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Nov. 15, 2017

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Beth Kieffer Leonard, CPA, CGMA – 2017 Most Powerful Women in Accounting Honoree

Employer: Lurie, LLP

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What opportunities do you feel women in accounting have now that they didn't have when you started in the profession?

Today it is acknowledged that women in leadership in any organization provide significant value and make a difference in the success of an organization. When I graduated from college 50% of the graduates were women and yet many did not stay in the profession or were in leadership positions. That has changed tremendously over the years with women in leadership positions in service lines, leading practices and driving the changes we see today in the profession.

How important is work/life balance and what suggestions do you have for those who are struggling to attain this?

Rather than talking about work/life balance, I would like to focus on equilibrium. Sometimes your personal life requires more time and sometimes your work life does. I think as long as there is an understanding between the person and the team they are working with on what the individual needs to do in both parts of their life, a person can achieve equilibrium. Further, I feel strongly that this is critical for both men and woman and that this balance is not for one gender and not the other. What is essential for the success of this approach in both a person's personal and professional life is clear and proactive communication so that everyone's expectations are understood.

What is the most difficult part about being a women in the accounting profession?

For me, there is nothing difficult about being a woman in the profession. I was well prepared for the role and believe I have gained the respect and support of our team and my peers. On the other hand, it is sometimes disheartening to see how few women are in leadership positions at the top firms in the country. Many of these

firms are incredibly innovative and progressive and yet, they still don't have women

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profession.

I have been actively working on behalf of woman in the profession for quite some time. I will continue in any way I can to promote, develop and provide opportunities for women to succeed and stay in the profession. My work is in our firm as well as on a national level to encourage women and be a role model for what is possible.

Looking back at your career, what would you do differently given the knowledge you have today and how can women who are entering the benefit from that knowledge?

The only thing I would have done differently is that I would have asked earlier in my career about the path to partner. I did not understand that this was something I could do and was reluctant to ask for a timeline. Today I would encourage everyone to get the information they need to understand their opportunities both inside their firms and outside.

I credit my path to leadership and fulfillment in this profession is the culture of our firm from the time I started working here. I always say that I was the same person in the parking lot as when I passed the threshold of the office and the ability to "be who I was" was an incredible freedom I always felt. When I had an idea for a client or the firm, it was always encouraged, even if not acted upon. I think the culture of a firm is the most important characteristic to finding a place where one can be successful and define success on one's own terms.

[Learn more about the 2017 Most Powerful Women in Accounting.](#)

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