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# 3 Must-Have Traits for Career Success in Accounting

What personal traits lead to career success in the world of finance and accounting? Many people think burning the midnight oil is the best way to impress management and advance their careers. Interestingly, most employers don't agree.

A recent Accountemps survey asked more than 2,200 CFOs what they think are the defining characteristics that lead to professional advancement. Only 7 percent of respondents cited working long hours as a success strategy. Too many hours can lead to a loss of productivity, mistakes and burnout.

So if a 50- or 60-hour workweek is unlikely to put you on the fast track to a promotion, what will? Here are the top three qualities that management prizes, according to our survey, as well as tips for integrating them into your own finance career:

**1. Employee motivation to acquire new skills**

Finance executives want to hire staff who are eager to add to their skill set. This was the top-ranked trait, chosen by 30 percent of survey respondents. Surprised? You shouldn't be. Accounting technology, such as financial reporting in the cloud, is reshaping the industry. Companies can either keep up with the evolution or get left behind, which means they need curious employees who are enthusiastic to stay ahead of the curve.

*Keys to career success:* Embrace life-long learning. Take advantage of all the courses, lectures and brown-bag sessions your employer offers. But don't stop there. You also should take responsibility for your own professional training, so research your options and submit proposals for continuing education courses and financial certifications. Your commitment to professional development not only helps make you a top-notch accountant, it also makes an impression on your supervisor, who keeps such things in mind when handing out promotions and merit raises.

**2. Excellent interpersonal abilities**

You can be the best data analyst in the finance world and still see your career stalled if you can't explain what those numbers mean to stakeholders and executives. Additionally, many organizations are shifting toward business models that rely heavily on interdepartmental cooperation, which means you need to know how to interpret complicated technical information and concepts for colleagues who aren't fluent in finance.

*Keys to career success:* The accountants who thrive in today's environment are those who possess and demonstrate the following soft skills:

- **Listening.** When someone is talking to you, make eye contact and pay attention to their words. Similarly, don't multitask during in-person meetings or conference calls.
- **Collaboration.** Team players go further within a company. Work on building consensus from the group, getting buy-in from colleagues and stepping up to offer assistance.
- **Problem solving.** Unlike accounting practices, which you learn in school or on the job, problem solving involves creativity that you often must learn on your own. Brainstorm with others to clarify problems, think strategically and create solutions.

The higher up you go on the org chart, the wider spectrum of people you'll interact with on a regular basis — from entry-level payroll clerks to the president of the board of directors. Your ability to work effectively with them all will determine how far you go in your career.

**3. Ability to adapt easily**

New regulatory legislation, industry-shifting technologies, mergers and other forces are constantly changing the business world. This means employers can't afford to hire or promote staff members who can't evolve with the times.

*Keys to career success:* Do you fear change or embrace it? Even though different routines and structures are stressful, the finance professional who thrives is the one who demonstrates flexibility. You can aid your career by quickly accepting new workplace or business realities, and then helping others make the transition.

It'd be nice if career success were like an Excel formula, where you enter certain variables and receive a satisfying sum. The path to professional fulfillment and advancement boils down to employee motivation — to keep learning, collaborating and adapting.

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