



# Thirst for knowledge

Dr Venus Tang FCCA, CFO at Excel Technology, describes how continuous learning has been an important part of both her professional and personal development

Even at the peak of her career as an accountant and finance professional, Dr Venus Tang is adamant that success depends on constant learning.

'The world is changing in a very rapid way. Even now, I am continuing to learn new technologies and trends that might help in my job,' she says.

Tang is the CFO at Excel Technology, a financial technology solutions provider based in Hong Kong that focuses on the Greater China and South-East Asia markets. It has been listed in Hong Kong since 2000 and operates in more than 30 countries out of 10 offices with more than 400 professionals.

This philosophy of continuous learning has been a constant in both Tang's personal and professional lives. It is a philosophy that helped her to shift gears early in her career by moving from IT to accounting in the early 1980s, when she took 18 papers of ACCA examinations for which she studied entirely on her own.

Almost four decades later, Tang has built a reputation as an accounting and finance professional with strong academic credentials and experience in senior management positions in companies ranging from property development to telecommunications and media to information technology.

## The human factor

Tang's deep well of energy comes through as she discusses the challenges facing modern CFOs and the importance of maintaining a healthy work-life balance as a full-time working mother.

## i CV

**2018**

Received the Distinguished Alumni Award from the City University of Hong Kong's College of Business for outstanding contribution to the profession and the university

**2016**

Independent non-executive director, Glory Sun Land Group

**2002**

Joined Excel Technology International (Hong Kong): now CFO and company secretary

**1999**

Group financial controller, South China Media

**1990**

Group financial controller, Star Telecom International Holdings

**1987**

Accounting supervisor, Shui On Construction Company

**1982**

Accounting supervisor, Henderson Land Development Company

**1980**

Accounts senior, Nelson Wheeler

**1979**

Computer programmer, China Resources (Holdings)

The way she sees it, accountancy and finance are not immune to the ways in which technology has insinuated its way into all aspects of life and business. A modern CFO has to be a 'digital CFO' and understand things like fintech, blockchain, big data, artificial intelligence (AI) and robotic process automation.

'More and more companies are going through structural reforms to adapt to the trend of digital transformation and new technologies,' she says. 'We have to think about how to use these new tools to streamline our workflow and improve efficiency.'

Despite this, Tang believes that the human factor remains all-important and is key for finance professionals to remain on the cutting edge.

'Digital and AI technologies can help with routine work most of the time. I strongly believe human judgment can never be replaced by robots,' Tang says. 'However, good managers should know how to use these new technologies to help their companies improve.'

This combination of constant learning and adapting to new technologies, along with a willingness to embrace challenges, has propelled Tang to the pinnacle of the profession. A good educational background is helpful, she says, but so is a strong qualification like ACCA's.

'A CFO today not only needs to be familiar with updated accounting standards, company ordinances, corporate governance rules and listing rules but also needs good language abilities and management knowledge,' she says.



A good finance leader also has to understand context, she says. For the CFO of a company in Hong Kong like Excel Technology, this context includes the language and culture in mainland China and the importance of programmes like the Belt and Road initiative or the Greater Bay Area initiative, the latter linking together nine cities in southern mainland China with Hong Kong and Macau.

It is also important to constantly move forward and expand both professional and personal boundaries. At a professional level, Tang exemplifies how this plays out through her work as a tutor at the Open University of Hong Kong and, more recently, as an independent non-executive director (INED) at Hong Kong-listed property developer Glory Sun Land Group since 2016. One thing she has learnt as an INED is how strong governance has become increasingly important over the past couple of decades.

'Since the Enron incident in 2002, more and more listed companies have realised the importance of corporate governance and began appointing INEDs,' she says. 'There is an important role played by INEDs in building better corporate governance.'

'My experience in working in China-listed firms, my knowledge of the culture of the People's Republic of China and my doctoral thesis on corporate governance were all very important qualities related to my role as an INED at Glory Sun,' she adds.

Tang also deploys her inexhaustible energy to champion ACCA, which she credits with driving her career to where it is today. She has been a member of the ACCA Hong Kong committee since 2015 and has served in eight sub-committees since 2001, as well as actively participating in ACCA events.

'ACCA gave me the chance to obtain a professional accounting qualification

and opened the door for my career development,' she says. 'I feel it is the right thing to do to give something back to ACCA.'

### Constant learning

Tang also extends this approach to constant learning to her personal life. Even as she has moved forward professionally, she has never stopped following personal interests and artistic pursuits. She is adamant about the importance of balancing a busy professional life with personal interests and family time.

'I am a strong believer in work-life harmony. Life is colourful. While I

**'While I am passionate about my job, I also love my family, my hobbies and my commitment to community services'**

am passionate about my job, I also love my family, my hobbies and my commitment to community services,' she says.

After completing her high school education, Tang started her career as a computer programmer and studied independently to take the ACCA examinations that allowed her to move into accounting and finance. Since then, she has continued studying and earned bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees from the City University of Hong Kong. She has also completed several professional diplomas in music and jewellery design. Not only that, she is an accomplished

player of the zheng, a traditional Chinese string instrument.

'My son and I learned to play the zheng together and we have been invited to perform together on multiple occasions,' she says. 'It is something that I am proud of and enjoy very much.'

She is also passionate about jewellery design. 'I love fashion, jewellery and design. For women, that is part of our life. I don't consider it as a workload but rather something we enjoy doing very much,' she says.

Tang is also a prolific mentor of young professionals through ACCA and at several universities, including the City University, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the Polytechnic University and Centennial College. She now has over 80 mentees and has served on the ACCA Hong Kong student affairs sub-committee since 2005.

'I think it is a very meaningful thing to do, for both them and for myself,' she says.

'My hobbies are indeed non-accounting studies but I always share with my mentees the 4Ps rule: passion, perseverance, persistence and patience,' she says. 'It is the motto I carry for everything in life. I think it is the key to successful learning.'

'Everyone has a story,' she continues. 'I am passionate about sharing my life-long learning path, time management skills, career development, professional knowledge and working experience with the younger generation. Thinking back, my completion of 18 papers of ACCA examinations through self-learning was also largely thanks to the 4Ps.'

'If you sit still, stop learning and stop catching up with new trends, you are at risk of being outdated,' she concludes. 'Life-long learning is the key to becoming a good CFO.' **AB**

Alex Ho, journalist