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## *Balancing the competing demands of the CFO's role*

As chief financial officers grapple with efficiencies, growing revenue, and meeting compliance standards, many can feel frustrated and distant from other members of their organization due to the very nature of their tasks.

Indeed, CFOs can often feel as if they are running uphill and at odds with their teammates. The very nature of their vital role in protecting the financial integrity of their company and keeping it on the straight and narrow, especially in these days of intense government oversight (Sarbanes-Oxley, Dodd-Frank, and health care reform) coupled with economic uncertainty, can conspire to set them apart from the rest of the organization.

Too much focus on oversight, without appropriate attention to their role on the larger leadership team, can cause them to appear as naysayers. Less skillful CFOs may appear to harbor black and white views of the world, while others in the organization crave from the CFO a more expansive “solutions-focused” approach.

CFOs do tend to be more task-oriented, which is not necessarily a bad thing — after all, attention to detail and meticulous assurance of getting a job done within the established guidelines is what undoubtedly helped the individual rise to the position of CFO in the first place. It is also what makes them thrive in a black and white world of regulations and procedures.

By the time the up-and-coming financial executive has arrived in the C-suite, they must learn to embrace a larger role dealing with issues that require more nuanced consideration. Issues at this level frequently lack clear delineation of right versus wrong and are further complicated by the involvement of other people with differing vantage points. This can be unsettling to the CFO with highly developed task skills, but underdeveloped people skills. The CFO that is unable to communicate effectively with other members of the executive team only compounds the sense of being on the outside looking in.

Yet, CFOs do genuinely care about their organizations, and want to be seen as part of the team. Expressing this care for and commitment to the organization, in a responsible manner, is crucial to the success of a CFO and his or her organization's financial foundation. By expanding their leadership capabilities through development of creative competencies — inner resources that encourage personal mastery, and allow a person to be authentic and courageous while getting results and valuing relationships — CFOs can realize equilibrium. They will have a reputation as a team player, be seen as solution-focused, and still remain systems-oriented and strategic, financially ethical and honest.

To achieve this, a CFO may need to alter how he or she approaches certain situations. Coming from a position of open curiosity versus cynicism allows a CFO the flexibility to pay more attention to the people side of the equation. They can better understand where people are coming from and what drives them to make certain suggestions or observations.

Maintaining an open-minded attitude allows a CFO to cultivate a global perspective. This perspective moves beyond booking numbers, and instead incorporates a holistic appreciation for the work of all the departments of the organization, and an understanding that without them, there would be no numbers to book in the first place.

The most successful CFOs learn, over time, that developing these skills allows them to realize that there is a way to build and maintain personal relationships while simultaneously guarding the financial

integrity of their organization. This expansion of competencies and balance between task orientation and people orientation ensures that they are not only capable CFOs, but important members of their organization's executive team.



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