



Six Tips for Communicating with Non-Financial Executives

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It may be hard for some financial professionals to understand, but not everyone in this world is a “numbers person.” For some people, crunching numbers and analyzing spreadsheets comes naturally, and they enjoy it — such people tend to go to work in the financial field. For others, digging into a spreadsheet is about as welcome as going to the dentist for a root canal.

It's not uncommon for Los Angeles and Southern California business executives to fall into this latter category. Many of them came up through the sales ranks of organizations and have never had to deal much with numbers. Not only do they not really understand spreadsheets and financial statements, but they don't really *want* to understand them. That's what they have hired their financial team for.

Speaking the “Financial Lingo”

Finance leaders would do well to remember this when it comes to communicating with members of the executive team, including owners and CEOs. Simply put, you can't assume that non-financial executives are going to speak the same “financial lingo” that you do. Nor should you expect them to understand complex spreadsheets and financial statements that you take for granted.

Given this, here are six things to keep in mind when it comes to working and communicating with non-financial members of the executive team:

- 1. Learn to present in a graphic, not just a numeric, way.** Non-financial people can usually understand financial data better when it is presented graphically, rather than numerically. So when making PowerPoint presentations to the executive committee, for example, be sure to include plenty of pie charts and bar graphs, rather than just rows and columns of numbers.
- 2. Work on honing your people skills.** Financial leaders cannot afford not to have strong people skills. If this doesn't come naturally for you, make it a priority to improve your people skills. Learn to listen well and ask good questions, as well as how to understand different personality types and resolve conflicts.
- 3. Focus on developing your marketing skills.** Most financial professionals lack a basic understanding of marketing skills. In order to communicate most effectively with the executive team, you need to understand the basics of marketing and not only the role it plays in the overall organization, but also its impact on the finance department.
- 4. Hone your time management and organizational skills.** Managing your time well, meeting deadlines and being organized and detail-oriented are also critical skills for finance leaders. It's important that you are able to work well under pressure and help solve other people's problems. If you can, you will be viewed as a good team player by other members of the finance team and the executive team.

5. Be open to learning new skills and software programs. For example, mastering Microsoft Excel is a must for any finance leader. The better you know Excel, the faster you can respond to requests from members of the executive team.

6. Be passionate about your job and willing to pay the price. In today's competitive corporate world, finance leaders cannot afford to be complacent or "ho-hum" about their jobs. The best finance leaders are competitive and passionate about what they do and willing to work long hours and go above and beyond what's expected, doing whatever it takes to get the job done.

More Than Just Numbers

In short, executive leaders are looking for more than just numbers from finance leaders. Your ability to present financial information, communicate clearly with the executive team, work well with others (including under pressure), and develop strong relationships across the organization are crucial elements in your role as a finance leader. If you don't possess these skill sets, the executive management team will become frustrated due to a lack of understanding of the financial position of the company — and your ability to rise within the organization will be severely limited.

An outsourced CFO service provider can help in these areas by offering hands-on guidance to help you communicate with and present information to the executive team in a way that is easy for them to grasp and understand. The result will be a more informed (and less frustrated) executive team that is able to make better decisions and a better working atmosphere for everyone in the organization, including members of the executive team and the finance team. You as a financial leader will get proper training and put yourself in a better position to rise up through the ranks of your organization, including possibly becoming a member of the executive team if you aren't currently.

Concluding Thoughts

Not everyone in this world is a "numbers person." While crunching numbers and analyzing spreadsheets comes naturally for some, it's about as welcome as going to the dentist for others — including many Los Angeles and Southern California business leaders. Finance leaders would do well to remember this when it comes to communicating with members of the executive team. Simply put, you can't assume that non-financial executives are going to speak the same "financial lingo" that you do. An outsourced CFO service provider can offer hands-on guidance to help you communicate with and present information to the executive team in a way that is easy for them to grasp and understand.

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