

# THE UNMISTAKABLE SOFT SKILLS OF THE 21ST CENTURY ACCOUNTANT

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***In time past, Accountants were often perceived as hard-nosed, numbers-oriented, and dour but the truth is that accountants are human beings like everyone else. They have soft skills and personality traits just like any other person and they deserve to be treated with respect.***

21st Century Skills are considered the most important skills to succeed in today's workplace. Technology is ever-changing and so, impacting the people working in professional services firms. The new generation of accountants is more tech-savvy, more business savvy and more engaged with their clients than ever before. They are also more confident, knowledgeable and professionally adventurous than ever before because they have the skills to handle business problems, regardless of the complexity.

## **UNDERSTANDING SOFT SKILLS**

Soft skills are the essential set of skills needed to successfully interact with others professionally. They set the professionals apart from their peers in the corporate world and can make all the difference in passing, networking, and productivity with clients and colleagues. The skills include managing emotions, building rapport, communication and conflict resolution, relationship management, and customer service. While hard skills such as accounting knowledge can be learned through formal classroom training or self-study, soft skills are acquired through experience gained during normal day-to-day working life with clients or peers.

The 21st-Century Accountants have a lot on their plates: managing multitasking, working with people of diverse affiliations across the globe and keeping up with new regulations and trends. In the course of achieving a perfect or near-perfect result, an Accountant may feel overwhelmed or stressed out but it doesn't have to be so. The ability to work well with others and use one's interpersonal skills to build relationships, will lead to lots of business opportunities.

## **THE UNMISTAKABLE SOFT SKILLS SET FOR THE 21ST CENTURY ACCOUNTANT**

The soft skills required by Accountants vary from one service industry to another but there some basic skills that all professional Accountants should possess.

### **• COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

This is the ability to express oneself in writing, verbally, through emails, phone and face-to-face conversations. It also involves the ability to carefully listen to what others have to say in very clear or unambiguous terms and to respond appropriately.

Accountants need to be able to communicate their findings and recommendations so that both parties are on the same page about what's been accomplished and what requires more attention or direction, thus establishing effective relationships that would help in ensuring success. Additionally, accountants must be able to communicate effectively with clients and other stakeholders who may have different priorities beyond accounting.

## • LISTENING SKILLS

Another important soft skill for any professional Accountant is the ability to listen. It is essential that one can listen well both on a one-to-one basis as well as when larger groups of people are talking at once. Listening effectively involves actively engaging in the conversation by asking questions, offering one's opinion, and providing feedback or suggestions when appropriate. This will enable one to gain an understanding of what other people are saying and allow one to form an opinion based on what they have said rather than just being told what they think or feel without any input from oneself!



## • ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

This is simply the ability to handle a large workload or implement a complex project within an established time frame. This means that accountants should be comfortable with new technologies such as email, the internet, databases, and computer programs used in their daily work as well as modern software packages like Microsoft Excel or Google sheets. It also means being comfortable with different kinds of machines used by accountants in performing their duties such as calculators, scanners, or printers.

## • ANALYTICAL SKILLS

*The role of an Accountant is not just about financial analysis or tax planning; it involves analyzing and interpreting numbers and writing reports that would be read by other people who need the information from their own perspectives on their own projects. The Accountant's role is, therefore, one of a facilitator rather than a controller, someone whose job it is to find out what needs to be done, how best it can be done, and then make sure it actually gets done in the most effective and efficient manner. Examples of Analytical Skills are as follows:*

- Forecasting.
- Problem-solving.
- Data mining.
- Data and metrics interpreting.
- Data Analysis.
- Creative Thinking.
- Critical Thinking.



## • LOVE FOR KNOWLEDGE SKILLS

Finally, 21st century Accountants need a deep understanding of their field—including its history and future challenges—to be successful at what they do today. This can take time but it's worth investing. Succinctly, the love of learning/knowledge means a passion for learning, a desire to learn just for learning's sake.

## • HOW TO PROMOTE SOFT SKILLS

Accountants are in a unique position to become more visible and effective in their works. They have been known to be quiet professionals, often sitting behind the scenes and doing their jobs while others take the spotlight. However, as we move into the 21st century, Accountants need to begin to take a more pro-active roles in the business world.

- There are many ways to promote soft skills but the most effective methods are those that are based on the qualities of those around an Accountant. For example, if soft skills are to be promoted, then as an Accountant, it is important that one makes sure that clients see them as important assets. This can be done by demonstrating how one's soft-skills can help in achieving business goals or make life easier for others.



- It is imperative to make one's soft skills very visible. Be intentional about promoting the soft skills by exhibiting them publicly, be it at professional or social events. When an Accountant demonstrates such abilities, people would relate better to what he or she is saying and doing. This will increase sales opportunities for one's company because people will pay attention when they realize that one cares about what one does.
- One can focus on what makes one unique as a professional Accountant. This may include sharing experiences that demonstrate how one's personality traits have helped one to succeed at something over time (such as being able to adapt quickly when faced with new situations).

- To promote one's soft skills, it is necessary to make sure that one's soft skills are authentic and genuine so they don't come off as fake or pretending.

## CONCLUSION

In the wildly tech-savvy age we live in, it is no surprise that the role of the accountant is changing. Changes in technology have subsequently led to changes in the skills necessary for successful professionals. Anyone can learn to effectively manage accounts while developing skills that will make them invaluable in any job.

Accounting is still and will always remain a reliable and stable profession putting soft skills into use. Even if technology continues to change the way we track business finances, Accountants would continue to be sought after for their immense knowledge of record keeping, bookkeeping, and their dedication to accuracy. Accountants can earn a lot in their field but it is soft skills like diplomacy, integrity, communication and leadership that would allow them to stand out and be successful in their careers.

### 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY SKILLS

- Critical thinking**  
Critical thinking is generating questions, evaluating information and arguments, making connections, identifying patterns, reasoning, constructing knowledge and applying it to solve problems in the real world.
- Communication**  
Communication is appropriately interacting with others to convey meaning and gain understanding for multiple purposes, settings, and audiences including the digital environment.
- Creativity**  
Creativity is generating ideas and approaches to design innovations, construct solutions, build understanding, and express perspectives.
- Collaboration**  
Collaboration is working interdependently, learning from and contributing to the learning of others for a shared purpose in a wide range of environments.
- Growth mindset**  
Growth mindset is working through challenges showing tenacity, perseverance, resilience, self-regulation and self-advocacy.
- Citizenship**  
Citizenship is respectfully and positively impacting others and being actively involved in addressing community, national and/or global issues.