

Honing your soft skills in a rapidly innovating industry

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Credit management is entering the age of automation, and like countless other fields, credit management has seen the potential of automation and artificial intelligence as it supercharges everyday processes and maximizes efficiency.

Why it matters: For those just entering the field, familiarizing themselves with the latest innovative credit strategies is at the forefront of their minds. But many worry that becoming too preoccupied with new technology could lead to many neglecting to take the time to hone and practice their soft skills, which can make a big difference in work performance.

Soft skills are not related to the technical aspects of credit management, but focus more on interpersonal relationships, communication and working style. The ability to work well with others on a team, manage your time and communicate effectively within your company and with external customers are all soft skills that credit managers engage in every day. It is important that these skills are valued the same as more technical skills because they make a huge difference in your working relationships and work performance.

“Soft skills are any skills that you have or can develop that don’t live in a technical area,” said Tracy Mitchell, CBA, director of accounts receivable for Trinity Logistics (Seaford, DE). “You need to learn these extra skills about credit because the technical skills are the easiest pieces to learn. Numbers are numbers and they’re always going to be numbers, but people are very individual and those are the things that you really must work on because we aren’t born knowing how to identify personalities, and we aren’t born knowing how to communicate well with other people.”

The solution is not to focus solely on soft skills while neglecting those technical skills, rather it is important to understand that a mixture of both technical and soft skills is what makes a well-rounded and successful credit manager. Without properly honing your soft skills, namely your emotional intelligence in the workplace, it will be hard to effectively evaluate your own work performance and understand your own strengths and weaknesses.

“Developing soft skills is really about self-awareness and absorbing natural human cues from the world around you,” said Chelsea Hirn, CBA, director of credit operations for KGP Telecommunications, LLC (Faribault, MN). “It takes knowing your own style of communication and how people have received you and asking, ‘Okay, was that the best approach to that situation?’ and growing and learning from it.”

The bottom line: Honing your soft skills can be key to not only getting the job, but getting promoted. Soft skills are crucial for any credit professional, especially for those in leadership roles where they are tasked with managing a team. If a person cannot be trusted to facilitate a strong collaborative working environment, they might end up losing out on possible promotions.