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PEOPLE SKILLS A NEW PRIORITY FOR FINANCE AND ACCOUNTING

Candidates missing out on job opportunities for lack of interpersonal skills

In the wake of the downturn, the days of the conventional and anonymous finance manager are all but over. According to specialist recruitment firm Robert Half, people skills are the new essential for those in accounting and finance, with many candidates missing out on roles for their lack of interpersonal ability.

A Robert Half survey of 1,400 Chief Financial Officer's (CFOs) across the United States determined that interpersonal skills were the number one attribute employers found most valuable in their finance staff. This is up significantly from five years ago when interpersonal skills were cited by only one per cent of respondents.

Andrew Brushfield, Director of Robert Half in Australia is not surprised by the findings that also reveal a third (31%) of CFOs would choose applicants with people skills over other attributes, such as advanced certifications.

"While strong interpersonal skills have always been important, they have recently taken centre stage in the changing workplace.

"In Australia, it's quite clear that the roles of the accountant and finance manager have evolved. These professionals now have increased visibility in their respective organisations because they need to be closer to business decision making and oversee outgoing dollars. They must also be able to present financial information to non-financial audiences, make strategic recommendations and work with colleagues from diverse departments," he said.

According to Brushfield, employers take the view that some skills such as technical competencies can be taught, while other soft skills such as building rapport cannot.

"Employers have the opinion that they are in a better position to teach the required functional skills through on-the-job and professional training, but you can't teach someone how to build relationships and develop rapport," he said.

Brushfield advises job seekers to use the employment interview as an opportunity to establish a rapport with hiring managers. "The conversation should be natural and applicants should try to find common ground with the prospective employer."

Rapport developed in the interview will continue to be of benefit, as it is a necessity that accounting and finance professionals can work well with colleagues throughout the business, and when representing the business.



“No matter how hard employees work or how many good ideas they may have, if they cannot connect with their colleagues, their professional life will suffer,” said Brushfield.

Robert Half’s CFO Master Series, an online video series that unearths personal and professional insights from some of Australia’s leading CFO’s, features a video with Gillian Larkins, CFO of Westpac Institutional Bank. In this video, Larkins talks about the role of the CFO and the importance of connecting with colleagues.

“You just have to be aware – continuously reading, continuously talking to your colleagues, talking to your mentors, talking to your bosses,” she said.

The US survey was developed by Accountemps, a division of Robert Half International which is the world’s first and largest specialised staffing service. 1,400 interviews were conducted with CFOs over the phone. You can view the CFO Master Series at <http://rhiwatch.viotv.com/>.

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About Robert Half

Robert Half International Inc. (RHI) pioneered specialised staffing services and today is the world’s leader in the field. Founded in 1948, the company is traded on the New York Stock Exchange (symbol: RHI) and operates four separate divisions in Australia, each serving distinct markets. They include: Robert Half Finance & Accounting, for temporary and permanent finance and accounting personnel; Robert Half Financial Services Group, for high-calibre finance and banking professionals; Robert Half Management Resources, for specialised interim financial professionals and Office Team, for highly skilled temporary administrative support. There are more than 360 Robert Half International locations in Asia Pacific, Europe, North America and South America. Visit www.roberthalf.com.au

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