

By Becky Roberts

So you want to be a computer support technician? Or perhaps you are one already, but you can't decide whether you're just having a bad week or you're really not cut out for the job. What does it take to be an effective support tech? Is this a career at which you can excel and be happy? The ability to do well in any job and to enjoy it depends to a certain extent upon our personalities, skills, and attitudes. So how can you tell if you shouldn't be a support tech? Consider the following indications that you might be on the wrong track.

1 You don't respect other techs

Start by examining *your* attitude toward support techs. When you have to call your ISP or other service provider, do you treat the techs with respect or do you assume they're all idiots reading flip charts? If you do not respect the role of the support tech, regardless of how well a particular tech performs, you probably shouldn't be one, as you won't value yourself or what you do.

2 You view the job only as a stepping stone

How do you see the job as support tech? Is it an end in itself or merely a stepping stone to something "better"? Unfortunately, in many organizations, the support tech job is regarded as being on the lowest rung of the IT ladder, as an entry level position to be filled by people with little or no proven experience who will be promoted out of the spot at the earliest opportunity. All too frequently, I've seen applicants for support tech positions state their objective as being a network administrator or DBA. Few applicants actually say they're aspiring to be a support tech. Irrespective of the frequent lowly positioning of support techs, if you do not respect the job as something to aspire to rather than a necessary rite of passage -- a techie purgatory -- you probably should not be a support tech.

3 You care about technology but not people

Ask yourself *why* you want to be a support tech. If it is first and foremost because you enjoy messing around with computers, supporting tech-ing may not be the best choice of career. In many organizations, the tech spends as much time, if not more, dealing with user-perceived issues as with genuine technical problems. On the other hand, if you primarily enjoy helping people, relish problem solving, have infinite patience, and have some technical aptitude, being a support tech could make you deliriously happy.

4 You're not really driven to keep up with tech trends

Of course, #3 does not mean that an interest in, and an aptitude for, technology are not necessary prerequisites for being a support tech. Arguably, without a strong independent interest in technology, it is highly unlikely that the support tech field will be a successful choice of careers. Being an effective support tech requires keeping up with current technology and, regrettably, not every company will provide the time and tools necessary for this task during normal working hours. This means that to stay competitive, you will need to devote some of your own time and resources to keeping yourself current.

5 You don't care about the business you're supporting

Support techs are employed in all types of businesses, from schools to hospitals to chemical plants to casinos. Although many of the basic functions and roles of the tech in each of these industries are the same or similar, in my experience, the really outstanding techs are the ones who take the time to learn the industry they are supporting. You don't need to pass the bar exam to be a support tech for a law practice, but making the effort to understand the business will give you the information you need to better prioritize your tasks and provide proactive support. A tech who takes the time to learn the job functions of the people he or she is supporting can add considerable value by making suggestions to enable the users to make more effective use of the available technology and become more efficient in their jobs.

6 You don't handle stress terribly well

Another important factor to consider is how you respond to pressure in the form of urgent deadlines, highly stressed employees, and irate corporate executives. If you aren't capable of staying calm and thinking logically and clearly to figure out why the presentation due in exactly seven minutes will not print or how to retrieve the boss's file that a secretary inadvertently deleted, a career as a support tech is liable to cause you a great deal of stress and misery. In such circumstances, techs are required to show that they acknowledge the urgency of achieving a fast resolution without engaging in the user's panic, while still treating a quite possibly abusive user with respect and professionalism.

7 You need recognition and praise

Being a support tech often means being invisible until something goes wrong. Ironically, if you're doing an awesome job by proactively taking care of the users, you're less likely to be noticed than if you're slacking and are frequently called upon to save the day.

Early in my career, a VP took me aside and suggested that I might like to occasionally crash the network server so I could justify my existence by heroically restoring it overnight. You may be fortunate and encounter the odd users who appreciate that they never have to call you, or even a boss or co-worker who expresses gratitude for the fine job you are doing, but this type of positive feedback is usually the exception. If you require frequent approbation to feel confident and satisfied with your performance, being a support tech may not be the best choice of careers.

8 You're a little short on patience

Do you regard yourself as a patient person? Dealing with certain users requires a great deal of patience and composure. Some users will always make the same mistakes, which they expect you to fix. Others will require hours of individual tutoring to be able to perform even the most basic tasks on their computer. Addressing the needs of these users calls for patience, composure, and empathy.

One tech with whom I used to work had an outstanding reputation among the more difficult users for being an excellent teacher, willing to give up his breaks and lunchtime to assist with any mundane task. One evening after work, I ran into him at a local park, red-faced and pouring sweat, violently slamming tennis balls into a wall. Each tennis ball had a face drawn on it in the unmistakable likeness of certain employees, with a name inscribed underneath to remove any doubt as to the intended identity. Not being an innately patient person, the tech had developed this creative method of dealing with his frustration rather than taking it out on the users.

9 You're a bit shaky when it comes to problem solving

The process of resolving computer problems requires a systematic, logical methodology, with occasional flares of inspiration when the logic fails. Although there is no single "correct" methodology for determining the cause of a problem, the ability to think clearly and logically is an essential qualification for being a support tech. If you do not have a natural aptitude for systematic problem solving, being a successful support tech will require you to devote considerable time to developing comprehensive problem-solving techniques that can be adapted to any situation.

10 You're shy, antisocial, or awkward in your communications

If your communication skills are anything short of excellent, or you possess good skills but have a strong preference for hiding behind your keyboard all day, a career as a support tech will make both you and your users very unhappy. In most organizations, the support tech is the face of the IT department. In many cases, the tech is the only IT staff member with whom most users will ever interact. This means that the ability to communicate effectively with all types of users, regardless of their technical ability or position within the company, is of paramount importance.

Additional resources

- TechRepublic's [Downloads RSS Feed](#) **XML**
- Sign up for TechRepublic's [Downloads Weekly Update](#) newsletter
- Sign up for our [IT Career NetNote](#)
- Check out all of TechRepublic's [free newsletters](#)
- [10 ways to decline a request for free tech support](#) (TechRepublic download)
- [10 good reasons not to provide free tech support](#) (TechRepublic download)
- [The top 10 peeves of a support tech](#) (TechRepublic download)

Version history

Version: 1.0

Published: August 20, 2007

Tell us what you think

TechRepublic downloads are designed to help you get your job done as painlessly and effectively as possible. Because we're continually looking for ways to improve the usefulness of these tools, we need your feedback. Please take a minute to [drop us a line](#) and tell us how well this download worked for you and offer your suggestions for improvement.

Thanks!

—The TechRepublic Downloads Team