

Don't just talk about the icing

Imagine you come to a complimentary initial meeting with me to discuss a potential collaboration. During the conversation, I mainly talk about my editorial work, my extensive coaching materials, and the articles I regularly publish on LinkedIn. I hardly mention my coaching practice itself—after all, everyone knows what a career coach does. Could I count on your commitment?

Peter Näf

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Probably not. After all, you came to the meeting to learn more about my particular approach to career coaching. Quite rightly, you would point out that coaches differ both in the services they offer and in the way they work.

I occasionally encounter exactly this situation with my clients. One example is Manfred (name changed), who came to me during an outplacement programme. Despite reviewing his CV and listening to detailed descriptions of his work as a CFO, my picture of Manfred remained surprisingly vague. He spoke at length about restructuring projects, the implementation of a new ERP system, and his involvement in M&A transactions. What was missing?

One CFO is not like another

I found myself wondering: Is Manfred only involved in interesting special projects? Doesn't he have a day-to-day job with all the small and tedious tasks that also need to be done?

Then I spotted the gap. I asked him who in his company was responsible for overseeing accounting and controlling, who dealt with financing issues, and who advised the executive management team on financial matters. He looked at me with mild irritation and surprise: "Well, me, of

course—but surely that goes without saying!" Does it?

One might indeed assume that the responsibilities of a CFO are clear, given that every larger company has one. However, the role can vary considerably. In an SME, a CFO may primarily ensure proper accounting and prepare the annual financial statements. In a multinational corporation, the role may focus on complex financing structures. In a start-up, the CFO may be responsible for securing growth through funding rounds, while in a publicly listed company the role may also include investor relations and financial market communication.

The trap of the apparently obvious

By talking about the special projects that interested him most, Manfred communicated the icing—but forgot the cake.

What seems obvious to us is often left out of our communication—sometimes consciously, as in Manfred's case, but often unconsciously as well (see article "50plus – (Self-)Underrated Potential"). The typical responsibilities of a CFO felt self-evident to Manfred because he had been performing them routinely for many years and had therefore become increasingly unaware of them.

Yet these very responsibilities were the core requirements of the positions he wanted to apply for. We therefore adapted both his CV and the way he presented himself verbally. He started by talking about the responsibilities that defined him as a CFO. The interesting special projects came afterwards—as icing, not as the cake.

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