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Just Say

NO

FP&A can't
always give
business
partners what
they want



FP&A is a maturing discipline with multiple stakeholders around the company. Because of that fact, it can sometimes draw us into conflicting stances. It is easy to organize our thinking around what is in the best interest of our stakeholders, but FP&A has obligations to multiple parties: itself, the finance organization, the business partners, the business owners, and society as a whole (honor the public trust).

Yet, when trying to execute on this in real life, things become difficult. It's easy to say yes to our stakeholders but very difficult to say no. In this case we quickly start to doubt our relationships with our stakeholders. Can we still work together afterward? Will they still like me? Am I a good business partner if they see me and finance as the "department of no?"

Previously, we wrote that FP&A's mission is to drive the right strategic choices in the company.

Living up to that mission requires taking a stand; if your business partners understand that, they should also see that is critical to your role to provide an effective challenge. Maintaining your integrity and ethical conduct requires that you say no even when the easiest solution is just to say yes. A defined and easy-to-communicate framework for how we act as FP&A professionals would facilitate this.

A framework for doing the right thing

AFP has created Standards of Ethical Conduct as part of the Certified Corporate FP&A Professional certification, and they define three areas of relevant ethics: competence, confidentiality and integrity. To help you define what this could mean for your own FP&A department, this article dives one level deeper to provide tangible examples for the practitioner.

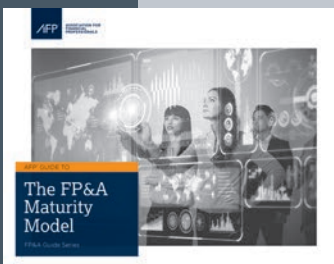
STANDARDS OF ETHICAL CONDUCT	TANGIBLE ACTIONS
Competence	
<p>Continue to acquire an appropriate level of professional knowledge and skills in finance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have or gain adequate financial knowledge through education or on-the-job training to administer FP&A responsibilities. • Have or gain business and operational experience with a goal of becoming a well-rounded professional. • Have a plan for the continual growth of your career, including finance, business, technology, and leadership. Leaders: ensure staff have the time and resources for continual growth. • Be curious, questioning, and open to change, as well as contrary information.
<p>Perform professional duties in good faith and in accordance with technical, legal and regulatory practices, as well as the letter and spirit of the law in the field of finance.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know the legal, regulatory and compliance constructs around your business to ensure your company operates within those limits. • Create processes that are transparent and fair in the execution of FP&A actions.
Confidentiality	
<p>Maintain confidential information acquired in the course of professional activities and only disclose such information when legally obligated to do so.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure access controls are in place for data. • Invite the right people to meetings; know whom to include and exclude, and know who are employees versus third-party stakeholders (contractors, consultants, etc.).
<p>Refrain from using or appearing to use confidential information for unethical or illegal advantage either personally or through third parties.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not act for personal gain using material, non-public information. • FP&A reports to the CFO with purview over the entire company; beware of “capture” by the business unit where decentralized FP&A benefits a single unit at the expense of the larger enterprise.
Integrity	
<p>Practice honesty and standards of professional care in all dealings without engaging in any activity that would prejudice the ability to carry out professional responsibilities competently and fairly. Avoid conflicts of interest or the appearance thereof.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support your company's code of conduct, and interpret FP&A ethics within this larger framework. • Surface contradictory or negative information when relevant, not avoiding conflict. • The winning results are the best answers for the company and the public, regardless of where they come from.
<p>Refrain from abusing the financial systems and markets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honestly and candidly report information; do not distort the truth to make the numbers fit.
<p>Disclose fully all relevant information that could reasonably be expected to influence business dealings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare our colleagues with the fullest, best and most relevant information. • Clearly articulate assumptions, estimates, and unknowns. • Beware of cognitive biases that may lead to incorrect conclusions or steer conversations. • Represent data accurately, paying careful attention to scales and inclusion/exclusion of outliers.

The simplest standard is still remarkably effective: “How would I feel if this action were on the front page of a news website?” By using this guide, in conjunction with the FP&A Maturity Model, we are providing resources for you to build a dynamic FP&A team and career.

Ready to say no now?

We’re committed to helping FP&A professionals succeed in their careers both now and in the future, and we know how difficult it can be to say no. However, we hope you’re now better equipped to deal with the difficult issues. We hope that you’re able to reach a point where your stakeholders trust your no as much as they trust your yes. Then saying no becomes the easiest thing in the world!

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The AFP Guide to **The FP&A Maturity Model** is available for download at: www.AFPonline.org/publications



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