

VICTICRAT OR ROCK STAR — THE CHOICE IS YOURS

By Peter J. McGarahan



Just another day... another 1,000 calls, another technology rollout, another global outage, another upset customer, another missed SLA, another senior executive challenging the value of the support organization. Amid these pressures, do you survive or thrive? Are you a Victicrat or a Rock Star?

Yes, we have pressures, but who doesn't? We also have a choice: to be a **Victicrat** (a victim of our own choosing) focused only on surviving today's fire drill, or a **Rock Star**, a leader with vision and tenacity who refuses to let outside variables and compelling forces control their destiny.

I recently facilitated a support organization panel on creating value for the business. I was impressed by how these support leaders had wisely used the last two years to prepare themselves and their organizations for the recent “**all hands on deck; full steam ahead**” bellow from the captain. Rather than choosing to be victims of cost cutting, offshoring, outsourcing, automation and global competition — which we all face and to which some of use succumb — they chose to succeed. Remarkably, their individual success stories were similar, centering around “**The Big Rocks**”:

- Alignment of services
- Support demand management and resource utilization
- Implementing best practices mapped to integrated tools
- Creating operational and marketing metrics and reporting
- Expanding the scope of their services.

These support leaders became change enablers. They started with a clear vision — create a service business within the business and operate it as an entrepreneurial endeavor — then optimized their organization into a cost-effective, SLA-adhering support delivery team around that vision.

What these leaders had in common was a desire to challenge current process and conventional wisdom in pursuit of a new business model. They thought differently to

think ahead. These support leaders were **Rock Stars**; it was no wonder that the audience stayed for hours, asking questions and wanting to learn more about the leaders' journey.

Wish you were there? Let me summarize what I think was an excellent evening of support practitioners learning from their peers in a passionate, dynamic exchange of learnings.

The Ten Ways to Increase Your Support Organization's Value to the Business:

1. Create a Support Services Portfolio

The first step on the road to increasing your value proposition to the organization is to create a Services Portfolio. It is a portfolio because it contains investments that, if leveraged properly, will generate returns. Review each of your services against the needs of the business and currently deployed technology. Rank each service in terms of value, preparing to:

- Determine the needs of YOUR Business
- Financially calculate and measure consistently
- Realize business units will interpret differently
- Maximize the full potential of any investment
- Understand people interpret value at different times in different ways
- Measure against performance goals

2. Create a Management Portfolio

A Management Portfolio should include all of the data and plans needed to run your support organization like a business. It will help you justify your business model, cost and value to senior management's priorities, concerns and questions that senior management will expect addressed. Prepare the information in presentation format, complete with metrics and reports on demand, utilization, financials, trending and recommendations. Stick to your core messages throughout: 1) value versus cost, and 2) productivity gains, revenue generation, and increased profitability.

The **Management Portfolio** should include:

- The Support Story
- Support Strategy and Vision
- Current Assessment
- Roadmap and Project Plan for Continuous Improvement

- Strategic Sourcing Plan
- Human Resource Plan
- Training and Development Plan
- Business and IT Projects Plan
- Marketing Communications Plan
- Cost-per-Contact Plan

3. Manage the “Inelastic” Support Model

In support economics, the triangular forces of supply, demand, and service level agreements must balance if the support organization and the business are to benefit. This triangle is inelastic and will implode with force if demand rises without a balancing adjustment to SLAs and/or resources.

You need to know the current level of demand for your services from all channels, as well as utilization rate of your current resources and adherence to service level and operating level commitments. Always know whether your team is over, under, or at capacity with respect to the demand for their services versus the supply of resources available to support it.

4. Regularly Communicate your Continuous Improvement Plan

Create and communicate a continuous improvement action plan that addresses the gaps between business-aligned strategy, how the team is currently performing against industry best practices, and how you will close that gap. To ensure internal (support team) success, set a steady target of prioritized tasks needed to achieve your end-vision. To ensure external sponsorship, use the plan to influence customer perception. Think of it as a powerful marketing tool! Lay out the facts in plain English — here is where we are, here is what’s broken, here is how we’re going to fix things. Then make it more compelling by adding in a project scorecard, which tracks the baseline, target and actual metrics of any project, initiative or task.

5. Practice “Getting out of the Office”

What do your people know that you don’t know? How do they get that knowledge? When was the last time you actually worked the phones, or tagged along with your team as they interacted with clients?

Remember, responding to 100 emails by day’s end is the quickest path to Victicrathood. Get out of the office! Spend time with your team on the phones, shadowing them as they perform their duties and network with peer management –

inside and especially outside of the IT department. Most important, visit with your customers! Spend time learning what's important to them and discussing ways you and your team can deliver value. Empower your team with line-of-sight access to business people, imparting to your team a sense of urgency and your trust in their ability to solve clients' issues without having a command-and-control bureaucracy impeding their efforts.

6. Expand Your Scope of Services

Broaden your services and range of coverage to deliver more value to more of the business more often. Be unafraid to grow your support team vertically and horizontally, realigning resources and adding technical as well as business expertise to meet your expanding reach. Realign your support organization with a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for each of the business units and functional departments you support — Human Resources, Facilities, Operations, Finance, Sales and Marketing, etc. — so that their needs can be met faster and better.

In addition, by branching out horizontally, your team's career opportunities are expanded as well. This is a towering competitive advantage for you in recruiting potential Rock Stars!

7. Think Strategically, Act Tactically

Senior executives don't listen to or value support leaders who can't deliver what they promise. Nor do they keep them around long. Don't sell a strategy your team can't implement tactically! Give your team the structure, business understanding and tools they need, then empower them to deliver what you promise.

Start with structure — In today's demanding IT service management environment, a service desk must have positions like Knowledge Engineer, Tool Administrator, Trainers, Metrics and Reporting, Q&A and Surveying, Support Automation, Business Liaison, SLA and OLA adherence, etc. Make sure your organizational model is an enabler, not a barrier, to success. Second, communicate the business needs behind your strategy, the tools and tactics necessary to bring it to life, and guidelines for front-line decision-making that allows for flexibility within boundaries.

Finally, put in place daily tracking reports so you can take action when thresholds are crossed and the business is being impacted. A networked, in-the-know support leader always positions himself and his team for success in delivering on strategy, winning new business, and entwining his team's value into the heart of the business.

8. Create the Business Case and Cost Model providing new services

Communicating your support organization's value proposition to senior management, key influencers, and potential champions requires a clear and compelling business case. It must state clearly:

- Where you are now — what's broken, what's not, and why
- The opportunity
- Your strategic vision for transformation — What does success look like? (including organizational model, services and value delivered, financial outcomes)
- How you'll get there, how long it will take, and what you'll need

The best way to sell a Business Case is to pre-sell it. Create buy-in and pack the audience with pre-sold champions. Select three or four senior executives that are well-respected, vocal leaders and influencers with other senior managers. Present the business case to them and seek their feedback. Ask hard questions, even if the answers may not be what you want to hear — is this an aligned business case ready for funding? What's missing? Do you believe in it? Can you support it? Listen closely and heed their advice!

Construct your business case in this manner:

- Introduction and Overview
- What Does Success Look Like?
- Assumptions and Methods
- Business Impacts
- Sensitivity, Risks and Contingencies
- Conclusions and Recommendations

Then, before you walk into the boardroom, remember a timeless piece of advice when dealing with senior management — keep your symptoms short. Boil your presentation down to three to five slides that clearly state the opportunity, the vision / solution, the value and benefits derived, and what you need from them to implement it. Have “hip pocket” slides from your business case analysis ready in case you get called to address questions and concerns.

9. Reporting, reporting, reporting

Communication goes a long way in creating allies, champions, informed users, and satisfied clients. Frequent reporting to the various business units and functional departments, based on data collection and analysis with go-forward

recommendations, is a hidden and underused asset that delivers tremendous value clients and support organizations alike.

A constant focus on reporting enables you to quickly capture and categorize all of the support activity within the business, realign resources to boost productivity, reduce total support costs, and resolve more complex client problems faster and more cheaply. This clearly enhances the perception of the support organization by improving its leadership value to the business. Speaking of which...

10. Leadership and Attitude

As a support leader, it is my responsibility to create a valued portfolio of services that cannot be commoditized. I must create, sell and market the value of these services. I must continue to think strategically and act tactically to be more productive, cost-effective and deliver the highly valued services aligned with the business goals and objectives. I must continue to look to eliminate, deflect and automate repetitive calls and realign and focus resources on the business-critical systems and processes.

As a support leader, creating and showing VALUE are my main accountabilities. Value is determined every day, at different times in different ways, by different people who utilize the services of the support organization. The key term for realizing value is UTILIZATION. I can only truly receive value if I, in turn, over the lifetime of that investment, utilize it so I get my money's worth. Lead, utilize and generate the biggest bang for the buck while delivering a solid return. That makes me a Rock Star!

Summary

Today's Support organization is under constant pressure to show empirical value to the business. Support leaders today **must** increase their value proposition to the business, then communicate it. Otherwise, they'll fail and die. Or worse, become Victicrats.

Educate senior management about your world — the support environment and your organization's contribution to front-line productivity and revenue gains — and demonstrate the value you deliver to the business. Make them need you. Have a vision. Rethink how you communicate your vision and your value proposition to ensure that our business impact is felt throughout the organization. Expand the scope, depth and breadth of services your organization delivers to the business. Know your cost structure to deliver support at Tier-1, as well as all other tiers involved in issue resolution. Make sure whatever you do is measurable, defensible, and of clear value. Communicate that value time and again. Report quality, report action, report value.

A mature support organization — one that's structured around a vision of transformation and success, and led with passion and focus — can serve as a dynamic business catalyst of remarkable value. It's up to you to constantly transform, manage, market, and communicate how your team adds value in the pursuit of revenue and increased productivity of your customers, employees and partners.

So let me ask you... are you a Victicrat, or a Rock Star?

Rock on!

Pete McGarahan is the founder and principle of McGarahan & Associates. Pete's value to the support industry and business is his thought leadership. As a practitioner, product manager and support industry analyst and expert, he has influenced the maturity of the service and support industry. By focusing on aligning the support organization with the business goals and objectives, he contributed thought leadership to reposition the Help Desk from the helpless "infant and victim" stage to the mature Enterprise Service Desk stage. He has been instrumental in helping to create, teach and implement the support strategy, structure, best practices and roadmap for running support organizations like a business, passionately stressing the need for creating a value proposition to sell to senior management.



Previously, McGarahan was the Executive Director of the Help Desk Institute (HDI) and Director of Marketing for the Vantive Corporation. McGarahan has over 20 years of experience in business support, planning, design, and development. His passions for customer service lead the Taco Bell support organization to achieve the Help Desk Institute Team Excellence Award. In addition, IT Support News selected McGarahan as one of the "Top 25 Professionals in the Service and Support Industry". He is a Certified Instructor, author, keynote presenter, industry leader and advisor as well as customer service advocate. As program director and host of the STI Knowledge Symposium, Pete is constantly challenging and guiding the support Industry to align itself with addressing key business challenges. In his industry leadership role, he proactively addresses current economic, business and support industry best practices and trends.