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Accounting

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Tracy Gaspardo Mortenson, J.D., CPA

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Professional Associations: AICPA

Educational Background: J.D., Georgetown University Law Center; B.S. in Accounting, University of Illinois

Hobbies: Jogging, softball, remediation and dispute resolution for those under 10, reading, travel, coaching.

[Click here to see the other honorees](#)
of the 2012 “Most Powerful Women
in Accounting” awards.

Q&A:

Studies show that more women than ever are graduating with accounting degrees, but few are pursuing, or staying in, public practice careers. What do you think may be causing them to think public accounting careers are not as attractive as other careers?

I think it comes down to a few misconceptions that suggest that one's quality of life is better outside of public accounting. First, there is a widespread belief that the first few years of life at public accounting firms are fraught with long hours and rampant travel. Second, there is an ancillary perception that these long hours are spent in windowless rooms performing less than fulfilling tasks. Women today are demanding careers which allow them to progress and succeed while also maintaining a fruitful and fulfilling life outside the office. They want to enjoy what they do, feel like they are making a difference and enjoy a healthy work-life balance.

What advice would you give to these college students about the opportunities for

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creating work environments which are harmonious to the needs of working mothers and fathers and more balanced for all staff.

If you were asked as a consultant to give advice to firms, would you have any recommendations on things they could do to better retain and advance more qualified female staff?

I think they need to walk the walk and then make sure the women who have succeeded within their firms are proselytizing. Young women won't believe a bunch of male partners telling them the work-life balance issues have been addressed. They need to see and hear female managers and partners who are making it work discuss how the firm supported their careers and decisions about family. They also need to invest in technology which supports a work-from-anywhere philosophy and communicate a very clear plan to young associates that articulates how they will be supported in both their career and life aspirations.

Do you think that there is still a glass ceiling in accounting firm senior management and partner levels, or that the profession has moved to a mostly gender neutral state?

I would like to believe that we have moved to a mostly gender neutral state, but the numbers simply do not support this, do they? Female students are excelling in accounting curriculums – it is not the work itself that is repelling women – so it must be something else. I definitely believe we are on the right track and the infrastructures are in place which will support equality, but to say the glass ceiling has been completely shattered would be denying reality.

Do you think being a woman in the accounting profession has made career advancement more challenging than it might have been for a male in the same situation?

Twenty years ago, yes. Today, no. I believe that today, as long as a woman is willing to make

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supportive of your career. That factor alone trumps all other "solutions." Also, limiting ourselves to two kids has really helped as well.

In all seriousness, I have found that sticking as firmly as possible to a consistent schedule helps immensely. It helps manage expectations of colleagues, of clients, of kids and of spouses. There will always be fire drills, but if your colleagues can count on you to be responsive during working hours, your kids can count on you to put them to bed and your spouse can count on you for weekend date nights, most pitfalls can be avoided.

How mobile are you regarding your work? How have mobile devices and apps impacted your productivity and work-life balance? (Spending less time in the office?)

I am EXTREMELY mobile and mobile devices have made all the difference in the world. In fact, I owe any work-life balance I have achieved to my ability to work and connect remotely. I probably do at least 20% of my work "on the go," i.e. from the bleachers at a Little League game, from the check-out aisle at the grocery store, while waiting for a band concert to start, etc. Just last weekend, I called in to a meeting from a card table set up outside Walgreens that was stocked with Cub Scout popcorn (ever try selling popcorn for \$20 a bag outside a drug store in the pouring rain in Chicago – character building, let me tell you). The remaining 80% of my work is probably split between my home and my office.

What single piece of technology could you absolutely not live without, and why?

There are actually two pieces of technology that I could not live without. The first is my iPhone. It not only allows me to be more efficient, but it helps in my struggle to maintain the work life balance that is precious to us all. My second lifeline is CCH Mobile™ which puts answers at my fingertips by providing unprecedented access to CCH's world class tax and

accounting content. We're all looking to maximize efficiency, and CCH Mobile™ is an

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Charts from the app.

It actually allows me to appear more knowledgeable than I actually am as I am able to pull up relevant commentary within seconds – whether in a customer's office, in a meeting or on the phone. I no longer need access to a desktop or to wait for a log-in or authentication in order to get my answers. It truly has changed the way I work. I also use SayHi Translate quite a bit and rely heavily on both my CNN app and Google Maps.

What do you like to do when you actually have free time without any obligations to work or family? (Examples: reading, wine and movies, tv, art, travel, exercise, cooking, etc).

I suppose if I had free time, I would probably spend it marveling at the fact that I had free time. In all seriousness, I try to grab an hour several times a week to run with my iPod jacked up at full volume. This is the one hour each day that I allow my mind to go absolutely anywhere – and as long as I bring our dog with me, I feel like I am multitasking. I also try to steal one night each month for my friends – there is nothing that mitigates stress for me like talking over a bottle of wine to women who have known me half my life.

Technology

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