



## EPISODE 7: The complaints that sink CAs TRANSCRIPT DOCUMENT

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[00:00] Hi, and welcome to the Acuity podcast. I'm your host, Aly Garrett, founder and principal of All In Advisory. In this episode, you'll meet Rebecca Stickney, leader of CA ANZ's Professional Conduct team in New Zealand. Along with Kate Dixon, her counterpart in Australia, Rebecca contributes to the public interest articles and Acuity mag, which break down a range of topics that might be of concern to chartered accountants, such as handling complaints, dealing with conflicts of interest and acting for families and friends. She's here to share her insights into the wide variety of complaints that the conduct team receive and how CAs can avoid getting into situations where clients might make a complaint against them.

You'll also hear the story of Rishabh Tandon, a young CA living in San Francisco and working as the finance lead for Global Music Publishing at

YouTube. That's coming up for you later in conversations with Gen CA. And Andrew Van De Beek is back to share his latest account accounting hack with you.

It might surprise you that CA ANZ receives 300 to 350 complaints about members each year, that's almost one a day. If you're a CA listening to this podcast, I bet at some stage you've heard about a member that's come under scrutiny and had a complaint made about them. I also bet you've thought gee whiz, I hope that doesn't happen to me. The fear of the disciplinary tribunal and potential sanctions is real. So where did the complaints come from? And how can you avoid ever seeing your name in the disciplinary decision section of Acuity magazine? Rebecca Stickney leads the Professional Conduct team for New Zealand and is here to tell you how, Becky, welcome to the podcast.

[01:41] RS: Hi, Aly, thanks very much for having me.

AG: So what are the types of complaints the CA ANZ Professional Conduct team typically receive?

RS: As you can imagine, our members are in a diverse range of businesses, practice, and so complaints cover a whole range of issues. We get a lot of complaints about, say timeliness or competency or quality of the engagement, complaints about breaches of confidentiality, poor communication, or general sort of professional behavioural type stuff that falls into the kind of concepts of failure to act with courtesy and consideration or in accordance with the integrity or the professional behaviour standards of the code of ethics. We look at the ethics that relate to billing. We get conflict of interest type complaints or complaints involving threats to objectivity, independence, a number of what I would call more sort of technical competency complaints, or negligence. Sadly, at the sort of more serious end of the spectrum, we do get complaints involving allegations of dishonesty or a failure to act with honesty and integrity.

[02:49] AG: Wow, that's quite a diverse group there. And we'll go through in a bit more detail in a moment. But where do the complaints usually come from?

RS: Under the NZICA rules, so NZICA is the New Zealand Institute of Chartered Accountants or the CA ANZ bylaws, under both governing documents, any person may make a complaint. That may be clients, it could be employers, it may generally just be a person from the public, another member, another regulator, or it may originate from CA ANZ or NZICA itself. Typically, clients make up the large portion of complaints about public practitioners.

[03:25] AG: In relation to complaints, is there a split between male and female?

RS: Yes, typically, we get about an 80/20 ratio each year to male, male, female. And typically, the age range most complained about is the sort of 40 to 70 year olds.

AG: Why do you think that is? Is it that they may not be doing as much training or educating themselves?

RS: One thing is it correlates with public practice, so remembering that most of our complaints are about public practitioners. More members are likely to be in that age range and in practice. And I suppose also there may be training deficits, it might be a while since they've done ethics. Could be just not keeping abreast of changes.

AG: I've been in the business for about 27 years, I've certainly seen it morph and change and evolve, where it once was handshakes and wheeling and dealing. It now certainly is a bit more around the ethical engagement and making sure that the client is first. Are you starting to see that also?

RS: Yes, there's definitely a greater emphasis on trust and ethics and wider business practice. We still see a bit of that wheeler dealing potentially from smaller communities, where perhaps people are more familiar with their

clients, or there's still that kind of culture of - my word is my bond. I also think that there is some extremely dynamic members, including members in small practice who have state of the art, you know, practices, templates, engagement with their clients, and even really dynamic business models.

[04:56]AG: Yeah, it's certainly evolving. I think there's a momentum building towards utilising all the tools we now have available to us to make sure that we're going best practice and doing the right thing.

RS: Yeah, absolutely.

AG: You had a really interesting theft case recently. Can you tell me what happened there?

RS: I dealt with a complaint that I think actually highlights the important role that CA ANZ plays in maintaining the public interest in the competency of our members and the integrity of them. So I had a complaint that originated out of two clients. It was an older couple and they felt that they had been owed a tax refund and for some reason, didn't know why that had not been received. So, when I got the complaint, I asked some preliminary questions around the nature of the engagement. Transpired that they're paying fairly low fees, which was, like \$50 a year or something, it was quite surprising.

AG: You can't breathe for \$50! Let alone get a tax return done [laughs]

[05:56] RS: Exactly. So I thought that doesn't sound credible. But I also thought, well look, giving the member the benefit of the doubt, maybe there's actually an engagement whereby fees are taken from the refund. And perhaps the couple didn't appreciate that that was what they'd signed up to. So I said, look, go off to Inland Revenue and find out what you should have received by way of tax refunds. And unfortunately, it was a lot, quite a significant amount that should have been paid out. So we engaged forensic accountants to go and meet with the member and undertake a review of the practice that highlighted immediately that there were significant

concerns with the member and that these weren't the only clients involved. An interim suspension order was issued while we completed our investigation and we were able to identify and trace through, just under two years worth of transactions through various bank accounts, and ultimately, the member was struck off. The member's finally being sentenced this year - the Serious Fraud Office identified about just slightly over a million dollars in funds missing and was just slightly under 250 clients who had been affected by the conduct.

AG: Wow.

[07:07] RS: Through the criminal channel, that member is now serving a custodial sentence.

AG: Very serious stuff

RS: Really serious. And thankfully, we do have a really robust system to deal with that sort of misbehaviour.

AG: Absolutely. We want to be known as a trusted advisor and a trusted professional. So you certainly want to weed out those that are the cowboys and not doing the right thing. I thought we could go through the common complaints that you see arise for CAs in public practice. You mentioned before about timeliness - how late are we talking when people complain about timeliness? Could it be avoided by updating the client more regularly?

RS: Yes, absolutely. I think often complaints will escalate, and it can actually start as quite a trivial matter and then grow. Typically, where members will get sanctioned by the disciplinary bodies, is if they fail to either properly itemise and explain their bills so that the clients don't understand or if there are some other sort of ethical breaches that sit around that. In the worst cases, I've seen members double billing, or even may even look like double billing, but it's actually about a failure to explain what that bill pertains to. Billing for work

that was undertaken three years ago, or when the member had said that they were going to write it off.

[08:20] AG: Ouch!

RS: If the work is well in excess of say a fee estimate or quote, or there's an agreed amount, and then they bill well beyond that, that's certainly something that can end up in a reprimand or some sort of sanction.

AG: Yeah, I'm seeing now a lot more CAs trying to do upfront billing or fixed fee, hoping that that might solve some of those communication problems. Are you seeing anything like that?

RS: I think there's a mixture. The most important thing is to have a really robust terms of engagement, and make sure that it's updated regularly. So we often see members that signed the terms of engagement 10 years ago, and have never bothered to update it, or maybe do an annual questionnaire, but that actually doesn't cover the fact that the scope of services has changed over time.

AG: I often find that's such a critical document to use. And there are products like Practice Ignition now that allow us to do those terms of engagement and update them regularly. So there are programmes now available to help

RS: Yes

AG: accountants and CAs to utilise them, which will save us at the back end with billing disputes. So..

RS: Yeah

AG: Some forward thinking.

RS: Exactly. And I think you should be seeing that as your fundamental protection. Members could potentially also use that as a means to address,

what happens if we get into a dispute? This is how I like to handle it. If there's a conflict of interest, this is our approach for dealing with that. Are there any conflicts that need to be foreshadowed up front?

AG: I imagine confidentiality is a very critical component now, as part of the client CA relationship. What types of confidentiality breaches are you seeing?

[10:00] RS: The tricky types of confidentiality breaches arise, say when a couple is splitting up, so matrimonial disputes, or even engagements that involve multiple generations, so you might be accountant for mum, dad, and the kids, and, you know, as the kids get older, actually, they have dominion over their own affairs, and perhaps don't want to share that with mum and dad. In relationship disputes, as the couple splits up and say, there's one that's a director of a company that remains as a client of the accountant, one of the spouses has actually gone off to another accountant. And there's just a lot of hats being worn. And so it's hard to navigate all of those relationships and so sometimes things slip out inadvertently. It's more rare that you have complex confidentiality breaches, say where the firm is representing multiple parties to a transaction and there may well be different partners acting for different clients in that transaction. But there's a deep need to safeguard confidences, so commercial types of transactions.

AG: Do you have any tips for CAs dealing with these cases? They can obviously become quite emotional.

RS: It's really important that members identify who their client is and where their obligation lies. We're talking here about breach of confidentiality, but potentially the more challenging issue is conflicts of interest and breaches of objectivity. Conflict cases typically arise in from two avenues. One is a conflict of interest between the interests of multiple clients or different parties, but the member doesn't have a conflict themselves. The second avenue is where the members own interest is in conflict. And often in that latter category, the cases are more serious. In cases that involve conflicts between

the interests of two clients, often members are trying to do the best by both parties. But it's a failure to identify that circumstances have changed. So say, if you take marital disputes, initially the member may well be the long standing accountant for the client couple, as the relationship dispute sort of evolves, at the beginning, they may well all be on the same page, and then things take a turn, and the member may honestly feel that they're trying their best to help people at a very difficult time. But you need to have really good safeguards set up right from the beginning, that explains where the boundaries of your help are, and at what time you tell clients that it's in their best interest to take independent advice. Often members don't necessarily put enough thought into, how am I going to protect myself if it all goes awry here. So protecting the client's interests, but also protecting your own standing as a CA.

[12:48] AG: Mmm absolutely.

RS: But the self interest complaints are often some of the more serious complaints that we deal with, and quite frequently end up at the disciplinary tribunal, and in some cases, result in removal of membership. Often these cases arise where the member is perhaps entering some sort of joint venture with the client. It may well start off with good intentions, but there is a risk to safeguard their own interest ahead of their clients. And over the years, I've done some really interesting cases that have been quite serious. Sometimes the member is actually managing the client bank accounts or the business, the venture's bank accounts. And they make sure that their investment gets paid out ahead of others. One case I did, the member was a trustee of the client, the client was an investor, along with a range of other people, the member also put an investment in, but the client had a preferential investment over everybody else, including the member. And the member wearing his trustee hat actually had fiduciary obligations to that client. He also had fiduciary obligations under the client monies rules where he's managing the trust account. There was an agreement to pay out monies, but

wearing his advisors hat, he should have ensured that all of the funds went to the secured creditor and client instead of himself and others. We've also recently done one where a member had a business coaching advisory business as an adjunct to the general sort of CA practice, and took on shareholdings of various clients and then ultimately manoeuvred the clients out of those businesses, and that member has been struck off, it was quite a serious complaint.

AG: It's profiteering from the clients...

RS: And failing to act with honesty and integrity. So there's a conflict in the member of self interest, they often also have honesty, integrity, breaches associated with them.

AG: How often do you see these happen?

RS: Thankfully, they're more uncommon, but we would typically have, you know, one or two every year or two. Members really need to be alert to this even if they don't have malevolent intentions, there can be a real risk, where your interests are also in conflict, that might be interests by virtue of your family's interests as well - might not be you directly. It's just being alert to all of the angles that something could come back to bite you. And protecting yourself.

AG: It's looking at it from that third party perspective and getting through the smell test, isn't it?

[15:26] RS: Exactly. I mentioned before the importance of documenting, it is surprising how many members don't document things - that they may say, I recognise there was a conflict of interest, and I discussed it. But you can't prove that if it's not written down somewhere.

AG: You mentioned safeguards there, do you have any particular examples of safeguards that that we could apply?

RS: Absolutely. At the very least, it might be identifying that the client should take independent advice or offering that opportunity, offering that opportunity in writing, and getting the clients written informed consent to continue acting, and keeping a copy of that on file.

Maybe going so far as to identify the circumstances where that's not going to be enough. And where you will cease acting, it might be using different partners in the firm, it might be saying, well, this part of the engagement, I'm now going to stand down, I'll keep doing your basic compilation, but I'm not going to do the valuation of this part of the business, you need a specialist for that. You don't need to wear all of the hats.

AG: And that leads well into independence, doesn't it? And not wanting these independence breaches. Could you talk a little bit more about that?

RS: Yes. Auditors will be very familiar with independence. And other types of specialist areas have very specific independence requirements; insolvency, valuations and certainly in assurance, but there are other scenarios where you need to think about 'is there a risk to to my independence?', 'is there a risk to the perception of my standing?'. In audit cases, we certainly deal with a range of independence breaches. So that might be thankfully, usually not in the licenced cases, but doing both the compilation and the audit. That's an absolute no -

AG: Big no-no!

[17:12] RS: Big major no-no. And often that arises, I think, where members aren't actually practising as auditors and might be doing it for benevolent, charitable reasons. So perhaps doing an audit of the local squash club, and there's a lot of pressure to try and help out their community. And it's great that members do give their time, but at the same time, you need to know where your limits are. We have had our share of cases where members have fallen foul of those sorts of hardwired independence obligations.

AG: Did you want to tell us a little bit about trustees? And what you're kind of seeing in that area at the moment?

RS: So what we're starting to see now is complaints that are either originating from the beneficiary children of elderly clients, or clients who are perhaps wanting to realise their assets as they move into retirement and finding that the trusts that they'd set up to hold their matrimonial home, they're wanting to sell down their assets and the trust instrument isn't quite what they want, or isn't fit for purpose anymore. And so we're getting some complaints about members who are needing to balance the obligation as CA as well as their fiduciary obligations as trustee. And that can sometimes be in conflict with each other. If they're wearing both hats, that might be that as the trustee, they're approving their own bills as accountant. Ethically that's not really a very tenable position, however it may actually be allowed under the trust deed.

AG: So are you saying that the trustees are CAs over these trusts?

RS: Yes.

AG: Oh, wow.

[18:52] RS: Members are made trustees or even executors of states. And so we've been getting complaints about members who are really taking on dual roles. And that can create objectivity threats, it can sometimes be a conflict of interest. They're very challenging to navigate, particularly say you're dealing with the beneficiary children of elderly clients who are perhaps going into care or may now be deceased. There are certain obligations that the members have as trustees, there are limits to what beneficiaries may be entitled to, although there's probably more emphasis on information being made available to beneficiaries. And so members have to be really careful as they navigate those dual roles, and may need to choose to only wear one hat and probably the natural hat to give up is the accounting hat. If they find that they're in a situation that there is some acrimony in the trust and perhaps

a risk of litigation, or some threats being made against trustees, members really need to think carefully about how they're going to manage sort of a risk of exposure to say, a conflict breach. Either outsourcing the accounting work to another firm or another partner in the firm, thinking about arrangements for how their fees should be approved, what type of information they could provide to interested parties to appease disputes, and ensuring they've got really good transparent communication. We are also getting complaints from children of older clients, where there's a changing of the guard and say there's a competency type issue with the parent instructor. Those are very challenging cases for members to navigate.

AG: Honestly, they can be quite common, where the accountant is asked to be the executor on an estate because they are the trusted advisor. And I often see them as co executors, with lawyers, for instance, does that help if there's a co executor?

[20:54] RS: Where new trust deeds are being negotiated, it may be asking to have some input to ensure that the trust deed actually encompasses some safeguards and protections for the member. For example, where the professionals fees are being approved, that that is approved by the other trustees, They're not authorising their own fees. Or what are the powers of appointment? And if new people need to come on board, can the trustees enable that without needing to go to court? Do decisions need to be made by majority? It's very complex. And often members actually genuinely feel that they're trying to do the right thing, and may well be dealing with quite divisive sort of parties, it's important to just sort of ensure that they are protecting themselves and sometimes it's recognising when they should cease acting, and that's really tricky if they have been the long standing advisor for a very important client where that relationship has actually been their entire professional career or something.

AG: It does become difficult because I've had similar situations, and you do deeply care for that person, they become a friend. And that's where you

really need to seek advice and get that external opinion, isn't it? Because you might be losing your independence.

[22:10] RS: Yes. If you anticipate this through your quality control manual, for example, like conflicts of interest, there should be a really good section in your quality control practices for the firm policies around exactly how you do this, what kind of documentation you need for every single case, how safeguards are communicated, etc. It's just being alert to changing circumstances.

AG: Could you give us some examples around honesty and integrity complaints and not misappropriating funds or giving false and misleading statements?

[22:41] RS: It can sometimes be just in correspondence - promising to do something in a way that is just on the face of it a lie or dishonest. In serious cases, it can be actually manipulating financial information. We have had cases unfortunately, where say, members in practice have issued two sets of accounts, one for the bank, one for the tax man.

AG: [laughs] There is so much client pressure to do that. Unfortunately, still to this day.

RS: Yeah.

AG: But the banks are getting smarter.

RS: Yeah.

AG: I'm being a bit cheeky here, but can you complain about a client if they ask you to falsify documents? I suspect the way out is to say no longer a client [laughs]

RS: No longer a client, yeah. I mean, it's interesting, we haven't had a lot of complaints. But obviously, the NOCLAR provisions are a relatively new part of the code, Non Compliance with Laws and Regulations. So that's meant to

serve as a protection for member's ethical guidance when they're dealing with clients or businesses, employers even, where there is serious non compliance with laws and regulations and provide steps that members should take in order to protect themselves and ensure that their own ethical standing isn't compromised.

[23:52] AG: I mean I've heard of situations where clients have asked for, let's call it dodgy things to happen and the accountant stood up and said, no, and so they've moved accountants. We would normally provide in course an ethical letter, which can be risky if we expose these types of things, because of confidentiality and privacy, do you have complaints about that also?

RS: Yes, we get lots of complaints about ethical clearance. [laughs] From two avenues. One is aggrieved clients who are upset about either refusal, or you know, the scenario you've given, or breach of confidentiality or they perceive it as threatening, where the member may say, 'look, I can't give you this, because X, Y, and Z'. We also get complaints about failure to provide an ethical clearance. So that's from other members. You've taken on this client, and you haven't contacted me to seek clearance.

AG: Are there any good resources available that CAs can check out and get support if they're dealing with a complaint?

RS: On the CA ANZ website, there's some really good resources about avenues for member support, and also about how to deal with a complaint. And if you are sent a complaint, you'll be sent some information about dealing with the complaint. So the first thing is, don't panic, take a breath, read the complaint, I'll say to people try to play the ball, not the man. It's very easy to get quite upset about receiving a complaint, it can be extremely stressful. But the really important thing is we want both sides of the story. Members absolutely hundred percent should make the most of their opportunity to explain their side of the story. We are looking for appropriate information to verify the matters. The bulk of complaints are either found to

not warrant further action or result in relatively lower level sanctions. Only the minority of matters are really serious enough to go to the disciplinary tribunal. Members should think about reaching out for support. So, CA Advisory Group is a panel of experienced chartered accountants who can provide sort of ethical support and maybe provide a sounding board while they're going through the process. There's also the member support team NZICA. Inappropriate cases, and particularly where it's a serious matter, they need to think about informing their PI insurer, professional indemnity insurer. They may need to take legal advice. It's really necessary, and the sooner you do it, the better. Often members can make the situation worse by not approaching the response in a really appropriate way. They need to be mindful that they have some confidentiality obligations under the rules and bylaws when the complaint is made. It is a confidential process, but under the rules and the bylaws that explains who they can talk to, the fact that they can disclose without breaching confidence to certain parties, so be aware of those obligations. And also, feel free to reach out to the case manager from CA ANZ or NZICA who's responsible for that complaint. We're always happy to talk to people about the process, or give ideas about where people can get support.

[27:05] AG: That's really wholesome, holistic support there. Becky, thank you for joining us on the Acuity podcast. My key takeaways from this is communication can solve a lot of these complaints. A good appropriate engagement letter and documenting everything and looking at the big picture will help us to get through any complaints that may be made. So thank you so much for your time.

RS: Pleasure. Thank you very much for having me, Aly.

AG: On the way, conversations with Gen CA. But right now, here's Acuity pod hack guru Andrew Van De Beek.

AVB: ANDREW VAN DE BEEK

[27:41] AVB: Hey hey! How you doing? Andrew here. Hey I've got some hacks on how to get your team engaged in more than just workflow. The first hack is an incredibly obvious one and it's all around KPIs. Do you have some KPI's in place with your team members? And if so, when you look at those KPIs are they just workflow related? Is it just about the dollars that they invoice clients? The tax returns that they lodge? Or is it more than that? Do you have things like client retention built into your KPIs for your team members? Do you have things like expectation of presenting the business at networking events? What is it that you can build in as a KPI within your team that you can then help to then empower them to do more than just the direct workflow related things. If you do that I find, that your team will start to look at opportunities more than just completing that tax documentation. The second one kind of then comes off KPIs, give them responsibility. Something outside of just that workflow. Now that could be something as simple as saying hey we're going to hold a party or a drinks, or a something, i'd love you to get involved and help to organise that. Often the leader of the business is always doing it or they punch it to their admin team to look after it, but what does it look like if you ask one of your accountants and say hey I know there's like a dozen of your clients that you look after, we're thinking of getting them together. What would you like to do? Ask them, give them a responsibility for organising that. Or maybe it could be holding a meeting -that's one thing we do at Illumin8, every day is we do a stand up meeting where we go round our entire team and we say what did you achieve yesterday? What are you looking to achieve today? Are you stuck and can any one in the room help you? What was your win? And then any generic team conversations, that meeting from day one has been held by a team member, it's never held by myself as a business leader because we believe that the team are more engaged when they're involved in running that. How do you give them a voice and give them responsibility, so they're connected and caring about what it is that they're doing? The third one that i've got for you is you need to ask for their input, then you need to listen, and then you need to show that you're doing

something about it. One thing that I learnt from my team a few years ago, was that my leadership at that point in time was going ok, but I had a really negative aspect where I wasn't following through on things. I would talk about stuff, I would share or ask for their input and nothing would happen. So my team started to believe that well, I didn't really care about what they said, what's said, what they shared. What was actually discussed was actually hot air. So ask for their input - and it could be something like hey we're thinking of offering this service, we're thinking of charging this price, we're thinking of having this beer in the fridge, whatever it is, ask for their input, see what they have to say about it, and the more opportunity they have for it the more connected to your business they will become.

And the last tip that I have, the last hack that I want to give you right here is be true to what you tell them. So day one when someone comes in for an interview in your workplace, what are you telling them? You'll have responsibility and autonomy and blah blah blah, and then a year and a half later you're still looking over their shoulder at every second thing they do. Or are you actually giving them that autonomy, are you allowing them to stuff up? Are you then kindly correcting and guiding them along the way. One of the things that I have said to every single team member at Illumin8 is that this business is being designed in that it is not mine, I am the caretaker of it. And one day it will be my team. Now that's my whacky approach, but that means I'm talking equity day one with people, saying there is potential if you're around here for long enough and you connect to what we're about and you're interested in it, that equity might be on the table for you to invest in. and now we've got three people involved in equity at different aspects in the business over the last few years and that's incredibly rewarding because it shows that they care deeply about what we do and we also see an opportunity to be engaged in that. OK gang, that is my hacks today on how to keep your team engaged in your business beyond workflow, peace out!

AG: It's time for conversations with Gen CA, here's CA ANZ President Peter Rupp, speaking with Rishabh Tandon.

PR: PETER RUPP

RT: RISHABH TANDON

[33:01] PR: With over 2 billion monthly active users on the platform, and over 20 million paying subscribers, YouTube is far and away the world's most popular music platform. Today I'm joined by Rishabh Tandon, who's managed to turn his CA qualification into an exciting role at the cutting edge of the music industry. And Rish, as he likes to be called, has found himself at the forefront of valuing the contracts and creating the systems to support our insatiable thirst for digital music. Rish, welcome to the programme.

RT: Great to be here.

PR: So let's start with your current role with YouTube. How would it change the way we listen to and access music?

RT: So I'm currently the finance and strategy lead for music publishing at YouTube. And basically what this means is, when a consumer watches a video on YouTube that plays any sort of music in it, we make sure that we hold the appropriate rights and licences to be able to play that music. So this could be content from an artist uploaded official music video, to people performing covers of songs all the way to a snowboarding video, which might have some sort of music in the background. So part of my role includes valuing the rights that these music labels and publishers give us such that we can pay the artists, songwriters and composers fairly for their content. And then the other part of it includes internal strategic projects to ensure that we have the right infrastructure, and cross functional alignment in place to be able to do this. Gone are the days where consumers purchase physical CDs or download individual songs, we now effectively have like the entire global music catalogue in our pocket at all times. We're just completely revolutionising the way that they're able to discover new music. And it's really cool working for a company like that, that doesn't sit still, and is always looking for sort of new and innovative ways to connect people with music.

[33:53] PR: But when you started out in accounting, did you expect to be at the cutting edge of music? And what did you think you would be doing?

RT: Absolutely not. Honestly, I kind of just fell into accounting. I picked it as a subject in high school as I was, academically pretty strong in maths and then ended up studying it at uni. And then low and behold, I started my career in audit at EY. More critically, though, I'd always known that I wanted to live and work overseas. So after a few years at EY I decided to take the plunge and move to the US. So I did some contracting for a few months before moving into the m&a advisory practice at KPMG. But after a few years in consulting, I realised that I really wanted to be responsible for something from start to finish, and be able to see the sort of wider picture. And I knew I had those skills that I could transfer to industry. And that's what led me down the avenue, which led me to my role at Google.

PR: And you've moved to the US for the role. Ordinarily, you would have been in the sort of Google campus working on your role. But now you're sort of spread out, given the current COVID travel restrictions, how's that working for you?

[34:50] RT: I think it was the adjustment at the start. So YouTube has its own campus, maybe like a half an hour drive away from the main Google campus. But yeah, everyone, went to the office every day. And it was a great campus experience and environment and food and snacks and all that fun stuff. But also just the ability to be able to collaborate with your teammates being in the same room. That being said, it's a very global team. So even though you're in the office, you're talking to people spread out all over the world. When we shifted to work from home, it was definitely a bit of an adjustment. But it's sort of reached that steady state now where everyone knows how to operate from home, I think people are definitely missing just that in person interaction with team members. But Google's announced that we're going to be working from home until the middle of next year. So people are doing different things, we decided to pack up shop in San Francisco and give up our lease and spend the next few months sort of travelling around California experiencing different towns. And then when we are ready to go back to the office, I think we'll figure out what we want to do then.

PR: Fantastic. Given the challenge of working remotely and and trying to connect with all your colleagues, how do you find balance in your working life at the moment?

[36:00] RT: I think at the start, everyone sort of struggled because all of your work is happening on video conference, all of your social engagements are happening on video conference, and then it definitely got to a stage where everyone was fatigued with that. As time has gone on, and fallen into rhythm, I think it's about, blocking out those times of the day that you want for yourself, like we're currently by the beach down in Southern California. So I make sure I've got a period of time blocked off in the morning and in the afternoon where my wife, my dog, and I will either go for a walk or a bike ride. Just being able to take that ability to disconnect and have that me time is critical, especially because we don't have that natural divide between home and work anymore that we used to when you're commuting to work, you're stopping for lunch, you go down to the cafe and get lunch. Even if you're not stopping to take a break to eat, you're still breaking up and going to get food. Whereas now you're going from the room to the kitchen, which takes about 15 seconds, cook something or you heat something up in the microwave, and then you know you're back at your desk. So I think it's taking yeah, that conscious step to make sure you are setting time aside for yourself. Otherwise, the burnout is very real as well.

[37:10] PR: So what's been the most important driving factor for you in your career? Is it what you do or how you do it?

RT: I think it's a combination of all of those things. Like to land a role at a company you want to work at, I think a lot of it also comes down to who you know. I knew people at both KPMG and Google who've asked me when I was applying, but of course, it still then comes down to you to show that you have the ability to deliver during your interviews. But once you're in, I think it definitely sort of comes down to how you do it. We all know how to work out spreadsheet magic and analyse information. But it's really the ability to sort of build those relationships that foster both mentee/mentor relationships. I've found have been the ones that allow you to grow and showing your ability to help others, learning from others. And being a team player, which is really what's going to drive your career further.

PR: We're working in an environment with constantly emerging digital technologies. I'm just interested if you had some advice as to what mindset or approach CAs can have in these digitally advanced organisations?

[38:12] RT: I think we need to, as CAs keep a very open mind. You know, it could be incumbent upon you to take those best practices that you're seeing at some companies and clients that are digitally ahead of the curve and taking them to your other clients. If you're in an industry and wanting to learn what you can do to implement change at your company, you know you could speak to other CAs within the organisation or outside of your organisation through a platform such as MyCA. You want to leverage other CAs as a sounding board, to my earlier point around networking, and, you know, really use them as a resource to help you. You know, historically larger companies have moved slower in embracing new technologies. But as the new generation it is, again, incumbent upon us to be the ones that are pushing that change across, we can apply that different generational lens being the ones that have grown up with computers and mobile technology with us constantly. We should be the ones at the forefront of that, pushing these new technologies that are available.

PR: What advice would you give to younger CA's now joining the profession?

[39:19] RT: in terms of advice for someone starting their career in accounting, I'd say the first thing which might sound very obvious, but get the study aspect of the programme out of the way sooner rather than later. It really helps solidify the theoretical concepts. And you'll learn the valuable skills of time management, discipline and prioritisation that, honestly, you know, Peter, I'm sure you can attest to as well, you'll need for the rest of your career. Additionally, I can't stress enough the importance of networking and building strong and meaningful connections, personally speaking, that sort of helped me get to where I am today. Meet those people, make those connections, and, get yourself into jobs that probably don't even exist now. And we don't even know about.

PR: So what does the CA designation mean to you?

[40:04] RT: So the CA designation provides me with a great sense of accomplishment and pride in having achieved something that many around you, aspire to. And as I mentioned, it opens countless doors provides you with so many opportunities, and as long as you're willing to adapt and change, that's always going to keep you in demand as well. And the ability to live and work overseas as a definite highlight as well. I've been in the USA for almost seven years, and regret absolutely nothing. And I think, having that ability to start off my career in Melbourne leverage that to come and come to the US, you know, do some different types of consulting, and then being able to

move into industry and do that has been incredible. Without the CA designation, I don't know if I would have been able to do it.

PR: Where do you think you'll go next?

RT: Honestly, I have absolutely no idea. A few months ago, I transitioned from the purely financial roles into sort of the financing strategic projects aspect. This is a brand new foray for me, not solely looking at financials. I think I'll see how this goes for a period of time and then you know, decide do I want to hone in on that finance side or hone in on the operational side and just see where it takes me. I think being at a company like Google, the opportunities internally, are immense. Having that flexibility of figuring out what I want to do, is really great.

[41:19] PR: And as you say, the role might not even have been invented yet.

RT: Yeah, exactly. Exactly right. I didn't even know the role that I'm in right now. I had no idea what this was when I finished uni 10 plus years ago, so in 10 years time, who knows what any of us will be doing?

PR: Rish Tandon, thanks for joining Gen CA Conversations.

RT: Thank you. It's great to be here.

AG: Thanks for listening to this episode of the Acuity podcast, I'm Aly Garrett, from All In Advisory. For more stories like these, be sure to check out Acuity magazine on the CA ANZ website. Find out more about this podcast series by visiting [acuitymag.com/acuitypodcast](http://acuitymag.com/acuitypodcast). If you enjoyed this episode, we'd love you to rate review and subscribe so more people can find the podcast.