

Resolutions

T By **Mano Mahadeva, CPA, MBA** | Column Editor

Today's finance role within an enterprise has transitioned into one that looks to its past, but helps shape its future. No longer the back water bad guys, department heads across organizations look to finance leaders as valued partners and collaborators to garner business insight and gain operational efficiency. This transition, however, does impact roles and responsibilities within the finance team – which may require the acquisition of new skills, capabilities or experience by team members for effective results.

To be relevant today, all of us need to professionally evolve and be proactive in doing so instead of waiting to be told. However, this is a challenge for us, because the commodity of time is insufficient to cater to the many conflicting priorities and distractors. So, as we wind down 2017, here is an opportunity for us to help reprioritize time and activities so that we can include such new skills and capabilities in the coming year. To help you on your way, below are some areas to consider, which may be very meaningful to your career.

Basic skills are still very important to one's career and they are easier "said" than done – those of communication, presentation, writing and presence! In simple terms, **communication** is knowing how to convey and receive messages in person, as well as by email, phone and social media. Communication skills include listening (being an active listener), non-verbal communication (hand gesture, eye movement), saying just enough with clarity, using a friendly tone and stating information with confidence, empathy, open-mindedness and respect. All of this sounds very simple and obvious, but it is the one area that trips us up the most.

Presentation skills help get our message across, clearly and effectively, to our audience, such as to our board, management members, investors or other constituents. This can be a daunting task to most anyone, but can be mostly mitigated by lots of preparation and work. Toastmasters International is a group that helps one develop public speaking and leadership skills through practice and feedback in a club setting. If you don't have the time to attend these meetings, set up your phone/camera and record yourself! I have done this many times and they can provide a very scary, but educational moment watching one's self perform poorly!

Writing skills are coming back in a big way. Employers have begun to ask potential employees to write answers to certain questions, such as on a project plan or a business plan, in their presence, to check on one's ability to write. It's no surprise that texting and Twitter messages have become almost simply acronyms and single alphabets these days. Finance team members correspond with numerous constituencies, internally and externally, so this required core skill set is receiving a higher status of importance.



Knowledge – Reading a variety of materials and classroom or online learning can help us keep up with the latest changes in the profession. The acquired knowledge helps change the way we think and helps to reframe questions and solutions. Good decisions come from knowledge and not pure numbers – in the real world, it is about making critical half-time adjustments that help our company stay in the game. A habit of voraciously reading (or listening to) quality journals, periodicals, research papers, business books and summaries helps us gain insight and perspectives to shake up any traditional, familiar or inert ways. Regardless of the way acquired, a nugget of critical information is worth its weight in gold.

Critical Self-Review – It is helpful for us to conduct our own honest look back over the past year to reflect on what worked and what did not. A useful tool that ably supplements our own review can be done with a 360 review that provides feedback on our performance by professionals within our department, as well as those outside. We can compare both results to assess our strengths and deficiencies and remedy any shortfalls.

Walking in Others' Shoes – Most of us like to stay in our comfort zone, since this is what we know and we do it well. Why not work with a colleague in another area to understand the challenges they face so that we might be more sympathetic to their needs? It also helped me to better understand our key business drivers and those factors that made them change. It gave me an opportunity to explain variances beyond mentioning a percent change.

Outstanding leaders drive business performance. They can turn around a business. They can build up teams and create a culture to foster innovation. It's all about one's mindset – we, as professionals, need to be nimble and willing to adapt to a changing ecosystem. The good news is that we have the capacity and capability to adapt, but how we disrupt ourselves is a skill that needs to be cultivated. ■

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