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numerous Black CPAs who are making a difference. Among those are young leaders who inspire ...

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When Richard Caturano, CPA, CGMA, became AICPA chair in 2012, expanding minority representation in the profession was one of his top priorities. “I felt that the biggest contribution I could make would be to take steps that would make the profession more representative of the population of clients we serve,” said Caturano, former National Leader and now Executive Sponsor of Culture, Diversity, and Inclusion at RSM in Boston. His conviction that proactive efforts were needed ultimately led to the creation of the AICPA National Commission on Diversity and Inclusion (NCDI), of which he is a past chair.

Ken Bouyer, who served as the commission’s inaugural chairman in 2012 and is a current member while being the Americas director of inclusiveness recruiting for Ernst & Young (EY), says that the current environment provides an important impetus for change.

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profession when a classmate's parent gave a presentation to her high school calculus class. "He talked about the many career options and the fact that you don't do the same thing every day," said Cummings, who is now a director at BKD in St. Louis. When she eventually took a college accounting class, "it just clicked."

Another honoree, Kenneth Omoruyi, CPA, learned about the profession as an undergraduate accounting student in his native Nigeria. With a dream of immigrating to the United States, he decided that earning his CPA would give him instant credibility as a foreign-trained accountant. "No matter what background a person has or what school they went to, it is a leveler" that certifies a certain amount of competence, experience, and expertise, he said.

Find or be a mentor

For Cummings, the road to becoming a CPA was not always easy. During her first few years at the firm, she was self-conscious about being the only Black person in the room, and worried about things like her hair being different from her colleagues'. She tended to stay in the background, but then she saw someone else get an opportunity that she felt she deserved. Since then, "I always speak up," she said.

Cummings was encouraged by several important role models along the way. One partner urged her to be her authentic self and avoid putting up a façade to fit in. The partner also introduced Cummings to Black business contacts and recommended her for stretch assignments. Another woman encouraged her to apply for the 40 Under 40 award despite Cummings' doubts about her chances of being chosen. Both role models were white women. "A mentor doesn't have to be Black," she said, "just an advocate who will help you have the confidence to be yourself."

Omoruyi also benefited from early encouragement. After moving to Houston, he met Sam Abraham, CPA, at his church. Abraham had his own firm and had also attended

university in Nigeria. He reviewed Omoruyi's transcripts and experience and

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passion and persistence, "I realized she was exactly what we need for our program to be successful," Caturano said. After working on his team, Walker has now succeeded him as National Leader of Culture, Diversity, and Inclusion in the firm.

Bouyer has mentored Lanier Mason, CPA, another 40 Under 40 honoree, since Mason first joined EY US. "That's the importance of role models," Bouyer said. "You need to see that people who look like you can have a great career."

Improve a business's DEI

To accelerate the rate of change, "organizations, large to midsize and small, need to appreciate that there is such a benefit and richness from a diverse workforce," said Bouyer. "It's also important to consider whether you have a team that will serve changing demographics among clients, other stakeholders, and society," he said.

To enhance diversity, Cummings recommended that firms consider factors in addition to grades in the recruiting process, including the reasons some students don't fit the profile they are seeking. Cummings worked three jobs while going to college, but one firm refused to hire her because her GPA was one-tenth of one percent below their standard cutoff. She has thrived at BKD. While she said her firm does have Black partners who have been hired from outside, there has never been a Black partner who came up through the ranks within the firm. "My goal is to be the first one," she said.

For DEI to succeed, Caturano said, it must be a top strategic priority for the organization. In fact, he believes it can help achieve other critical goals, such as bringing in new business and staffing, by expanding the firm's scope.

Inspire others

Omoruyi's dedication to the profession was tested when, due to a series of timing and

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with several Black aspiring CPAs who have since become licensed, including providing CPA Exam study materials for some. He points to the ripple effect of one person inspiring five others who go on to inspire many more. "You're building a legacy," he said.

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*The **Black CPA Centennial** (BCPAC) is a yearlong effort to honor, celebrate, and build upon the progress Black CPAs have made in shaping the accounting profession. The BCPAC is a collaborative effort of the AICPA, Diverse Organization of Firms, Illinois CPA Society, National Association of Black Accountants, and National Society of Black CPAs.*

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