

Voice over: Hello and welcome to the CPA Australia podcast, your weekly source for business leadership and Public Practise Accounting information.

Kimberly: I would like to welcome Sarah Godfrey, psychologist and coach to this podcast.

Sarah Godfrey: Thank you Kim. It's a pleasure to be here.

Kimberly: Thank you. We're going to be talking about human skills and future proof your career, an area that you're quite an expert in of course. To kick off then, what in your opinion do finance and accounting professionals need to add to their skill base for the future success in their careers?

Sarah Godfrey: It's an interesting one because accountants are an interesting breed of professionals. They are both practical and organised and very rational, and yet they have a very good nature. So I think moving forward it's to realise that technology and the way we're heading can be practical and organised and what we're really looking for is bringing out that agreeableness, that good natured part, which is the human skills, so that we emphasise things like authenticity, vulnerability, integrity, moving forward. And that will get the connection to the clients of the future.

Kimberly: Exactly. So it's a case of looking at those sort of elements that allow them to do their job better than they are currently doing with the advantage of using technology.

Sarah Godfrey: Yeah. So I think where the business profile is going is people looking for value. We can get services anywhere in the world now, it's very competitive, but people want connection. So they're really looking for what value do you give me. So if I invest in you, what do I get out of it other than the service? And I think that's where we really need to be thinking about professional development and self development. What can I enhance about myself that will bring people and think that I've got great value?

Kimberly: Absolutely. I think that's a really great point and one that I think is quite often missed in terms of that value proposition in terms of the service and the delivery, because then extends that customer authenticity as it were back and becomes quite bespoke I guess.

Sarah Godfrey: Well people are savvy. They know now the difference between selling a story or selling a product and an authentic person that's actually investing in them. And I think as the world turns we've got to be a bit careful about not being authentic within ourselves and being vulnerable and being open with integrity. Once we realise that and use that as a strength, then everything becomes quite pure and quite, I think more solid and people will invest more likely in that service.

Kimberly: Absolutely. Well quite often, I mean, in the public practise sector specifically, they have quite long relationships with clients, but then again, finance teams

that are doing this sort of work within their organisation. It's those sorts of relationships that the authenticity is needed. Disruption, innovation, change is the new normal. Agility, the digital economy are all referenced daily in business vernacular. You mentioned along the lines of that authenticity, maybe the relationship economy. I've heard you use that phrase before.

Sarah Godfrey: I guess that's one of mine.

Kimberly: Absolutely. Can you expand on what you mean by that?

Sarah Godfrey: Well, if we look historically we've got the consumer economy and then we've got the digital economy and those two have created a very different market out there. So consumerism was really about scarcity because we didn't have the internet and couldn't buy anything everywhere. And then the digital economy has changed. We've got abundance. Abundance is everywhere. You can get anything you want, anytime, anywhere practically. So the relationship economy is moving away from that and saying, if you can get everything anytime, anywhere, what's the difference? What's the point of value for people? And it's the relationship you do. So it's about collaboration with your clients, with other agencies and with the social world. So people are investing in what are you doing, rather than what are you giving me? And so the relationship economy is about relationships, interaction, human interaction. And we've kind of moved away from that.

Sarah Godfrey: Texting, emails, internet has created a bit of a block in our ability to be human with other humans. In my line of work, I've seeing a lot of younger generations coming through, incredibly anxious because they're great as long as I can email you if you're next to me. But if I have to sit in a meeting with you, those skills of nonverbal language, facial expression, all of those things are being lost, and that's what people are going to value. I can get everything online now, but what I want is a real connectivity with a person. So relationship economy is about building that.

Kimberly: Yeah. And I understand, I mean obviously with 18 year old daughters quite often their text that comes through and the meaning that is lost behind it. With that generation coming through to the workplace, that ability for them to connect with people in different ages. I mean, that's part of it as well. Quite often I have to say I'm using my sarcastic font on my phone so they can actually get the sense that I'm being silly or whatever.

Sarah Godfrey: But it's true because things like misinterpreting language. So if I'm used to looking at the screen to read how you feel and then I'm with a real person, I can miscommunicate what your facial expression and tone is. So we actually are losing these really basic skills. So that's what I wanted to bring to this, was these aren't new skills, I'm not teaching you anything you don't have. What I want is amp it up and make it far more accessible.

Kimberly: Absolutely. So those human skills then, communication, collaboration, innovation and solution finding. Let's unpack each one of those to understand not to a huge extent. We don't have to go to the bottom of your suitcase. What is a basic requirement in each instance? And perhaps what a finance professional would need to be doing at the highest possible level for each one of those? As you said, they're not new skills, they're already understood, but it's a case of making people aware that, that's what is needed. So communication.

Sarah Godfrey: Well communication I've taken from the soft skills that we've been kind of putting in the back shelf and not really thinking are that important. So communication is really about how we communicate. So it's not just on the one to one, it's how we communicate to the world, how we communicate our message, how we value those communications. But as I said a little earlier about the nonverbal language, about really reading people. And then there's another level and as a psychologist of course I'm really interested in this bit, is coming from our own place. So understanding why I'm communicating the way that I am and a lot of people are moving in this world without really knowing what motivates them or what is shadowing the conversations. So communication is a soft skill, but I think we really need to focus on it.

Kimberly: Interestingly, I was at an event earlier today and one of the panel discussions that was going on was about how can I be an authentic business partner in my business? And a lot of it came out about the communication piece. It wasn't necessarily what is it you need to say, but who is it you're talking to? What are the issues going to be with what you are suggesting? And answer those questions before they're asked. So that communication piece sits across a lot of it and understanding where they're coming from, where your audience is coming from.

Sarah Godfrey: In business, and like I own my own businesses, we shy away from vulnerability. We see that as a real weakness. But definitely we are now viewing vulnerability as the strength and authenticity is connected heavily to that. So I can't have an authentic conversation with you if I'm hiding, if I'm worried you're not going to like me or I'm not going to look professional or I'm not going to say the right thing, that God complex syndrome, you know, that we have to know the right answer. So I think when we talk about being authentic, we have to go a bit deeper and go vulnerable. So what am I really afraid of? If I can master that, then every conversation will be authentic because I know who I am.

Kimberly: I think you've freaked all of the listeners out now by saying the word vulnerable. [crosstalk 00:08:21] But I think, I mean because it's from that vulnerability, that authenticity and genuineness actually comes from, when you're genuinely trying to help somebody or genuinely tight trying to get the business or communicate within the business what it is you're trying to do.

Sarah Godfrey: And we're not perfect. The clients of the future don't [inaudible 00:08:39] Well, some of us might be, but the clients of the future, they know a lie, they know a falsity. So there's no use us continuing to pretend to be something we're not.

We've got to get really real I think, and that'll keep people loyal to the brand and loyal to the person and the service.

Kimberly: Absolutely and that's what it's about. So collaboration.

Sarah Godfrey: Collaboration is more than just working within teams. We're looking now at bigger pictures, the community, the social world, what are you doing to add value to the world? So your actions have to be bigger than just servicing your client. The client wants to see and how does that help the world? Where does that go? Who are you working with? What are your values? So collaboration is really about where you're investing yourself, and that then filters down to whether the client will like you or not. So it's a bigger picture than just working within teams and working within your workplace. We have to extend it and think what are we adding to the social world?

Kimberly: Absolutely, and I guess for those corporate members who are working within finance teams, when you talk about a client in that context, it's those other stakeholders, it's the marketing department, it's the operational department, it's those other ones that you need to communicate those finance and those figures to. I mean that works just as well in terms of it.

Sarah Godfrey: Yes, it's really about the effect I have on you and the effect I have on others. And if I can master that then it just spreads like a domino effect where everyone wins and everyone adds value.

Kimberly: Absolutely.

Sarah Godfrey: So collaboration is a big thing as well as far as the relationship economy.

Kimberly: So innovation.

Sarah Godfrey: Oh, my favourite innovation. I'm so loving this.

Kimberly: I knew you were going to go off on this one. It's like I'll just sit back now.

Sarah Godfrey: For years and years I've been saying in seminars and just in my workplace as in with people, we have made a huge error with the way that we recruit. We have screened out innovative people because they're the difficult people and they don't read well on the HR assessments. So innovation is big, creative flair is the rich of the new world. Again, the way we're heading computers programmes can do all the basic stuff. What we're looking for is innovative thinkers. People who are out of the box, they're coming to us with, you know, the term, the originals or outliers. These people are bringing new things to us and what we've done is trying to eradicate them from workplaces because they didn't fit moulds and standardised tests. So I'm really big on bringing those people, look for the innovators around you, get people talking about their ideas and allowing them to talk, which goes back to communication and collaboration.

Sarah Godfrey: Encourage people to have a different opinion. There's a story that CEO told me in advertising, and they had done this for a huge international company in advertising marketing and the whole team was so pumped. They were so pumped. They landed it. They were all congratulating each other. They took it to the agent and said, "Here we go." They put out the marketing ploy and that the company were just shocked. They said, "We hate it." And they rang me up and said, "How did that happen? What was the cognitive structure that we missed there? How did we get that wrong? We were so sure it was going to sell." And the problem was they were all the same person both on each end. So the company was all the same person and the marketing department were all the same type of person. No one was challenging it. There was no original thinker in that group so it didn't work.

Kimberly: There you go. It's an interesting one, isn't it? Sort of thinking outside the box or that blue sky thinking is a very important process.

Sarah Godfrey: And we've got to move inside, so it's not just outside. We have to be innovative with ourselves. Who am I really? What parts am I not using? What am I hiding from? That kind of internal innovation.

Kimberly: All of that challenging stuff.

Sarah Godfrey: Are you creeping out now yet?

Kimberly: So then the last point, that last human skill, solution finding. What do you mean by that in terms of how to develop that ability?

Sarah Godfrey: It taps into being innovative. So solution finding is I think one of the more challenging aspects of human skills, because we often don't like to own our problems. We look for Google and other sources to tell us what we should do. And so solution finding is about owning your stuff. So it's personal responsibility taken up a level. So first of all, what can I do about the problem and there's certain strategies you need to master before you can really take that on, but it's about looking for different ways of finding solutions. So instead of going down the old paths, what else can I do? How do I use my human skills better so that the solution I find impacts people in a different way, adds value, doesn't just meet my needs, but meets other needs. So solution finding rather than problem solving is about being more open and having more integrity and authenticity in the process.

Kimberly: Great. So is any one of those human skills more important than another?

Sarah Godfrey: Do I have a favourite?

Kimberly: Well yeah. Is there any bias in your answer?

Sarah Godfrey: A little bit of bias for me. I like the combination of authenticity and innovation, which is really communication and innovation. I think if you can land those first, things start to roll. You'll see a difference in the way that you're moving in the world and the way that you perceive yourself. So I think those two combined are where we're headed and if we can be vulnerable, authentic, and clever and creative, there's probably nothing that can stop us being successful.

Kimberly: Absolutely. Emotional intelligence, empathy, adaptability, resilience are all important. Where do they fit in your human skill sets? Do they fit in any particular area?

Sarah Godfrey: Yeah, I'm just kind of reworking small terms. I think we've heard empathy and resilience so much, particularly in professional development that just reworking them into terms like vulnerability and authenticity and starting to reshape them. Like empathy is great and we need it, but empathy can also tip over to another area. So we have to have balanced empathy. We have to understand what these human skills are or emotional languages really are and go back to basics and learn how to do them properly. So I think they're all relevant and all part of the human skill process is just moving them into different terms.

Kimberly: Yup. Well, I'm sure. Design thinking and creative thinking are currently popular methodologies and I think they fit into the ... I'm onto my next question, where do they sit within your framework? But again, I'm sure that they must crossover a little bit.

Sarah Godfrey: Again, I don't think what we're doing is creating new because there's very little new in this world, but what we're doing is being innovative with what we've got and heading back to basics because that's, I think where the fundamental error has occurred with our growth. So design thinking is fantastic, but it has a big component of empathy in those six stages. So again, that's exactly where we're hitting look for the empathy, the vulnerability and the authenticity there. And creative again is like the old school brainstorming is what we used to call creative thinking. It's a bit more practical, and it doesn't have things like vulnerability, authenticity, but it does have creativity. So they align beautifully with what we already know and I think there's not a huge gap between relationship economies and human skills and those older style of processes that we're very used to.

Kimberly: What about critical thinking?

Sarah Godfrey: Ah, critical thinking. That one I think we can get rid of, a little bit.

Kimberly: [crosstalk 00:16:30] Just tell me what you think Sarah. Don't be politically correct about anything.

Sarah Godfrey: No, not me. I think critical thinking ... I remember was it 20 years ago being filmed by the ABC, pontificating on about critical thinking skills. So I don't think

it's a new process to me at all, but it's very practical and organised in a rational and reasonable and intelligent, which is great, but it misses other things we need. Emotions, passion, again authenticity, creative thinking. So I think critical thinking is great in measured amounts with certain professions or processes, but where we're headed, we're going to have to think better than that. We can't just be analytical anymore. Again, we're going to have machines doing that. What we need to do is be thinkers.

Kimberly: This is the interesting thing, isn't it? And especially for the finance and accounting profession, sort of what you've traditionally done, where you've traditionally been verifying and looking at data and all the rest of it. That is going to be automated. That's going to be done by other things, but what you're capable of over here is actually authenticating that data. So understanding where the data is-

Sarah Godfrey: Interpreting it.

Kimberly: Absolutely. And that was exactly it. It's authenticating where that data has come from, making that that doesn't make sense as it goes into the machine or whatever it's going to be.

Sarah Godfrey: The robot.

Kimberly: The robot. Absolutely. And then when it comes back out, how do you communicate that data? What is the business story behind it? And that's where I think this part comes in. So it's not a case of being scared or worried about the future. You already have the ability to cope with it and it's just really fine tuning those skills perhaps.

Sarah Godfrey: Oh definitely. We're just shifting the focus. So instead of focusing on technology, were moving away and going, "Well look, that's going to do its thing." There's not much we as human beings can do to slow that down now. Their predictions are incredible. Robots will even replace me as a psychologist at some point, so the future is here now.

Kimberly: You can't be replaced Sarah.

Sarah Godfrey: So I think what we have to do is do the things that our technology can't replace and that's the things that we long for, communication, connectivity, I mean just jump on Instagram and the amount of affirmations people are seeking to feel like they belong shows us that although we're advancing in one area, we're really falling behind in another area and that's what will bring people to business. They will connect and be loyal to a brand they believe in that I think has a bigger idea than just selling or just a service.

Kimberly: Great. So if a finance professional is able to master these human skills as well as the technical aspects, what realistically can they expect in respect of their career or indeed their personal life?

Sarah Godfrey: I think it's a two-answer for that. There's the personal and the professional. So on a personal level they will grow and be I think a healthier and more adaptable flexible human being, and hopefully a lot nicer to be around and a lot more self aware. I think professionally we're going to get stronger. So I think the reliance on technology to get us through and hard skills to get us through, that era is drifting away now and we need to be just stronger as human beings and be able to be more resilient in terms of dealing with conflict, telling people our story, being real in the moment instead of creating a facade of who we are in the business world. And we're already seeing it everywhere. I mean, Richard Branson is a nice example of a man who's gone from a real business structure to being really, really in the relationship economy.

Sarah Godfrey: He tells everyone who he is, he doesn't hide. He's very vulnerable. And that's what I mean, we can't be afraid of the word. It's a strength. It really means, "I don't know, and I don't care what you think of me." As long as I know who I am and I'm a good human being and I'm working at it, then that I think would be where we need to go as far as keeping our clients loyal to our brand and keeping people connected to us so they keep coming back year after year in spite of the competition that's going to be out there.

Kimberly: You mentioned in and amongst that, that the self awareness piece, you know, finance and accounting professionals can sometimes have a tendency to being introverted. Not all of them. I mean obviously there's a scale and all the rest of it. But in terms of that self awareness, how can they authenticate what they actually are because some people's awareness of themselves is very different. I mean, is there a way for them to easily understand what it is they're doing or what they can improve on in terms of that?

Sarah Godfrey: Yeah. I think it's just not being afraid of knowing yourself, and you're right I've seen a lot of accountants actually because they are very interesting people. They are mainly introverts although a lot are extroverted, but introverts are amazing people and again, there's a real trend to push back against extroverts and go with what introverts are, which are really connected to people, great listeners, very gentle, great thinkers as well. So any introverts out there, I'm all up for promoting that and making you stronger and really proud of those skills because they are the skills of the future listeners, thinkers, people who care, impacts. So I think we just got to not steer away from those and think because we're quieter people are shyer people that we can't be strong and really great communicators and very forceful with ourselves as well.

Kimberly: So instead of being worried about the future, really accountants and business professionals are actually very well placed because they've got a great mix of that skill base to be able to benefit from automation and machine learning and

those things that are coming. But also to augment that with the human skills that they naturally have.

Sarah Godfrey: I think so. I think there's about seven professions all up that probably will survive the future really well as long as they remain being very human and authentic and have a lot of personal responsibility and connect with the world. And accountancy is actually one of them that will be challenged in the future, but not necessarily as like a profession that's going to go. We need human beings and we actually want to deal with human beings. So I think it's not being afraid of learning these new skills at all, but being really excited about finding out a bit more about yourself and what you're not using, we've all got untapped potential.

Kimberly: Absolutely. It's just knowing what that potential is sometimes.

Sarah Godfrey: It's just finding it out and not being scared of being challenged about it.

Kimberly: Absolutely. So it's about that authenticity. It's about that genuine and, and that scary word, vulnerability.

Sarah Godfrey: Yes. Well we were moving the word, we're changing the meaning of it.

Kimberly: There's no need to be scared of it anymore.

Sarah Godfrey: No, don't be scared of it.

Kimberly: Well thank you very much Sarah. It's been an absolute delight talking to you as always.

Sarah Godfrey: Thank you Kim.

Kimberly: Absolutely. So Sarah will be taking part at Melbourne Congress-

Sarah Godfrey: On the Wednesday.

Kimberly: Wednesday, the 17th of October and we'll be doing a masterclass entitled human skills, future proof your career, and I understand you've got a book.

Sarah Godfrey: Yes, I've got a book coming out I think just before the conference, which is terribly handy called Life Works When, and essentially a different kind of book, say a story of the pieces of happiness you need to master in order to have a healthy life. So it's not actually a textbook, it's a storyline, a bit like some of the other books that have been around before. Just I thought we'd take a fun and kind of childlike approach to a serious issue of happiness. So that'll be fun to have out so it will be there.

Kimberly: Yes, absolutely.

Sarah Godfrey: And you can go to our lifeworkswhen.com and subscribe to get the news when that's going to be published.

Kimberly: Great. Well thank you again.

Sarah Godfrey: I've loved it. Thank you.

Kimberly: My pleasure. Lovely to have you here.

Sarah Godfrey: Thank you.

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