PROFESSIONALS GUIDE

UNLOCKING A SUCCESSFUL CAREER IN FINANCE

Think Ahead

ACCA
PROFESSIONALS GUIDE
UNLOCKING A SUCCESSFUL CAREER IN FINANCE
Your opportunity awaits...
Flexible and mobile, your role as a finance professional can take you anywhere you want to go.

Set your own course wherever you’re heading
Everyone’s career path is different. Some people know exactly where they want to go right from the start. Others might discover the perfect job almost by accident.

Making dreams a reality
“We must always be on our toes to seek new challenges and to explore our true potential.”

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Flexible and mobile, your role as a finance professional can take you anywhere you want to go. Your opportunity awaits…

Every finance professional begins their career in the same place: with a vision of where they want to be and a hope that, one day, it will happen. Over the past 110 years ACCA has produced countless highly regarded accountants. Many have excelled in the world of finance, others have moved to other company roles such as CEO or COO. Some have stayed in Pakistan and there are others who have travelled the world.

Here they reveal their secrets to achieving real success.

Be an all-round professional

Modern finance professionals have to be commercially aware, innovative, good managers and comfortable when it comes to voicing their opinions. “It’s only by demonstrating the deep understanding of the challenges faced by those in senior operations roles that you develop your credibility,” says Muhammed Arslan, ACCA, Accounts manager at Solex Chemicals in Multan.

“You need to be able to present your findings at board level with confidence backed up by evidence, while being ready for anything when they start drilling down into the detail of your recommendations.”

Have a plan

A career plan will help you keep your goals in sight, remind you of what’s important to you and help you make good choices. But be patient - success doesn’t tend to happen overnight. Asad Ali, finance executive at Pak Arab Refinery Limited (PARCO), says it is worth waiting for: “There are no shortcuts when it comes to success. Patience is the key. Whatever the circumstances are, keep moving forward, one step at a time.”

Become a good communicator

Negotiating with others, expressing yourself clearly and advising clients and colleagues are at the heart of a good finance professional’s role.
Fozia Hussain FCCA, general manager finance at DP World based in Karachi, says becoming an effective communicator is as important as every other aspect of your training.

“As finance professionals we are trained to develop the traits required for decision making, time management and self-organisation. 
“But it’s how we communicate that determines how successful we’ll be at gaining the trust of those who we want to treat us as business partners.”

Keep thinking ahead

Develop a broad skillset so you’re ready to take advantage of the next big opportunity as soon as it arrives.

Faraz Fareed, assistant finance manager of Soorty Enterprises in Lahore, says: “I enjoy continuing to learn by attending seminars and workshops or by joining online discussions and networking."

“It’s fundamental for self-improvement and building your career even if it’s simply listening to other people’s experiences.”

Finally... stay in touch

Keeping up to date with industry developments and news is vital if you are to perform at your best and seize opportunities.

Get to know the important people whose opinions matter, follow their social media accounts and engage with them.

Go to conferences, attend careers’ fairs and check ACCA Careers’ Job Board regularly so you are on top of all the opportunities there are to progress your career.

Remember, when you’re part of ACCA you’ll have all the support and guidance you need to make your own success story.

Finance professionals in industry need to demonstrate they have a grip on business tactics, strategic planning and risk. Calmness, patience and tact are vital characteristics.

Faraz Fareed  
Assistant Finance Manager, Soorty Enterprises
Apply yourself

Research vacancies thoroughly, so you know what’s required and are confident that it’s right for you, both in terms of qualifications and your personal interests. Applying for jobs that don’t match your current skillset will just lead to disappointment. Remember too that sometimes you only discover what you can do, by challenging yourself. Kashif Mehmood, Executive Audit Officer at Allied Bank Limited, says: “We must make our own way rather than trail the footprints created by others. “We must always be on our toes to seek new challenges and to explore our true potential.”

Be your own brand

Make a point of highlighting your achievements outside of the workplace both in your application and your interview, so potential employers can see there’s far more to you than your qualifications alone. “Evidence of value added on their CVs will be a massive advantage, such as involvement in projects, joined committees and out-of-office interests” says Nikki Turberville from Michael Page Financial Services.

Stand out from the crowd

Interviews can be intimidating, it can be hard to get your message across. Little things make a big difference. Rachel Ashe, online marketing specialist at Hays Ireland, says: “Your body language gives the interviewer a strong indication of how you would fit into a team. Avoid touching your face and hair as it distracts the interviewer; they might think you are not comfortable with the questions being asked.”

Be confident in your abilities

Entrepreneur Arfan Zaka ACCA is Chief Operating Officer at Zaka Brothers Ltd, which has a chain of 24 motorbike showrooms and deals in a range of electronic household products. Since 2009 he has seen it grow to a PKR 500 Million business with 125 employees. “My advice to all ACCA aspirants is that they must have confidence in their degree and trust in their esteemed institution, ACCA,” he says. “Show gratitude to others, but keep your spirits high as a professional qualified accountant. “Believe in yourself, no one is better qualified than us.”
Make an impression

You want your interviewer to remember you – so ask pertinent questions and flag up your qualities.

Nicholas Kirk, regional managing director, Page Personnel Finance, says: ‘If you want to be a truly outstanding candidate, you need to ask some memorable questions during your interview.

“Most candidates will be asking top-line questions about the role such as KPIs, so try and come up with some that will really stand out.

Fozia Hussain, FCCA, general manager finance at DP World, Karachi, adds: “I’d stress the importance of demonstrating initiative. It’s often only when we go that extra mile and grasp the specifics of difficult challenges that we can root out solutions and add real value.”

The perfect job – and the career you want – is out there waiting for you. Now go and get it.

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Chief Operating Officer,
Zaka Brothers Ltd
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Kashif Mehmood
Executive Audit Officer, Allied Bank Limited
Everyone’s career path is different. Some people know exactly where they want to go right from the start, others might discover the career they want almost by accident. And sometimes that can take them to places they never thought possible...

What does the future hold for you?

You’ll be in demand...

Fuad Azim Hashimi, President and CEO Pakistan Institute of Corporate Governance predicts rising demand for financial professionals. “Pakistan will move steadily but surely towards documentation of the economy. This alone will spur demand for finance professionals in the country,” he says. He believes there will be an increasing demand from the private sector for capital to be raised through IPOs or private equity.

“You’ll be more than a ‘number cruncher’...

As a modern finance professional you’ll work with gadgets and tools that will help you become more flexible and adaptable than ever, changing your role and creating fresh opportunities. Mubashir Dagia FCCA says: “Technological advances will shift the focus from computing to consulting, as accountants take on new roles as consultants, advisors and performance managers, relied on to analyse business information, support decisions and provide strategic advice. “Services currently provided by accountants such as data entry, book keeping and tax returns, will become less profitable and disappear due to automation. “Accounting specialists will be favoured over generalists.”

“Finance professionals are equipped to respond to such needs and will therefore continue to be in demand.”

SET YOUR OWN COURSE
WHEREVER YOU’RE HEADING
You’ll surprise yourself…

At some point you’ll probably wonder if you’re doing the right thing. Are you in the right job, can you pass those exams? Have confidence – you’ll be amazed at what might happen.

Malik Muhammed Ikran ul Haq is a manager in accounts and administration at Zeeshan Electronics, Islamabad. Yet he only embarked on his studies to become an ACCA finance professional when he reached his mid-30s.

“I joined the Pakistan Air Force immediately after passing the SSC exams in 1990,” he explains. “When I was close to retirement in 2006/07, I thought of my future. I would be 34 years old.”

He opted to study with ACCA, and now believes he made the perfect choice.

“I am glad that I made the right decision as now I can proudly say that I am at a better position than my PAF colleagues.

“If I can get success through ACCA qualification at the age of 40, then I am sure a young ACCA member can lead the world.”

You’ll overcome challenges…

There are bound to be personal and career challenges that threaten to throw your plans off course. The trick is to stay focussed and not give up.

Kashif Mehmood started his career as a customer service assistant for a wholesale group. He’s now Executive Audit Officer at Allied Bank Limited. “Regardless of the difficulties we may face individually, in our families, in our communities and in our nation, the old adage is still true - you can make excuses or you can make progress, but you cannot make both,” he says.

“Be honest, be realistic to yourself and to your work. There is no substitute for those core values.”
You won’t be alone...

The workplace mentor is an essential companion on the road to ACCA membership. They’ll be there to offer guidance, support as well as oversee your performance. So you’ll always have the help you need from someone who understands the challenges you face. It can help to identify a range of mentors who can help you at different stages.

Robert Half managing director Phil Sheridan says: “Finding a mentor is important. Having someone you can turn to throughout your career to ask for advice, whether it’s navigating office politics or preparing for a career transition, will hold you in good stead.

“Even the most senior professionals will typically have someone they turn to for guidance.”

If I can get success through ACCA qualification at the age of 40, then I am sure a young ACCA member can lead the world.

Malik Muhammed Ikran ul Haq
Manager Accounts and Administration, Zeeshan Electronics, Islamabad

The future is there for the taking. Where will your ACCA qualification take you?