

# 10 Characteristics of a Professional Accountant

## Getting in touch with your soft side.

Kerry Dimmer

Your numbers are good, so too your qualifications but aspiring to becoming a 'great' Professional Accountant requires more than technical ability. Kerry Dimmer uncovers 10 soft skills that will help define you as exceptional.

**S**oft skills are the people, social and interpersonal abilities that when well-developed enhance the quality of our business relationships. These abilities relate to self-development, self-management and self-awareness. We reflect these in our personality, our attitude and behaviour.

Because soft skills are intangible they are difficult to measure. It's the X-factor that makes you shine and is both attractive and enviable. Tobie Oosthuizen is the national training director of BDO, an audit, advisory and tax company, and Stefan Bezuidenhout, a lecturer in the department of accounting at the University of Pretoria. Both agree that the soft skills of the accountancy profession need attention.

Bezuidenhout says that the academic programme is already so full "that there just isn't enough time to expand a student outside of the realm of hard skills", so the onus to develop soft skills generally falls to the individual. Few companies offer in-house soft skills training however BDO is the exception, having created internal programmes that focus on employees aspiring to leadership.

**The following are key X-factor dynamics that you may be lacking:**

### 1. Communication

Success often depends on relationships that are formed by the maintenance of skilful communications. Being able to articulate verbally and in writing presents an opportunity to make an impact.

### 2. Time Management

Critical to an accountant who needs to prioritise tasks and work on any number of projects simultaneously. The dedication to meet a deadline at all costs, coming through at a pinch. Time Management people are busy people but they are organised.

### 3. Critical and conflict thinking

This involves the depth of problem solving, especially during times of extreme pressure. Bezuidenhout emphasises conflict is something that people tend to avoid because it can be stressful.

### 4. Strong work ethic

Being conscientious, motivated and dedicated to getting the job done properly and making sacrifices, even personal ones, when necessary.

### 5. Grooming and personal habits

'Professionalism is portrayed in the grooming', says Bezuidenhout. You are a reflection of your organisation so your social skills will be scrutinised by employers and clients. Your workstation should be neat and organised.

### 6. Team player

Employers are interested to see how you cope as a member of a group. Do you interact well, are you able to cooperate, motivate ideas, identify the potential of a team member, and work within the unit as a collective powerhouse? Can you take a leadership role when you need to and share praise?

### 7. Self-confidence/awareness

Do you believe in yourself, that you can do the job, are you calm and can you inspire confidence in others? Do you have the courage to accept criticism and apply what you learn? It's all about being in tune with yourself, fitting into your own skin comfortably.

### 8. People management

Empowerment is key, and not just for self gain. It's about how you value, inspire, engage, coach, mentor and appreciate your colleagues. This is an easily 'learnable' practice that teaches how to bring out the best in others, even the most difficult of characters or across a broad range of cultures.

### 9. The three R's

Are you resourceful, resilient and reactive? Do you adapt well to new situations and challenges, do you embrace change, and are you open to new ideas?

### 10. Confidentiality and honesty

Do you have integrity? It is crucial that a professional accountant is trusted but can balance that with honesty. The numbers never lie, nor should you! □

