

Hey! What's New? 2026-6

Why 2026 Will Reward CFOs Who Say "Yes"

In a recent article in *CFO*, Dean Quiambao points out that, "for decades, the CFO's mandate was clear: Protect the downside, keep score and wear the badge of CF-no. That mindset was ingrained through years of navigating volatility and generally more conservative decision-making." Over the last several years, however, "that mindset has been dwindling, and heading into 2026, that playbook is officially dead. The CFOs who will thrive over the next few years won't be the most cautious ones. They'll be the ones willing to say yes: To visibility, to new ways of working, to technology, and to a much broader definition of leadership."

Quiambao believes that the role of the CFO is undergoing a fundamental shift. "Finance leaders are no longer just stewards of controls and reporting; they are also responsible for driving business growth. They're becoming what we think of as platform CFOs: Orchestrators of cross-functional growth, integrated decision-makers and strategic architects across the enterprise." The most obvious way to think of this, he says, "is how a CFO must address the integration of technology and AI into business and demonstrate the ROI."

It's no longer enough to sign off on the budget. Quiambao writes. "The platform CFO must actively shape the roadmap, challenge assumptions, connect investments to outcomes and ensure that technology actually translates into enterprise value."

The economic environment heading into 2026 is uncertain. Interest rates, geopolitics, labor markets and technology shifts are all moving targets. The common approach for CFOs is to wait for clarity, stability and tailwinds. "But waiting has become its own risk," Quiambao says. "The most effective CFOs he works with aren't waiting for conditions to improve. They're actively creating momentum through partnerships, smarter operating models and deliberate investments in capability."

He notes, though, that artificial intelligence is accelerating this shift faster than many finance leaders expected. "AI will increasingly handle analysis, forecasting, reconciliations and reporting. That doesn't make the CFO less relevant. It makes judgment, prioritization and leadership more critical than ever."

Yet, Quiambao finds, "confidence remains low. Only a small percentage of CFOs we surveyed say they are truly confident in where their organization should be investing in AI. That gap matters. Because if the CFO isn't fluent enough to lead the conversation, someone else will."

This is where saying yes matters, he stresses. "Yes to learning, experimentation, upskilling — and not just your team but yourself as well. As a CFO, you're a steward. People watch how you respond to change. If you delegate AI away or treat it as a side project, your organization will too."

One of the most common objections he hears from CFOs is not having the bandwidth to be more strategic. "The data backs that up. Lack of capacity is consistently cited as the biggest barrier to strategic work. But here's the uncomfortable truth: Capacity is not just a resource problem. It's a leadership decision."

Quiambao feels that “too many CFOs say no to options that would free up time, such as managed services, automation and rethinking legacy processes, because they feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable. Saying yes to new operating models isn’t about losing control; it’s about reclaiming it.”

Most CFOs are uncomfortable building a personal brand or stepping into visible leadership, he says. “But in a world where capital, talent and opportunity move quickly, visibility isn’t ego. It’s a way to showcase intelligence, build goodwill and trust within and beyond your organization. CFOs who stay invisible risk being outpaced by those who don’t.”

One of the most practical shifts Quiambao sees among high-performing CFOs is also one of the simplest. “They deliberately protect time to think forward. At least once a quarter, they create space to step out of reactive mode and focus on the processes, platforms and partnerships that will matter looking ahead. Strategic thinking doesn’t happen by accident. It has to be scheduled.”

This discipline, he concludes, “is what separates the CFOs who will be rewarded in 2026 from those who will feel perpetually behind. The winners won’t necessarily have perfect forecasts or flawless execution. They’ll be the ones who said yes to evolution, learning, visibility and leadership beyond finance.”

For more, check out [Why 2026 will reward CFOs who say ‘yes’ | CFO.com](#).