

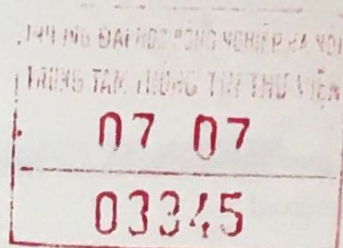
THE ADVENTURES OF AN IT LEADER

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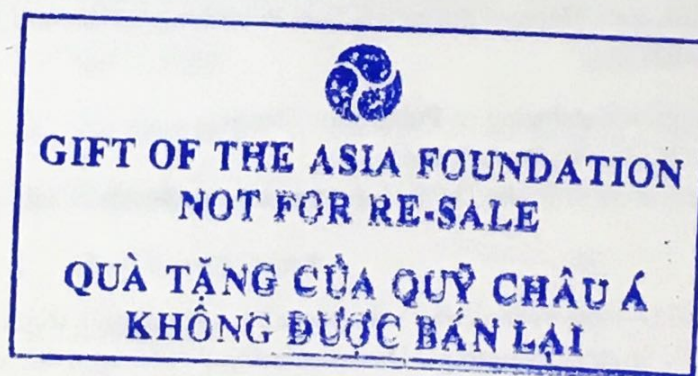


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THE
ADVENTURES
OF AN IT LEADER



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INTRODUCTION

The Adventures of an IT Leader invites readers to “walk in the shoes” of a new CIO, Jim Barton, as he spends a difficult year learning IT leadership at the IVK Corporation, sidestepping the pitfalls that make the CIO job the most volatile, high-turnover job in business.

Although this book is based on the authors’ years of firsthand experience with diverse companies and managers, the IVK Corporation and its staff are fictional. As the story begins, the midsize growth company is attempting a turnaround following a period of slowing business performance. The stock price has fallen substantially as investors have adjusted their expectations of the firm’s growth. An aggressive new CEO, Carl Williams, takes over and assigns a new management team. In the process, CIO Bill Davies is fired and Jim Barton, former head of Loan Operations and a talented general manager, is appointed CIO. Barton has no background in IT—none at all. The story follows Barton as he figures out what effective IT management is all about and deals with issues and challenges of the job. The financial and other information about IVK in chapter 1 provides a cogent snapshot of the company’s situation as the story begins.

The Main Characters

In order of appearance . . .

Jim Barton: The new CIO of IVK. A talented and ambitious general manager, Barton knows little about IT. He sets out to learn quickly and to lead the IT department toward renewed growth, stability, and strategic partnership within the company—but not without facing serious challenges.

Introduction

Carl Williams: This bold turnaround CEO is high on ambition and short on patience.

Maggie Landis: A savvy management consultant and Barton's girlfriend, she often provides Barton with valuable insight, references, and perspectives.

The kid: Wise beyond his years, this twenty-something tech nerd, whom Barton mysteriously meets only at Vinnie's Bar, proves a useful sounding board and source of surprisingly good advice.

Bill Davies: Former CIO at IVK, Davies was fired in part because he struggled with management-level communication. He tells Barton that he "won't last one year" in the job of CIO.

Bernie Ruben: As the director of the Technical Services Group and longtime IVK employee, nearing retirement and thus mostly immune to concerns about risk to his career, Ruben frequently provides Barton with the candid advice, knowledge, and context he needs to make key decisions.

Raj Juvvani: As director of Customer Support and Collection Systems, Juvvani is part of Barton's core IT team.

Tyra Gordon: As director of Loan Operations and New Application Development Systems, Tyra worked closely with Barton when he was head of Loan Operations and takes the lead on several new IT projects under his management.

Paul Fenton: As director of Infrastructure and Operations, Fenton manages a large and important domain, including IT security, and is part of Barton's core IT team.

Gary Geisler: As director of Planning and Control, Geisler works closely with Barton on IT financials.

John Cho: IVK's outspoken resident security genius, Cho has a distinct fashion sense and provocative musical talent.

Jenny: Barton's ever-dependable executive assistant.

Several additional characters populate the story, but are described in context.

PART ONE

***THE HERO
CALLED TO
ACTION***

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEW CIO

Friday, March 23, 11:52 a.m. . . .

Jim Barton sat motionless in a blue leather chair, one of several positioned around an elegant glass table at one end of the CEO's expansive corner office. At the other end, Carl Williams stood looking out a window. The silence grew long. Finally, Williams turned to look at Barton.

"Speechless" was not a word most people could imagine applying to Jim Barton. His energy and outspokenness as head of the Loan Operations department made him one of IVK's most dynamic executives, a key player and a likely CEO someday—of a different company, if not this one.

But the news Williams had conveyed moments before had left Barton silent, dumbfounded.

A few minutes earlier Barton had rushed to William's office, summoned for *his* turn with the new chief. All morning, leadership team members had marched down that hallway one at a time, each after receiving a phone call, each on a journey to discover his or her fate. As the executive assistant greeted him courteously and waved him in, Barton allowed himself some optimism.

Most likely, he thought, he was about to receive a promotion. He'd done a good job, been a big contributor as the company had grown to its present size. Something like "Chief Operating Officer" would fit him quite nicely.

On the other hand, to hear that he was being asked to leave would not have enormously surprised him. He hadn't done anything to warrant such treatment. But unexpected things happen when companies are in crisis. The logic behind executive appointments, retirements, resignations, and firings was rarely transparent. Sometimes, Barton thought there was little logic to it at all.

The timing of his meeting gave Barton reason for hope. According to word going around, firings, resignations, and forced retirements had been handled in the first meetings of the day. Since midmorning, he'd heard mostly about reassignments. Executives involved in early-morning meetings had departed as soon as they'd finished, but for a while now people emerging from meetings with the CEO had been staying. It was late enough in the day that he might just be in line for that plum job.

But his mood darkened when Williams, standing by the window, not looking at Barton, began to speak. The CEO's words struck Barton with near-physical force.

"Jim, I don't think you're going to like this very much."

Barton's mind raced. *Why would he wait this late in the day to fire me? What have I missed or misunderstood?* He pulled himself together well enough to answer: "Just tell me, Carl. We're all grownups here."

Williams chuckled. "It's not what you think. We're not asking you to leave or anything like that. But when you hear what I have to offer, your first inclination may be to think along those lines yourself. Though I sincerely hope not."

To Barton, William's gestures, standing across the room, staring out the window—the entire scene—appeared overly dramatic. Although the view from the thirty-fourth floor was enticing, Williams wasn't simply lost in admiration, he was avoiding eye contact. Barton glanced around the room, seeking additional clues to what might be going on. The office, he noticed, had been completely transformed, all signs of the previous occupant vanquished. That was too bad. Barton had gotten along well with Kyle Crawford, the former CEO. There had been rocky moments, but suddenly, looking back, those didn't seem too awful.

"As you know," Williams continued, "the board is determined to get things on track. They want us back on our earlier, steeper growth tra-

jectory. They believe, and I agree, that the controversy that has dogged us for the last eight months has been a damaging distraction. When they brought me in from outside, they asked me to take a look at the company and to formulate a recovery plan.

"As you probably suspected, the board asked me to reconstruct the leadership team, to clear away the 'rot' that might remain from the way some things were done in the past. To recommend the composition of a team that could rise to the challenges we are facing in the coming months. I'd like you to be on that team."

Relief. It didn't sound like a demotion. Williams continued.

"It has been a difficult process. I haven't told anyone else this, but the first time I went to the board with my proposed team, they balked. They asked for additional changes. I had originally proposed a very different role for you than the one you've ended up in."

An unusual assignment. I can live with that. Spirits lifting, Barton made a constructive noise: "I'm willing to do whatever will help," he offered. "You know me, Carl. I'm a team player."

"I'm delighted that you are taking that attitude," said Williams, who smiled but maintained his place at the window.

"You see, after a considerable amount of shuffling and reshuffling, and having discussed this with the board extensively, we've . . ." Here Williams drew in a deep breath, "Well, we've decided that you should be our new chief information officer."

This was the news that had knocked the air out of Jim Barton, reducing him to his unfamiliar wordless state. After allowing Barton a moment for thought, Williams finally turned away from the window. Barton felt the boss's gaze burn into him. Finally, Barton managed to babble: "CIO? You want me to be the CIO?"

"Davies has been overwhelmed in that role. You've been one of his most outspoken critics."

"I know, but . . . I've got no background in information technology."

"By all accounts, you have a lot of thoughts on how IT should be run. A lot of people think you have pretty good thoughts about this. I think you've said a few things along those lines to me, even in my short time here. Unlike Davies, you'll report directly to me."