CIOs expect increase in IT hiring and spending

Quarterly survey indicates a slight rebound in optimism

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SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

After 18 years climbing the IT career ladder, **Kent Dorsey** figured the best thing he could do was take a "certain step down."

Dorsey, 41, had been a team leader at **Massachusetts Institute of Technology**. In December, he took the role of an information technology architect, affiliated with **Robert Half Technology**. He figured such a position, which bridges the gap between business strategy and information technology, would enable him to sharpen his expertise in current technologies and other capabilities and maximize his ability to secure a senior IT position.

"I'd like to get back into a team leader role," said the Braintree resident. "I considered my possibilities and decided to stay out of the market for a while to reconnect with my applied skills."

When he does make the move back to team leadership, he'll be a prime candidate in what IT industry observers call a "candidate-tight market."

According to Robert Half Technology's June 2006 Midyear IT Employment Outlook, growing competition for skilled information technology professionals is making it more difficult for organizations to attract and retain them, prompting companies to ensure their compensation packages — or exceed — current industry and local market standards.

The report also summarized the findings of this year's CIO Insight spending survey, which predicts IT spending levels will jump 5.4 percent over 2005.

In Boston, a net 8 percent of Boston-area CIOs expect to hire IT professionals in the third quarter, compared with a net 8 percent in the second quarter and 13 percent in the first quarter, according to the Robert Half Technology IT Hiring Index and Skills Report. The report measures the optimism of CIOs regarding the upcoming quarter's hiring outlook for IT professionals.

The net 13 percent in Boston reported in the survey in the first quarter represents a drop of one percentage point from the fourth quarter of 2005, although it was one point above the national average.

"It does seem there was some pessimism going from Q1 '06 to Q2 '06, but things have leveled out," said **Dan Crispell**, vice president of the New England region for Robert Half Technology. "CIOs in the area appear to be feeling better about their businesses," which should lead to hiring additional IT professionals.

He attributed the downward shift in the second quarter to a general unease over the economy among companies. "With rising interest rates and gas prices, I think they're waiting to see what's going to happen with the economy; if it's going to remain strong or soften a bit," he said.

But Dorsey said waiting is the last thing IT professionals should do, especially in terms of enhancing their marketability. Flexibility, he believes, is key as an increasing number of companies expect IT professionals to do their job — and then some. For instance, Crispell's job description at

IT HIRING PROJECTIONS

Nationwide IT hiring projections are showing a slight midyear rebound.

2nd quarter 2006	3rd quarter 2006
12% INCREASE	13% INCREASE
4% DECREASE	3% DECREASE
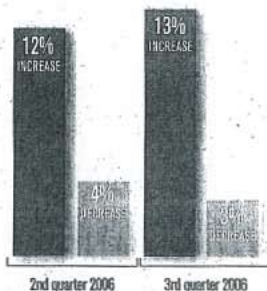
Source: Robert Half Technology IT Hiring Index and Skills Report, June 2006

MIT seemed to become obsolete almost before he read the last sentence. His responsibilities, it turned out, ran deeper than the eye could see. Bottom line: Adjust or bust.

"I feel my flexibility helped me. It was a good experience to wear all those hats — it either makes or breaks your career path because you have to refocus your efforts." He had to learn to "engage clients all the way through to operational support and ended up learning a lot of valuable skills in terms of strategic planning and other higher level functions outside of my official job title."

Richard Curtis, relationship manager for Information Technology at **State Street Corp.** in Boston, said his company is "increasingly recruiting multifaceted IT staff that have a solid fundamental understanding of business and finance versus those who are simply trained to solve a problem."

The days where a programmer "sits in a back room and does his code and doesn't interact with other people in the company are over," said Crispell. "IT professionals now have to be more able to communicate and understand the business as well. In many cases, the people who do well are the ones who communicate well."