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Why CPAs Rock!

You want to know why I love being a certified public accountant (CPA) in public accounting? Accounting is the international language of business. CPAs rarely get the spotlight. We don't have a sexy reality television show. Sometimes, we're unfairly portrayed in the media as numbers nerds, bean counters, or tax collectors. By Lisa Ong, CPA, PwC, Dallas, Texas

I welcome the opportunity to give props to my unsung heroes and heroines in public accounting. How can we attract more talented students and get them to think about what they could do as CPAs to make a positive impact? Here are just a few reasons why "CPAs ROCK!"

Challenge. I love the challenge of working on teams of highly talented people to solve complex client issues. I've learned about a wide variety of businesses and travelled to many places around the country that I had never before visited. In my early career in public accounting, I found the work was never boring because I was always meeting new people and moving from one team or client to the next. I was continuously learning and doing something different every day. No two days were alike, nor were they predictable. Many of my colleagues have even had the opportunity to work overseas on global assignments to broaden their global business perspective. Few careers give you a chance to work abroad, let alone actually encourage you to increase your global business perspective.



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Purpose. Doing work that matters is important to me. In public accounting, I know the work I was doing was supporting the reliability and trust of the investment and business community. With technology, I'm able to manage work/life flexibility to enjoy being a working mom while also travelling for business. We focus on delivering results rather than face time in the office. I also get to work on projects that appeal to my passions, such as serving on nonprofit boards like the Texas Society of CPAs' Diversity and Inclusiveness Committee. Our efforts are helping attract more students to the profession.

Advancement. The accounting profession is fairly resilient and has continued to hire entry-level professionals throughout the economic downturn. It also offers significant learning and development opportunities. My firm, PwC, provides an average of 100 hours of training each year to

its client service people. Being a CPA gave me the best management training and continuous learning opportunities. The growth of the profession and high demand for our services creates many opportunities for career advancement. Early on, as a financial statement auditor, I saw the businesses from the eyes of the leaders. I worked with senior leaders to understand what makes their businesses profitable and how to help them accurately report their financial results. Instead of waiting for a new job opening to appear, I could actively work on my skills to prepare for my next promotion. The public accounting field is in high demand, so there is no shortage of demand for strong managers. I was supervising others by the end of my second calendar year on the job. This developed my leadership and managerial skills early.

Reputation. CPAs are known for being trusted business advisors. The CPA certification brings credibility as a respected professional, like lawyers, doctors and engineers. People understand that CPA certification requires time and effort to achieve. It signifies that you have studied and worked hard to uphold the high standards of the profession. Another bonus

– being a CPA gave my parents something to brag about!

Opportunity. CPAs are fluent in accounting as the “language of business.” Knowing the language opens doors to a diversity of career paths and offers exposure to new experiences. When I started in financial auditing, I couldn’t anticipate the wide variety of projects and people that I would get to meet. For example, 12 years ago I had a chance to interview senior leaders in the banking industry on trends forecasted for the future of banking. It’s cool and interesting to see their predictions are coming true, such as the increase in online banking services and deposits using camera phone applications. I attended a national diversity meeting about inspiring more students to remain in the accounting profession. While there, I had my picture taken with *CSI: NY* actor Hill Harper while he autographed copies of his inspirational book, *Letters to a Young Brother*. I helped a community bank raise funds in the public markets through an initial public offering. I helped attorneys review documents and prepare expert testimony on a fraud case. I toured manufacturing plants to see how PVC pipes are made from raw materials. I’ve done surprise inventory counts of drugs in hospital pharmacies. I could go on about the volume of things I’ve seen because the accounting career path creates so many unique opportunities that I could not get elsewhere.

Caring. CPAs care. I’ve seen CPAs giving back in many ways to the communities they support. CPAs are actively lending their financial expertise on nonprofit boards. They use their reputations to raise funds for charitable causes. They help companies reduce their carbon footprints by implementing “green” programs. They collect coats for underprivileged children in the winter. They organize walks, bowl-a-thons, and even pie-in-the-face contests to raise awareness for great causes. PwC gives every employee 10 paid hours to donate time to charities of their choice. They use the time to engage in such activities as organizing community service days where we can teach a class with Junior Achievement,

sprucing up schools and community centers, and sorting donations at the food bank. CPAs volunteer time to prepare tax returns for low income or elderly tax-payers to help them get their eligible credits and refunds. I once witnessed a mother crying for joy when she heard she would get a \$3,000 tax refund. CPAs teach families how to increase their financial literacy and create a budget, manage their finances and improve their lives.

Knowledgeable. CPAs know how to get things done. They are analytical, creative problem solvers with great relationship skills, and they can help negotiate and navigate complex situations. For example, CPAs can help a company learn to open new operations overseas, track purchases and sales through new systems implementation, adjust controls to prevent losses and fraud, and produce best-in-class reports for management to make fully informed decisions. CPAs know and understand the business rules, tax rules, government rules, and industry best practices. CPAs are connected. They have a wide internal and external network of business relationships across the world and can connect people to the right resources to get things done efficiently and effectively. CPAs are in high demand, which in turn can help fuel compensation growth. But it’s more than money that makes being a CPA rewarding. It’s the people I work with every day. When your work aligns with your passions, it’s not work. When you know what you’re doing is important, it means a lot more than just having a job. When everyone around you shares the values of excellence, leadership and teamwork, you feel welcomed, included and valued.

I received wise advice from a mentor, and his kind and caring words stay with me to this day. He told me that life is too short. Most of us will be working until we are at least 65 years old unless we get a large inheritance or win the lottery. If you are not having fun at work, you should pause and revisit your career decision. Being a CPA in public accounting has “ROCKED” for me. (I would say it’s been “awe-

some,” but my daughter tells me that’s not cool anymore.) It’s been fun, exciting and unpredictable. I would not hesitate to do it all over again. Don’t just take my word for it. Ask other CPAs and you will likely hear similar responses.

As you ponder your future, explore a career that’s not just a job, but a passion. Find something that will let you live the type of life you want to have while giving back to the community too. You can learn more about the accounting profession and becoming a CPA by visiting Destination CPA at <http://go.tscpa.org>. While you’re there, be sure to check out the career video currently playing in the drive-in theater.

About the author: Lisa Ong, CPA, is National Director of Minority Retention and Advancement at PwC, one of the largest professional services firms in the United States. Lisa designs strategy, resources, training and tools to create a unique people experience, specifically tailored for the needs of diverse talent. Lisa is a frequent speaker within PwC and on college campuses. The views expressed in this article are her own.

