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Elizabeth Pittelkow, CPA, CITP, CGMA, DTM – 2017 Most Powerful Women in Accounting Honoree

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What opportunities do you feel women in accounting have now that they didn't have when you started in the profession?

In today's environment, more women are serving as partners in accounting firms,

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who are struggling to attain this?

Work/life flexibility is essential for satisfaction and happiness in life. I recommend scheduling personal time on your work calendar. My work/life flexibility has been much better when I formally book personal activities on the same calendar as my work meetings. I talk about my passions with my colleagues so they understand why I am interested in my activities outside of work. I involve my colleagues in my activities, like participating in Illinois CPA Day of Service.

What is the most difficult part about being a woman in the accounting profession?

The most difficult part about being a woman in the accounting profession is how some people and organizations are unenlightened about how certain behaviors exclude women. For example, I have seen companies plan events that have traditionally excluded women, which have included golf outings, cigar clubs, and fantasy sports leagues.

In the 2000s, a client requested an all-male audit team, which my company rightfully did not agree to provide. I was the only female on that audit team, and I felt excluded from most of the conversations since they frequently talked about fantasy football updates. I decided to join a fantasy football league to better connect with my client, and I received shocked reactions from both the all-male fantasy league I joined and from my client contacts when I showed interest in managing my own fantasy team.

What is the best part about being a woman in the accounting profession?

The best part about being a woman in the accounting profession is the opportunity to work in the profession. Accounting is one of the most versatile and value-adding

professions in the world, and being a part of this profession is a dream come true for

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mentor members in the profession. I will continue to promote diversity and inclusion programs in organizations I represent, and I will participate in discussions to educate others. Additionally, I will continue to teach communication and ethics classes to help promote more strategic skills. I will also continue to serve on professional committees and boards to create and contribute to initiatives that will strengthen the profession and lead it into the future.

Looking back at your career, what would you do differently given the knowledge you have today and how can women who are entering benefit from that knowledge?

When I started my career, I was shy and unconfident. I thought working hard would be enough to succeed, but it was not the only skill I needed. I advise any woman entering the profession to focus on communication skills. I joined Toastmasters a few years into my career, and it has been game-changing for me. I recommend frequent discussions with your supervisors to gauge your performance and learn ways to improve your strategic skills. Find work/life flexibility in your career early. Do not let your identity be wrapped up in your job or let people's feedback define who you are. Work hard, be good to people, and embrace learning throughout your career.

When I was in middle school and high school, people told me I should consider 'female-appropriate' jobs. My visceral and immediate response was to shatter that expectation for myself and others. I want to lead by example and serve others in a career that has given me so much joy. One person can make a difference, even when it seems impossible to change the status quo. When more people in our profession work together to achieve positive results, we can achieve them faster. I work in the accounting profession with others to continue to make it the best profession in the world!

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