

Base Skills for CPAs Aren't Always Accounting Oriented

What nonaccounting skills are essential for aspiring CPAs, and how can educators best prepare students to succeed as business partners in accounting roles?

The article by Cory Ng and colleague, published in the Pennsylvania CPA Journal, highlights the importance of nonaccounting skills for Certified Public Accountants (CPAs) in both corporate and public accounting roles. Modern accountants are expected to be business partners, requiring a blend of technical accounting knowledge and strong professional skills. Core competency frameworks from the AICPA and the Institute of Management Accountants emphasize these nonaccounting skills, which include communication, critical thinking, and collaboration.

Communication skills are vital because CPAs must explain complex financial information to clients and colleagues without accounting backgrounds. Despite this, students often underestimate the importance of communication. Alumni involvement and practical exercises like presentations and informational interviews can help students appreciate and develop these skills. Role-playing, though uncommon in accounting education, may also enhance interpersonal skills.

Critical thinking is another key competency, involving the ability to analyze, evaluate, and solve real-world problems. The CPA Exam now uses task-based simulations to assess these skills, encouraging deeper learning through problem-based learning and case studies. These methods simulate real-life messy problems without fixed solutions.

Collaboration skills are increasingly necessary, but teamwork can be challenging due to personality differences and varying enthusiasm. Group projects with peer evaluations and case competitions can improve students' ability to work in teams, fostering conflict resolution, project management, and communication skills. Educators play a crucial role in preparing students with these essential base skills.

MAJOR TAKEAWAYS:

- Communication skills are essential for CPAs to explain complex financial data clearly to clients and non-accounting colleagues.
- Critical thinking involves analyzing and solving real-world problems through authentic, case-based learning and simulation assessments.
- Collaboration skills, developed through group projects and competitions, prepare students to work effectively in diverse professional teams.

WHO NEEDS TO KNOW:

- Accounting Educators
- Accounting Students
- Accounting Firms

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