

STUDENT ACCOUNTANT
ACCA'S MAGAZINE
FOR TRAINEES

OCTOBER 2013

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CAREER DEVELOPMENT
PREPARING FOR A PERFORMANCE REVIEW

WOMEN IN ACCOUNTANCY

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

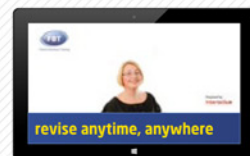
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EDITOR'S CHOICE



WELCOME TO THE OCTOBER ISSUE OF *STUDENT ACCOUNTANT*

Accountancy has long been considered by some to be a male-orientated profession when it comes to those taking their place in the boardroom. However, an intriguing statistic has revealed that more than half of all new ACCA students are female. Could this be proof that opportunities now exist for women to progress like never before and that the glass ceiling might be about to shatter to make way for more female senior finance professionals?

Whatever your gender, one thing that we all have to face at some point is the annual appraisal with the boss. We consider how you can turn a potentially stressful situation into something meaningful and positive... that is, if you plan and prepare for it adequately.

Did you know that between 30% and 40% of all positions are filled through networking? Do you actively network? If not, read our piece in Learning

Centre with tips on how to go about it. Our latest exam paper prizewinners also have some valuable tips of their own to share on effective study and exam technique. Be sure to check them out too.

This month's crop of technical articles are relevant to Paper F4 and Papers P1 to P7.

Finally, thanks to those of you who recently completed the *Student Accountant* self-select form to be kept informed of all the latest articles and exam technique videos relevant to the papers you are studying. If you haven't yet done so, please do it now. Don't get left behind! Full details are on page 44.

If you have any feedback about this issue, please email us at studentaccountant@accaglobal.com

Victoria Morgan
Editor, *Student Accountant* magazine



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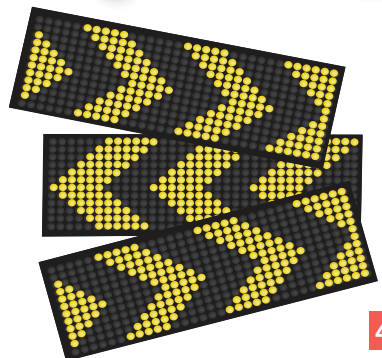
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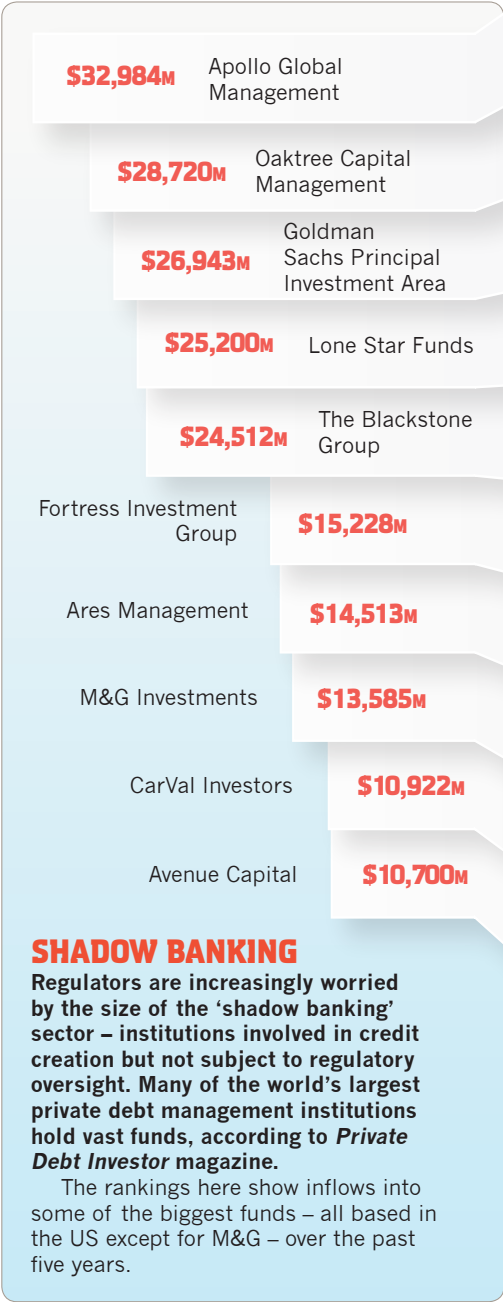
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ACHIEVE MORE. BECOME MORE.





JAPAN



PAKISTAN

JAPAN

Japanese sports fans celebrate after hearing that Tokyo had won the bid to host the 2020 Olympics – it last hosted the Games in 1964

PAKISTAN

Tens of thousands were forced to leave their homes after heavy monsoon rains. More than 140 people were killed and roads and bridges were washed away in the Punjab and Sindh provinces

CHINA

A man rests on a bed in an IKEA branch in Shanghai – a common sight in the Swedish store which is now the largest foreign commercial landowner in China



CHINA



UK

UK

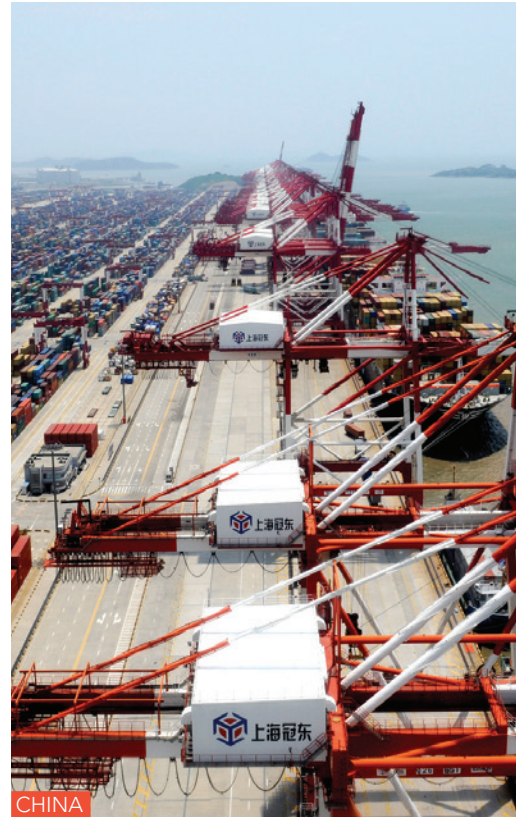
Japanese camera maker Olympus and UK subsidiary Gyrus Group were charged by the UK's Serious Fraud Office with providing 'misleading, false or deceptive' material in accounts for Gyrus Group



US

CHINA

China's State Council has approved the establishment of a pilot free trade zone in Shanghai that will help foster China's global competitiveness and serve as a new platform for cooperation with other countries



CHINA

US

Madonna topped the Forbes celebrity rich list with earnings of US\$125m, narrowly beating Steven Spielberg

UK

Vodafone sold its 45% stake in Verizon Wireless to US telecoms group Verizon Communications. The £84bn deal is one of the biggest in corporate history



UK



'TOO BIG TO FAIL' INITIATIVE GETS RENEWED BACKING FROM G20

Global leaders at September's G20 meeting in St Petersburg in Russia endorsed the efforts of the Financial Stability Board (FSB) to ensure the major crashes that sparked the financial crisis never happen again.

In a report prepared for the summit, Mark Carney, who chairs the FSB and is governor of the Bank of England, said good progress had been made on the FSB's ambitious 'too big to fail' initiative, which he described as essential for a more robust, competitive and fair financial system – but that more needed to be done.

The G20 leaders (pictured at the meeting) agreed and renewed their commitment to 'make any necessary reforms' to drive through the FSB's key recommendations, which include undertaking 'the necessary actions to remove obstacles to cross-border resolution, taking into account country-specific circumstances'.

Russian president Vladimir Putin told the summit that a return to economic crisis could not be ruled out, as world leaders had not yet resolved the problem of returning the world economy towards steady and balanced growth.

ACCA ELECTS NEW PRESIDENT

ACCA has announced Martin Turner FCCA as its president for 2013/14. Having qualified with ACCA in 1976 and become an FCCA in 1981, Turner is currently a freelance management consultant, advising the health sector in countries including Iraq, Kazakhstan, Nigeria and Serbia. Prior to that, he was chief executive for the Health Services in Adelaide, Australia, and worked for more than 20 years as a chief executive in the National Health Service in the UK.

Commenting on his appointment, Turner said: 'My focus for my presidential year will be to work with ACCA's Council and staff to ensure the organisation continues to deliver on its strategic aims in a challenging climate. I will also focus on work that promotes and discusses global standards, looking at governance, ethics, sustainability, corporate reporting and audit.'

Anthony Harbinson FCCA succeeds Turner as deputy

president, while Alexandra Chin FCCA is the new vice president.

FAME FOR TWEEDIE

Sir David Tweedie has been inducted into American Accounting Association's 'Accounting Hall of Fame'. He was presented with his award by Robert Herz, former chairman of the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) and himself a member of the Hall of Fame. The citation recognised Tweedie's role in developing accounting standards first in the UK and then with the IASB.

PwC BOOSTS NUMBERS



PwC has appointed 32 new partners across its firms in mainland China (13), Hong Kong (eight), Singapore (six) and Taiwan (five), bringing the total number of partners in the four regions to over 690. Of the new partners 17 are with the assurance practice, eight in tax, and seven in advisory, and 13 are female.

END OF THE 'CLASSIC' FINANCE CAREER?

Nearly 750 CFOs around the world were surveyed for a new report by ACCA and the Institute of Management Accountants (IMA), which suggests that tomorrow's finance chiefs will need deeper business acumen balanced with core finance understanding gained from a broader finance and business career.

Jamie Lyon, ACCA head of corporate sector and author of the *Future Pathways to Financial Leadership* report, said: 'We can expect a different premium to be placed on the capabilities that will really matter for future finance leaders. The survey suggests you can't get away from the need for retaining baseline finance skills, but there are so many more capabilities future CFOs will need to bring to the table too.'


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KAPLAN
FINANCIAL

CHINA CRISIS, WHAT CRISIS?

WE TAKE A LOOK AT SOME OF THE EVIDENCE POINTING TOWARDS A CHINESE SLOWDOWN AND THE EFFECTS THIS COULD HAVE ON THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

A wide-ranging number of economic indicators from China are pointing towards deflation in the country, as calls from economists and officials seemingly grow ever louder to cut interest rates in order to help boost slowing growth.

China's growth has witnessed an obvious deceleration from its double-digit rate of previous years, but so far it has only been a mild slowdown compared to figures from last year, which suggests that the changes and slowdown in the economy may be under control.

Clear economic indicators that the world's second-largest economy is slowing include the fact that consumer prices rose by 2.7% over recent months compared to 2012 – but much less than the 3.5% upper annual limit targeted by Beijing at the start of 2013.

Producer prices have remained in deflationary territory for the 17th consecutive month, falling 2.3% in July compared to a year earlier, the last available figures at the time of writing. A drop of 2.7% was reported in June.

Standard Chartered Bank believes that, due to the serial decline, a number of its clients are worried that China is experiencing serious deflation in the corporate sector. The National Bureau of Statistics backs up the bank's view. It reports that while industrial companies'

net income continues to increase over the previous 12 months, the rate of growth is, without question, slowing down.

As a result, concerns have been raised over China's corporate sector – specifically, whether it is facing a damaging profit squeeze as prices at the factory gate tumble.

Other indicative economic data includes a fall in state railway spend and a small contraction in the expenditure on highway construction, while many shipyards have reported a reduction in orders.

It could also be argued that the country has lost a competitive

edge after letting wage levels rise to head off social tensions and any risk of regime change demands, as seen with the Arab Spring. China's exports have historically been mainly low-end processing products, but more and more of these cheaper products are being manufactured in neighbouring countries with lower labour costs.

The country is now increasingly introducing research and development divisions and other high value-added sectors from developed economies, which is furthering its industrial evolution.





OTHER INDICATIVE ECONOMIC DATA INCLUDES A FALL IN STATE RAILWAY SPEND AND A SMALL CONTRACTION IN THE EXPENDITURE ON HIGHWAY CONSTRUCTION

'China is within a hair's breadth of outright deflation,' believes one prominent analyst, who adds that the country has suffered a deflationary trade shock from Japan's massive devaluation of the yen and from China's own semi-fixed link to a rising US dollar.

Given the size and importance of China's export manufacturing sector, any Chinese deflation is likely to have a knock-on effect and spread across the world at a time when growth remains weak and monetary policy in developed economies is already extremely accommodative.

If growth continues to decline in the country, developed economies will be increasingly concerned

that their economies will suffer from China's slowdown. Slowing growth will reduce the prospects for export-led growth. It would also adversely impact commodity trade with major trade partners.

As for emerging economies, China's weakening demand for commodities has already partly affected their exports of resources. China's outbound investment is expected to exceed \$90bn this year and will soon surpass its annual inbound volume, making it a country with net capital outflow. Much of these outflow investments will land in emerging economies.

A bigger worry for these economies would be borne out if the US, as

expected, tapers off its quantitative easing measures, which would alter the direction of global capital flows.

The momentum of the country's economy remains far from certain. Stronger than expected industrial output for August has reinforced hopes that China's economy is now stabilising after slowing for almost two years.

Factory output growth hit a 17-month high and retail sales grew at their fastest pace of the year during the month, increasing confidence that after contracting in nine of the past 10 quarters, the economy may be recovering – but any recovery is set to be bumpy.

China's leaders have made it clear they can accept slower growth as they try to wean the economy off a dependence on investment and exports in favour of domestic consumption. The effects of this policy mean that the impact on the rest of the world remains far from certain.

ON THE RIGHT FRACK

WE TAKE A LOOK AT THE ECONOMIC IMPACT FRACKING WILL HAVE ON THE GLOBAL ECONOMY AND WHY SOME COUNTRIES HAVE BANNED THE PRACTICE

The US is on track to become a net exporter of natural gas by 2020, a development that will have a profound effect on its balance sheet, the global economy and political relationships.

The boom in the nation's natural gas production is due to the increasingly common but highly controversial practice of hydraulic fracturing, commonly known as fracking, which has allowed companies to reach natural gas deposits previously out of reach in shale and rock formations.

Fracking involves pumping water, sand, methane and other chemicals – some toxic – into the rocks at high pressure and drilling long horizontal wells in shale rocks more than a kilometre below the surface. This opens up fissures in the shale, which are held open by the sand, enabling the trapped gas to escape to the surface for collection.

Energy companies insist the process is no threat to nearby groundwater, but environmentalists disagree. While US states including Texas are producing vast quantities of shale gas, others such as Vermont don't allow fracking due to concerns over drinking water contamination.

Advocates of fracking argue that exploiting the world's potentially vast shale gas deposits will help keep energy affordable and cut consumption of dirtier coal.

Sceptics claim fracking is dangerous and polluting.

Shale gas production has rocketed in the US during the last 10 years due to technological breakthroughs, prompting other countries including the UK, Australia, China and Poland to step up their fracking activities.

Others, such as France – thought to be sitting on Europe's biggest shale gas deposits – and Bulgaria, are among countries to ban fracking amid environmental concerns.

As fracking sites have increased so have controversies. A 2010 film showed people near one US site setting fire to polluted tap water and

last year a whistleblower claimed fracking in New York could poison the city's drinking water. This claim has been acknowledged by the US Environmental Protection Agency, but it believes risks will be reduced through improved drilling practices. In addition, fracking company Cuadrilla saw its UK operation put on hold after the process caused tiny earthquakes.

The estimates of world shale gas reserves vary. The US expects shale to provide nearly half its natural gas by 2035, while extraction is likely to be much slower in Europe as it is more densely populated.



Demonstrators walk through a roadside camp at the entrance gate belonging to a site run by Cuadrilla Resources, outside the village of Balcombe in southern England

WHILE US COMPANIES HAVE SEEN ENERGY PRICES TUMBLE IN A DECADE OF SHALE PRODUCTION, EUROPEAN COMPETITORS ARE PAYING UP TO FIVE TIMES MORE FOR GAS, PREVENTING THE CONTINENT FROM CLIMBING OUT OF RECESSION



A US government assessment of 32 countries claimed they had 169 trillion cubic metres of technically recoverable shale gas – around the same as the world's economically recoverable reserves of conventional natural gas. The survey put the largest reserves in China, the US, Argentina and Mexico.

However, estimates keep changing. The official figure for the US was almost halved in early 2012, while Cuadrilla claimed its Blackpool site in the UK has five trillion cubic metres – 10 times more than the US estimate for the whole of the UK. China's own survey estimated its reserves were almost twice as high as the US figure.

The US government expects shale gas to account for 46% of its natural gas extraction by 2035 and, according to BP, shale gas – along with tar sands and other unconventional fuels – will make the Americas largely self-sufficient in energy by 2030.

The US has already overtaken Russia as the leading producer

of natural gas, and the country's fracking revolution is likely to further change the dynamics of world energy and relationships.

The US's shift to energy self-sufficiency may weaken its strategic interest in the Middle East, North Africa and the Persian Gulf, while Europe remains dependent on oil and gas supplies from these regions.

'NO REVOLUTION'

A Deutsche Bank report looking at the potential for shale concluded there would be no 'shale gas revolution' in Europe due to factors such as higher population density and stronger environmental regulation.

US oil imports have fallen below domestic production for the first time since the 1990s and now represent just 40% of demand. In addition, most imports come from other Western hemisphere producers – the US imports over three times more oil from Canada than Saudi Arabia.

European officials are concerned about the economic impact of the US's shale revolution. While US companies have seen energy prices tumble in a decade of shale production, European competitors are paying up to five times more for gas, preventing the continent from climbing out of recession and regaining a competitiveness on world markets.

Japan's energy prices are even higher than Europe's, while China is also feeling the heat as cut-price power makes production cheaper in the US.

Conversely, the shale revolution has inadvertently pushed the US into the forefront of the fight against global warming as the switch from coal to cheap natural gas in US electricity production means the country has seen carbon emissions hit their lowest levels since 1994. As a result, it has overtaken most European countries in meeting the goals of the Kyoto protocol, despite never ratifying the climate change agreement.

ENSURING PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS

THE PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS TO BECOME AN ACCA MEMBER INCLUDE THREE ESSENTIALS PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES RELATING TO PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS – YOUR ABILITY TO MANAGE YOURSELF, COMMUNICATE WITH OTHERS, AND USE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY. THIS ARTICLE IDENTIFIES OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP YOUR SELF-MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS

MANAGING YOURSELF

Your workplace mentor may provide you with guidance as you gain practical experience. However, how you approach and manage your workload, strive for higher standards, and work with other people will determine whether you meet your performance objectives. These factors will also contribute to your development as a professional and to your long-term career success.

Although self-management is a performance objective in its own right, it's also a skill you will employ when meeting most of your other performance objectives.

Here are some questions to ask yourself when managing your workload:

Prioritising and planning

- ❑ What are you doing to ensure efficient use of your time and your employer's resources?
- ❑ How are you organising your workload in order to gain a clear view of all the tasks you need to complete?
- ❑ What steps are you taking to build in extra time to handle problems, unexpected additional work, or unavoidable distractions?

AS A FINANCE PROFESSIONAL, YOU MUST BE ABLE TO PERCEIVE HOW THE PEOPLE YOU DEAL WITH RESPOND TO THE OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

Quality assurance

- ❑ How thoroughly do you check your work before submitting it to your workplace mentor or manager for approval?
- ❑ When appropriate, how are you demonstrating that you can take the initiative and not always wait for instructions on what to do?

Development of working relationships

- ❑ How effective are you at getting the best out of colleagues?
- ❑ In what ways might you alter your behaviour to improve results?
- ❑ When working with your manager or with more senior colleagues, what are you doing to encourage guidance and feedback?

Development of skills and knowledge

- ❑ Without being prompted by your workplace mentor, are you striving to improve yourself by acting on perceived or casual feedback?
- ❑ What steps are you taking outside of your daily responsibilities to gain knowledge?

- ❑ How do you demonstrate this new knowledge at work?

Professionalism

- ❑ How are you adapting to fit the culture of your team or employer?
- ❑ What kind of attitude do you think your output indicates?

Developing your communication skills

In most jobs, the majority of your time at work involves dealing with other people. Whether you are working alongside peers, reporting to a line manager, delegating to juniors, collaborating with non-finance colleagues, or liaising with the employees of clients or suppliers, how you interact with them is vital to your personal effectiveness.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEHAVIOURAL STYLES

Although everyone is unique, many people exhibit common characteristics that dictate the way they relate to their surroundings – at home and at work. As a finance

professional, you must be able to perceive how the people you deal with respond to the office environment – including their perception of what is significant or urgent and how they might behave as a result. Improving your understanding of other people's 'behavioural styles' may help you to adjust your own behaviour and therefore get better results from office interactions, leading to the following benefits:

- ❑ a more positive working relationship with your workplace mentor while you gain practical experience
- ❑ better feedback from managers or clients
- ❑ improved promotion and management prospects
- ❑ added job satisfaction
- ❑ access to more high-profile work or clients.

Adjusting your own style to achieve better results from working with others doesn't require you to act in a false way. You simply have to stand back and observe, in order to improve your understanding of why people behave in certain ways.

Identifying common styles

Watch and listen to your colleagues to observe how certain traits and characteristics can determine how they give and receive information:

- ❑ Do they appear to listen to some people more than others? If so, who and why?
- ❑ How do they respond to people who are critical, hesitant, emotional, or forceful?
- ❑ Are they more friendly and cooperative in meetings or on the phone? What factors influence this?
- ❑ Do they prefer information to be conveyed verbally or do they insist on everything in writing? If this depends on who they are dealing with, who and why?
- ❑ Do they welcome statistics and facts to support an argument or are they more likely to make instant decisions based on instinct?

You also need to understand your own style, so that you can alter how you behave in order to be more successful when dealing with others. For instance, if you tend to rely on intuition and you are working on a specific project with a colleague who approaches tasks in an objective way, you might find it helpful to support your ideas with facts and figures.

Using style awareness

Put your heightened awareness of others' likely behaviours to good use as you accumulate practical experience. Consider the following:

- ❑ If you wish to observe a colleague in a meeting, how receptive will that colleague be to your suggestion? If it's the first time your colleague is attending this kind of meeting, it may be better to wait until the second meeting, but how might your colleague's behaviour influence your decision?
- ❑ If you are given the opportunity to undertake a job rotation, how is the colleague with whom you are temporarily swapping roles likely to respond to 'handover' instructions? Is it better to leave thorough notes and follow up later, or will your colleague be keen for you to take them step by step through your job?
- ❑ What factors influence your mentor's disposition? What events or actions of others tend to be most pleasing or annoying? When is he or she likely to be most or least receptive to requests for help?
- ❑ When communicating facts in writing, is the provision of supporting data likely to be welcomed or might it be regarded as unnecessary? What previous behaviour might the recipient have?

- ❑ If you are being coached by someone with whom you are unfamiliar, how might you best communicate that you prefer to work things out for yourself before asking for help, without affecting the coach's interest and enthusiasm?

- ❑ When shadowing a colleague, how can you judge whether they are likely to welcome questions while they are working on a particular task, or that you should wait until the end before seeking explanations?

The subject of behavioural styles and personal effectiveness is well documented. However, be careful not to become too prescriptive about style awareness – judgment based on your own experience shouldn't necessarily be invalidated by theories on behavioural style.

As with self-management, effective communication is not just a standalone performance objective. It's a skill you will need to continue developing throughout your career. As you refine your personal effectiveness, you will find that not only does your ability to meet performance objectives improve, but so does your capacity to take on more responsibility, with minimum levels of stress, and with increased energy and drive. You are likely to experience positive benefits outside the workplace too, meaning that you can really enjoy the rewards of your hard work. Improving your personal effectiveness makes you better at managing your job and your life outside of work.

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**IMPROVING YOUR PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS
MAKES YOU BETTER AT MANAGING YOUR JOB AND
YOUR LIFE OUTSIDE OF WORK**

WHAT IS BUSINESS NETWORKING?

WHY SHOULD YOU CARE?

If you are intending to get a job at the end of your studies, then you need to be aware of the impact that networking may have on that plan. According to studies by CareerXroads (1) and Right Management (2), between 30% and 40% of all positions filled were via networking referrals. If you are not actively networking, then you will greatly limit your range of job options.

The world is incredibly noisy right now with many people and organisations competing for your time and attention. We are getting very selective about who and what we give our favourable attention to.

When you seek employment you are also trying to get yourself noticed. You will therefore have to compete with the same noise. Here is the thing – you need to get used to the idea that becoming a skilled and enthusiastic promoter of your own skills and services is vital.

With so many distracting inputs, modern life can be confusing. We all have natural networks of trusted people. If a trusted person in your network recommends a service, contact or product to you it makes your choices so much easier – you will be more confident of a good outcome.

Business networking relies on this approach, gaining favourable attention in order for you to promote your skills and abilities. A good referral by a trusted business contact or colleague can open many doors for you, including some opportunities you might never have thought of. Employing someone who has been recommended makes an employer's life easier.

As an accounting student looking for work, or someone who has recently begun working for an accountancy firm and is looking to progress, business networking represents a fantastic opportunity for you. I recommend that you use available online networks as

much as possible, but this article will focus solely on face-to-face networking. People like dealing with people, so I believe personal face-to-face networking is always the best way to go.

You can network almost anywhere and with almost anyone, so always be ready to network; opportunities often come from sources you would least expect. It does, however, make good sense to go where suitable employers or contacts would go. Regularly attend job fairs, industry conferences, professional institute meetings, workshops and seminars, open days and any other venue with high potential.

MAXIMISE YOUR CHANCES

You already have a natural network of friends, relatives and colleagues. By actively networking further afield you will extend this network of contacts, show motivation and enthusiasm and maximise your chances of success. Your contacts will all have friends, relatives and colleagues too, so when you reach out the message can go a long way. How far your message goes depends on how memorable it is and also how memorable you are. If one of your contacts is asked 'do you know any accountants looking for work?', then you definitely want to be the one they remember and mention.

Always make a good first impression. Remember that people are not interested in what you can do but rather what you can do for them or the people they know. Show people you are uniquely different in a positive way. Short narratives and stories are more memorable than lists, so use pertinent anecdotes to

relate your experience and skills. Let other people tell you their stories and ask them lots of open questions. Be helpful and refer other people within your network.

The world is a wonderful mix of fascinating social cultures and each may have different forms of etiquette for making business contacts and networking. If you are unsure, then first ask someone who knows the local or national customs and you will be sure to make a good first impression.

The aim of networking is to make new contacts and friends. You are not there to push yourself on people. Introduce yourselves to each other in the most appropriate way for the location and situation and simply have a conversation. If people are interested in what you can do for them they will ask for more information. If they do ask for more information, or invite you to meet them, make sure you follow up. If you say you will do something, then do it.

Approach any networking opportunity with an open mind, a spirit of curiosity, a positive mental attitude and, above all, patience. If you know someone who is particularly good at networking, then ask them to help you out. You will learn a great deal and gain a lot of confidence.

Networking is not a theoretical subject so go out and actually do it. Spending time learning to network effectively is an investment that will pay for itself over and over again.

Andrew D Pope, communication skills consultant and author of *Business Networking for the Bewildered*. www.eryrglas.com

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EXAM TECHNIQUE

HEATHER GOUGH, ACCA PRODUCT MANAGER AND LIVE ONLINE TUTOR AT KAPLAN FINANCIAL, PROVIDES SOME USEFUL TIPS

USE YOUR READING TIME WISELY

You have 15 minutes of reading and planning time. You need to have planned how you will use this time. While you cannot write in the

answer booklet, you can write on the question paper. So you can plan answers, think about structure of answers in a written paper, prioritise which calculations you will do in numerical papers, and so on.

Before the exam, use practice and past exams to develop your technique for this reading time. This is so you know what works best for you and how to maximise the use of the reading time in advance of the real thing.

Do not rewrite the requirement or provide introduction paragraphs. You will not be awarded any marks, so this is a waste of time. Get straight into your answer and do not waffle.

YOU MUST ALLOCATE YOUR TIME AND STICK TO IT

Too often, students do not manage their time

correctly and end up spending five minutes on the

final question. For

three-hour exams you have to be ruthless with time management. Generally, you have 1.8 minutes per mark. Work out your time allocation for each part of a question and stick to it. It is difficult to pass an exam when you have only attempted parts of it. Missing out questions will seriously hinder your chances of success.



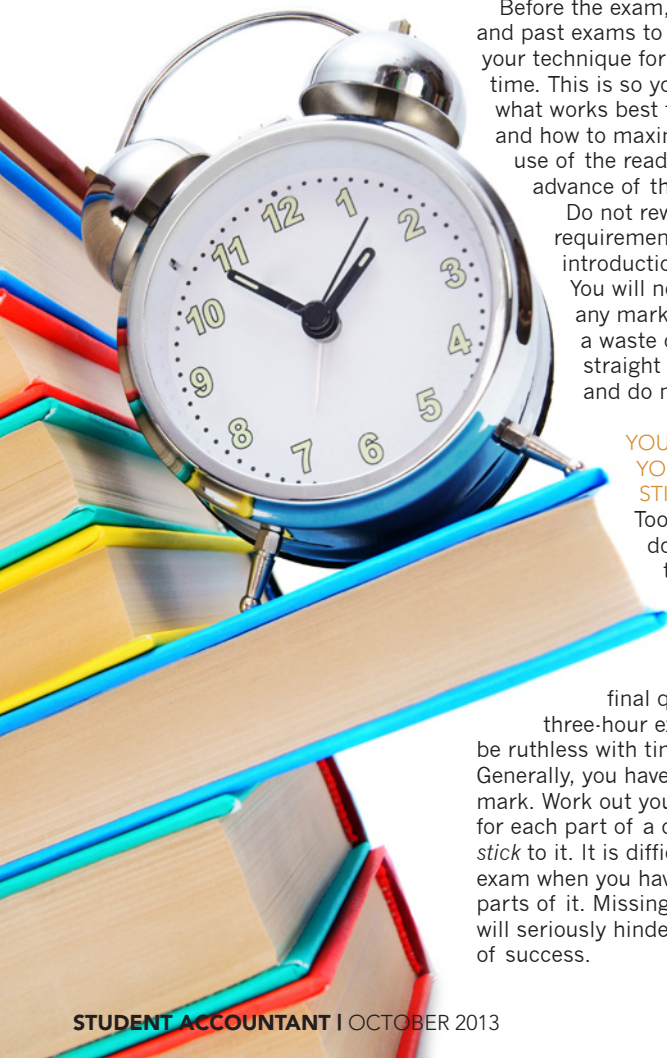
WATCH YOUR WRITING

This is a classic exam tip. It sounds obvious but you would be amazed at the poor quality of writing markers have to read. If the marker cannot read the script, then how can they mark it? To put it simply: think more, write less, and focus on making what you write clear, specific and legible.

'THINK MORE, WRITE LESS, AND FOCUS ON MAKING WHAT YOU WRITE CLEAR, SPECIFIC AND LEGIBLE'

MOVE ON

Once the exam is over, there is nothing you can do – you have to leave your exam emotions in the exam hall along with the paper itself. If the exam hasn't gone as well as planned, then you have to put it behind you, move on and focus on the next exam. Don't let a bad exam knock your confidence for the next paper.



OVERCOMING EXAM ANXIETY

PROBLEM SOLVED:

No matter how prepared I am, I get anxious and sick on the morning of an exam – how can I overcome pre-exam nerves?

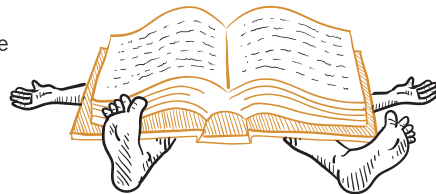
It's difficult to banish nerves altogether – but they can be managed. Setting off for the exam hall on an empty stomach is unwise – but eat the right foods. Fruit and vegetables can help to reduce stress; high-sugar and fast or processed food may do the opposite, while fatty foods can bring on sluggishness. Aim to get quality sleep the night before – light exercise (even a 30-minute walk) before bed will help.

If you are the type of person who gets wound up by other students worrying aloud about what questions are likely to come

up, the answer is simple: avoid them. Getting a good result is more important than mingling with your mates. Allow enough time to get to the exam hall but not so much that you will have to endure everyone else's agonising predictions before you go in. Take deep breaths to help you relax.

Examiners regularly cite poor time management as a major factor contributing to poor marks – so do practise past papers, allocating times to each question, and then stick to your schedule. This will help to create a sense of being in control, alleviating your nerves and allowing you to focus on answering the questions.

Plan ahead for tuning out what might go on around you. Spotting fellow candidates coasting or in



despair can be equally dispiriting. If something or someone distracts you, make it your strategy to look down at your own desk and focus on your breathing – this will help you recover your concentration.

Write out the techniques you intend to use to calm your nerves, and tell yourself (try speaking aloud) that they will help. Looking at your list if nerves hit just before you go in to the exam hall will help return you to a state of control.

HOW TO USE PAST PAPERS

Judicious use of past papers is one of the best ways of preparing for professional exams. The best students swear by them – but those who fail are bewildered at their lack of success. Why?

CONDITION YOURSELF

A common mistake is to avoid making the effort to set up exam conditions – or as near as can be contrived, according to your personal circumstances. Even if you are able to happily focus on textbooks or lecture notes with the noise of family, friends, or passengers around you, there's no substitute for complete silence when 'sitting' past papers. If you can, use a library – and arrive early enough to bag the most quiet and remote spot. Failing that, lock yourself in your room and give firm instructions to your family or housemates not to disturb you unless in an emergency.

Give yourself time to read through the questions before you start,

working out how much time you can allocate to each one. And set the same strict time limit for the whole paper, from start to finish, as the original exam allowed – no breaking off to stretch your legs, have a snack, or find a friend to chat to. Would you have the opportunity to do that on exam day?

The aim is to create an atmosphere that's as close to exam conditions as possible – the effect may be at a subconscious level, but it will be there all right.

BEAT THE CHEAT

It's hugely tempting, when stumped by a particularly tricky question, to turn to the back of the past paper, locate the answer, and tell yourself that you would have worked it out eventually anyway. This is highly inadvisable, even if you take the time to work backwards from the correct answer in order to understand the

logic of the calculation. The point is to replicate exam conditions – better to soldier on, or, if necessary, abandon it and move on to the next question to acquire easier marks, returning to the tricky question only if you have time.

There's no reason not to repeat past papers – much can be learned this way. It's easy to think, once you have worked your way through the paper and marked it from the back, that you would get much higher marks at another attempt. You would be amazed. Practise with as many different papers as are available, then go back to the first. You will remember less than you think, and the test will do you good. Where you were given a choice of questions, try the ones you didn't attempt first time round. Variety will keep your brain sharp and you will be better prepared should the real exam throw up nasty surprises.

MANPREET SHERGILL

ASSISTANT ACCOUNTANT, CUBIC DEFENCE NZ LTD, AUCKLAND,
NEW ZEALAND

Work experience is integral to ACCA membership and, for Manpreet Shergill, gaining this experience began as soon as she left school in 2002. Having originally planned to attend university in Canada, Manpreet didn't feel ready to move from Kuwait and instead decided to take ACCA's Certified Accounting Technician (CAT) qualification at a local training college, gaining work experience as a part-time accounts assistant at IKEA.

This led to a full-time job in the accounts team at a cleaning company – and a distance learning degree with an Indian university – before she decided to

move to London to continue her ACCA studies. 'I completed my Fundamental level exams while – once again – working part-time,' she explains, 'but, as my family were missing me, I returned home in 2008 without progressing further.'

After only a year in Kuwait, however, and a more responsible post at the cleaning company, Manpreet moved country again – this time to join her new husband who is a resident of New Zealand.

'After I arrived, my husband encouraged me to resume my ACCA studies, and so I set a target of sitting one paper every six months, finally passing all my exams in December 2012. As before, I combined work and study although my lack of local experience was a real disadvantage at first. However, advice from a local ACCA member helped me gain a short-term contract job, which led to longer-term contract work and then, eventually, to my current job as assistant accountant at Cubic Defence NZ.'

Manpreet made sure she recorded her work experience as she achieved each objective. The result was that the transition to ACCA membership took only three months.

'This is something I believe every student should do. If you delay, you may worry

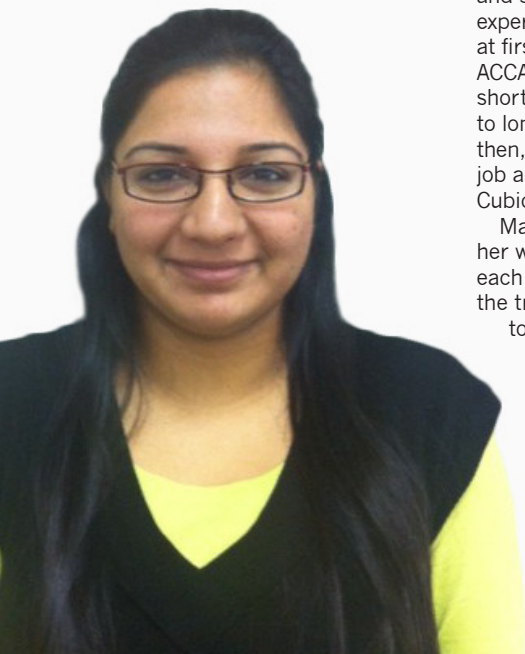
that certain objectives will have to be redone, or that gaining sign-offs from former employers might be difficult, especially if mentors have moved on. It is such as shame if you don't progress to membership after working so hard to pass the exams.'

For Manpreet, ACCA membership is certainly worth the effort. 'The sense of accomplishment is fantastic,' she says, 'and my new status has already allowed me to diversify into teaching, as I now provide tuition support for Paper P1 students.'

She also hopes to participate in more ACCA events, and is active in the local ACCA Women in Business Interest Group. 'This is a good networking opportunity,' she says, 'and a chance to discuss ways to improve the business world for women.'

Manpreet will begin the CPD requirement of ACCA membership in 2014, but is already working with her manager to continue her professional development and to move into a more senior position within the firm.

'I am yet to fully appreciate everything ACCA membership has to offer,' she adds, 'but I am sure it will deliver many benefits and, if the right opportunity comes along, I am confident that I will achieve much more in my career and personal life.'



'THE SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT IS FANTASTIC AND MY NEW STATUS HAS ALREADY ALLOWED ME TO DIVERSIFY INTO TEACHING, AS I NOW PROVIDE TUITION SUPPORT FOR PAPER P1 STUDENTS'

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