



# The one skill you need to become a CFO

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I talk to a lot of executive finance leaders for my job at Barden and it's always fascinating to hear the story of how they got *there* – how they evolved, overcame challenges and surpassed their peers; to hear about what has made them different throughout their career to bring them success.

In every story, there is one skill that comes up time and time again: the ability to influence others and drive outcomes.

Some may say that's leadership but, in reality, it's only one part of the whole package. Not all leaders are great influencers, but all great leaders have the art of influence nailed.

Luckily, through their stories, I've learned that everyone can master this important skill.

### **1. Make honing your people skills a priority**

Some lucky people are definitely born people-people. They can talk the talk and walk the walk when it comes to relationship building and stakeholder management. But for most of us, it's something we need to work on.

To start developing your skills in this area, you need to understand how others perceive you, be real about your level of engagement skills and then work on them in and out of the office.

### **2. Focus on your relationships**

As someone soon to be a qualified

accountant and an emerging finance leader, you're an expert. You're used to being in a position where you hold the answers and are often advising on some very complex matters. However, how this comes across can vary widely between professionals. Be careful not to fall into the trap of lecturing, and be conscious that however 'right' you know you are, it's not right to bulldoze a conversation with your opinion from the start. You may be right, but you've got to get people to trust that you're *alright* first.

### **3. Let others take ownership**

Have you ever noticed the difference between members of the team when they are working on something that is their idea, versus when someone else gives them the task? What if you could get them to have this level of ownership with all ideas and projects? You can. This is something every great leader has down to an art – the act of getting people to come up with ideas on their own and thereby creating a sense of ownership. Discussion is the place it starts – not instruction or mandate.

### **4. Remember: you're only as good as your team**

Having your team's back at all times is key to influence. You look out for them, and they will return the favour. The same can be said for your peers – *quid pro quo* makes you a better leader. You'll never get someone to do something if they believe you wouldn't reciprocate so start thinking about how to build a truly equal playing field in terms of trust, respect and loyalty.

### **5. Include. Never delude or exclude**

Decisions made outside of your team's control will always be seen as instruction. Likewise, in accountancy, shaky explanations or an overt manipulation of the facts will not go down well.

Never delude team members when it comes to the reasoning for a decision or exclude them from making the decision with you. Including the team, even partially, ensures you get the buy-in you need to make things happen.

### **We're all human**

Above all, don't lose sight of the human element of delivering outcomes. You must connect people to purpose. Always go into a new project thinking, "what's in it for them?" and focus on how to influence through those benefits.

### **Leadership is a frame of mind**

As a trainee, watch out for these traits in your managers as you chart your course through your accounting qualification and beyond. You don't have to be a manager to be a leader. You can be a leader no matter your level or your experience. Leadership is a frame of mind, not a job title. Learn how the better managers use these techniques and learn from the mistakes of the others. Your ability as a leader in the future will be shaped by how you interpret and adapt to the leadership styles around you now.

Good luck and get out there and lead!