

Career success | IA's vital characteristics?

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Richard F Chambers, president and CEO of IIA Global.

This is the time of year in many parts of the world when graduates enter the workforce, and when internal audit executives decide which candidates are most likely to find career success. So it is a good time to consider which personal traits are most important in our profession.

World-class internal auditors have exceptional technical skills, a grasp of risks and controls and an understanding of how the risks affect the bottom line. Professional qualifications can demonstrate that you have this understanding. But it is also essential to hire candidates with the right personal characteristics. As I explain in my book *Lessons Learned on the Audit Trail*, if I had the opportunity to build an internal audit department, there are five key characteristics I would look for in every interviewee. These characteristics are:

• Integrity and courage

The reputation of an internal audit function is built over years, but can be lost in a moment. Any internal auditor may occasionally be in a position that calls for a tough decision under pressure, so personal integrity is imperative.

• Teamwork and relationship-building skills

Outstanding internal auditors are good at teamwork and building relationships. Only through collaboration, with each auditor making specialised contributions based on knowledge and experience, can we best serve our stakeholders.

Internal auditing is a team effort. Even the least-experienced internal auditor has opportunities to build relationships throughout the organisation in the areas, departments, functions and activities where they work.

• Communication skills

You must be able to explain why an engagement is being undertaken and what your role will be. If you require information during the audit, you should be able to articulate why you need it. You must not only keep audit clients informed about progress; you must also build trust, motivate client participation and inspire prompt and effective corrective action.

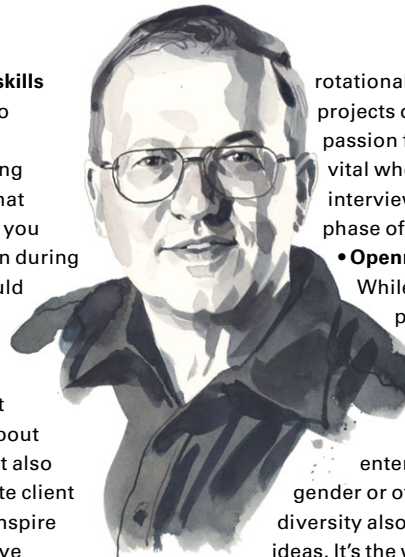
Without effective communications, an internal audit recommendation may result in ineffective action – or no action at all.

“Diversity also implies embracing diverse ideas”

• Curiosity and a thirst for learning

Internal auditors with a passion for excellence are always looking for a chance to expand their knowledge, regardless of schedules, budgets or workplace logistics.

Continuing education is more than taking a course each year. Some learning is best accomplished through formal training and development, or through the pursuit of a professional qualification or certification. But important lessons can emerge from



rotational assignments, unusual projects or self-guided learning. A passion for information can prove vital when assessing risk, interviewing clients, or in any other phase of audit work.

• Openness to diversity

While I believe in recruiting or promoting individuals based on qualifications, I also believe internal audit organisations should mirror the diversity of their enterprises – through race, gender or other characteristics. But diversity also implies embracing diverse ideas. It's the willingness to accept different points of view, and to listen to those throughout the course of our audit work.

These five qualities can be strong indicators of success, but other traits are also important. A reputation for objectivity and a passion for internal auditing are needed. The best internal auditors display initiative, flexibility, creativity, natural curiosity and a strong work ethic. They are persuasive and service-orientated, and demonstrate an array of technical skills.

If you have the characteristics listed, and you are willing to work to improve on them, I believe your chances of success in internal auditing are greatly enhanced.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Richard F Chambers – whose book *Lessons Learned on the Audit Trail* is available at www.theiia.org/bookstore – writes a blog at www.theiia.org/blogs/chambers and tweets at [www.twitter.com/rfchambers](https://twitter.com/rfchambers).