



## **The Senior Living CTO Has a New Job. Most Organizations Don't Know It Yet.**

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Here is a recently reported statistic my mind keeps going back to: more than 80% of senior living organizations say they establish success metrics for new technology investments, but fewer than 40% actively measure return on investment. Restated, this means over 60% of operators fail to track their tech ROI.

I've been working alongside technology leaders, operators, and investors in this industry long enough to understand that gap probably isn't a data problem. It's likely a leadership problem. And in my experience, it's exactly where the role of the senior living CTO, and CIO, and COO, is being quietly but fundamentally renegotiated.

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### **What the Data Says**

The research confirms what I've been seeing in the field: technology leadership has moved out of the back office and into the executive core of senior living organizations.

According to the Ziegler–Linkage–LeadingAge CAST CTO Hotline report (September 2025), more than half of senior living technology leaders now hold C-suite titles, with nearly half reporting directly to the CEO. Over 90% of organizations maintain a formal strategic IT plan, and

the majority review it annually or more often. Technology is no longer a support function. It is a governance function.

What those leaders are being asked to do has also shifted. The 2025 Argentum Technology Report found that technology investment is being driven by operational efficiency, staffing stabilization, care quality, and data integration, not innovation for its own sake. Interoperability, data quality, and funding constraints rank consistently among the top barriers. The implication is direct: technology leaders are now on the hook for enterprise-level friction, not just whether the systems stay up.

That execution gap I mentioned at the beginning tells me that even as expectations have grown, the internal structures to support them haven't kept pace. The mandate is strategic but the scaffolding, in many organizations, is still under construction.

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## What Technology Leaders Are Doing in Response

Technology executives across the industry express a common frustration. The question isn't "which platform should we choose?" It's "why didn't the last implementation embed the way it was supposed to?" Across my work and research with operators, investors, and technology leaders, I'm noticing three consistent responses take shape.

### **First, technology is being reframed as an operating lever and not an innovation program.**

The CTOs who understand this aren't chasing what's new. They're tying every investment directly to labor constraints, margin pressure, and execution risk. Automation (looking at you, AI) gets pursued not because it's exciting, but because it reduces cognitive load on already-stretched staff, stabilizes scheduling, and protects clinical and operational capacity that can't afford to slip.

**Second, stack discipline is becoming a measure of leadership maturity.** Years of well-intentioned point-solution accumulation have left many organizations managing complexity they never planned for. The Ziegler–Linkage–LeadingAge report notes that CTOs are increasingly leading rationalization efforts: consolidating vendors, sunsetting underperforming tools, and building clearer governance around what gets adopted and why. I've seen firsthand how this work, unglamorous as it is, can be the most consequential thing a technology leader does in a given year. It rarely makes headlines. It absolutely makes a difference.

**Third, the role is expanding from builder to translator.** The technology leaders I've watched earn real trust with their executive teams are the ones who can take operational pain points, financial realities, and technology options and turn them into something the whole C-suite can actually act on. They're the ones in the room explaining why data quality has to come before AI, why interoperability is a risk issue, and why underfunded systems eventually show up as labor cost, occupancy drag, or stalled growth.

All of this is happening, as the industry is painfully aware, under significant constraint. Staff capacity, time, and funding remain the most commonly cited barriers, which means sharper prioritization and clearer alignment aren't aspirational. They're survival skills.

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## What Comes Next

Looking ahead, three shifts feel inevitable to me. And at least one of them may surprise you: I believe the most important CTO competency in the next 18 months won't be AI literacy. It will be knowing what not to implement.

**Technology leadership will be judged by business outcomes.** Boards and executive teams are wanting more than hitting implementation milestones. The question is no longer “Did we deploy it?” but “What changed because we did?” Labor efficiency, margin protection, scalability, risk reduction: those are the measures that matter now. Technology leaders who can speak to those outcomes clearly, in the language their peers use, will be the ones seen as essential to business success and earn a seat at the proverbial table.

**AI will reward readiness, not enthusiasm.** I am genuinely optimistic about what AI can do for senior living. However, I've also lived through enough technology cycles to know that organizations investing first in data governance, interoperability, and internal capability will be the ones able to move responsibly when the time is right. The ones chasing tools without that foundation will spend considerable energy trying to explain why nothing is sticking. In short, there is no shortcut past doing the foundational work.

**The CTO role itself will become a differentiator.** As technology becomes inseparable from operations, finance, and growth strategy, the most effective technology leaders will look less like systems architects and more like enterprise operators: people who can hold complexity without flinching, work across competing priorities, and earn the confidence of peers who don't share their technical background. I think that's a meaningfully different profile than the industry was hiring for even just five years ago.

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## A Call to Action: Why Perspective Matters as Much as Technology

One of the clearest signals from both the research and from my own work in the field: senior living does not suffer from a lack of technology options. It suffers from complexity, fragmentation, and too many competing priorities pulling in too many directions at once.

Not every problem is a technology problem. But most technology problems, when you look closely enough, turn out to be prioritization problems. And that is exactly where an outside perspective can pay for itself.

After years of working alongside operators, investors, and technology leaders in this industry, what I've found is that the most useful thing I can do rarely involves identifying the right tool. It involves helping a leadership team get clear on what they're actually trying to solve, before the vendor conversations start. An advisor who isn't selling software, isn't protecting a platform, and isn't advocating for any particular solution can help move a team from stuck to decided in a fraction of the time it would otherwise take. That looks like:

- Stepping back from tool-level decisions to clarify what the organization actually needs
- Translating industry research and trends into a roadmap that fits your specific situation
- Pressure-testing assumptions before capital gets committed
- Building alignment across technology, operations, finance, and growth — so the decision sticks

The role of an independent consultant isn't to replace what your team already knows. It's to help them use it better, to bring outside perspective where internal noise makes it hard to see clearly,

and a grounded point of view where urgency is pushing toward a decision before the thinking is really done.

The evolution of the senior living CTO role is not about becoming more technical. It is about becoming more strategic, more connected to the business, and more willing to be measured on outcomes.

If you are navigating that evolution, whether you are a technology leader, an operations executive, or a board member trying to get sharper about what you should expect from your technology investments, I'd welcome a direct conversation. The organizations that work through this thoughtfully over the next two years will be in a stronger position than those that don't. I help leadership teams get there.

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