

The Visible Ops Handbook: Starting ITIL in 4 Practical Steps

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The Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL) is a widely used methodology to bring order to Information Technology departments that frequently operate in a state of panic or chaos. Or to quote Nathaniel Borenstein "The most likely way the world will be destroyed, most experts agree, is by accident. That's where we come in, we're computer professionals. We cause accidents."¹ Or another quote "To err is human, to really screw things up requires the 'root' password"⁵ (Anonymous) In the IT industry, an IDC survey showed that on average 80% of IT system outages are caused by operator and application errors.²

One may purchase Version 3 of the ITIL Library for 299.00 GBP (456.19 USD as of 7/22/10 at current exchange rates)⁴. This includes the following volumes:

- Service Strategy
- Service Design
- Service Transition
- Service Operations
- Continual Service Improvement

Or one can purchase "The Visible Ops Handbook" for considerably less and get the "big picture" understanding of ITIL in a few pages. It provides a significant step in answering the question "Where and how do we get started with ITIL?"

The two objectives in Visible Ops are:

1. Establish a standard process with the following characteristics: Definitive Project – clearly defined objective; Ordered – each step builds on the previous one; catalytic – each phase returns more resources to the organization than it consumes; auditable – create documentation in order to prove controls are working and effective; and sustaining – create value to the organization.
2. Facilitate a productive working relationship between IT Operations, Security and Audit.

The overriding objective is taken from the Hippocratic Oath which states in part "I will prescribe regimens for the good of my patients according to my ability and my judgment and **never do any harm**".³ (Emphasis added.)

The Visible Ops book provides four initial phases for getting started with ITIL.

Phase One: "Stabilize the Patient" and "Modify First Response"

Phase Two: "Catch and Release" and "Find Fragile Artifacts" Projects

Phase Three: Create a Repeatable Build Library

Phase Four: Continual Improvement

The book contains a very thorough description of the work required and organizational changes to be made in each phase to accomplish the goals. But, of course, you'll have to buy the book to get the details.

While I attended an Introduction to ITIL training class and was certified in ITIL Foundations, I found the Visible Ops book provides more of a big picture and provides specific direction to bring IT processes into a more organized and managed process.

Rather than approach problems with a shotgun (change everything at once until the system [hopefully] works again) the book describes a rifle approach (methodological ordered steps to fix a problem for the long term).

If your organization does not use ITIL principles then this book is a great way to introduce the concepts and get started using the ITIL processes. If your organization does use ITIL then this book condenses the material in the ITIL Library (5 volumes) into a concise description of the processes and will serve as a convenient reference book.

Either way, you will save your organization considerable money by starting with the Visible Ops book as compared to the full ITIL Library.

¹ Visible Ops, pp 8

² Visible Ops, pp 8

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hippocratic_Oath accessed 7/22/10

⁴ <http://www.itil-officialsite.com> accessed 7/22/10

⁵ Visible Ops, pp 21