



Podcast Transcript

Technology from the Top: AI, Data and the Future of Business with Today's CIOs – DeWayne Griffin

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Kattman: With a rapidly evolving technological landscape and an increase in data value, organizations now more than ever depend on their leaders to guide them through uncharted territory. Janine Anthony Bowen, co-leader of both the Privacy Governance and Technology Transactions team and the Digital Transformation and Data Economy team at BakerHostetler, gets an inside look at how chief information officers, or CIOs, across industries are tackling trends and planning for the future. Janine sits down one-on-one with current CIOs in the new series, Technology from the Top: AI, Data and the Future of Business with Today's CIOs. I'm Amy Kattman, and you're listening to BakerHosts.

On today's episode, Janine speaks with DeWayne Griffin. DeWayne is a seasoned leader with a strong track record of innovation and excellence in data and analytics, insurance and financial services, and commitment to having a social impact in the community. He currently serves as the chief digital and information officer of Insight Global, a leading staffing and professional services company, where he drives the company's digital transformation and growth strategy. He is a passionate entrepreneur and advisor of several organizations and a devoted husband and father of three. Let's take a listen.

Bowen: DeWayne, in addition to your current role, you are an active member of the Georgia CIO Council and the Information Technology Senior Management Forum. You have been honored with the title of Distinguished Fellow in that organization due to your contributions to the field of information technology. Also, in a previous role, you were a vice president and chief data officer, where you

were responsible for data and analytics, including strategy management and modernization. So, you have a truly informed perspective with these issues, and I'm excited to talk with you today. Shall we get started?

Griffin: Let's get started, Janine. I appreciate that, and I'm really excited to dive into our discussion today.

Bowen: Perfect. So, let's get started with our first question. Is all the noise in the marketplace and pop culture around artificial intelligence, generative AI in particular, justified?

Griffin: Absolutely. I think it is justified when you just look at the reality of artificial intelligence really being a pipe dream that started heavily in pop culture. A lot of people don't know this, but the concept or the ideas of artificial intelligence and humanlike intelligence being reflected in machines is actually first captured through the infamously known play called The Wizard of Oz. And it really was from that and the early 1930s, 40s that led into really the computer science pioneers of the day starting to try to shape that theory into reality, into computer programming, etcetera. And you just think about how far that's come to today and think of just the economic impacts of the companies who take AI as a technology and a capability, maybe a utility one day, and turn that into value into the way we live.

Think about your just own personal and cultural implications. Can you imagine your life without your phone, your laptop, or your vehicle? All of these things are connected and made better and effective for us and the use we have for them through AI. So, I think it is real. I think it is the next rev of shaping markets and shaping lifestyles for us.

Bowen: So, you've touched on this a little bit, but give me a sense of how you think business will be affected in this new era. You started talking about it, but give us a little more there.

Griffin: I think you can sit on either side as a business. You can sit in the business who through your capabilities and products, use AI to help make those products or services better, or you can sit on the side of where you, you're selling the actual product whose foundation of operation and capability is built into using AI. So, when I think about that, the businesses, whether whatever side of the coin you may sit on that are effective at using this, they're going to be the winners. They're going to be the ones that wins whatever the next economic wave that flush out in the coming years to be, depending on what time horizon when you look at that. I think that is the difference, and that is the meaning and importance that it has for our businesses today.

Bowen: And so, is it your perspective that businesses will be both consumers of AI as well as service providers offering products and services that incorporate AI?

Griffin: Absolutely. It is going to touch you in either interaction.

Bowen: So, we talked about pop culture. And so, what we have a lot of in pop culture is this, these contrary views about whether we should be afraid or not. So, there is one camp that says, oh, this is going to fundamentally shut down all of the economic productivity of all the individuals and no one is going to have work. And there is the other camp that says we're going to be so much more productive because we have these tools. So, should we be afraid of what is going on right now with AI?

Griffin: I think both personas are necessary. I think you need the evangelists who are willing to dream big and dream limitless into what AI can do for us, for betterment, and I also think you need those who are rightfully and justifiably afraid of it. Because it is change, right? And you talk through any significant change that we go through whether known or unknown, it is wrought with successes and failures.

So, I think there is a reality and a necessity we have to have of fear. Because if we don't, if we really don't do this right, it could be existential in some regards and where certain famous leaders, technology leaders have voiced that. We need those voices in the conversations just as much as we need the voices who are echoing what is possible with it because it is somewhere in between that I think we get it right. It is just the length of time it may take to do that.

Bowen: Interesting. As data has become an increasingly more valuable asset over the last three to five years, and maybe you'll tell me the horizon has been longer, but for certainly in that window, how has your role as a technology leader evolved? How have your goals changed as a technology leader, and how have your responsibilities evolved?

Griffin: Yeah. I mean, first, there is a lot of views to this, but data is the new oil for our digital ecosystem, right? Oil in the sense that you have to refine it, you have to make sense of it and turn it into use, and it feels like it was the last leg of this revolution of technology taking over, this digital revolution, that has just taken over, starting with the Internet. Evolving beyond the Internet into the mobile phone, from the mobile phone into now networking, the telecommunications going into the cloud, then from the cloud, then the IoT, everything is feeding data. Data is everywhere. Data, data, data, data and now making sense of that for business purposes and objectives. It's definitely evolved roles like mine and journeys that I've personally lived through and experienced.

And the role is that now there is an argument that technology is the business. And in some cases I think that is true but not all, but it is true that every business is impacted by technology. And what it's done for leaders like me is the breadth of understanding and connection we have to have with business is vast. There's so many places I have to try to be me and my teams to really work with the business on solving the problems of the business to deliver the outcomes of the business.

And this role has made us as leaders, we're not leading cost centers anymore where we have to do this when we were called data processing. You know the

data processing group that sat in the back with those big machines? They were loud, and they had the pen pockets, and they always wore glasses. That was always the persona, right? That was the view of it. No. Now we're at the seat of the table with the most senior executive levels and talking about the objectives of the business and where technology is embedded in that. And in some case technology is the business.

Bowen: Probably when you started your career, right, you've talked about the data processing function. What has evolved is IT was this internal organization that supported the business objectives, was not about the business, to your point about a cost center. We would think of IT as the people we called help desk, the people who set up our computers, but we didn't think about the external facing role that information technology had.

And so, now increasingly more I see folks in roles like yours being really external facing as opposed to internal facing. Maybe that deals with your notion of having a seat at the table with other C-level execs who are talking about driving the business. Is that the right way to think about it?

Griffin: I think it is in some regards because you get a lot of title jargon that gets into this that I think that adds a little bit of confusion. I am, my role by title is chief digital and information officer, and it expands on the traditional role that is for the technology leader is the CIO role. But you're seeing that CIO role go through shifts to be now the chief digital officer, the chief transformation officer, the chief technology officer because of the shift in the role and the necessity of that technology leader to the objectives of the business. So, I think that is really a reflection of it, and it is a reflection to where the state and the focus of the business has evolved and mandated a different type of leader sitting into that.

The digital part of my role and functioning focus is really building the assets within the business that are creating value. These assets are built off capabilities like artificial intelligence. These assets are driving automation. These assets are helping marketing. These are doing these different functions which is an added on to just the traditional legacy pieces of infrastructure, networking not dealt with the old DP days. That is the shift I think we've gone through.

Bowen: Back in the dawn of cloud computing, around 2008, 2009, 2010 or so, companies went through a lot of go, no-go analysis with respect to moving data or systems into the cloud. What are the analysis and decision rubrics that you are using right now to determine how to maximize the value of data in the enterprise?

Griffin: Great question. If you're not solving the data question, you're not creating value. I think one of our superpowers we've added in technology through the year is being able to extract and manage software or the application layer from the data layer so that the inherent dependency we used to have is separated. So, as a former chief data officer, learning the hygiene of data and that oil concept we talked through is very important. And I think there's a couple of vectors that you can say drives the analysis and decisions around it.

First is access, second is usage and third is cost. So, organizations have to make decisions around how they need to access data in whatever manner and how that access can be either accelerated or let's say, managed to effectiveness of that organization's objective. And that is the usage part, right? Maybe I just have to retain a lot of data. Well, I can retain data cheaper in a more cloud service provider's offering than I can in my own data center. I can get better tiers of that, and that is where the cost factor then starts to come in. What is the cost of that?

So, the movement of data really was driven from access questions, usage questions or cost. Usage. You don't do AI without data. Can I use it effectively out of my data centers, or can I use it more effectively in the cloud? That becomes a factor into it. You had organizations, a really industry-leading streaming organization had data centers everywhere, got rid of all their data centers, went fully cloud, ran our entire operation fully cloud, learned through that model, and what do you know. They're now building back data centers because they've learned based on cost and usage and other factors that not everything needs to run. It is a little bit more expensive to run end to end. So they found that great rubric to make that better decision, but they learned that through cloud.

One of the things I always anchor on an organization's way between cloud and their data centers, it is a different operating model, especially when you apply the financial lens and the fiscal responsibilities of IT to it. When you think of your data center, it has a CapEx type model. You're capitalizing that. Well, when you think about running in the cloud, it is more of an OpEx. It is different to manage OpEx than it is to manage CapEx, and you have to be ready for that shift. And it comes to the data conversation. That is where that access, usage and costs all comes together for importance.

Bowen: So, are you suggesting then that the data conversation and the cloud conversation go together with respect to these three points you just raised, access, usage and cost?

Griffin: Absolutely. And you can't forget that you also cannot forget the application in the software solution tied to that. Many organizations are all in the cloud because they're using the SaaS solutions, software as a service solutions, that they don't even offer running them in the data centers no more. You have to use the cloud to run them. So, then it becomes an important data conversation, and what data then do I have access to through that solution? The only piece we didn't really touch on here is the networking piece, and that is also another factor you can get into.

Bowen: Artificial intelligence has sucked all the oxygen out of the room conversationally, but there are other things going on. So, what else are you thinking about technologically in order to generate revenue and move the business forward?

Griffin: AI definitely sucks a lot of the, it is the big focus. And again, it has the investment focus and the value focus. But you better be very close, and I would even say on par, is you have to be talking about cybersecurity and risk. It is interesting. I think your question you posed was to generate revenue. Well, you generate revenue

by getting new business, and you also generate revenue by not paying fines through breaches and hacks and things like that.

I think cybersecurity is a huge technology that every organization has to be, not only have technically solved but have the hygiene and discipline, too. You're one breach away, or you're one significant outage away from a cyber event impacting you, and you have to manage through that. So, that is what I think is another big one driving not only investment but importance for how the business moves forward.

Bowen: So, let's close with this. My son is a computer science major, and given your role, I can't help but ask. What words of wisdom would you have for him and next-generation leaders, both in technical but also in non-technical disciplines?

Griffin: Yeah. So, first shout out to your son. Great major. As a computer science major myself, I just think of the world it opened me up to and what that world is looking like now for professionally some 20-something years later. And a few years ago I wrote probably one of my most effective articles. I have a pretty good LinkedIn presence I try to maintain, and a lot of that is around mentoring and for students, just like your son.

When I celebrated my 20-year work anniversary, I wrote an article talking about being a corporate athlete and the importance of when you start your professional career as a computer science major. Whether you start with a startup, you start your own company or you start with some major large organization, you have to have an athlete mindset around what that career is going to entail. And I really highlight in there three very important tips I would tell with him that I think applies to him and any other profession or any other major.

One, relationships always matter. Never underscore the importance of relationships you have around you personally and professionally. Two, readers are leaders. I don't care if you listen to a book, you read books, however you may want to consume them. Readers are leaders. If you ever want to be a leader, you always need to be a reader. That is why we read in school. Three, last but not least, you must give to receive. I think that if I just had the right mentor, if I just had the better boss, giving usually opens your posture up better for receiving, because once you learn to give you learn to receive the other way, and I'll say my career has lived through that.

So, I think if you anchor on those three things and what they mean throughout the different things to learn and whatever role he starts with, whatever company he may start with, and whoever he might involve, he may evolve to in between, I think he'll look back at the career he is able to build and carry out and just enjoy the journey and the ride.

Bowen: Well, DeWayne, this has been a pleasure, and there's so many other things we could have deep dived into. Maybe we'll do a part two and tackle some of those at some other time, but I really appreciate your time and thank you for joining us.

Griffin: Thanks for having me, Janine.

Kattman: If you have any questions for Janine, her contact information is in the show notes. As always, thanks for listening to BakerHosts.

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