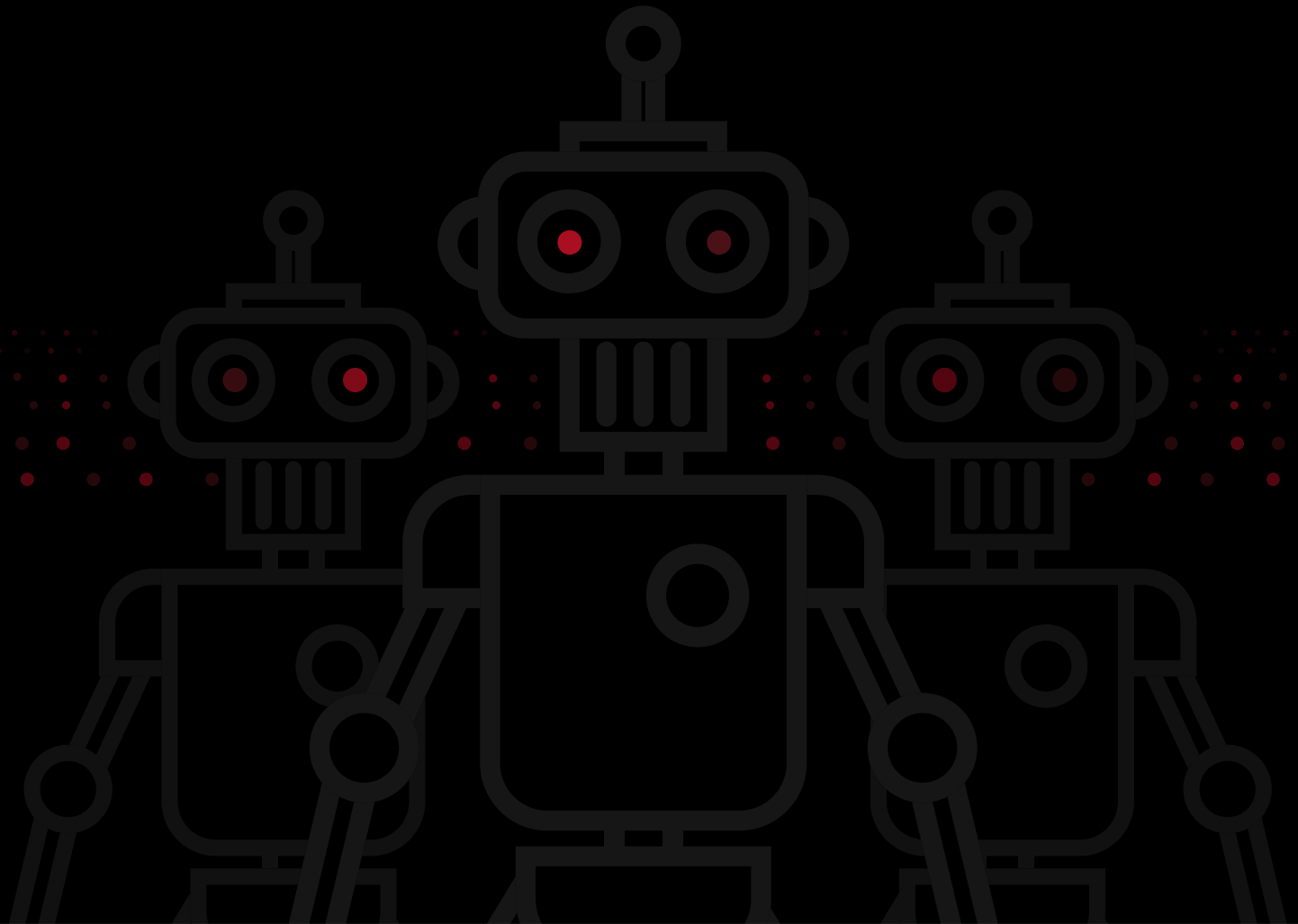


The Six Skills Accountants Need to Survive the Robot Uprising

# ROBOTIC UPRISING



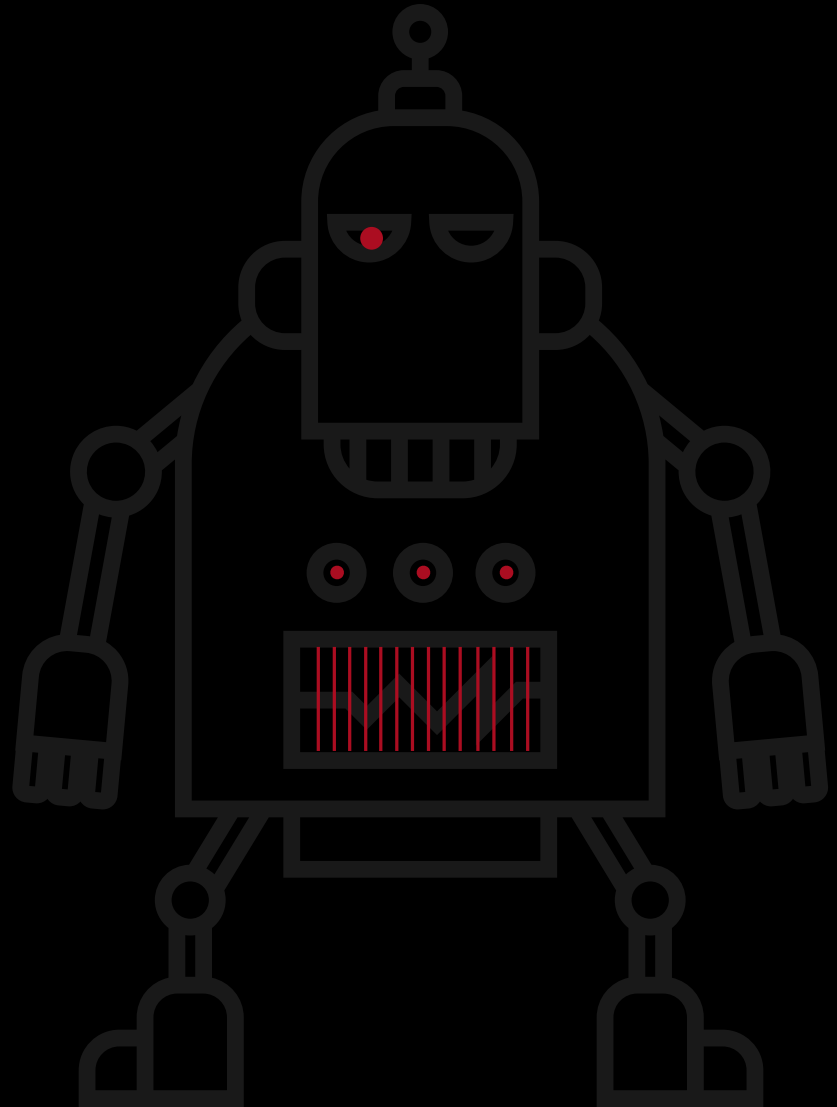
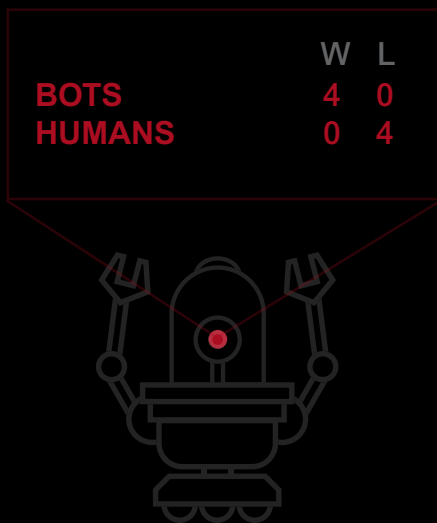
## WHAT YOU THINK YOU NEED FOR THE ROBOT UPRISING:

1. Canned goods
2. Matches
3. Groucho Marx glasses  
(for fooling facial recognition software)
4. Underground bunker  
(in case none of the above work)

## WHAT YOU REALLY NEED FOR THE ROBOT UPRISING:

1. Mad analytical, business, and  
communication skills





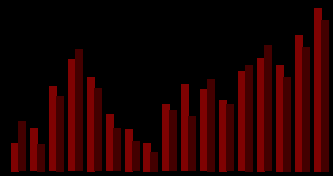
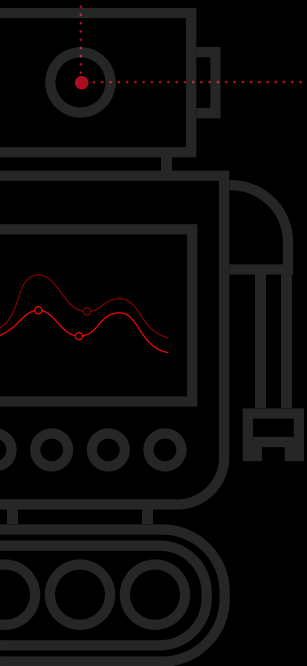
## THE TURING TEST IS TOAST.

Google’s artificial intelligence (AI) AlphaGo beat the world’s top Go player, four games to one. Siri and Alexa decipher and take action based on human speech. Even the Turing test is seemingly toast: in 2014, a computer program fooled 33% of judges from the Royal Society in London into thinking it was a 13-year-old Ukrainian boy.

Yet despite all the doomsday warnings—and contrary to any iteration of Terminator—surviving the age of robots doesn’t require stockpiling canned peas or mortgaging a bunker. Yes, robots are performing more previously human-driven tasks,

from manufacturing to accounting and beyond. But current thought leadership urges us to view robots not as replacements for humans, but resources.

Think of it this way: robots can do a lot of boring tasks very quickly, far faster and more accurately than a human being. By reducing the time needed for mind-numbing transactional work, robots enable human beings to do the work that really matters—such as writing symphonies, sending rovers to Mars, and, for accountants, transcending the function of bean counter and transitioning to the role of strategic counsel.



\$32.70	\$93.21	\$64.46	\$19.42	\$19.46
\$73.42	\$50.96	\$78.27	\$9.06	\$4.46
\$73.04	\$91.93	\$52.16	\$7.17	\$41.37
\$82.86	\$63.82	\$30.32	\$61.16	\$44.46
\$46.85	\$30.17	\$31.51	\$36.62	\$9.19
\$12.58	\$26.65	\$15.75	\$33.20	\$24.53
\$47.84	\$3.22	\$8.76	\$70.77	\$26.63
\$23.79	\$27.07	\$77.07	\$74.06	\$41.33
\$72.10	\$58.35	\$56.78	\$51.55	\$3.31
\$35.76	\$41.27	\$15.98	\$76.19	\$90.76
\$55.94	\$74.23	\$75.86	\$53.61	\$3.00
\$55.80	\$25.14	\$53.74	\$17.23	\$63.38
\$60.71	\$8.09	\$49.49	\$45.25	\$28.37
\$27.87	\$29.58	\$0.02	\$62.44	\$94.88
\$24.93	\$29.88	\$45.22	\$95.64	\$80.10
\$72.59	\$12.23	\$60.19	\$13.72	\$0.51
\$56.78	\$45.14	\$7.40	\$93.80	\$72.37
\$25.63	\$58.70	\$97.52	\$71.37	\$56.40
\$71.26	\$78.41	\$44.00	\$38.61	\$24.51
\$58.02	\$40.55	\$41.33	\$15.81	\$43.20
\$80.54	\$56.93	\$83.02	\$5.30	\$31.55
\$65.74	\$10.08	\$20.94	\$19.01	\$89.23
\$14.00	\$5.07	\$31.76	\$42.74	\$14.34
\$46.64	\$49.87	\$60.56	\$24.46	\$94.88

## FROM BEAN COUNTER TO STRATEGIC COUNSEL.

As the robots do the boring stuff they're meant to do—automate the sheet out of transactional work—accountants get to become the exceptional analysts they were always meant to be.

And just in time. Historically, accountants have been responsible for the bread and butter of finance—efficient accounting operations, clean audits, and compliance. Yet companies today need much more from the finance function.

In every industry, accountants are now expected to transition to the role of expert counsel: strategic advisors with an understanding of the entire business, analytical capabilities, and near-mythological forecasting abilities.

At first glance, it seems like a win-win. Robots take over the time-consuming, rote tasks and accountants get to become key strategic players, just as companies need them the most. But there is a catch: the skills accountants use today aren't the only ones they need to become accountants of the future.

The accounting function has spent so many decades focused on transactional work that the skills this new strategic role demands—analytical abilities, business acumen, and relational and communication skills—haven't been cultivated as extensively. (And for the record, it's not that accountants aren't good at these things but rather that there are only so many hours in a day. If you're spending an entire week matching transactions, there's little time left for cross-training or providing predictive insights.)

According to Helen Brand, chief executive at the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), “To succeed as a professional accountant...a vastly different set of skills is required than was necessary just 10 short years ago. And in the next decade, things are likely to change even faster and more dramatically as the global economy continues to evolve at an ever-quickenning pace.”

So, what does the exceptional accountant of tomorrow need to cultivate today? Think mad skills, not macros. Strategic aptitude, instead of spreadsheet savvy. In short, capabilities that enable any accountant to deliver predictive insights to leadership, drive data-based decisions, and provide expert counsel.

- 1. DATA ANALYSIS**
- 2. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**
- 3. RELATIONSHIP BUILDING**
- 4. CREATIVITY**
- 5. BUSINESS ACUMEN**
- 6. TECH SAVVY**



## DATA ANALYSIS

For the finance function, providing leadership with historical data used to be quite sufficient. Yet today, companies also expect to have access to predictive data (prescriptive data as well, but we don't want to freak you out).

For today's accountants, this requires knowing how to turn that hot mess of Big Data into concise, decision-driving insights. Vanguard businesses are already hiring accountant-slash-data scientists; accountants looking toward the future must have both a theoretical and practical understanding of data and analytics.



## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

It's said ad nauseam: it's the Age of Information. Yet all of this information is just noise if it's not shared effectively. The exceptional accountant of tomorrow won't just know why data looks like it does (analytical skills); she'll also be able to skillfully convey those insights to others.

Accountants must begin to cultivate strong written communication skills: the ability to think critically and translate those thoughts into compelling documents. They will also need strong oral communication skills: the ability to convey pertinent financial information to executive teams and stakeholders.



## RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Ah, the good 'ol days. An introvert—or an accountant—could hide in the back office, subsisting on a few basic greetings at the legendary water cooler (or beer cart, as the case may be).

Yet thriving in tomorrow's business is going to take more than water cooler-level conversational skills. As automation streamlines transactional tasks, accountants won't have the "millions of transactions to match" excuse to sidestep human interaction.

The exceptional accountant of the future will know how to manage numbers and people. That requires cultivating a broader range of relationship skills today, such as how to work in a team, how to motivate and engage employees, and how to deliver bad news without making somebody cry.



## CREATIVITY

Used to be, nobody wanted a “creative” accountant. But in an era when businesses must quickly identify opportunities while simultaneously mitigating risk, a finance professional who can think outside of the proverbial box is a strategic asset.

Accountants who can combine creativity with a deep understanding of the company’s financial capabilities will be able to solve complex financial—and non-financial—problems faster and more cost effectively.



## BUSINESS ACUMEN

Contributing to the business on a strategic level requires more than just an understanding of the numbers.

Accountants also need to understand the business as a whole. The ability to provide counsel to the C-suite requires seeing the big picture, from how each functional area works to the best way to acquire and retain talent.

When accountants have the opportunity for stretch assignments, cross-training, and job-sharing, it’s easier to understand—and make decisions based upon—the holistic interplay between a company’s services, employees, customers, and stakeholders.



## TECH SAVVY

Technology isn’t just changing every job function; technology itself changes rapidly. Instead of expecting to use the same tool for the next decade, accountants today must be ready to use new technology every year. This requires not just a basic understanding of technology itself but the ongoing cultivation of flexibility and adaptability.

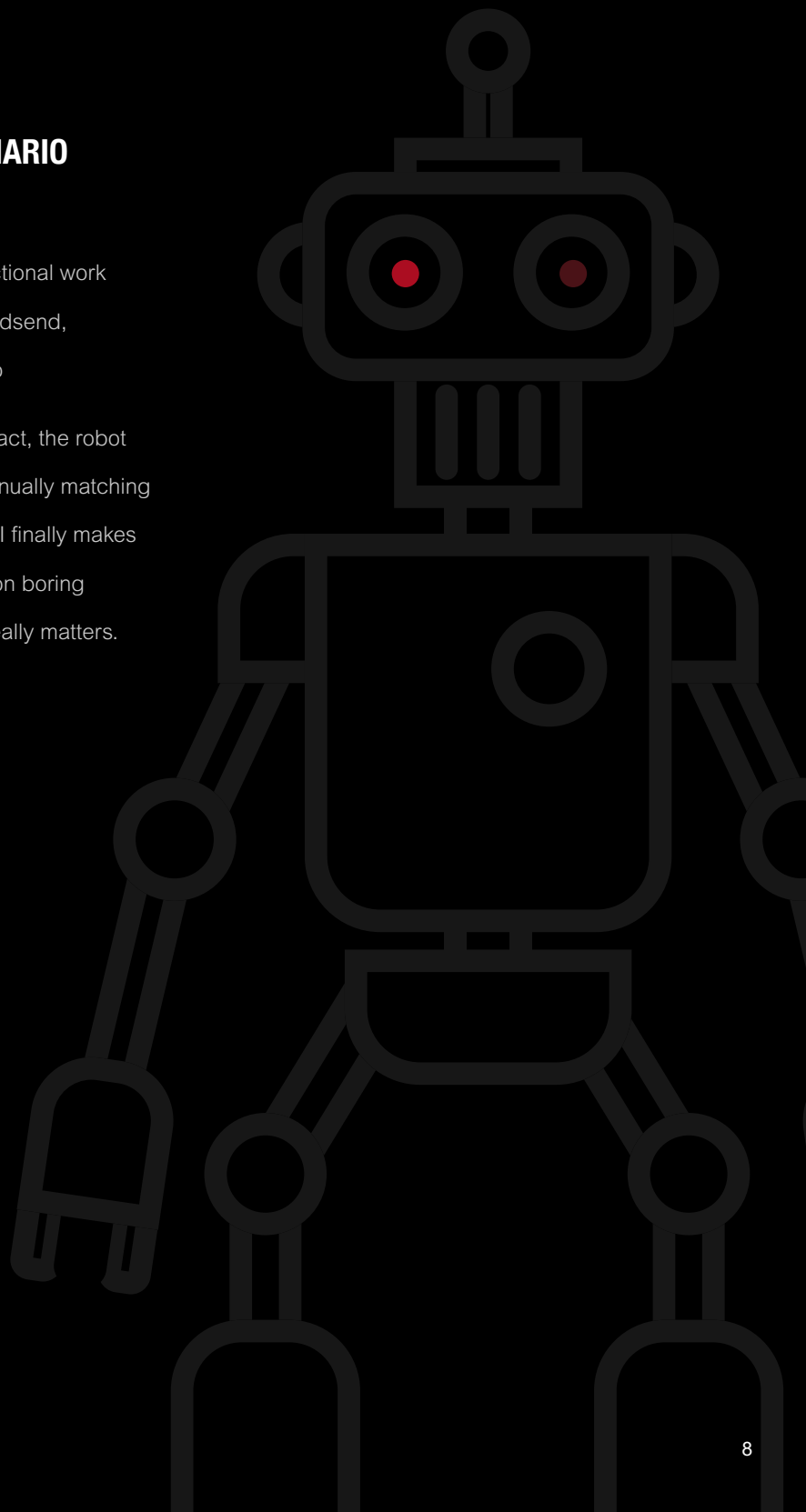
## #WAYBETTERTHANTHATTERMINATORSCENARIO

### RO•BOT UP•RI•SING *NOUN*

A time when human beings can stop doing boring transactional work and start doing the work that really matters. *synonyms*: godsend, a dream come true, #waybetterthanthatterminatorscenario

We have nothing to fear from Terminators or Toasters<sup>1</sup>. In fact, the robot uprising is a boon for overworked accountants tired of manually matching transactions and wrangling thousands of spreadsheets. AI finally makes it possible for finance professionals to stop wasting days on boring transactional work and instead start doing the work that really matters.

<sup>1</sup>Toasters, à la Battlestar Galactica, are just hunks of metal. But, full disclosure, if one of those “human” Cylons shows up, you’re on your own. Mortgage that bunker and buy those canned peas, stat.







## AND JUST IN TIME.

Today more than ever, companies need finance and accounting professionals who can transcend traditional number crunching. Yet for accountants, making the transition from spreadsheet jockey to strategic expert does require new skills.

Accountants who cultivate business acumen can begin to provide guidance relevant to the entire company, not just the finance department.

Nurturing creativity leads to innovative solutions for some of the biggest challenges in business today, from the unexpected corner of the “numbers” people.

Developing analytical capabilities ensures the accounting function can deliver true insight, not just historical information, while building communication and relationship skills guarantee those insights aren't lost in translation.

Finally, because technology will continue to change at lightspeed, accountants who not only have basic IT skills, but also flexibility and adaptability, will always be ready to integrate new, more efficient tools into existing processes.

**TO FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN BEGIN CULTIVATING THE MAD SKILLS OF AN EXCEPTIONAL ACCOUNTANT VISIT [BLACKLINE.COM](https://blackline.com)**

