

IT

By Charles Mandel

STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE

Ensuring that IT investments are in the right places so that greater efficiencies are realized is paramount for BDC's CIO

Outside her job, Mireille Rondeau likes to scuba dive in the clear blue waters of the Caribbean, but that's not the only place where she's coming up for air. Rondeau is breathing new life into the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) as its vice-president of systems and technology (the bank's CIO equivalent). Things have changed in the CIO world, Rondeau says. She likens the past to a "master-slave" relationship that has now evolved into a partnership between information technology and the business it serves, with the CIO acting as the go-between that bridges the two areas.

people," she jokes. More seriously, she says on the information technology side, it's relatively easy keeping up with ideas through networking with other CIOs and online web magazines devoted to the subject. Rondeau identifies those as good starting points for working with her staff of 100 to develop ideas that are promising for the organization. "With the business, I guess that's a little more difficult," she says. "You've got to sit down and learn the business, understand where their challenges are, and see where you can add value."

She looks for the same sort of value from

It's possible to end up in a similar job to hers without all the degrees, Rondeau observes, but the degrees can provide a method for studying what it is she does. Nor does she have any regrets about not completing school. "A degree in IT that would today be 27 years old would not have much bearing on what I do today." What she recommends for young people half-way through their career and which she believes would be more relevant would be an executive MBA or its equivalent.

While security is a priority for Rondeau at the bank, she says it's not something she personally finds herself managing on a daily basis. Rather, she leaves that to "people who have a lot more knowledge than I do in that area." But it's all part of the noticeable splash Rondeau creates as she sets the bank's IT policy.

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"We are all living in a new era right now, an era that's post-Y2K where we were seen as an necessary evil," Rondeau says. That's led to CIOs becoming more proficient at project management, and better understanding and identifying performance metrics in order to demonstrate their value. "We've all had to do that," Rondeau insists. "Now we're at the point where we have to make sure the investments are in the right places."

At work, Rondeau is concerned with ensuring the right balance in information technology investments. She considers one of her big challenges to reach the point where the department enables the bank to reach greater efficiency and the support to either grow new markets or put new products into the marketplace. "Efficiency gains are there, but you need to invest in order to get them, in developing processes, training people and in various tools."

What is it that Rondeau does to create the alignment between information technology and business? "I guess it's important to have a lot of meetings and talk with a great deal of

her suppliers, citing quality, reasonable and competitive price and the ability to meet set agreements as her main criteria. At the same time, her suppliers provide another challenge. While Rondeau says the bank builds some applications, she also sees many being purchased, subscribed to or outsourced. That leads "more and more to what I see is a landscape where what we are supporting is not all under our direct control. It certainly becomes a challenge of managing all of those pieces so that they perform in harmony."

Information technology wasn't an area Rondeau originally contemplated as a career. She studied economics and political science at Concordia University at night, while working in IT during the day for Hartford Insurance. At some point, it became obvious to Rondeau that she couldn't keep working all day and studying all night, and she enjoyed IT enough that she decided to go into it full-time. She moved on to SNC, then to Montreal Trust before landing at BDC 10 years ago as a director of development.



MIREILLE RONDEAU