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Joanne S. Barry, CAE

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for women in the accounting profession?

A new report just came out that said the number of female firm partners increased by 1 percent nationwide last year 19 percent in firms with 50 to 200 people, which is really abysmal about 50 percent of accounting firm staff are female—and when I say staff, I mean female CPAs, not administrative or support staff. In order to get ahead in any office, you have to learn the politics and leverage them. It's as simple as that. I think some women believe they will be promoted through hard work alone. That may work if you have a boss who places a lot of value on hard work, but many care mostly about results. And if you're head is always looking down at the work and you're not making the right connections in the firm, who can help you advance or can put in a good word for you with those who do make those decisions, you're not going to get as far as you could. There are a lot of opportunities for professional staff, but you have to create opportunities if you want to make partner. And if you find yourself in a firm where you just can't break through the glass ceiling, leave for a firm where you can.

What advice would you give accounting firms on ways in which they can better retain and advance more qualified female staff?

I don't necessarily believe creating a "women's advancement committee" is the right way to go. I'm not saying there is no value in them, but I think there is a potential for stigmatism there because it could create an "us versus them mentality," because it highlights their differences based on gender and really won't move things forward unless there are men who are on it. Another risk is that firm leaders may feel they have addressed "women's advancement" issue just because they have a committee for it.

The best way firms can retain and advance more qualified female staff is to recognize

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are quieter than others. Regardless of gender, make a point to ask them to weigh in on the discussion. Even if they don't have much to add at the time, they will appreciate being recognized and it sends a message to the other people in the room that you respect their opinion—making the rest of the staff more likely to respect it too.

What is the name of one book that has been a great influence to you?

Walden by Henry David Thoreau. It centers me and I return to its simplicity often.

In what ways do you participate in the professional community to change/improve the accounting profession?

It's important for someone in my role to have a 360 degree perspective of what's going on in the profession and external factors that have an impact on it. So I sit on several accounting department advisory boards at universities in New York and New Jersey, which provides me with first-hand knowledge trends and issues in accounting programs; but I also sit on boards of organizations composed of managing partners of New York firms, which allows me to participate in discussions about what is going on in the firms right now. I also need to know what is happening on a national level, so I often meet with AICPA leadership and am president-elect of the CPA Society Executives Association Board of Directors. I also need to know about trends in the association community, because that also has an impact on the operations side of the NYSSCPA. My position on the Board of NYASAE helps me with that.

Participating within all of these communities and sitting on so many organization boards that are dedicated to the profession gives me a unique perspective of how the

profession is evolving. So I share what I've learned and what I'm seeing with New

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

Disruption, disruption, disruption: The profession is changing; and is faced with disruption on multiple fronts: generationally, technologically and in client accounting services. Technology is leading to the automation of a lot of client accounting services, firms are specializing and mergers and acquisitions are going through the roof. If smaller firms don't establish a specialization, they won't be able to compete and they may not even be able to sell.

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

That is already one of my primary priorities. About three years ago, I established the NextGen program at the NYSSCPA

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

Having a mentor is a game changer for your career success. I sought someone who was the exact opposite of me so that I could benefit from the traits that made him successful. Over the years, he taught me how to ask for what I want, act with confidence and authority, to see perfectionism as a weakness, and to always have an eye on the future and identify the up and coming stars. I am a better leader as a result of that input. The smartest people are the ones who know that they don't know it all. It took me a while to get there. He helped me to paint a picture of where I wanted to be.

[See the other recipients of the 2016 Most Powerful Women in Accounting award.](#)

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