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Carla M. McCall, CPA, CGMA

**2020-2021 Most Powerful Women in Accounting
President**

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– more specific feedback, more explanation as to why things are done the way they are, more opportunities, and more support. My path would have looked much different had I not advocated for myself.

Take time to lift your head up out of the work. I created my own leadership opportunities within my firm. Over the years, when I noticed areas where the firm could improve or leadership was needed, I stepped up. I created our first coaching and mentoring program, our Women's Opportunity Network, our Innovation Lab, and our first Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiative. I am lucky to be in a firm that embraces change and gave me the freedom to create and lead. I always felt (and feel) supported.

What steps would you offer to employers to be more effective in retaining and advancing women?

Women lead differently. Embrace it! I was once told that I shouldn't try to help everyone or fix everything. The funny thing is this trait has helped forge my path. I offer ideas, solutions, and connections to help my partners. This built trust and strong personal relationships and by the time I became a managing partner, they were coming to me regularly. One of my partners put it best and said my biggest skill is being able to "connect the dots." There is a lot of value in that and not everyone can do it. The bottom line is look for diversity in thought, action, skill, and experience and let women lead authentically. Don't try to fit them into a box.

There's substantial evidence that gender diversity at the management level enhances a company's performance. I challenge all companies to do better. Don't wait for women to ask for the role. Point them in the right direction. Encourage women to set lofty goals, ask for what they want, and be authentic along the way. Make sure women have a clear path to leadership and make sure your company has a real strategy and company-wide goals to achieve diversity in leadership. Unconscious

bias training is a first step to make sure people understand how bias may be holding

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I feel lucky to be in a profession that is constantly evolving, that values advancements in technology, and that provides an environment of constant learning. I love this profession because there is infinite opportunity – opportunity to learn, to lead, to innovate, to evolve, and to be of service.

What book(s), blog(s), or podcast(s) do you recommend that have guided you on your journey?

I have read so many great business books over the years and the themes have changed based on the evolution of my career. Some of my favorites are: *Good to Great*, *True Professionalism*, and *Smart Collaboration*. I value the insights from the *Harvard Business Review*, *Financial Management (FM) magazine*, the *Journal of Accountancy*, and *CPA Practice Advisor magazine*. We had our partner group read *The Anticipatory Organization* a few years ago which was the impetus for creating our Innovation Lab and Changemaker Challenge. The book I just finished, which I strongly recommend, is *No Rules Rules: NETFLIX and the Culture of Reinvention*. First, attracting the best talent is key and this book talks about the power of Talent Density. Secondly, we can process ourselves to death! This book really highlights the importance of not stifling creativity with process and leading with context, not control.

McKinsey & Company issued their 2020 Women in the Workplace study that basically says that the current pandemic is starting to impact the strides women, especially women of color, have made in the profession. What advice would you give to employers to support women during this time so that the future of our workforce isn't negatively impacted?

The reality is a disproportionate share of the burdens of the pandemic (childcare, chores, caring for elderly or sick relatives) fall on women. Women of color have the added stress of racial strife and feelings that their lives (and contributions) are not

considered equal. As a global community, we are indeed facing heightened

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your team the permission to take wellness breaks to move (or fold laundry if that will help you feel balanced), meditate, practice gratitude, and embrace this time with their kids. As Women Leaders, it's important to model this advice.

What advice would you share with young women CPAs striving to achieve similar success in this profession?

Set goals and ask for what you want. Look for mentors in your company that will support you and be candid with you and others on your behalf. Look for opportunities to lead, and if you don't see any, create them. Leadership is about having ideas, creating opportunities, and proving to everyone that you are valuable to those around you.

Support others as well. Leadership is about motivating those around you, building trust, and empowering. I love the quote "anyone can be a leader, but a title doesn't make you one." Think about the type of leader you want to be and then seek out those in a position to support you.

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

Joel Aronson (Retired Partner, AAFCPAs; Retired Founder & Wealth Advisor, AAFCPAs Wealth Management) was an important mentor and sponsor to me early in my career. He was a good listener and he always gave me candid feedback. He did two important things: he listened and he asked me a question that changed my trajectory: "**what was I doing in the community that I was passionate about?**" I was head down, focused on my goal and deliverables. That question set me on the path that included Board service, mentorship in Bentley's Center for Women & Business, participation in the MSCPA and AICPA, and more. I met amazing people, acquired inspiration from diverse mentors, and gained valuable exposure to diverse people, including

visionaries in my profession. I often reflect on where I'd be had it not been for Joel

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expressed... Leaders should strive for authenticity over perfection.

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