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Sarah Elliott, CPA, PCC

2020-2021 Most Powerful Women in Accounting

Co-Founder & Principal

Intend2Lead LLC

What advice would you give others following in your similar path about the opportunities for women in the accounting profession?

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Don't make assumptions about what women want or need from you – ask them! Each of us are unique human beings with different talents, needs and aspirations. Listen, learn and gather ideas. Be willing to take risks and try new ways of doing things based on what you learn.

Create a coaching culture at your organization where everyone is free to explore who they are, what they really want and how they can best align with the organization's vision and goals. Provide your people with developmental opportunities (e.g., coaching, mentoring and sponsorship) to help them uncover and live into their potential.

Why did you choose to work in – and stay in – an accounting related field?

I switched my major from chemical engineering to accounting in college because I was attracted to the sense of order and logic. I like the way things in accounting fit together, like a puzzle, to explain how a business works. Once I joined the profession, I realized how much opportunity it gave me to lean into non-technical skills, like leading, collaborating, teaching, growing new business, problem solving, managing a business and so much more.

After I retired from a 14 year career in public accounting in 2014, I started a second career in leadership development. I decided to serve accountants because I love us!! I see so much potential in this profession. Accountants have a lot of power and influence to make positive change and help a lot of people in the business world. But, oftentimes, we never quite realize it. What could be possible when we become more conscious, evolved leaders?

4. What book(s), blog(s), or podcast(s) do you recommend that have guided you on your journey?

My favorite books that I've read in 2020 are:

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- Madeline Pratt's Finding Fearless podcast
- Mark Goldman's Where Accountants Go podcast

McKinsey & Company issued their [2020 Women in the Workplace study](#) that basically says that the current pandemic is starting to impact the strides women, especially women of color, have made in the profession. What advice would you give to employers to support women during this time so that the future of our workforce isn't negatively impacted?

Don't assume you know what women need. What each woman needs may be different. Ask us. Listen.

Don't use the pandemic as an excuse to cut corners and costs. Your people are *everything*. Take care of us, and we'll take care of the business for you. Invest financially in our future (and, thus, in the future of your organization) by doing everything you can to provide the support we need during this challenging time.

What advice would you share with young women CPAs striving to achieve similar success in this profession?

Don't underestimate your power and the options available to you. Dream big. Ask for what you want. If you're not sure how to get it, go for it anyway!

Lean into the unknown, with a growth mindset. Let go of having to "get it right." Let go of feeling like you have to be perfect. Give yourself permission to experiment and fail. This is how we learn and innovate. I don't think there's ever a clear, straight path forward (and if there is, it sounds kind of boring!). We must make up the path as we go, one step at a time, and learn from our mistakes along the way.

Describe one person who has been an important mentor and sponsor to you and how that person helped shape the direction or focus of your professional life.

Early this year, my friend (and social justice activist), Leandra, invited me into

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done. I have learned so much from Leandra, and I'm grateful for her openly sharing her experiences with me as a woman of color and her patience with me as I stumble through my own learning.

The anti-racism work we're doing together helps me see how we can integrate DEI into Intend2Lead and use our influence to contribute to forward progress. I believe that coaching cultures naturally create more inclusive leaders, and I want the future of the accounting profession to include *all* of us.

Please share a personal rule or principle that you follow.

We are inextricably linked to one another. We like to think we're independent – that we can do so much on our own. This is an illusion. We live in interdependence. Every single thing that each of us does impacts everyone and everything around us (whether we realize it or not). To create the positive changes we want to see – in our organizations, the profession and our communities – we must think beyond ourselves as individuals. We must consider the impact we have on others. We need one another now, more than ever, so let's consciously evolve together.

Read more about the [2020-2021 Most Powerful Women in Accounting Winners](#).

Accounting

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