

People skills make accountants count

Excellent technical qualifications and a well-presented CV may be enough to get you noticed by potential employers, but won't be enough to keep their attention for long if the rest of your skills set doesn't measure up

In an industry characterised by the need for strong technical skills, personal development is often forgotten. If you're aiming for your first job post qualification, Page Personnel Finance knows that it's your soft skills that can set you apart from the crowd.

It's never a case of one skill set fits all, but there is a trend for the similar sorts of skills that are in demand – regardless of level or organisation. A lack of these skills or the capacity to develop them will limit your ability to progress your career. Strong qualifications are a given in the competitive job market, but according to Peter Istead, MD of Page Personnel Finance in London, the key soft skills in demand are:

- Communication skills, both written and verbal.
- Ability to simplify technical terms.
- Commercial awareness.
- Management skills.
- Influencing skills (especially in group work).
- Problem solving.

As your CV is the first thing to get you noticed by a recruitment consultant or hiring manager, it



is important to include evidence of your non-technical achievements, according to Istead. The role you've played in commercial business areas and where you've interfaced with external customers are key to reference. Evidence of your ability to apply numeracy and knowledge of IT to real life situations is also key.

Soft skills 'most important'

Soft skills are "the most important" to look out for when hiring, according to Lee Gibson, commercial & finance director at Serco: "Technical skills are a given, they are mandatory, but what differentiates a candidate are the softer skills." Gibson rates the ability to "listen and

learn", and most crucially, "influence" as the most important skills a finance professional should possess.

Matt Ashley, group financial controller at National Express, agrees that soft skills are very important for accountants. He classifies finance roles into four broad categories: data gathering, data analysis, decision support and decision making. It is in the latter three categories that Ashley finds it is particularly crucial for finance job seekers to display strong interpersonal skills.

The soft skills that Ashley looks for when hiring is the ability to persuade and influence, and the ability to explain challenging concepts in simple terms for a non-specialist audience. "With potentially complex issues, like tax and financial derivatives, it is important to be able to explain them as simply as possible," he said.

The interview

An interview gives you the chance to show off more than the facts listed on your CV. Recruiters and hiring managers will typically use competency based interviewing to uncover your skills, where the interviewer will ask you to describe real-life situations in which you've overcome challenges. So be armed and ready with examples of your achievements to ensure that your people skills complement your top-notch technical qualifications to secure you the job of your dreams. [PG](#)

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