



EPISODE 1: YOUR CAREER MAP

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AG: ALY GARRETT

DR: DAVID RIORDAN

AVB: ANDREW VAN DE BEEK

AG [00:00] Hello and welcome to the Acuity podcast. I'm your host Aly Garret founder and principal of All in Advisory.

In a world free of the dreaded 'C' word, career progression opportunities for chartered accountants were virtually unlimited. If you wanted, you could travel worldwide developing skills and having great experiences as you came across new and varied accountancy work. But with the limit on international and domestic travel, and as many of the big four let go of junior and senior staff, how should chartered accountants seize the opportunity to continue their career path?

AG [00:44] In this episode of the Acuity podcast, you'll learn about some excellent tools to help you move forward, even while the world seems to be stationary. As well as methods on how to self-audit when your career path takes a curve or two. In Conversations with Gen CA, you'll hear from forensic

accountant Courtney Dennett who works for the Australian Federal Police. And don't miss the Acuity podcast hack guru, Andrew Van De Beek - that for you a little later.

AG [01:11] But right now I'd like to welcome David Riordan. David is a recruitment specialist and career coach at Chartered Accountants Ireland, who guides new CAs as well as CAs looking for a change of direction. David, welcome to the podcast.

DR [1:25] Thanks Aly, Brilliant to talk to you.

AG I'd love to start by asking you what your career path has been like, was it what you had initially planned?

DR Ah, absolutely not [LAUGHS], god was there even a plan? [LAUGHS]. I started off from school I went into UCD in Dublin and did a BCOM because I suppose, it seemed like it made most sense at the time. It was a good business degree, it opened up a number of different channels and from there I went into IT, would you believe for about 10 years. Which I really enjoyed actually, loved IT, but then we hit the dot com bubble and it unravelled a little bit. I had to do a little bit of a retake on the career path and a bit of a pivot, and I went back to basics in terms of my own business training and decided to, to follow that on by doing the professional accountancy with Chartered Accountants Ireland. And I went back and I did my auditing through a mid-tier practice, and did my three and a half year contract, at the time I was moving - I was buying a house, we just had our first child and it was pretty hectic. But by the time I got to the end of it, very worthwhile and from there like I'd been about five years in

practice at that stage, doing a lot of auditing which was really worthwhile but I knew it wasn't a long term prospect in terms of staying in audit. So after the exams were finished I...it was really only then that I had to take stock and actually decide to map out my career and that's when I fell into recruitment I suppose. And I was probably just lucky that I really enjoyed it, but it opened up a whole world of education for me. It was only really then that I could see how you actually map out a career, and plan for the future, so I did everything in reverse.

AG [03:20]

Yeah, that's quite a journey to get to a career counsellor and coach. What motivated you to become a counsellor in that area?

DR [03:28]

I suppose I'm a bit of a helper monkey by nature, and I'm quite a competitive individual so recruitment and helping people with their careers had a bit of both of those in it. In a sense that you have targets every month when you're working in the recruitment sector, it's quite sales oriented stuff, that fed my competitive nature. Whereas at the same time at the end of every month it was really rewarding and altruistic to be able to say I've helped, five, ten people into new jobs, and new careers, and new lives, and I really enjoyed that.

What I find in speaking to a lot of Chartered Accountants is that they have quite a competitive nature as well. A lot of Chartered Accountants they're quite ambitious. So I love sitting down and having the face to face consultations with members and talking through their CVs, and not just their career paths, but the extra interests and hobbies that

they have. Which can be very important and come into interviews.

AG [04:26]

Where should they start on their career path?

DR

I think you need to start thinking about that actually when you're in your training. The fantastic thing about the CA qualification is there are so many different routes you can go down. Like there's literally a 100 different avenues you can choose. But so many newly qualified members suddenly hit that cross-roads upon qualification that they need to figure out like what type of roles, what type of sector, what kind of company etc do I want to work for, and where do I want to take this new profession, qualification. And – really, if you have spoken to colleagues, peers and superiors etc. about what you could do once you qualify, I think that's the time to start mapping it out, and start figuring out how you actually build a career.

DR [5:16]

I wish I'd had a mentor back, kind of early stages myself, who could give me a bit of a steer and kind of say – make sure you're aware of your options when you qualify and really start putting the building blocks in place at that early stage. I always say it's a bit of a long standing project. And that's the best way to treat it. If you give it a bit of time and attention every month, and you've got a mentor in place, then I think that's the way to come at it.

AG [5:44]

So how in your early career should they go about finding a mentor if they don't have one?

DR [05:50]

Mentors can come from all walks of life. They don't have to be a CFO or an FD. It can be someone, even in your family, your extended family. That was the case for me, my father-in-law was a highly accomplished business person, and he knew me personally. And that was very valuable. Then equally, if you make good connections or you get introduced to, key people in the finance world, that would be useful as well.

And you can have multiple mentors as well. But if you've worked for someone in the past earlier in your career who you get on really well with and actually knows you. And knows, can be honest with you about what your strengths and weaknesses are, and give you a view on what you're good at and what you're weak on. Then that can be really valuable. You might not know that yourself and you can prop that up in terms of, education and courses or, other means.

AG [06:43]

So if somebody was to approach a professional mentor, are there any guidance – or any guidance that you could provide to them as to where to start? Like how do they actually find that person, how do they approach them?

DR [06:56]

Just literally, approach them and sort of say can I have a coffee and a chat about my career path. Then if it's through formal channels, I always encourage members of the institute to use LinkedIn and build up their network that way. And to zone in on a core of experienced finance professionals that are going to be really good links for them.

But even a zoom, and it's nearly easier to get chatting to someone now, through the way technology is.

DR [7:25] I would recommend having a few different mentors, to get a few different views on your CV, your interview techniques, your approach to career etc.

AG [07:37] I really liked that you mentioned LinkedIn. It's something that I've utilised a lot in my career for mentors and connections, and it's actually a really great way to connect with people that you may not know, and may not feel comfortable emailing. So early on in your career for an accountant, what foundational skills do you believe are important that they should actually have, that could cross multiple disciplines?

DR It's a good question. And, it's actually a really important one because – I do find myself Aly, saying to members, that are zoning in very heavily on technical expertise and should I do this course or that course. Or you know, I was thinking of doing my tax exams you know, for another two years and stuff like that. And you have to remind them to ask themselves why am I, why are they layering on extra technical courses and skills – to what end and to what value add?

Whereas sometimes actually it's the soft skills from an early stage.

DR [08:33] But for me the key skills are communication skills obviously and that often means being a really good listener, as well as a speaker. And presentation skills and then relationship building skills, and, and technology skills as well. The

relationship building skills is actually quite important to develop at a very early stage in your career. Whether you're in practice or industry. And building that network, because I always say that by the time you become an FCA and a fellow of the institute, what you really need to have established, is a very strong, personal network, that's going to be your ally as you forge the latter stages of your career.

DR [09:16]

And that's something that members aren't really told. Just forging really good business relations, is essential. And that feeds into the really good communication skills. I mentioned then the technical skills side of things, we're seeing more and more these days that technology and accountancy and finance are converging and as a result, working with big data and systems implementation etc, so certainly entering along those lines, are really good skill sets to pick up. As well as I mentioned the presentation skills and the ability to communicate effectively with senior management in an organisation, that's going to feed into your, your advancement and ambitions that way as well.

AG [10:00]

So how important do you think it is to be open to opportunities that you think initially might not suit yourself. What sort of advice do you give around that, if an opportunity presents itself out of the blue.

DR

You have to look at everything. And I've always recommended that members forge good relationships with their institute careers team, with a few good recruiters who really understand them and understand the Chartered Accountants pathway. It's funny Aly, sometimes

the best and the brightest top 10 placed Chartered Accountants aren't the ones that actually have the most stellar careers. I find in the last 10 years I've seen, the Chartered Accountants who have really grafted and worked their way through academically and through the early stages of their career. And decide to treat their career as a project are the ones that really succeed. They're constantly speaking to the right people, they're constantly looking at what might be the next step forward and do they need to shift gear slightly. Would they like to try and test out a new kind of avenue, to enhance their skill set etc. And sometimes that means looking at new opportunities and weighing up whether it's going to make sense as a next step in their career.

DR [11:17]

If it's a case then that something new comes along, for example I...placed a newly qualified member into a technology company recently. He came down the route of having done standard auditing for 3 and a half years, and he wanted to do something a bit different, he loved systems. He figured that he'd move city and go into this new role as a Systems Implementation Specialist within the finance space. Which is a very different kind of a role for him. But he figured, look he'd probably move back home after 12 months, and he wouldn't lose anything by doing it.

At the very least he'd pick up a new skillset on to his CV. And if it didn't work out, there was no harm done. So sometimes – and the early stage of your career can be the time that you do that. And the first 3 years you get a little bit of a license to do various contracts, try and test and

taste different kind of roles. And see what you enjoy, what type of companies and sector you enjoy, and move on from there.

AG [12:19] Yeah, so you say – you know taking a chance and maybe not looking at quite a lineal pathway, and maybe taking a risk. Do it in your early part of the career?

DR Yeah, definitely. I think that, that's what helps you find your passion. There's nothing to say that you can't jump out and do new things later in your career, you know, it's a bit more a pivot at that stage but – I always encourage newly qualifying members to take a serious look at doing a contract for 6 or 12 months once they qualify. And there's no commitment then, in terms of long-term. It looks fine on a CV.

AG [12:55] So if we're heading into the mid-career, what's the most common transition that you are seeing?

DR Yeah, It's funny, like we're in a funny time at the moment I suppose with COVID etc. But – I would say that the last 6 months has actually had a lot of members take stock. And take a bit of a review of careers in general. And many of them are talking about work-life balance. Talking about part time roles and that kind of thing. And sometimes that happens in the middle of someone's career and they just need to...change things around a little bit. Or the other big transition that I'm seeing at the moment is at that mid-career stage, moving out of practice into say industry or financial services. Where they've been climbing the ladder, in a Big 4 or practice in

general, and they want to change it up and move out into a company where they are just dealing with one client, essentially, and they want to get to – to, value add within that one client from a commercial perspective and work loads to do with that.

AG [14:03] I've heard they do that often because they don't want to do timesheets. [LAUGHS].

DR Yeah, practice is super for getting exposure to multiple sectors and working with clients, and the variety and everything. And it's really rewarding in terms of skills and experience with different companies and clients. But a lot of members do just hit that point where they decide they want to move out and just join one company. And I think that's the main kind of mid-career transition. I often say to members, like manager level is a good time to do that. If you go beyond manager, if you become a senior manager or associate director in practice – you're heading for kind of 7-10 years to become an FCA soon. Your career is a bit more set, and it can be harder to transition out into industry and services at that point. So maybe manager level is the time to do that transition.

AG [15:03] Sometimes transitioning – is it always the right move? Like is there an element where it might be a bit of a knee jerk reaction, something may have happened at their work, they get frustrated and look to move. I've often found people moving from firm to firm in professional practice tend to find the same types of issues. Do they need to dig a bit deeper before they make a transition from firm to firm?

DR [15:26]

You know the grass can often look greener on the other side. And if you're moving from practice to practice, sometimes that can be just changing the wallpaper really. You need to think of why you're moving, at which point, certainly you look at options and you look at a move to another practice for example. But equally, I always think it's very healthy and rewarding to have a good relationship with your boss. And to be able to have, good heart to heart with them about like where your career is going. You'll find in many good practices that they'll really want to support your career path. So, sometimes that can mean they facilitate you moving into a new area if you're upfront with them. Look at new opportunities in a practice as well, it's healthy and rewarding to be up front with your superiors about what you're ambitious for in your career path.

AG

If I was midway through my career, and I was getting itchy feet, and I came to you. What's the first thing that you would get me to do?

DR

The CV is the sales document, every week I say to Chartered Accountants, it's the one time where a CA has to become a little bit of a sales person. The CV is my sales document, I need to make sure that's in really good shape and that's the starting point. So world class CV, and that, you might even have a couple different versions of. You also need to have really good, well researched clarity about where you wanna go, what direction, what role and – to what end.

Like not enough people think about the subsequent steps

on their CV. So if you were to move into a new role, with this next move – where does that get you on your long term goals in terms of where are you gonna move to from this – next role?

DR [17:10]

you need to have almost done a separate document for yourself on that in terms of what your value add is. The weaknesses can be really important because that's what you're gonna get tested on those at interview stage and you're going to have to be honest about your weaknesses and your developmental points. If it's a case that you've been in practice or in the one job for a long time you might need extra tuition in terms of interviewing, and that whole phase.

So there's – in any kind of stepping into the market at any stage there's a number of phases to it, is the application phase, the CV, there's the interviewing phase and then there's the decision about when you get offers. What to go for, and is this the right move, and will it fit into the bigger picture?

It works really well to have a good ally who understands the market and can give you good – independent advice. It's really worth having a good relationship with a recruiter who you trust and can chat on a regular basis and gives you a really good update on the market. I think that's invaluable. And it's impartial.

AG [18:15]

I really love the strategic component of that and thinking big picture, it's really about getting to know your why and trying to align it to that. There may be people listening that have recently been made redundant, which must have been a difficult time, and could lead them to questioning

their careers. But they could also potentially see that and it be a catalyst for an opportunity to pivot or take stock, have you had any experience in helping people through this? And what would your advice be?

DR

A lot of sectors have experienced difficult times recently. And members who are exceptional and never would've been in situations where they faced redundancy or the shutters coming down on their business, are now in that space. And they need to take stock and try and figure out next steps. So it is a bit of a challenge but it's also a real opportunity. There was an example of one member recently she was Big 4 trained. And she would have gone on and subsequently set up her own business in the Optician kind of space. And then – built up that business over years for it to be bought out eventually then by a major business.

DR [19:24]

And she stayed on as a manager, within one of the shops but she's parting ways now and taking a package. So, very entrepreneurial Chartered Accountant and is looking to figure out that next step in her career path. And has an awful lot of commercial experience to impart to the next step of her career. Now, someone like that may go on and set up their own business again, or then might step back into the accountancy world. But, she's speaking to us at the moment, about how to go through that whole transition and figure out the current market. The starting point on that really is to understand from her own perspective or her strengths, her value add, what it is she's really good at, and what makes sense for the next step in her career.

DR Individual circumstances are different for everyone, not everybody gets voluntary redundancy packages. Some people just need to get straight back on the horse and find the next job really quickly due to mortgages and all the rest of it.

AG And it's really about building that resilience.

DR [20:29] Yea it is, it's funny, I have an awful lot of members come in every week to me and say, oh I could do that job, I'd really like the idea of going into partnering or whatever. The problem often that I need to remind them of is that it's the market that dictates. Sometimes in a tighter market, the employers get much pickier. The competition for roles gets higher. There's less roles out there for you to look at etc. That's why the first phase of starting to look at the market is to understand it and research it. And figure out where you're going to get the best bite in the market for your skillset.

AG [21:07] Because it's a competitive market. How does somebody stand out from the crowd? What are some of the things that you've seen that make somebody an outstanding candidate?

DR [21:16] Yeah, how to differentiate themselves a bit. I think that's the key Aly. You need to understand who are the other 8 candidates that are lined up beside me? And what sort of skill sets do they have, and how do I differentiate myself versus them.

Upskilling or even taking a hybrid role can often be a good

way of doing it. So if you want to transition into a new area or a new type of a role, sometimes you need to do a 2-step and take a role that's halfway in between. And look where you want to ultimately get, that can be the differentiator, I think.

AG [21:49]

I've often found specialisation can be a great differentiator. You mentioned earlier on in the career, some people were wanting to do too much technical too early. Is there a time in your career where it's better to specialise or is it something that builds over time?

DR [22:04]

Yeah I think you hit a point where you know what you enjoy. Whether it's, for example if it's forensic accounting, you've got exposure to it earlier in your career path and you just know that it's something you really like, then that's absolutely a niche channel, that you can specialise in early, and for a long time.

You can specialise later in your career as well, as a kind of – insulating yourself a little bit from the market. For example insolvency, it's something you can develop as a skill set to counteract a difficult market. I know for example some practices in Dublin have made a point of being specialists in insolvency, even during the really good times, so that when the market becomes very difficult, they're gonna survive, because they'll drop that expertise in relation to the insolvency market. It can be clever and worthwhile, building a niche skill set like that, that, gives you longevity and more resilience in the market for sure.

AG [23:02] You touched on resilience, what are your major tips to build resilience? What sort of things would you do or give advice to candidates on how to build their resilience?

DR [23:12] I think it comes back to the relationship building. It's probably the most important things as you build your career. And build up a network, a personal network as well as your personal brand. And make sure those connections are really clear and aware of your personal brand which is very important.

What you need to remember is everybody has a personal brand, whether it's up online or LinkedIn or whether it's out there and what people say about you when you leave the room.

You're putting yourself out there – in terms of the resilience of that you need to make sure that you're adding value at every instance in your career path.

AG [23:51] When I moved to a Big 4, one of the things I learnt from them was actually how to build my personal brand. And for me, they recommended that I build a specialisation. And so I did that by getting on LinkedIn and posting articles, and going to industry events. And starting to really build that personal brand. Do you have advice for people on how they can build theirs?

DR [24:15] Yup. And it's – it's all of the above, exactly what you said Aly. When I meet members as well I encourage them to get closer to their institute. An awful lot of newly qualified members once they've done their 3 and a half years and exams and everything, they sit back and go, oh god. That's it. I'm done with exams, I'll take a little break from

the institute now for a while now. And they drift off into the distance a little bit. Where in fact the cleverer thing to do is to get, to take that time, and get even closer to the institute. Get involved with committees, events, take a bit of a leadership role – that's, it's such an amazing vehicle, I see it in for example we have a young professionals committee, and group in Ireland. That it's brilliant in terms of social and events and speakers, and all of that. And it's a great way to be visible, when you're talking about your personal brand, that's the key. It's being visible and being out there. And being talked about, and being known for something, whether it's, high quality technically, or communicatively, or whatever, it's just being visible.-And social media's very powerful for that.

AG [25:26]

So, what about the people who are later on in their careers, what options could they look at to potentially transition out and start retirement planning. Do you have any tips there?

DR [25:36]

We do speak to a lot of FCA members who are in the latter stages of their career and, what I'm finding – particularly in the last year or 2 actually Aly is that, a lot of them are looking at – consulting.

That's what a lot of them fall back on to, they've got a lot of experience in, in business, in strategic decision making and commercial acumen and all of this. And they want to give a little bit back.-But the other thing that I'm seeing a lot of members who are approaching retirement get into is, not for profit organisations, charities, part time work is always an option then as well, and directorships, and non-

executive directorships is something that comes into the frame as well.

AG [26:19] Absolutely. So to finish up, what's the best piece of advice that you could give someone no matter where they are on their journey?

DR One thing that I've been saying to members at the institute in the last year or 2, I kind of realised – a lot of members don't think far enough ahead on their CV. So it comes back to setting yourself goals, short and long-term goals. And, if you were to ask a lot of our membership what's your plan in the next 5 or 10 years? It's the old cliché kind of interview question. But like, where do you want to actually be? Like genuinely, really examine yourself, where do you really want to be in the next 5 or 10 years?

DR [27:05] Then if you can give yourself an honest answer on that, that matches your ambitions etc. You work back from that. You set your goals, and you start putting the steps and the building blocks in place for that. And for me that refines back to the CV, and going okay. If I was to look 2 steps ahead and 2 paragraphs or entries ahead on my CV, what does that look like? So if I was to make a move now, what should that next paragraph be? But equally, the paragraph after that, is the one to think about. So if you were talking about moving to another practice, where does that get you in terms of your overall goal, or the – the jump after that? And that's what I think a lot of members don't think about. They just go, well that looks like a nice role and then they'll go for that. But they're not thinking

bigger picture. So it's hard to do, but if you can get a kind of a notion of the bigger picture plan, that's the key.

AG [28:01] Thanks so much for that Dave, I've really enjoyed speaking with you and I've learnt so much and I know that our listeners, either early, mid or late career will certainly have got a lot of gold from that. But one of the things that really stood out to me was in all of those stages – being strategic and future focused, and mapping out your career journey, and seeking mentors, will really help you to move forward in your career. So thank you so much.

DR It was lovely talking to you Aly, thanks very much.

AG [28:34] Here's our Acuity podcast hack guru, Andrew Van De Beek, director of Illumin8.

AVB: [28:39] Today I've got some hacks that are going to help you to stand out positively when applying for that all important next role, next step in your accounting career. Employers today are not particularly looking just for a number-cruncher, but they want someone with soft skills and other parts and traits to them that allow them to be more than just that times-tables by the back of a hand accountant. And this I believe will help you to show them that you are that person

AVB: [29:08] Firstly, I want you to start using more video in your application processes. It is a great way to show off who you are, what your personality is like, as well as to show them how good at communication you are. Now you can use a simple tool like Loom or Zoom, or even just do a selfie on your phone - it will do the job. But use this time to show them who you are. Use it to communicate your why, your purpose, and how you are going to be a great fit within their organisation. Secondly, please please please please please please please please please, do not stalk your prospective employer. It drives me

nuts getting an application through Seek or whatever platform you use, then you get an email, then you get connected on LinkedIn - you have three different missed calls and they drop in for a quick chat. You might really want this role, but doing this, you are more than likely standing out in a not so positive way.

AVB: [30:04] Next one I've got for you, I want you to really think about the design of your cover letter and resume that you submit for the application. Your cover letter, it should be short and punchy. It should show some personality. It should maybe have a photo of yourself and be that really unique, hey it's great to meet you this is who I am, kind of short piece of writing. If it moves onto a second page, it's way too long - that's for your resume. Now speaking of your resume, make it look different than all the others out there. Don't just use the same template you can find in Microsoft Word. Jump on UpWork or a platform like that and find someone who can quickly design something that helps you to show who you are and stand out from the crowd. Make sure you review that cover letter and that resume every time you apply for a role. It's pretty crazy that we still get applications for a role that we haven't actually advertised. And if you are going to say things like, a skill of mine is attention to detail, make sure you don't have any spelling errors. Also don't forget, social media, whether you like it or not, is your other resume. LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram and other platforms can be easily searched by your prospective employers, and good ones will do the research on you. So use them to your advantage. LinkedIn is a great way to connect with peers and really learn from your industry about what roles might look like, so engage and show your enthusiasm through there as well.

AVB: [31:31] And the last one which is close to my heart, through this whole application process, don't just say what you think an accountant would say, because that's what everybody else is saying and your employers will see through this. No one, well maybe a couple of people, but pretty

much no one has an interest in tax and accounting. That's your job - you might be interested in earning money but that's not an interest. Answer and be true to yourself. Show why you'd be a great fit. It's not about your ability to reconcile data in a timely fashion. It is about more than that. So be unique, be interesting. Still be relevant - I'm not saying to think about fluffy elephants flying in the cloud - but be relevant but be you through this process. That will help you to show your employer that you are that kind of person that they've been looking for. Alright friends that's enough from me, catch you for the next set of hacks.

PR: PETER RUPP

CD: COURTNEY DENNETT

AG [32:27] And now it's time for conversations with Gen CA. Here's Peter Rupp, president of CA ANZ, speaking with Courtney Dennett.

PR [32:38] I'm here with Courtney Dennett who's had a fascinating trajectory through her career that really started with part-time jobs, working in local accounting practices whilst she was at university. She then took a graduate role with PwC and now has a fascinating role with the Australian Federal Police. Courtney, welcome to the program.

CD [32:58] Thank you very much for having me.

PR [33:00] So people don't tend to think of the federal police when they think of accounting. What is your role here?

CD [33:05] My role at the federal police is as a forensic accountant in the criminal assets confiscation taskforce, basically working in proceeds of crime.

PR [33:14] So, what sort of evidence are you providing that might be used in a court proceeding?

CD [33:20] It depends a lot on each investigation. Sometimes I'm actually a financial investigator helping you know tease out what information it is that we're looking for. Otherwise I perform things like asset tracing or unexplained wealth calculations, looking into illegitimate funds. I can also be called to the witness box as an expert witness within the court proceedings of these investigations. I get to work with a lot of different people and different investigators, which is fantastic because they obviously have a different skill set to mine, so it's great that we can complement each other in these investigations. On the flip side, that's probably the main challenge - that I'm working with people with a completely different skill set and therefore I don't have the chartered accounting I guess cohort that I have had at the Big 4 firm. We do have a great forensic accounting cohort at the AFP but on each investigation, it's generally just me, sometimes one other accountant working on each job I guess.

PR [34:21] So when you were studying for accounting, what did you imagine you would be doing now?

CD [34:26] Not this! I was very much in the mindset of having a traditional accounting role. I did a lot of part-time work during my degree and then took a graduate position at PwC which you mentioned. I definitely expected that I would be at PwC for a long time you know, climbing the ladder there, doing client-facing, you know business development, what I would consider a traditional accounting role, so very different to where I've ended up.

Whilst I was at PwC I was sent on ? to the AFP to work in their national taxation team. So again quite a traditional role, looking at their fringe benefits tax and GST and providing tax advice to employees at the AFP. While I was there I guess it opened my eyes to other opportunities that I hadn't ever considered. It certainly wasn't on my radar and whilst I was there I heard about this particular team that just put a completely different spin on what accounting did mean to me.

PR [35:24]

So your perceptions have changed quite clearly, but what about your perceptions of the accounting professions. In the time you've been working as an accountant, what do you think have been the main changes in the last ten years and maybe, where are we heading?

CD [35:39]

People these days are much more trusted business advisers, much less just crunching numbers in the office doing a tax return. I think there's an element of being a bit more of a jack of all trades, particularly in the Canberra climate where there is a lot of consulting to government agencies. You need to be able to think on your feet and slot into a number of different roles, not necessarily I am just a tax specialist, I can only do tax. There is certainly still a place for that absolutely in firms but particularly in Canberra, I think it's just much more broad and much more expansive in knowledge-base and expectations of roles.

PR [36:18]

So what advice would you give to a uni student, or even a high school student now who would want to follow a career in accounting?

CD [36:26]

Be flexible. I think many people that know me would describe me as the girl with a 5-year plan and I think what I have learnt in my career is that plans don't need to be rigid. There are many many ways a career path can be taken on a journey and I mean, I quite like the ideology that you're trying to get somewhere and if you're knocking on the door then it's ok to try the window. There are just many ways that can get you to where you want to be.

PR [36:55]

That's really good advice. What sort of platforms do you have or forums to encourage younger CAs in the profession?

CD [37:03]

I have also in the past been a member of the Young Chartered Accountants, the YCA panel, which I think provided a great platform to network and be in contact with many other young chartered accountants. I can't consider myself young anymore, so I've stepped onto the Regional Council. And I think still it's a really great way to connect with our members and let them know what offerings it is that we have. There are a lot of events that we put on or provide for and many learning opportunities as well. And from an employment perspective at the AFP, we are clearly not a finance brand or a finance department, but we have a lot of grads coming through that end up working in you know, financial teams like I mentioned before the National Tax Team or the Financial Reporting Team. So it's good for them to be able to see that if they're starting their career with the AFP that there are different opportunities outside of the regular thing as well I guess.

PR [37:57] So what do you think it is about the chartered accountants designation specifically that has added to your career?

CD [38:04] I see the designation as my ticket to ride. You know so many people think, yes I've got the CA I can travel and that's absolutely right, but I also think it provides a really good level of recognition for career opportunities. So I know that my workplace, although they are not chartered accountants, have confidence in my ability because they know I am a chartered accountant. So they know that I've got the background required to perform a good job of being a forensic accountant.

PR [38:30] Casting your mind back, what was it that initially attracted you to the CA as a sort of a launch to your career?

CD [38:39] I guess just the robust nature of the qualification itself. Everybody spoke very highly of chartered accountants. It helped being at PwC that they really support the grad diploma of chartered accounting and a lot of my cohort were doing it at the same time. So that helped, but I'm quite a driven person so I was always going to do something to become a chartered accountant or some kind of further qualification to my university degree.

PR [39:04] So your friends from uni, what do they think of what you're doing now these years later?

CD [39:11] To be honest, if you say I'm a forensic accountant at the AFP they just go 'oh wow' and then don't ask anymore questions because I don't really think they know where to start. Those that have asked and interrogated a little bit

more find it really interesting and there's a lot of accountants at the AFP that sort of look to me and say 'can you let me know if there's work experience or a vacancy', particularly within the AFP because other people in the department know much more about the role than what I generally talk about externally. They are quite keen to get experience in the area.

PR [39:43]

Courtney Dennett, thanks for joining Gen CA conversations.

AG [39:49]

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