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Michelle L. Thompson, CPA

2019 Most Powerful Women in Accounting

CEO and Firm Managing Partner

Cherry Bekaert LLP

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1. Be your authentic self and work hard.
2. Always believe in yourself, even when you feel you are unqualified. You can achieve more than you think.
3. Find a mentor – Someone you look up to and trust, preferably someone highly-regarded at your firm. Seek out people that bring out the best in you, allow you to be you and will champion you in the organization.
4. Don't be afraid of change. Seek ways to grow yourself personally and professionally.

What would you suggest to accounting firms that are interested in retaining and advancing more qualified female staff?

Treat people with respect, value their contributions and find ways to support them will create an environment for all to succeed. Conduct "Unconscious Bias" training. Provide family flexibility plans.

Why did you choose to work in – and stay in – the accounting field?

I started in the profession because that is what you were supposed to do if you majored in accounting. I stayed in the profession because of the variety of experiences. Nowhere else do you get the deep exposure to so many different kinds of businesses. You are never bored and there is always a new challenge.

What book(s), blog(s), podcast(s) do you recommend?

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The continued force of technology in the accounting profession will dramatically impact the way in which we serve our clients, manage risks and stay competitive in an ever-changing environment. The fundamental skills sets of our workforce need to change. Many of the tasks that we have historically celebrated as our work product will be performed differently. Our skills sets need to change from advice givers to question seekers.

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

My role will be like many others – being open minded, being willing to try to new things and accepting things must change. I must lead my organization forward with these same characteristics.

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.

A senior partner in our Firm took me under his wing while I was still a senior manager. He encouraged me to be me and to not try and fit the traditional mold. He was my advocate and my critic. He was always honest with me. He supported my creativity and paved the way for me.

Please share a personal rule or principle that you follow.

You didn't get where you are by yourself, so make a difference for someone else.

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[Learn more about the 2019 Most Powerful Women in Accounting.](#)

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