IT managers often find themselves in situations requiring exceptional management skills. We present a challenging scenario and ask three ITA readers how they'd handle it.

Word of new laptops leaves IT flooded with requests: Now what?

The Scenario

Company tech Sam Knowles was heading to lunch when he noticed exec Jordan Peel showing a group of workers a new laptop at a table in the employee break room.

"Sam in IT just helped me set it up," he overheard Jordan saying, "We're gonna start giving out more soon. You should ask him about it ..."

Sam had a bad feeling as he got in his car. The company was updating some of its laptops, but only execs and users with special circumstances had gotten new computers so far.

Eager users' requests

Sure enough, when Sam got back, he found his inbox stuffed with emails from users asking for devices.

"Sounds like Jordan got too excited about his new toy and felt like sharing," said IT manager Joe Johnstone when Sam explained the situation later on.

"I'm not sure what to tell people," Sam said. "Some users made valid points about why they should have one.

"Some users have been working on outdated equipment for years now," Sam added. "Plus, there are people working remotely who have said a new laptop would help them work."

"It's great that we finally have some funding to update our equipment, but I doubt we can help everyone," Joe said.

"So how do we decide who the lucky few will be?" Sam asked.

If you were Joe, what would you do or say next – and why?

Reader Responses

1 Lee Morgenstein, IT director, Bederson LLP, Fairfield, NJ

What Lee would do: After we swap out any computers with serious issues, we can formalize a process for issuing new laptops based on multiple factors, like age, performance and duties. We should emphasis to users this will take time and may not follow a specific pattern.

Reason: We want to bring a little order to the rollout to prevent users from sending too many request.

2 Roland Welsch, IT manager, Jefferson County Government, Jefferson, WI

What Roland would do: I'd first advise Sam to get an inventory list of what new laptops we have, and compare what the duties were of the users requesting new laptops. We can enlist execs to show their support and help with the selection process.

Reason: We need to formalize the process and get leaders' input and support. Taking stock of supply and demand can jump-start the process.

3 Jonathan Israel, Director of the Practice Resource Institute, The Florida Bar, Tallahassee, FL

What Jonathan would do: My first steps would be to communicate with our users about the process so far. Specifically, I'd explain about the pilot program with the execs and how our process for selecting candidates to receive new equipment works.

Reason: Users need to follow procedure, otherwise we risk going over budget for the laptops trying to accommodate everyone.