

Information Technology Solutions and Implementations for Colleges and Universities



John Slack
President

“We have developed proven processes, based upon sound management principles supported by senior consultants who have all helped institutions exceed their strategic goals.” - John Slack

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CEOCFO: Mr. Slack, your website indicates that EduServe is aligning technology with higher education. How so?

Mr. Slack: We work with higher education executives to ensure that every dollar they spend on technology contributes to the strategic goals of the institution. Today, more than ever, the focus in higher education is on student success and accountability. Technology plays a major role in both areas.

CEOCFO: What might be a typical engagement?

Mr. Slack: A perfect example is an institution that finds that their operations are inefficient and not serving the needs of the students. They may lack the information they need to make sound, data driven decisions and they may feel they lack technology leaders that can overcome these obstacles. The institution will engage us to perform a technology assessment. We will work with all of the constituents across the institution to understand what is working for them and what needs improvement. Often the issues can be resolved by implementing best practices in technology service management and realigning business processes with technical solutions. Sometimes it involves selection and implementation of new technologies such as student information systems and reporting tools. In many cases, it involves leadership; helping an institution train or recruit technology leaders. This all leads to providing the processes and tools necessary to strengthening teaching and learning and service to students, faculty, and staff, while creating a technology environment that is efficient in its operation.

CEOCFO: *When you are assessing a school and what they have in place now, what are some of the things you might look at, given your many years of experience, that others would not think are important to pay attention to when developing a plan?*

Mr. Slack: Accountability for student success and the high cost of education have become a major topic in the executive offices of every institution. Affordable, quality education demands efficient operations and a teaching and learning environment that drives student success. Appropriate technology to support academics and operations is critical to supporting the learning environment, driving efficiency in operations and making informed, “data-driven decisions.” Our consultants are all senior leaders in higher education with the experience necessary to know where to look for issues. We do not look at these projects as trying to fix what is broken. Every institution is different; there are no “canned” questions or preconceived ideas prior to starting the engagement. We view each engagement as an opportunity to build on strengths of the institution, identifying processes and technologies needed to strengthen the environment. Our research is guided by what the executives feel is important and where they are taking the institution.

CEOCFO: *Are you typically consolidating so there is one central system where everything is contained?*

Mr. Slack: That depends upon the situation and what the executives want. As I said earlier, there are no canned answers when it comes to technology. That is a great question though. What we often find is that institutions will have implemented software packages 10 or 15 years ago. They were fine at the time, but business processes and technologies have changed dramatically since the initial implementation. An awful lot of what we do is engaging the end users, finding out what they need to do their job, and making sure that the applications and support currently in place today are effective.

CEOCFO: *How are you able to reconcile the cost of a new system or a system that would really do what an institution needs with the fact that most institutions are always short on funds?*

Mr. Slack: Everybody thinks of technology as being very expensive, but the right technology will allow an institution to operate more efficiently, provide better support and assure executives that they have accurate data to make informed decisions. This all translates to improved outcomes, higher revenues and lower costs. The return on investment in technology that supports the strategic initiatives is measurable and one of the best investments an institution can make. It can make the difference between thriving or just surviving.

CEOCFO: *When an institution turns to you, are they aware of that already? Are they prepared to make that commitment?*

Mr. Slack: That is part of the qualification process for us. We work with institutions that recognize they have a problem and are committed to finding solutions. We only work with institutions we can help and those committed to success. When we get involved with an institution, they are much better off for having us there. They get more out of our engagement than they ever put into it. They end up with a technology environment that supports excellence. Many institutions talk about survival, and I am always struck by that because it seems to me the goal should be to thrive not just survive. Once the leadership understands that technology is one of the keys to success, it's easier to commit the resources necessary to excel.

CEOCFO: *How can you smooth the transition from one system or one group of systems to the new venture?*

Mr. Slack: There is a whole course of study today called change management, and we are experts at it. The essence of change management is to get the people affected by the change involved in the decision process early and then develop a communication strategy that keeps everyone involved. This helps manage the stress that is inherently part of change. The communication plan provides executive management communication to all of the effected constituents that reinforce what is going on, why we are doing it, and how it is going to impact the institution and make the institution better.

CEOCFO: *With so much change in technology, new devices and new ideas, you are working with a system and working to implement a plan that should be around for a while. How do you account for the potential of change that could make a difference?*

Mr. Slack: Technology that drives the strategic goals is critical for success and a great investment but technology not linked to the strategic plan is a waste of money. That is why it is important to have an in depth technology assessment that helps create a technology plan. Sticking to the plan will help an institution avoid buying technology for technology's sake.

CEOCFO: *Are you able to guide the school as well where they may think they know what they want but it is not often what they really need?*

Mr. Slack: Yes. It is common for us to be asked help evaluate a technology or vendor before the client has actually defined the issue they are trying to address. The first question we ask is "what is the strategic plan of the institution". This will help our clients focus on themselves and their needs rather than what the vendor is trying to sell them.

CEOCFO: *Giving back is important for the EduServe. Where do you focus your efforts and why is it important for you?*

Mr. Slack: It is interesting you say that because when we started this company 10 years ago, our view was that we could all find a job. Making money is not the only goal. The reason we got into this business was because we recognized that a lot of colleges and universities really struggle with this idea of having a meaningful technology plan; one that really supports the mission of the institution. One of the criteria, as I mentioned before, is that we only work with institutions that we feel we can really help. Our over-arching view of this is that at the end of the day, we want to make higher education better in the U.S. We have actually reached out internationally, too. We believe that by taking this kind of approach we can really make a difference in higher education and consequently make a difference in the lives of the students that depend on higher education for their future. That is critical to us.

CEOCFO: *Why is EduServe noteworthy?*

Mr. Slack: EduServe has been supporting higher education strategic plans and technology initiatives for over 30 years. We have developed proven processes, based upon sound management principles supported by senior consultants who have all helped institutions exceed their strategic goals. We have helped over 230 institutions plan and implement technology that drives their strategic plans.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine