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in Accounting

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Jennifer Elder, CPA, CSP, CMA, CIA, CFF, CGMA, MS

2018 Most Powerful Women in Accounting

Consultant and Keynote Speaker

What advice would you give to female college students about the opportunities for women in the accounting profession? (so many thoughts!)

Be fierce and fearless! Push yourself outside of your comfort zone. Take advantage of

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Ask and achieve. Ask for the opportunities. If you don't ask, you don't get. And once you get the opportunity, do whatever it takes to succeed.

Build your brand! How do you want to be seen? Everything you say and do (verbal and non-verbal) adds or subtracts from your reputation. Be deliberate about building your brand.

Learn from failure! Not every opportunity will turn out the way you expect but that doesn't make it a failure. Failing is not in the falling down, it is in the not getting back up. Nothing is a failure if you learn from the experience. Apply what you learn to enhance the next opportunity.

Anticipate the future! Look ahead. Anticipate the future – six months, one year, five years out. The most successful women I know are always looking out for what is coming next. Or as Wayne Gretzky (an incredible hockey player) said, “skate to where the puck is going, not where it is,”

Prepare to pivot! Change is ever present. Do not expect to stay the same for very long. Learn to adapt and pivot as the world changes around them. Accounting is such an amazing profession because there are more opportunities than you can ever imagine. There are opportunities:

- in public, private, education, not-for-profit, or government
- in tax or audit or consulting
- in every industry imaginable
- with small, medium, or large organizations
- for full-time or part-time
- for introverts and extroverts
- to work for someone else or for yourself

What would you suggest to accounting firms that are interested in retaining and

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When it comes to retention, I believe that organizations need to view all employees as individuals and stop trying to fit every employee into the same box. Ask employees what they need and want to succeed.

Create a structured mentoring program. A mentor should be outside of the employee's direct line of reporting. Create a regular schedule for check-ins. Have topics and questions outlined for each of the check-ins. Allow employees to give feedback about their mentors and change mentors if requested.

Why did you choose to work in – and stay in – the accounting field? A

ccounting was not my first choice but it became the best choice. I originally graduated with a degree in educational counseling but discovered I could not support myself. I went back to school for accounting and never looked back. I love the profession because of the incredible variety and challenge. No two days are ever the same! And there is always something else to learn. Despite what others may think, there is absolutely nothing boring about our profession!

What are you currently reading?

I am always reading something, multiple books and articles! I carry articles and books with me when I travel and they sit on my nightstand at home. I read the *Harvard Business Review* every month. I subscribe to business book summaries. And right now I am reading, A Whack on the Side of the Head: How You Can Be More Creative by Roger von Oeck and Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die, by Chip Heath.

What changes do you foresee in the accounting profession of the near future (3-5 years)?

So many changes coming down the pike – augmented intelligence (AI), blockchain,

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with internal and external clients and start asking questions such as, “what keeps you awake at night?”

How do you see yourself participating in shaping the future of the accounting profession?

As a professional speaker and trainer I want to change the paradigm of CPE. CPE can't be just about compliance – getting the mandatory number of hours. We have to engage learners, provide them with opportunities to think on their own and apply concepts to real-life scenarios.

It does no one any good to lecture at students. Anything technical can now be found on the internet. Anything that can be memorized can be found on the internet. What can't be found on the internet are nuances and application. Any CPA can look up the rules and requirements of the AICPA's Code of Professional Conduct. So reciting the six principles in an ethics class does not add value. But providing a complicated real-world scenario that does not have one right answer gives the students an opportunity to engage in the learning process, practice critical thinking and problem-solving, and an opportunity to work with their peers. Now that is a value-added process!

I hope to instill today's accountants with success skills that go beyond their accounting degree. I don't like the phrase “soft skills” because there is nothing soft about them. In many ways they are harder than the technical skills of accounting as there is no one right answer.

Today's accounting leaders need to develop their communication skills. They need to be able to network and make connections with anyone and everyone. They need to be able to present complicated financial information in a way that is accessible and useful.

They also need to develop their critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills.

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could we” instead of saying “we can’t.” My Mom always said, “don’t cry over spilt milk.” She taught me to pick myself back up, dust myself off, and keep trying.

Please share a personal rule or principle that you follow.

Find the positive – there is always a solution if you think creatively!

[See the full list: 2018 AICPA / CPA Practice Advisor Most Powerful Women in Accounting.](#)

Digital Currency

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