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forty years of experience leading a top accounting firm in Los Angeles, California. Now, he's sharing his best strategies and tips for others looking to break into the ...

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**By Dennis Duban, CPA.**

For young accountants with or without their CPA, and whether they're looking for an entry level accounting job or a chance to move up the ladder, the job application process for the accounting profession can be daunting – and for good reason.

Having founded my own CPA firm 40 years ago, I certainly have had my share of opportunities to hire. In fact, even with an HR department that screens resumes and conducts initial interviews, I have continued to be the final voice in almost all hiring

cases. Our firm offers bookkeeping, accounting, business management and financial

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## **KNOW THE PROCESS**

Finding a “job” in public accounting is not difficult these days, but securing a quality position that sets you up for success is often challenging, and requires a lot of forethought.

While you are at university you are already laying the foundation for your resume and interview. Your history is being written – and experiences in college beyond the classroom can assist you in writing that text. If you have the opportunity, try to take on internships – they can be very useful and you can benefit from the networking and other opportunities.

Studying fields related to accounting is increasingly beneficial – you're more well rounded and have a deeper industry background. Nowadays, familiarity with computer hardware and software is invaluable. Potential employers will be pleased to see that you are well versed in the software programs that they utilize to do accounting, taxes, management and spreadsheets. So even if there is not a specific course, these programs can be learned in self study programs.

Joining organizations that are part of your industry is also helpful and practical as it familiarizes you further with the real world. Study groups, charitable organizations and leadership positions help distinguish you and build your exposure to working with others. By juggling studying, work, extracurricular activities and helping others you are paving the path of how you will operate in the world after graduation.

Firms want committed individuals. A college degree will not differentiate you from other candidates – we all studied accounting. It takes an excellent GPA, a passing score on the exam close to or shortly after graduation, a professional appearance and superior leadership and communication skills to stand out in a crowd.

## **RESUMES**

First, make sure your resume is perfect. Double check for typos, accuracy and dates

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that the reader knows you have the experience. Too much detail is not necessary, since the person reading the resume knows what accounting and tax preparation entails. Finally, be laser-focused in your communication and keep the page number down to two at the most. At that point, either you've had so many jobs that the employer will believe you cannot keep a position or they will simply think that your experience is based on quantity and not quality.

## THE INTERVIEW

First and foremost: do your homework. Find out everything you can about the company so that you (a) know that the company is a place you want to work, and (b) are prepared to explain why. As you dive into the conversations, parenthetically refer to prior research and familiarity about the company. When you're asked if you have any questions, have some in your back pocket – just make sure that they're not answered from a quick search online. For example, ask deeper questions about the history of the firm beyond the date established – ask to be enlightened about its owners, the size of the company and staff and other items that may not come up in the search. You can also discuss important topics that affect you, including relocation issues, work from home policies and other items that you truly care about. Ultimately, make sure the person on the other end of the phone knows you cared enough about this interview and about working for this company that you were very well, if not overly, prepared for this day.

Most importantly, be respectful, genuine and professional. It sounds silly, but pay attention to the interviewer and their questions – be to the point and make sure that they're getting the information they're looking for! If the interview is a phone call, I like to speak to a mirror to make sure that my face reflects my delivery. This helps you sound interested and engaged, and shows the interviewer that you're excited about the opportunity.

In today's environment, it is highly likely that your interview will be on Zoom. Have

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If you've followed those steps so far, you may end up with an in-person interview with a company representative or the owner. Again, make sure they know you did your homework. Be prepared to answer questions like, "Why would you want to work here?" or "What do you think you would bring to the firm?" If the interviewer doesn't ask those questions directly, insert that information into the conversation. While the reason of course varies from person to person and job to job, try to take this to a deeper level than the paycheck or title. Think about and explain: "Will you be able to grow and achieve success?" "Will your skills be put to their highest and best use?" "Will you and this company be happy that you are employed there?" This company will invest a lot in you from the get-go. Discussing these items in advance can save a lot of time and money for both sides.

## THE DECISION

Lots of people will tell you that you need to begin your accounting or tax career with a "Big 4" firm, saying that this is the best way to build a resume. I simply ask you, are you trying to build a resume or a career? I also recommend that you think seriously about the size and type of firm you would want to work for. Keep an open mind, but have an idea so that you can ensure you gain the information that you need during the process.

Early in my career I found that the size of the firm was not necessarily the most important consideration. After all, at one time my firm was simply called Dennis Duban, CPA. Having founded a firm that would be considered small by today's standards, I know that the variety, scope and sophistication of responsibilities and the opportunities afforded to learn are awarded years earlier on a smaller team than they might be at a large international firm. And achieving experience at this accelerated rate has a lasting impact on the individual who, in future applications or

opportunities, can refer to the levels of experience they bring and the sophistication

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accounting expertise to individuals and businesses. In 2014, the firm name was changed to DLD Accountancy, LLP. Dennis' specialties include tax compliance and planning for individuals, partnerships, corporations, estates and trusts. His specific areas of tax expertise include real estate, the entertainment industry, construction and development, professional corporations, retirement and estate planning. He believes that each client's financial goals are achieved by careful, insightful and individual attention to their needs and by creating an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect.

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