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**Shannon Nash, CPA, JD**

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and take advice from as you navigate your career path. Second, rely on your supporters. Supporters are different than mentors in that they're typically people who are vested in your career success. They don't have to be within your company but find someone to help with your career aspirations and goals by opening up their access to help you.

Next, invest in yourself. For me, this means continuing education — to remain competitive, you have to make sure you continually retool for your industry or position, whatever that might mean. A lack of time off cannot stop you. You need to stay curious to stay competitive, and part of that is being a life-long learner. Unfortunately, gone are the days when you can expect your employer to provide you with additional education, so you need to come out of pocket and put some money on yourself.

Finally, build your “brand” and develop a platform. If you want to get to the next level, you have to brand and market yourself. Your brand changes over time, so you need to be flexible and pivot over the years. Part of it is figuring out what you're passionate about and what you can speak about confidently. For example, in accounting, if you've been particularly adept at helping your company implement ASC 606 Revenue Recognition rules, lean in and make that part of your professional identity.

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

Tech companies thrive when they innovate. And the best innovations – across every function of a company – come from diverse teams and diverse leadership. Companies need to reflect on past practices that have led to a lack of diversity in senior leadership roles. If you're an executive and trying to make a positive change within

your business, look at how you can reimagine your recruiting and retention policies

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I think this is a great start, and I'm thrilled to work for a leader who has put diversity at the top of his list of priorities. With the national spotlight now focused on social justice issues, companies are looking at their D&I programs and reassessing what they've done, or not done, to promote a more diverse workplace. It will take the efforts of many – from schools, nonprofit organizations, and companies – to start to affect real change. I think there is hope that we can make progress, but that progress will not happen overnight.

Finally, business leaders have focused on hiring for diversity and not spending enough time creating a company culture that accepts and supports people of all backgrounds, the “I” in Diversity and Inclusion. I've seen many programs focus solely on getting diverse employees in the door and then do nothing to retain them. There should be more effort made to create and implement inclusive policies and a culture that supports people.

### **Why did you choose to work in – and stay in – an accounting-related field?**

I have always found motivation and success in finance and numbers – I was an accounting major and CPA before I went to law school. After graduating from the University of Virginia School of Law, I worked at several law firms, including K&L Gates and Cooley. I spent the better part of a decade working on corporate, transactional and tax matters. At a certain point, I hit a fork in the road and realized I wanted to work closer to the business. The idea of business operations and owning a P&L energized me, and I felt a career shift back to finance was a more effective way to achieve my goals.

After making the transition back into finance, I was fortunate to have various roles in corporate finance and accounting departments, which eventually led to positions as VP of Finance with Cumulus Media Inc and CFO with Insidesource Inc. The depth

and breadth of my role at Insidesource helped transform me into an operations

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help the company run more efficiently and effectively, which is particularly critical as we rapidly scale the Business.

I believe having a background in both law and finance has made me a better executive. Part of my role as CAO is to perform a risk analysis within the business. CPAs are trained to see things as black and white, whereas attorneys often see things as shades of gray. This critical thinking level is part of my DNA now as you never lose your legal/analytical skills. This has ultimately helped me develop positions that can be substantiated and serve as a basis for decision making.

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

- Blogs
  - AICPA Insights
  - Accounting Today
  - The Lawyer Whisperer
  - The Broadsheet (Weekly Newsletter by Fortune Magazine)
- Podcasts
  - How I Built This (NPR)
  - Women At Work
  - SaaStr
- Books
  - *Unapologetically Ambitious*, by Shellye Archambeau
  - *Alpha Girls* by Julian Guthrie
  - *Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do* by Dr. Jennifer Eberhardt

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

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guidance as possible.

I've found that the employees and teams that are flexible and remain open to discovering new ways to succeed at their job have the best opportunity to increase his/her value to the organization. Executives are leaning on their teams for a lot these days, all while asking them to do more with less. And that pressure is likely felt more so by women who, in many cases, have the added task of managing a merged "home-life" and "work-life." Whether it's orchestrating multiple WFH requirements with their partner, facilitating children suddenly at home, adjusting to remote learning, or coordinating and shifting in-person school schedules. If there's one thing I would urge employers to consider adding more of right now is flexibility. Women might need to adjust their working hours to account for homeschooling or might even come with a few new coworkers in the background – and that's alright. Women are rising to meet today's challenges in so many ways and still want to set themselves up for success later in their careers. Help them do that.

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

Technical skills remain critical, and with the adoption of AI, it's a must for any young CPA. Don't be afraid to roll up your sleeves and master technical platforms and software because it's not going away. While this is more of a given and training most practitioners will get in school or at their employers, young women CPAs will have to ensure their hard skills are polished and competitive to get ahead.

The flip side is the importance of soft skills. Being a good communicator is critical if you want to move up the corporate ladder. Also, being a manager means you need to figure out how to direct employees with various hard and soft skills. You're working with many different personalities and communication styles – and what works best for your staff accountant may not work as an email to your CFO. I highly suggest

taking PowerPoint and business email writing classes – the lessons you learn will

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utilize daily in my current role. The program's cornerstone is a week-long camping trip where we were required to completely unplug and survive as a team by putting the skills we had learned into action.

I'm not a camper and didn't grow up hiking, so this was far out of my comfort zone. One key focus throughout the Forum was mindfulness, and it's something I practiced a lot during that week in the wilderness. One night it occurred to me – the challenges we faced as campers were kind of like managing a team — all out in nature together. Some people don't want to do anything, so how do you motivate them? Others wish to perform specific tasks – so how do you create work that will benefit the entire team? You also learn about your boiling point, and mindfulness teaches you where you need to work on yourself to better present to others and encourage them to focus on what's important. Mindfulness and being an effective leader takes constant work – and you have to be open and willing to challenge yourself, learn, and evolve. In the end, difficult conversations are still tricky, but I approach them differently and know that I'm better for it.

**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.**

I have two:

Larry Bailey, CPA, has impacted thousands of careers/people directly and indirectly by just being a trailblazer. Larry was a pioneer earning an MBA in finance from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business, followed by successful roles with KPMG Peat Marwick, LLP, and PricewaterhouseCoopers. In the 1970s, he became one of the first African American partners at a major accounting firm. Many people owe their careers to Larry. The lessons he taught me have shaped my leadership style and ensure that Larry's legacy is still ongoing.

The other is Debbie Allen, as in Three-time Emmy Award-winning director, actress,

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and they passed a bit of my wisdom (which I got from Larry and Debbie) to the next generation, that would be awesome.

**Please share a personal rule or principle that you follow.**

A bird sitting on a branch is never afraid of breaking that branch because her trust is not in that branch but on her God-given talent. Always bet on yourself!

Read more about the [2020-2021 Most Powerful Women in Accounting Winners](#).

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