Hey! What's New? 2026-44

What It takes For a CFO To Lead Operations and Tech

According to an article By Janice Stucke, CPA, in the *Journal of Accountancy*, "CFOs are increasingly adding operational and technology leadership to their duties — assuming a CFO/COO hybrid role and also overseeing digital transformation — at businesses of all sizes. This often happens at the behest of boards of directors and is part of a trend in which C-suites are consolidating, with the CFO position emerging as second only to the CEO."

But, she adds, "providing exceptional financial leadership while also excelling at risk management and digital and business transformation requires a level of boldness many find uncomfortable, and even experienced leaders will have moments of doubt."

Stucke says that "It takes an incredible amount of courage to lead in an area that is not in your traditional wheelhouse or within your experience. As a CPA, I was trained to tie everything out. I have my bearings when validating information regarding the financials. Stepping into leading IT, I had to trust the skill sets of others and receive advice from a greater number of sources to make sure the company was on the correct path."

According to Stucke, the hardest part of expanding beyond the CFO role and leading in IT, operations, human resources, strategy, risk, etc. "is that, while you mitigate the risk as best you can, it takes time to hone new skills. I remind others and myself that, like the balance sheet, decisions are made at a point-of-time snapshot, and the snapshots are ever-changing."

After adding technology leadership to her CFO responsibilities, Stucke gained the COO title in November 2025. "I chose a hybrid CFO and COO title because I was not ready to leave my CFO roots behind. I believe that the foundation we bring as CPAs and financial leaders provides the added value needed for transformational business success."

With the increasing emphasis on overall P&L management within COO roles, the likelihood of CFO/COO-to-CEO succession grows. Stucke points to a 2025 Russell Reynolds Global CFO Turnover Index, that shows that, of the CFOs who moved on to other positions in 2024, 34% moved to a president or CEO role, with another 15% moving to a division CEO role, 6% to a separate COO role, and 15% to another C-suite job overseeing areas including risk and corporate strategy."

"Increasingly, boards of directors and CEOs need CFOs to lead enterprise-level strategy initiatives because they want CFOs to create value by driving business decision-making versus reporting on what has previously happened," she continues. "These types of projects also improve the chances of CFOs being considered higher-quality candidates for CEO succession. I have learned through many tough lessons that it's important to have a strong leadership vision and protect your place as the leader, but it's also essential to acknowledge that you don't know everything and that you are relying on others to help."

As you expand your operational reach and begin working with pivotal players outside of your department, she says you need "to understand that it takes time to build those relationships. You need those key stakeholders to buy in to your leadership and the mandate to get those

pivotal pieces of information you need to be successful. Often your success depends on their willingness, and that takes careful cultivation."

Constant communication at the top, she says, "and with those aligned in the process takes a significant amount of effort and crafting but will prove fundamental to your success. There is no manual on what that delicate balance must look like for your leadership style, the dynamics of the situation, and your ultimate goal, but this is another constant gut check that must be adjusted as the project moves along."

Stucke has learned that "the key in leaning into these expanded roles is holding onto crucial boundaries that allow me the time to process and give myself time to have additional insight. I try to hold on to a steady exercise routine, whether that is a jog or a walk or doing some daily meditation. I find that having this additional mental space helps me be more creative or have additional insight into the problem I'm contemplating at the moment."

If you do end up taking on a CFO role with COO or CTO responsibilities, she urges her audience to "make sure to acknowledge and tap in to your team members for their insights. This builds trust down and across your remit and helps you provide the most value possible to the organization."

For a whole lot more, see What it takes for a CFO to lead operations and tech.