are the people who are really planning and doing the execution. That's really important to cultivate. If you look at it now with post great resignation, we're doing a lot more hybrid working. We're seeing still a lot of people shuffling jobs around.

Really focusing on making leaders successful in running transformation programs I think is number two. That's why I wrote Digital Trailblazer. It's not really how I got into the journey. I'm happy to tell you

about that, but Digital Trailblazer is a book for aspiring leaders to learn and feel what it's like to be inside a program transformation, sit through my lens. It's a first person narrative book. You're sitting through my board meeting. You're sitting through detractors throwing darts at me when they didn't like the results I was telling them. You're sitting through some of my personal experiences through 9/11, through changing my business because of COVID. Lots of things have happened that leaders have never experienced before and now, when you're leading a transformation program, you want that confidence that you've read, you've learned about it before, and you're able to take action when you see something.

So, I think number two is leadership. Then when it comes to technology, like I said, technology really does matter. We have to be very strategic about what platforms we're picking as a technology. We're not startups that we can just let our technologist pick another technology every time there's a new platform out there, every time there's a new upgrade. We need to be able to create standards, so that we're more efficient, so that we create best practices. And so, finding technologies that allow us to multipurpose, that allow us to integrate workflows, that allow us to bring data together in a homogenous way across different business units, these are some of the things that enterprises really need to think about as they're building their platforms out. Sorry, it's not easy. This is not...

Albert Chou:

Yeah, let's recap the top three things you said. I said, "It feels like it's more of a people problem than technology problem." You said, "Well, technology is very important." But in your order, you said process is the number one thing. When you have the process, you will most likely succeed. Two, do you have great leadership? Someone who can guide the path, set the vision, is making great decisions based upon, as you said, customer inputs. Not internal inputs, customer-based inputs. Internal inputs are a big part of it too. And then three, the technology pieces that comes into play. These were your top three things. If you can, do you have an example of how these major functions have impacted a business? I'd love to hear through a case, or maybe if you also have a story of where it went wrong, where, "Hey, because the process was wrong, nothing else could work and here's what happened." People remember stories for sure.

Isaac Sacolick:

Yeah, my book is full of them. I will tell you that. It's 10 chapters. It's all stories. One of my favorite ones I mentioned, a three and a half million dollar charity, that charity's called Charity Navigator, was one of our smallest clients. About 20 people when I started working with them. They were essentially a rating technology, rating charities in terms of how they were using their finances, how they were using, what their governance model was. It'd come out with a five star rating. Their leadership team said, "Well, wait a second here. We've got a lot of people coming to our website, asking questions like, 'I'm interested in the environment. I'm interested in animal charities. What charities are doing a good job managing their businesses, managing their impact, that I should go do my donations in?'"

They ran into a problem. They were only rating 10,000 charities at the time. It was a highly manual process to do that, lot of really smart people involved. They were rating on, I think, 40 different metrics that rolled up into two master classifications that went into their rating. They said, "How do we do this better? How do we rate 100,000 charities? How do we rate 200,000 charities?" If you go to charitynavigator.org today, you're going to see they're rating hundreds of thousands of charities. They're doing it with much more automation. They're managing impact, so you can understand whether the money you're putting in are actually helping the constituents that they're claiming to go help. It's not a perfect system, but they're doing it at scale with a lot more variability in what they're doing.

Walking into that organization was just walking into many organizations I walk into today. A lot of people working very hard, very passionate about what they're doing, trying to do the best job that they can, but they are stuck in systems, in ways of working that need to be unwound and rebuilt up again. I said, "Look, it's process, it's people, and technology." You think about, if I'm going to go run a race, if I'm going to go do an Ironman, my brother-in-law does Ironman, I only do biking, the very first thing I need to do is get on a bike, right? Doesn't matter what bike it is. If I'm going to start getting ready for a race, I need to actually make my commitment to build up my muscles to be able to do that.

And then I'm going to say, "Well, you know what? I'm doing this fairly well, I need some help. I need leadership involved. I need somebody to come here and train me how to do this well, so that I'm doing things more efficiently, so that I'm using best practices when I'm doing." And then, I'm going to look at this and say, "Oh, I'm on an \$800 hybrid bike. Maybe, I should go invest some money in a better bicycle. Maybe, I should get some better wheels and improve my performance by picking the right technology to work at." Same concept, right? We're going to do that inside our organization. The main difference from what I just described working inside organization is that internal inertia.

What we used to call change management and I call transformation management, it's bringing people along in the journey and saying, "You're a part of this process. We're going to learn together. We're going to challenge your thinking. We're going to challenge the status quo. We're going to want you to push back in areas that are truly impactful. We want you to turn on your active listening, so we can learn new ways of doing things." And so when we use words like, "We're going to automate something," or, "We're going to put some more intelligence around something," we need a receptive audience to say, "We're going to figure out how to make these processes and technologies work, so that our customers can feel the impact and we can feel the growth that comes after that."

Albert Chou:

Charity Navigator, they got the problem, which is, "Hey, we're in a hamster wheel world. We're working hard, but we're not going anywhere. We're not going forward. We're not able to evaluate even more charities." There's so many factors, so many things. Talk about how the decisions then led to the solution, because that's pretty cool.

Isaac Sacolick:

That group was a challenge. I mean, it was a group of people who were used to looking at data every single day, evaluating every single metric, every single number. We had to get them used to looking at dashboards and using alerts to tell them when something was an outlier and reevaluating some of the criteria that they were using to evaluate charities. What I'm describing to you, Albert, is you really have to take that chisel and really break down every single assumption and start asking questions, "Well, how can we do this differently, or are we doing the right things here at all?"

One of the things I always get involved in with is this idea of, we're going to take a process and we're going to move it to cloud technology, or we're going to move it to the web, or we're going to make it mobile enabled. The inertia of the organization is, take what we're doing today, make it work better, put it into modernized platforms, and call it done. The first question you really have to ask everybody is, "Are we even doing the right things that are relevant for today in the future? It's going to take me six, 12, 18 months of evolution to get to something that is your new vision. Let's talk about what that new vision is and then work backwards." Our vision is we want to go rate 160,000 charities. Our vision isn't we want to take our existing rating process and continue to do it in a more efficient way. It's a very big difference.

Albert Chou:

What were some of the solutions that I guess, they ultimately figured it out, but that decision right there to say, "Hey, this isn't the question we're answering. The question we're answering is how do we rate," like you said, "100,000 or more charities?" What was the downstream impact of leadership changing the questions? Give us an idea of some of the solutions. Did people immediately start thinking of different solutions? What happened?

Isaac Sacolick:

Well, sometimes, we had a lot of agreement and sometimes, it's what I call ground warfare. I know I talk about it in the book. I mean, you want to foster collegial debate. You don't want to end up in a situation where nobody wants to own something, or everybody is nodding their head. You go six months down the ride, invest in something, and then you found out that they're just agreeing with you because they think you never actually finish what you started. I've had a couple of those situations in my career where people were just nodding their heads, and then you found out at the end of the storyline, they really weren't on board with the entire story program. So, you really want to bring them on board with it.

For Charity Navigator, for most of the clients that I work with that are really smart, they're going to put everything through a future customer lens first. Who are we trying to impact? They may not be existing customers. They may be new markets that they're going after. You have to reawaken people to say, "Who are your new competitors?" I've worked with data providers that really were publishers that became analytics providers, that had SaaS companies that were their competition. But if you looked at them, when I met with them, they would say, "Well, another data provider is my competitor. The other newspaper down the road is our competitor." When I worked in media newspapers, they were just wiggling up and down the dollars over who could get the latest advertisement or the latest subscriber to buy their local newspaper.

They weren't looking at cars.com and hotjobs.com and later on Facebook and Google as their competitors. Now, they get in this continuous situation where they have to figure out, where are we competing with them and where are we collaborating with them and how do we evolve our businesses in this messy landscape? A lot of what we're talking about is creating that debate and then coming at the end of that debate and saying, "Okay, we've heard people's voices. We're going to have to make some decisions here. It's not that we're not going to revisit them, but we're not going to just kick the can down the road and wait for something to emerge. We're going to make a deliberate step to go do something. We're going to figure out what that MVP is, what that minimal viable expression is. We're going to put it in front of customers and then learn from that experience." That's what I see the best companies doing.

Albert Chou:

Is that what you're seeing a lot, which is, "Hey, they're willing to..." Effectively, the idea that, "We will do nothing," is no longer an option. We got to do something, right? I only know the cases I know. This company's not around anymore, but the most famous case I think most casual listeners can probably recite is Blockbuster looking at Netflix and never thinking it was a threat, until it was way too late. Netflix was already shipping videos back and forth between millions and millions of customers and they were going on to stream. Blockbuster had just introduced their DVD online subscription platform well after Netflix had already eaten their lunch.

This idea of doing nothing is often pervasive, especially in big companies, because I mean, let's face it, a lot of big company workers have a... The perception is they have a CYA mentality. You know what I

mean? It's like, "It's easier just for me not to break anything. I just don't want to break something. I don't want to take a risk." But it sounds like the modern climate does not reward that in any way. And so, it feels like doing nothing is certainly going to fail. That's what it feels like now. Give us an idea, are you seeing more companies saying, "No, we have to make a change. We have to try to solve this problem. We cannot just hope that it goes away?"

Isaac Sacolick:

I think most companies are saying that. The question is, do they have the wherewithal to continue to invest and work through the issues and recognize that transformation doesn't happen in 18 months? It doesn't even happen in three years. The best companies talk about seeing true financial market impacts to what they're doing in five to seven years.

Albert Chou:

Wow, five to seven. Okay.

Isaac Sacolick:

Yeah. It's not my research. That's big company research.

Albert Chou:

So, you got to have some conviction. This better be right.

Isaac Sacolick:

Well, it's not that they're not changing and they're not evolving what their mission is and what their vision is during that period of time. It's that they have the conviction to know that what they're working on today may not have an end point to their journey for four to five to seven years. Even when they get there, it's not like you could take a deep breath and say, "We're done." We're going to have to go do it again. There're things that we're investing in today, there's emerging technologies today that we would never invest in. Is quantum going to be something big for us today? No.

For most companies, it's something scientific to read, but in four to five years, I don't know what that's going to look like. AR and VR three years ago, nice toy, right? What's going to be the impact of the Metaverse over the next three to five years? I don't know. I did a set of keynotes for higher ed companies and I said, "You better use COVID as your wake up call." Look at what happened overnight. People had to go take a virtual learning experience when we all knew none of us were ready for it. The students weren't ready for it. The professors weren't ready for it. The technologies weren't ready for it. The experience wasn't that good. We had to do it, because we were in crisis management.

Now, we're past crisis management. Universities are back open and we have a different problem: it's expensive. I showed them data and saying, "Look, companies are hiring more people. They're advertising more jobs that don't require a degree, because they want a diverse candidate pool. They know they have to train people coming out of college. They know they're pouring a lot of money into that. They're opening to hiring people from a larger radius for hybrid working. They're not even putting a degree in their job description." There's some data around that that shows, even in IT positions, the drop in the number of jobs requiring a particular degree or background to be able to apply for that job. That's down.

Now, you look at future technologies. Maybe, the Zoom experience didn't work for me as a student, but is a Metaverse experience going to work for me? Well, the answer today is probably not. Will the

answer to be there in a year, three, five or seven years? I don't know the answer to that, but if I'm in a university, I'm looking at those technologies. I'm looking at my cost for tuition. I'm looking at what students are trying to learn. I'm asking questions, what does higher ed look like five to seven years from now? What are we teaching? What's the experience look like? What do we need to invest in now to learn from? They're hiring me to talk to them. So, I know it's happening that a lot of different industries are using that crisis to say, "You know what? We're not going back to the way we're working."

Albert Chou:

You've shared a lot of nuggets about the way things are and the way things are moving. I'm curious for yourself, there are actual bills being passed in the law. They're going to make significant investments in US manufacturing going forward. The chips building, very prominent right now, in the news right now. The government wants more companies to make things in America. We know that you already said that these industries have not invested as much as they probably should have into what the new experience is potentially going to be.

If I'm a CIO of one of those companies, what are you telling me? What do I got to embrace? What are some of the things I got to embrace to tackle this? You hinted at it on the recruiting side with saying, "Hey, you got to lift some of these requirements and standards, not because it's not needed. It's because it actually has a negative effect." You hinted at some of the things that, let's say, a modern CIO needs to be very aware of. What are some other tips and tricks that you think, or things and suggestions that you say, "Hey, if you're leading an organization that's stuck in maybe legacy ways, these are some things you got to embrace or should embrace pretty quickly?"

Isaac Sacolick:

Yeah. I think the very first thing that really comes to my mind, Albert, is something that companies are terrible at and that's really creating priorities. I'm going to go there because a lot of companies translate digital transformation to, "We're investing in technology. Let's get everybody's wishlist on the board. Let's prioritize them."

Albert Chou:

"Let's make an app."

Isaac Sacolick:

"Let's build an app. Let's upgrade the website. Let's upgrade the ERP. Let's put this new system in. Well yeah, we'll put some money aside to do some security. We'll put some money on the side to do some work around customer." All of a sudden, the CIO's looking at this thing and saying, "I got 45 priorities and a staff of 30. That math doesn't work," or they're 450 with a staff of 300. Just add a zero. I see it every single way to go. The very first thing the CIO really needs to do is listen for that one thing, what's the big thing that that organization's really going to rally around. That's what they need to listen to.

You talked about manufacturing, money being poured in certain sectors. I see that happening in construction. I see that happening also in healthcare. The CIO isn't going to know initially what that strategic direction's going to look like, but the same way you're echoing things that I'm saying, that's what the CIO needs to do. What if we did this? What if we experimented in this space? What would happen if we put a team together to think about analytics end-to-end in a construction company, or patient experience in a hospital system with 30 local hospitals. What does that look like if we start putting together a team to start answering questions about, what if?

What would the impact look like? What will we do in this space? The CIO needs to look for number one, that one thing that's really going to matter, to start using that as the magnet to run transformation in their programs. They also have to look for the reverse of the act. The [inaudible 00:33:46] of that is things that we're still going to do, but matter less. It's not that we're going to turn the lights off, that we're stop going to doing them. It's that they matter less. When that business executive comes in and says, "I need IT to go do A, B, C and D for me," the CEO is going to be back up there and saying, "You're not our top priority right now. Our top priority is this one thing that's on our horizon right now. We're also exploring these two other things, but we're not even working on them yet."

When you can start having that dialogue, you start getting into how to bring more people onto that ship that's going to really rethink how that business is going to run. Believe me, more people get on that ship, more objectives get thrown on it, more initiatives fall off of it. But when you start with one major objective and break off of that, you start seeing the places where you can make impacts, getting success with that, whether it's through leadership, through process or technology, and then you're starting to build that muscle up of saying, and that confidence that, "We can do things differently than we've been doing in the past."

Albert Chou:

And then as you were saying that, I started thinking in my mind, "Well, who's doing a great job? Who is just doing an exceptional job?" I'll name my example, and I have no idea how much technology went into this, but I will tell you, for anyone who's ever used Safelite auto glass, I think it's one of the best experiences you can possibly have. Yeah, it sucks to get your windshield cracked, but they make it easy to book your appointment, easy to tell you where it is. The service tech comes to you. I mean, you're not even aware that it's happening. You just literally come outside and your broken glass is replaced and they leave you with maintenance tips and all that stuff. Like you said, it's a hybrid of physical... It's a physical service. It cannot be done digitally. So, it has to send a truck with a windshield to me. I don't know how they do their inventory systems, Isaac. I don't know any of that. All I know is my glass has broken four or five times in my life.

Isaac Sacolick:

It's like magic, right?

Albert Chou:

Yeah. Every single time, super easy experience. Yeah, it sucks to pay, but it's frictionless, man. It's so painless. They show up on time, the windshield's changed, and I think to myself, "That experience is so unique, it doesn't really exist in a lot of different companies." But I'd love to hear from your perspective, who is doing a great job? Who do you see building experiences? It typically requires a lot of digital to make it happen, because we have gone to a society where we don't want to talk to people, we want to make it easy to order whatever it is we need to order, we want to pay however we want to pay, and of course, we want the job done.

Isaac Sacolick:

I think a lot of the examples, honestly, you're seeing are in tech companies. They have it in their DNA. They know a little bit when their product lifeline needs to get rethought. That's why we use Netflix as an example all the time. Constantly challenging themselves. I don't think we see a lot of great examples, honestly.

Albert Chou:

Wow, okay. Yeah.

Isaac Sacolick:

I think this is still an area that companies are struggling. We see bits and pieces of it at different times. I'll share an example. When I'm on an airplane and I'm notified in my app that my flight is delayed, I know it before the people at the desk do, and they're telling me that my new inbound flight is going to show up at seven o'clock, they're going to get everybody off the plane, clean it, board it, pack it up, we're going to be ready to go, who came up with that? We all know that's BS, if you need to take that out, but they tell it to people every single day that flights are delayed.

And so, the reason I'm telling you this story is that we're still transforming. It's still hard. It's still not easy to do. We have incredible high expectations, because when we do see bits and pieces of genius, we expect that to be showing up in other places. Even when we see bits and pieces of genius... Just [inaudible 00:37:44] the first time you did a Lyft or an Uber and you felt, "Wow, I can get anywhere in five minutes and have a great experience," until the next time, you're now waiting 25 minutes and it's 30% more money because-

Albert Chou:

Listen-

Isaac Sacolick:

You don't have [inaudible 00:38:01].

Albert Chou:

Now, the Uber, Lyft lines are longer than the cab lines. I'm like, "Why would I wait for that? I'm just going to walk right to this cab." Now, everyone's in rideshare and it's a total zoo of cars trying to get in and out and the cabs are lined up orderly. I'll just take a cab.

Isaac Sacolick:

There's a great picture I use in one of my blog posts and I use it in a defensive measure, but it also applies to offense. You see that soccer player one-on-one with another soccer player. They're standing there on their toes. They're ready to pounce left, right, back, forward to be able to respond to the person in front of them. You got to do that in defense, but they also have to do that in offense. We might come up with the best experience today. In two years, it'll be dated. We'll put it out today, "85% of our customers are happy. We have a great CSAT score."

What about that other 15%? What are we learning from them? How are we measuring them? What are we going out and learning from that experience? We put something out today, tenfold, the number of people using it. All of a sudden now, I have a supply chain issue that I wasn't anticipating. That's why it's so hard for me to answer your question, because every six months, we have to go back and challenge what was working, evaluate what was working, really look at what's not working and say, "Where are we going to spend our time to continually improve?" That's hard for people, right? "It's summertime. I want to take a break."

Albert Chou:

That's true. Kind of full circle, it's never done. That's the reality of it. You might be doing okay today, but that doesn't mean you'll be good tomorrow. That's the reality. The economy's moving fast, customer demands are moving fast, the environment's moving fast and...

Isaac Sacolick:

And then, you going to get whacked.

Albert Chou:

Yeah. If you're not able to move with it and play offense, like you said, you will be finding yourself in the situation which a lot of companies are in today, which we've talked about at the top of the hour, which was, "Hey, there's a lot of industries right now that are struggling. They're just not ready for the demand they put out there."

Isaac Sacolick:

Look, though you asked me, I'll answer your question from earlier. There are certain fundamentals, okay? We don't have people working by themselves doing innovation. They work in teams. They're collaborative. They have to be customer driven. That's why I always start with agile processes. Tell me who's on a team working together that comes from different skill sets, that can understand what their customers are asking of them, and then what they're going to prioritize and get work done over the next couple weeks. I think agile is a very fundamental process. When I think about technology, I do really go back to data. We talked about the importance of real-time data. Real-time doesn't mean sub-second response in every situation, but it means that when I come in, in the morning, I want to know how my book is selling. I don't have that today. I don't know how many books I sold yesterday. I might not know for another three months.

Albert Chou:

They got to collect all the data from all the sources, man.

Isaac Sacolick:

Oh man, I don't know what it is. Left side, right side, who's not talking to each other. Look, real-time data is truly important. I think the other trend that you're seeing on the technology side is we just can't rely on IT as a group doing all of the IT. And so, we're seeing a lot more technologies that provide capabilities back into the business, continuing to allow mostly younger people, but not always younger people, people who have a technical acumen to build applications out, to build dashboards out, to investigate a data source. You have IT coming in and saying, "Let's not say no. Let's say how should we go about doing this? Where should we be spending our time, so we can get some best practices in place?"

I think we're saying some of the building blocks... We'll go about it different ways. I might use one technology and you might use a different one, but we're going to have some fundamental things that we see a lot of companies doing at the same time. If you don't have a CRM today, I'm like, "You're crazy. How do you not track what's happening with customers?" I have a small business. I have a CRM in place. It might not be the same one that you're using, but I have a CRM in place. I have a financial system in place. I'm using Office. I'm creating databases all the time. I just mentioned all technologies. How does a small business, a medium-sized business, not have these things integrated and working for them? And yet, there are plenty of them that's [inaudible 00:42:26].

Albert Chou:

I don't know, but for anyone listening to what Isaac was just talking about, there's a guy on Twitter, his name is Nick Huber, but he's constantly talking about how, if you disrupt someone like the labor-intensive businesses, they don't rely on technology, you will clean house because these are services that we just cannot do without. To your point, Isaac, there's a lot of people or companies in the industry that they just really haven't embraced technology which is crazy. For anyone who's trying to get work done on their house, I think you've felt this pain.

Isaac Sacolick:

[inaudible 00:42:57]. When you were saying that, I'm thinking the plumber or the electrician coming to my house, we haven't figured that one out yet.

Albert Chou:

Well, Isaac, man, it's a lot of fun having you on the show. I think your perspective is interesting. For those that are interested, Isaac's new books are...

Isaac Sacolick:

Yeah, Digital Trailblazer is out. It's gotten some good write-ups, some good reviews. If you're an aspiring transformation leader that wants to be in my shoes, living through the darts being thrown at you and saying, "I want to learn from those experiences," please read my book and I leave 50 lessons learned for you at the end of all the different chapters.

Albert Chou:

Awesome. We'll have your book linked up in our show notes for anyone who wants to check it out. Isaac, it was awesome having you today on IT Visionaries, but before you go, it is time for the lightning round. The lightning round is brought to us by Salesforce platform, the number one cloud platform for digital transformation I've experienced. Isaac, we got one minute to learn as much about you as possible, but we're going to ask you questions outside of the world of work. You ready? What's your favorite food?

Isaac Sacolick:

Kale can do a lot for me.

Albert Chou:

Kale? You mentioned before that you did over 50 talks in a calendar year sometimes. I assume you travel quite a bit. How often do you fly?

Isaac Sacolick:

I am not someone who's a road warrior, but I do quite a bit of travel. Probably, on a plane, 30 out of 50 weeks a year.

Albert Chou:

That's intense. What's your favorite airline?

Isaac Sacolick:

I fly United.

Albert Chou:

Where do you like to sit? Are you an aisle guy? A window guy? I know you're not a middle guy. There's no way.

Isaac Sacolick:

I am definitely a window guy. I like seeing what's going out in the world as much as I can.

Albert Chou:

There you go. A lot of times, you have a lot of downtime. What do you do to pass downtime? Are you a reader? Do you listen to music? Do you just think, or do you write?

Isaac Sacolick:

I am still writing about 12 articles a month, which is pretty intense. If you think about that, it's three or four articles a week. I don't have downtime. I'm doing some thinking, but I do a lot of reading, a lot of podcasts, a lot of audible books. I mean, there's just a lot of really smart, interesting content out there. I'm doing those things, and then doing a lot of outdoors. I like hiking. I like biking. In the wintertime, skiing. I'm a father of three. That's highly consuming.

Albert Chou:

Keeping busy.

Isaac Sacolick:

I don't sleep.

Albert Chou:

There you go. If you want to learn more about what it's like to be a StarCIO and what companies and CIOs are going through right now, again, we'll link up Isaac's books in the show notes. Isaac, thanks for joining us today on IT Visionaries. A lot of fun hearing your perspective. It was a lot of fun hearing some of your stories. I agree, the reality is if you're in charge of any one of these companies, your job is literally never going to be done because if you might be winning today, something's going to change tomorrow. So, you better be ready on your toes. Play offense, like Isaac says.

Isaac Sacolick:

There you go. Thank you for having me.

Albert Chou:

Thanks for joining us on IT Visionaries.

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