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How do you measure success?

On a professional level I get personal satisfaction from accomplishing a difficult task or solving a member's problems. Making a difference—that's what it's all about. I am very proud to be a member of our profession. Meeting other CPAs, developing relationships with them and gaining the respect of my fellow CPAs is most meaningful to me.

I also get a big kick from learning. Not just from continuing education programs, but from working with other professionals and learning from their professional experience. A great man once told me to try and learn at least one new thing each day. That great man was my father. He was right, of course, and what I came to realize was that in order to learn new things each day, I had to be open to change, to try new things and to listen and be receptive to the ideas of others.

Did you have a mentor and if yes, how did the experience affect your career?

Yes, I have been fortunate to have more than one mentor during my life. I believe it is very important for everyone to have a mentor—someone who believes in you and supports you in your professional career. My first mentor was my Dad. He taught me that I could be anything I wanted to be and could succeed at any task, if I put my mind to it. He was working for Ernst & Ernst when I was born, but he spent most of his career as the CFO of a privately held company. He was a highly esteemed and active member in our community and he demonstrated a sense of fairness and integrity in everything he did. Passing the CPA exam was the greatest honor I could pay to his memory.

I also had the privilege of working with great leaders at KPMG who helped shape my professional destiny. One in particular played an active role in mentoring my development in public accounting, sharing his experience with me and guiding my growth. The single most important thing he taught me was to develop a long-term plan for my professional and personal life. It is essential to making the two work together.

Do you still have a mentor? What role does that person play now?

There have been a number of remarkable individuals that I have worked closely with and learned from throughout my career. It is hard to select any one in particular, but I would have to say it is my current “boss”, Tom Hood. He believes in me and supports me, more than I probably deserve. Tom is a true leader. His energy and enthusiasm is inspiring to all he works with. Tom not only allows me to try new things, he encourages it and makes it possible for me to grow in ways I would not have tried on my own.

Are there organizations or networking groups that helped you achieve your goals?

Not many people, even loving family members, understand what a CPA is or does. There is a definite perception that we all just do tax returns. In my career as a public accountant, I was an auditor—not a tax preparer. At parties, among friends and even in family gatherings I would tire of trying to explain what it was that kept me at work for so many hours. It was obvious as I watched their eyes glaze over that others tired of it also. I was lamenting this to my mother one day when she said to me, “Carol, you do SOME taxes, don’t you?”

If for no other reason, this alone is a reason to be a part of a networking group of CPA professionals. I truly believe I belong to one of the greatest professions. But it is a tough one. Let’s not kid ourselves about it. There are tremendous demands on CPAs to produce—to keep up—to get ahead. I can’t imagine how hard it would be to go it alone. There is so much to be gained by sharing with other professionals who have similar experiences and who understand the demands you deal with.

I still have close friends from my early years at KPMG. We helped each other face the challenges of public accounting and shared our secrets of success. In my fifteen years at MACPA, it is the relationships that I have had with other co-workers and CPAs that have shaped my career and helped me to be successful. It has been my privilege to work on several committees at the national level with AICPA. Those experiences have been truly invaluable. I have been impressed with the expertise and knowledge the other AICPA members and staff have. The friendships have been the icing on the cake.

What is your approach to integrating your work and personal lives? Have any strategies proved more successful than others?

It was really a struggle for me in the beginning when I had two young children and worked for one of the largest accounting firms in the world. I wanted to be treated equally—not differently. I wanted to prove I could carry my weight and not make excuses. I recognized that if that was what I wanted, it was up to me to make it work. That meant I had to make arrangements to be at work when it was needed and to be home when it was needed and to be able to recognize the difference. It is about setting priorities and setting plans in motion to focus on those priorities. Yes, I did work long hours in busy season, but I would set aside quality time for my family. Then when it was slower at work, I would devote more time to family. My company allowed me to take time off to go to important family events, and my family recognized there were times I would have to give more to the company. It is truly about achieving balance between the two.

One strategy that helped was establishing a pattern of working. My family knew what to expect of me and so did my employer. For example, Sunday was always “family day”. The kids got to choose what we did that day. Rarely did I let anything interfere with that. To this day, even after they have grown and moved out, my son, Justin, and my daughter, Salena, like to do family activities on Sundays.

At this point in my life, with my children grown and gone you may think it is easier. But it is still a balancing act. Quality of life is tremendously important and I enjoy sharing it with my husband, Lee. We work hard at balancing career and leisure activities. Sometimes it is difficult to just find time to be together. I am lucky that he is so supportive of my career. He not only makes it possible for me to do my job, he often assists me in tackling the tougher aspects of it. He also supports me greatly when the schedule is very demanding. I guess the strategy here is taking turns helping vs. needing help rather than trying to trump the other spouse’s tough day.

How does your organization handle advancement of women?

The state society itself is not a male dominated organization. For that matter, the profession is not as male dominated as it was when I began. I can remember some clients in public accounting who did not want women on their engagements. Fortunately, those attitudes have changed and many women are executives in the clients’ companies, and many women are partners in major accounting firms. Women have more opportunities than ever to be whatever they want to be as my father once encouraged me.

What advice would you give to a young CPA about having a rewarding career?

I would encourage all new professionals to become part of a networking group of CPAs. Learn about the profession from interacting with others—not just your peers, but also the leaders of the profession. Become involved in the profession. Join a committee. You would be surprised what you can contribute and you will definitely benefit from the experience.

Determine what career opportunities there are and decide what interests you most. Create a long-term plan to achieve your professional goals. Make sure to include personal goals as well and build a plan that allows for the two to work together. Find a mentor, and nourish the relationship. Make it work for you. A mentor can help you set as well as achieve your goals.

Any final thoughts?

Learn something new each day.
Gain the respect of your fellow CPAs.
Make a difference.

Oh yes, and by the way, my daughter is now a CPA...go figure!