



# CFO Profiles in PE-Backed Environments

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The CFO role has evolved significantly over time, which adds to the challenge of finding the finance executive whose knowledge, skills, experience, and disposition fit your current business needs, whether that’s a focus on strategic leadership, organizational restructuring, performance management, digital transformation, finance stability or elevation, or a combination of any of the above.

There is no single CFO profile that fits the needs of every company - each company must target candidates with competencies that best fit their strategy, the composition of the rest of the company’s executive team, and the current finance-function capabilities. However, there are three CFO profiles that offer a glimpse into how the CFO role is evolving and raise important questions for middle-market companies to think about when hiring their next CFO.

- Strategist:** Acts as the financial and strategic conscious of the company, providing the necessary leadership to align financial and business strategies, while driving company performance. Partners with the CEO and board and exhibits strong communication skills with a focus on transparency, objectivity, and honesty.
- Disciplined Operator:** Having spent time outside the finance organization in such areas as operations, strategy, marketing, or general management, tends to engage heavily in business operations and strategy making use of strong industry and competitive insights.
- The Finance Expert:** With a good working knowledge of the company and a resume that includes multiple roles within the finance function - controller, treasury, audit, financial planning and analysis, or business unit finance - uses expertise in finance and accounting to provide the CEO and board with the financial information they need to make sound business decisions, especially important in early-stage business scaling and professionalizing the finance and accounting function.

Here’s what these CFO Profiles look like in action.

	The Strategist	The Disciplined Operator	The Finance Expert
<b>Key Focus</b>	Externally focused with an eye toward the market	Focused on operational efficiency and effectiveness, cash flow and value add to revenue owners	Controller-level focused with an eye on financial stewardship
<b>Most Important Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Treasury</li> <li>Capital markets</li> <li>Investor relations</li> <li>IPOs</li> <li>Debt and equity financing</li> <li>BOD communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FP&amp;A</li> <li>Audit and compliance</li> <li>Treasury</li> <li>Financial reporting</li> <li>Controllershship</li> <li>Forecasting and planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Financial discipline</li> <li>FP&amp;A</li> <li>Reporting systems</li> <li>Controllershship</li> <li>Financial reporting</li> </ul>



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	The Strategist	The Disciplined Operator	The Finance Expert
<b>Key Capabilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business ambassador</li> <li>• Investor roadshows</li> <li>• Financial playbook</li> <li>• Operational excellence</li> <li>• Strategic decision-making</li> <li>• Company scaling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Navigation of corporate dynamics</li> <li>• Copiloting with the CEO</li> <li>• Operational excellence</li> <li>• Situational assessment</li> <li>• Hands-on engagement with business operations</li> <li>• Value-creating, KPI-based decisioning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GAAP Accounting</li> <li>• Finance</li> <li>• Risk management</li> <li>• Asset preservation</li> </ul>
<b>Critical Issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determining strategic direction</li> <li>• Managing capital market expectations</li> <li>• Acquiring new capital</li> <li>• Navigating difficult capital markets</li> <li>• Executing mergers</li> <li>• Balancing risk and opportunities</li> <li>• Staying ahead of trends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing an efficient finance function</li> <li>• Evolving finance and/or business model and talent to match growth</li> <li>• Driving ROI through accountability</li> <li>• Adapting to global change</li> <li>• Managing risks related to growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing quality data</li> <li>• Implementing sound operational controls</li> <li>• Complying with complex regulatory requirements</li> <li>• Instilling good corporate governance</li> <li>• Adjusting to business model changes</li> </ul>
<b>Additional Skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thought partner to other functional leads</li> <li>• Building teams, systems, and processes for growth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New financial model management at accelerated pace</li> <li>• Management reporting</li> <li>• Business partnership</li> <li>• Corporate development</li> <li>• Process standardization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Treasury</li> <li>• Debt and equity financing</li> <li>• Capital markets</li> <li>• Investor relations</li> <li>• Credit agency relations</li> </ul>
<b>Typical Career Path</b>	Investment banking often enhanced by some CFO experience	Company accounting up to controller, chief accounting officer, or possibly CFO	Public accounting/CPA
<b>Expected Education</b>	MBA/CFA	MBA/CPA	CPA

Note: CFO roles vary by organization, depending upon a company's history, the characteristics of its industry, and the demands of the investors. These are general profiles for PE-backed environments.

At [Focus Search Partners](#), our CFO practice has extensive experience helping businesses accurately assess their particular environment to expertly match it to the most appropriate CFO profile, even if that's combining some aspects of multiple profiles to create a hybrid one just right for you. [Contact our team](#) for assistance identifying the ideal CFO for your business environment.