

STUDENT ACCOUNTANT
ACCA'S MAGAZINE
FOR TRAINEES

SEPTEMBER 2013

SA

SOFT SKILLS
THE 'MUST-HAVES' FOR
FINANCE PROFESSIONALS

**NEW CHALLENGES,
NEW OPPORTUNITIES?**
STEPPING UP TO THE SKILLS GAP

PERSONAL BRANDING

**HOW TO MARKET
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EDITOR'S CHOICE



WELCOME TO THE SEPTEMBER ISSUE OF *STUDENT ACCOUNTANT*

In last month's issue we looked at the increasing importance of creating your own personal brand to put you in the best possible position to land the job of your dreams. This month we look at how best to market that brand to help you stand out from the crowd to prospective employers. Read what our experts have to say.

We also consider whether the profession is currently experiencing some kind of skills gap and, if so, what are these missing skills – and could you take advantage by upskilling? We continue our skills theme with a comprehensive A–Z rundown of the must-have soft skills for accountants. Find out the qualities deemed essential to help you get ahead in the profession.

In Learning Centre, we meet the winners of this year's Simpson Scholarship, who reveal why they decided to apply for it and how winning it will help them to realise their potential and career aspirations. Also,

don't miss our profile of new ACCA member Danielle Sebire, who reveals all about how she met ACCA's practical experience requirement – including her top tips on approaching challenge questions.

This month's crop of technical articles are relevant to Papers FAU, FTX, F6, F8, P2, P4, P6 and P7.

Finally, if you haven't already done so, make sure to personalise your issue of *Student Accountant* so that you are kept informed of all the latest articles and exam technique videos relevant to the papers you are studying. Full details are on page 38.

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

Victoria Morgan
Editor, *Student Accountant* magazine



Published by the Certified Accountants Educational Trust in cooperation with ACCA.

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All technical content from *Student Accountant* is on ACCA's website

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

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TECHNICAL

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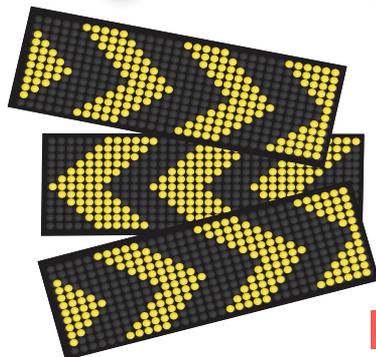
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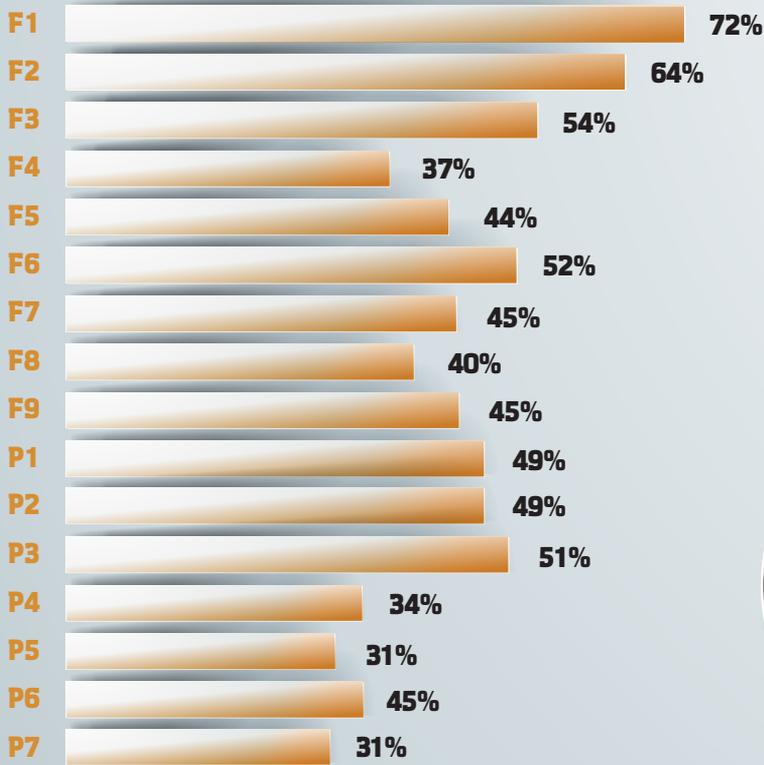
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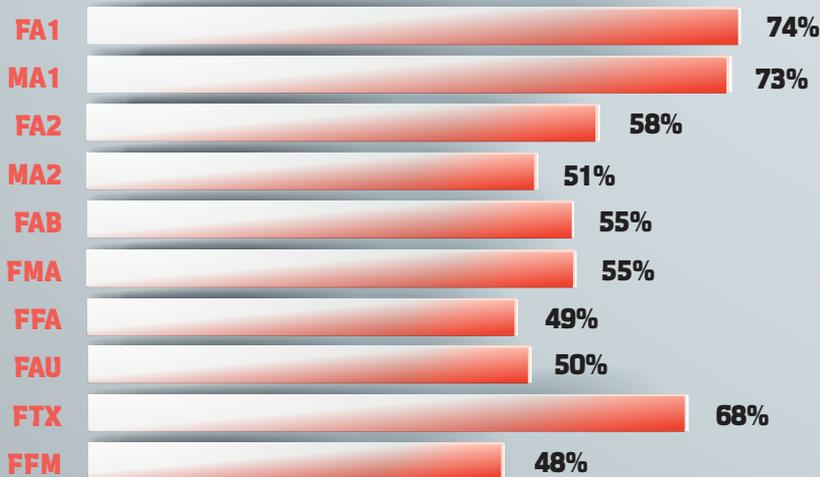
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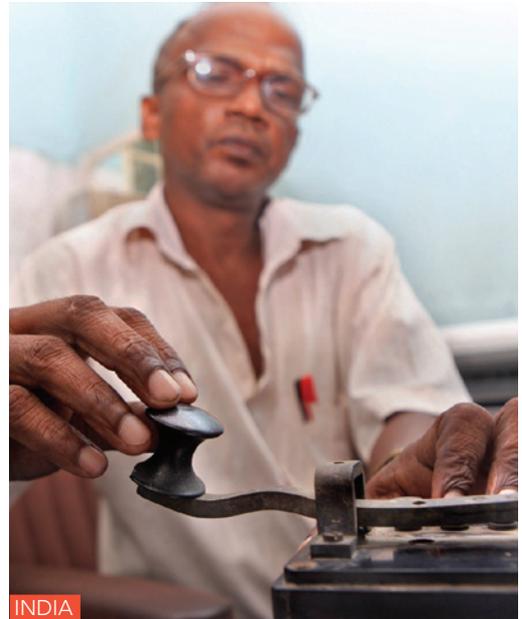
TANZANIA

TANZANIA
US president Barack Obama and Tanzania's president Jakaya Kikwete greet Tanzanians in Dar Es Salaam in July. Obama is seeking to build a new US economic partnership with Africa



CHINA

CHINA
July saw the opening of the world's longest and widest multi-pylon, cable-stayed bridge in Shaoxing



INDIA

INDIA
India's telegraph service was discontinued in July after 162 years of operation due to declining revenues



ZIMBABWE

ZIMBABWE

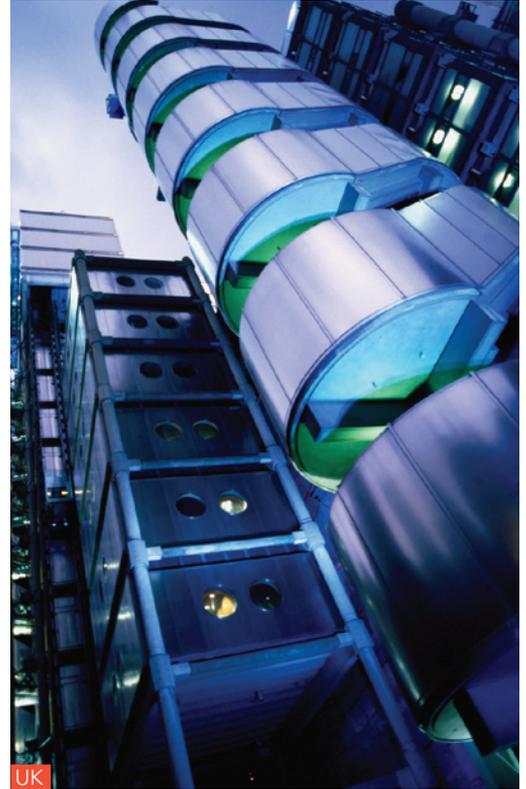
Voters in Harare wait to cast their votes during Zimbabwe's general election. The ruling Zanu-PF party won two-thirds of the seats

ITALY

The founders of fashion house Dolce & Gabbana, Domenico Dolce and Stefano Gabbana, received suspended prison sentences for evading tax on income of around €1bn



ITALY



UK

UK

China's Ping An Insurance has bought London's iconic Lloyd's building for £260m from German lender Commerzbank. The insurer is the first from China to buy into London's finance quarter



GREECE

GREECE

In a bid to boost tourism, the Greek government has reduced VAT on food in restaurants, bars, tavernas and hotels. The 10% cut will remain until 31 December

EY REBRANDS

Ernst & Young has been rebranded as EY. The firm also announced that Mark Weinberger has taken over as global chairman and CEO. He has been global and Americas head of tax, and served on the global and Americas executive. He was also assistant secretary for tax policy of the US Treasury under President George W Bush.

PwC WINS HSBC AUDIT

PwC has won the audit for HSBC after a competitive tender. The contract had been held by KPMG.

PwC also won the Hargreaves Lansdown audit from Deloitte. However, the firm is poised to lose the Unilever audit, which is going out to tender with the express intention of changing auditor to comply with best practice in corporate governance.

Meanwhile, EY has won the audit contract for Spanish airline Iberia, previously audited by Deloitte. EY already conducted the audits of sister company BA and parent International Consolidated Airlines. EY recently won the audits of BG Group and Land Securities from PwC.

AUDIT REPORT REMODELLING

Audit reports will be transformed under a fundamental reform, the International Auditing and Assurance Standards Board (IAASB) has announced.

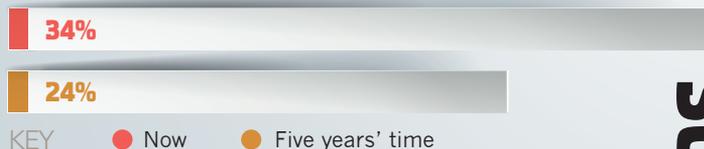
There will be more information about going concern, the auditor's independence and, for listed companies, disclosure of the auditor's engagement partner. 'We expect the proposed new and revised standards will result in substantive changes to how auditors contemplate and approach communication to users of their reports,' said IAASB chair Arnold Schilder.

BREAKTHROUGH HAILED

The apparent willingness of China's securities watchdog to

BIG BUSINESS TO MOVE OUT OF TAX PLANNING AS SMEs MOVE IN

One in three large UK businesses is engaged in tax planning, compared with fewer than one in five SMEs, a YouGov study has found. Adverse media coverage of corporate tax management is expected to discourage large businesses from efficient tax planning over the next five years – but also encourage more SMEs to engage in the practice.

LARGE BUSINESSES USING TAX PLANNING**SMEs USING TAX PLANNING****TRENDS**

hand over audit documents of a US-listed Chinese company to the US Securities and Exchange Commission is being hailed as a breakthrough in a two-year dispute. According to local media reports, the China Securities Regulatory Commission is now ready to transfer the audit papers, paving the way for fraud investigations to begin.

William McGovern, a partner at Kobre & Kim law firm in Hong Kong, told Reuters that if this occurs, 'the capital markets will be safer for investors and a new era of cross-border comity between the world's leading economies may have dawned'.

PARA 47 TOO FUZZY

The UN's sustainable development targets need to be clarified to be effective, an ACCA report has concluded. A survey of 49 sustainable reporting experts found

differing interpretations of what was meant by the sustainability commitments contained in paragraph 47 of the outcome document from the UN's Rio conference last year. The report, *Paragraph 47: International Perspectives One Year On*, is available at www.accaglobal.com/accountability

CONFIDENCE BOOST

Both business confidence and optimism about the global economy rose in the second quarter of 2013, building on the significant gains in the first quarter, according to the latest Global Economic Conditions Survey by ACCA and IMA (Institute of Management Accountants). Almost half of respondents – 47% – felt that the state of the economy was improving or about to do so, up from 43% in the first quarter. This is the highest level of optimism in two years and is supported by a stream of improving economic data.

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WE LOOK AT SUPERMARKET GIANT TESCO'S FORAYS INTO CHINA, JAPAN AND THE US AND ASK WHAT LESSONS CAN BE LEARNED FOR RETAILERS LOOKING TO EXPAND THEIR OPERATIONS INTERNATIONALLY. ALEX MILLER REPORTS

British supermarket giant Tesco has announced that it is entering into joint venture talks with Hong Kong-based investment company China Resources Enterprise (CRE), in an attempt to expand its presence in China.

Analysts say the joint venture would allow Tesco to reduce the amount of capital it commits to China, while still having a presence there. However, a number of observers are questioning whether the JV development in fact represents an honorable way of admitting that expansion in the country hasn't gone according to plan.

It is proposed that the combined CRE/Tesco company would be 80% owned by CRE, which has a stated aim of becoming the largest consumer goods company in China. Tesco would hold the remaining 20% stake. CRE would combine its 2,986 stores across China and Hong Kong with Tesco China's 131 stores and shopping mall business.

A statement from Tesco says: 'The partnership would bring together CRE's deep understanding of local customers, established nationwide infrastructure and proven track record as a partner with Tesco's global retail expertise, international sourcing scale and supply chain capabilities.'

However, at the time of writing, it wasn't clear what the new combined stores will be called, or whether the Tesco brand name will disappear altogether from the country.

BUT WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO TESCO IN CHINA?

The prospects were exciting when Tesco arrived in China in 2004, following a joint venture with the Ting Hsin food company, mainly operating hypermarkets and shopping malls containing Tesco stores.

While the likes of Wal-Mart and Carrefour targeted Shanghai, Beijing and other major cities, Tesco initially located to the likes of Qinhuangdao, China's largest coal port, and Anshan, an industrial town.

Tesco executives were convinced they had found the winning formula for the Chinese market and, as a result, began building huge 400,000+ square foot Lifespace malls including restaurants, cinemas and small retail outlets alongside the Tesco hypermarkets.

Tesco opened its first branded shop in January 2007 in Beijing, and by 2008 it had 56 stores nationwide.

It now has 131 stores in nine Chinese provinces, but it closed five stores during the last year and according to Yicai, a Chinese

financial news website, Tesco has failed to turn a profit from its China operation.

Building a retail chain in a country as large as China is difficult and expensive – doing so around huge multi-storey malls is even more expensive and time-consuming.

Retail analysts believe that, ultimately, Tesco failed to adequately adapt their offerings to suit local tastes.

It is not the first time Tesco has encountered expansion problems either. While it continues to operate in 12 countries including Thailand, Ireland and the Czech Republic, and boasts 350,000 employees, the retailer recently announced the closure of its markets in Japan and the US. Again, the alleged reasons for this included a failure to meet local needs.

Tesco launched its US venture in 2007, but observers suggest Tesco made the mistake of treating all the country the same and overlooking the importance of understanding more about local markets.

Tesco repositioned the brand as 'Fresh and Easy'. But rather than focusing on convenience and price, the idea was to focus on convenience and fresh organic food.

However, while organic stores and lifestyles are a well-known trend in

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JAPAN'S CHOOSY SHOPPERS SIMPLY HAD TOO MANY CHOICES – THE COUNTRY HAS A HUGE NETWORK OF 24-HOUR CONVENIENCE STORES, ONE EVERY 50 METRES IN MANY PARTS OF TOKYO

Europe, it appears this trend has not yet spread to the US beyond California and New York.

Fresh and Easy never made a profit and, following a strategic review in 2012, Tesco confirmed it was closing down its 199 stores. In order to exit Fresh and Easy, Tesco was forced to book a £1bn write down on the value of Tesco's assets in the US. In all, the US venture wiped £1.2bn from its profits.

It was a similar story in Japan. Tesco entered in 2003 with the acquisition of C2 Network, which at the time owned 78 convenience

stores. However, Tesco was dogged by ongoing trading losses at half of the 129 stores it owned when it made for the exit.

The retailer invested £250m in the Japan project, but simply could not establish itself in the market. 'Tsurakame' (the Japanese name for Tesco) only had a market share of 1% of the Japanese grocery market.

Tesco didn't appear to fully consider the cultural subtleties of the country. Although Japanese customers love to buy western products from Europe and the US, it is still important to present them

in a way that will appeal to the Japanese mindset.

Japan's choosy shoppers simply had too many choices – the country has a huge network of 24-hour convenience stores, one every 50 metres in many parts of Tokyo.

These overseas expansion difficulties explain why, in January 2012, Tesco issued its first profit warning in decades. Its full-year pre-tax profits for 2012 more than halved, representing the worst performance in the company's history.

But while the JV talks in China continue, if lessons have been learned from Japan and the US, then Tesco – the world's third largest retailer in the world – will bounce back to further cement its status, while other businesses can learn from their experiences.



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SIMPSON SCHOLARSHIP 2013

WINNERS

THIS YEAR'S SIMPSON SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS HAIL FROM SAUDI ARABIA, SOUTH AFRICA, SRI LANKA, VIETNAM AND ZIMBABWE. *STUDENT ACCOUNTANT* MEETS THE WINNERS AND FINDS OUT HOW THE SCHOLARSHIP WILL HELP THEM ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL

The Simpson Scholarship was set up in 1997 after ACCA member Muriel Simpson bequeathed in her will a scholarship to recognise the achievements of high-calibre students. It has been running in its current form since 2008 and has so far helped 30 ACCA students from 21 different countries.

For the chance to be awarded the scholarship, applicants must have

excelled in the exams they have already sat, and submit a 1,000-word essay on how the scholarship would help them achieve their full potential. As part of their prize, the five winners that are selected each year will have their exam fees, annual student or affiliate fees, and membership admission fees paid for them by the scholarship fund for up to five years, or until ACCA membership

is achieved – whichever happens sooner. BPP Learning Media, ACCA's Platinum Approved Learning Partner – content, also provides the winners with study materials for every ACCA paper they are studying.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOLARSHIP ►

THE 2013 WINNERS ARE:



RAMSHA KHAN
SAUDI ARABIA

Q What made you want to become an accountant?

A love for numbers and limited career options, to be quite honest!

Q How will the scholarship help you realise your full potential?

The Simpson Scholarship will help me to make a real impact in my career and

realise that nothing will hold me back.

Q When do you hope to become an ACCA member, and what plans do you have for your future career?

I do not want to rush the experience; I would rather proceed at a steady pace, working around my family obligations and other responsibilities. I feel duty-bound to serve my

country, which has given me so much. I want to help create a platform for women in Saudi Arabia, with equal opportunities for all for further study.

Q What advice would you give to other ACCA students?

Patience and perseverance are vital; don't ever give up just because you may not pass every exam at the first attempt.

'I WANT TO HELP CREATE A PLATFORM FOR WOMEN IN SAUDI ARABIA, WITH EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL FOR FURTHER STUDY'



**TINASHE ASHWORTH
MATAMBO** SOUTH AFRICA

Q What made you want to become an accountant?

My childhood dream was to become a professional accountant and I admired the career progression of many influential business leaders. Today's accountancy profession has not only

become more competitive and demanding, but a more vigorous level of professional qualifications and skills are now required from finance professionals. Having the ACCA Qualification will bring me into the rank of global accountancy professionals.

Q What plans do you have for your future career?

Gaining the ACCA Qualification will mean that I am not limited to the auditing and assurance profession, but that I have control over my future career. I see the ACCA Qualification as creating the entrepreneurs

of the future and tomorrow's business leaders, which is something that I aspire to.

Q Have you had to overcome any challenges on your path to ACCA membership?

I grew up in Zimbabwe and decided to move to South Africa to further my studies. Leaving my family and friends behind and settling in a new country was difficult while preparing for my first exam sitting. Also, keeping motivated is not always easy and you must be prepared to often sacrifice your social life with friends and family, but it will be worth it eventually.

'GAINING THE ACCA QUALIFICATION WILL MEAN THAT I AM NOT LIMITED TO THE AUDITING AND ASSURANCE PROFESSION'



RAIHANA MAHROOF
SRI LANKA

Q What made you want to become an accountant?

The passion I had for accountancy during my A-level studies made me want to pursue it as a career. Being an accountant will help me diversify and further my knowledge and skills in the different fields and enable me to deal with different business situations.

and achieve better results in my future studies, and this will lead to a successful and fulfilling career in the accountancy profession. Receiving this prestigious scholarship will be a stepping-stone to achieving my goals and making a positive contribution to my career and community.

ACCA Qualification requires significant commitment and focus.

Q What advice would you give to other ACCA students?

Try and plan when you want to complete your ACCA Qualification even before you begin studying. It is important to give priority to your studies regardless of what situation you are in. Aim to pass your exams at the first attempt, as it would be a waste of your precious time to have to resit. However, if you do have to resit, pick yourself up, assess your weaker subject areas and work hard on those. Believe in yourself and keep going. Aim high and work hard, and success will come.

Q How will the scholarship help you realise your full potential?

Aside from the financial benefits, winning the scholarship will motivate and inspire me to work even harder

Q Have you had to overcome any challenges on your path to ACCA membership?

The biggest challenge I have had to overcome so far is the lack of time to start revision well ahead of the exams, as I have had to take on part-time work to fund my education. Therefore, I have had to manage my time effectively as the

'AIM HIGH AND WORK HARD, AND SUCCESS WILL COME'



**HOANG THI NGUYET
CHINH** VIETNAM

Q What made you want to become an accountant?

I became an accountant purely by chance. However, I have since grown to really enjoy my role and I am proud to see the significant role played by an accountant and financial consultant in adding value to a business.

'THE SCHOLARSHIP WILL ENABLE ME TO OBTAIN A SOLID KNOWLEDGE BASE, WHICH IS ESSENTIAL FOR MY CAREER ASPIRATION'

Q Why did you decide to enter for the Simpson Scholarship?

I wanted a source of financial support so that I could concentrate on my studies.

Q How will the scholarship help you realise your full potential?

Thanks to the scholarship, I am more confident of reaching my goal of becoming an FCCA. It will enable me to obtain a solid knowledge base, which is essential for my career aspiration to become an international finance expert. It will also help improve my professionalism through completing personal performance modules, as well

as nurturing a principles-based approach through networking and best practice sharing via ACCA's network.

I hope to build a sustainable career in finance and also to help develop a strong finance community in Vietnam and, ultimately, support the transformation of our financial market.

Q What advice would you give to other ACCA students?

ACCA is a tough qualification, but I have enjoyed it so far. It is very satisfying whenever I learn something new or complete a paper. It is a demanding but rewarding journey.



MEMORY MUDZI
ZIMBABWE

Q What made you want to become an accountant?

An inner drive to help and work with small and medium enterprises and a desire to show young females that there are equal opportunities for all in many sectors.

Q How will winning the scholarship help you realise your full potential?

Winning the scholarship is an outstanding accolade, which gives me a competitive advantage now and in the future as it acknowledges my performance as a student.

Q What do you hope to do in the future?

When I become an ACCA member I plan to work with SMEs in my country. Working with and helping them to establish sound ethical policies will enhance the profession's credibility. It will allow the public to appreciate the role played by the accountant in nurturing small businesses and seeing them grow and compete with larger enterprises.

Winning the scholarship as a Zimbabwean will also increase

ACCA's profile and will help my fellow countrymen discover more about the qualification and what it has to offer.

Q Have you had to overcome any challenges on your path to ACCA membership?

My finances meant that I couldn't always afford the study materials that I needed. But thanks to the scholarship, I can now set aside more resources to join various study programmes now that the funding of my study materials is being met.

Q What advice would you give to other ACCA students?

The ACCA Qualification is not easy: much study planning and exam preparation is inevitable. It is important to maintain your focus if you want to achieve.

BEING ASSERTIVE

WE SPEAK TO SUZANNE HAZELTON, A LEADERSHIP COACH AND POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGIST, TO FIND OUT WHY ASSERTIVENESS IN THE WORKPLACE IS MORE THAN JUST A BUSINESS SKILL

Q Why does assertiveness matter?

Assertiveness is both a business skill and a life skill. In business it is useful to remember that you are paid to do a job. You will have a particular insight about the task at hand, and a particular perspective based on your familiarity with it. It is important that you develop your skills to be able to raise a point, a question or a concern, even with someone with more seniority. The best way to do this is to practise the skills of assertiveness. I say 'to practise' because, for most of us, these are skills that develop with use, and are not installed like an app, ready to go out of the box.

If you already consider yourself assertive, then take a moment to consider how much you take into account other people's opinions. Check you are not likely to become a bully. In the short term, bully tactics might work to get what you want – but very quickly you are likely to find others not wanting to work with you, support you, and might find yourself more isolated.

TAKE A LOOK AT SUZANNE'S BLOG FOR SIX WAYS TO INCREASE YOUR ASSERTIVE LANGUAGE ▶



SUZANNE SHARES A CHAPTER ON WORKING WITH OTHERS FROM HER NEW BOOK GREAT DAYS AT WORK PUBLISHED BY KOGAN PAGE ▶



THE ROLE OF LEADER DOESN'T START WITH THE TITLE – IT STARTS WITH YOUR ATTITUDE

Q What is assertiveness?

Assertiveness is the ability to put forward your needs, rights and wants and, at the same time, recognising that the other person will also have a set of needs, rights and wants that may be different from yours. How you reconcile any differences is more the art of negotiation. However, in my experience, many people often struggle with putting across their wants in business and in life, while others put out their opinions with little regard for others. Neither is assertiveness in action!

MY BOSS/PARTNER SHOULD ASK ME MORE QUESTIONS TO KNOW WHAT I THINK

Assertiveness is your responsibility. While a good leader or facilitator can do a great job of eliciting

thoughts and opinions, you can become more pro-active and more assertive and not rely on the skills of your manager.

TIPS TO DEVELOP ASSERTIVENESS

If you are more on the passive side, it helps to know what you want (note: this is what you want rather than do not want). And knowing what you want is just the first step; others are not mind readers. The next step is to be willing to state what you want.

If you are more on the aggressive side, ask others so that you are not bulldozing people with your thoughts and opinions.

The role of leader doesn't start with the title – it starts with your attitude. I believe assertiveness is an attitude. Develop yours today for more success and happiness in both your professional and personal life.

MY JOURNEY TO ACCA MEMBERSHIP

WE MEET DANIELLE SEBIRE FROM GUERNSEY, WHO RECENTLY TRANSFERRED TO MEMBERSHIP. SHE REVEALS ALL ABOUT COMPLETING THE PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENT (PER) – AND WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO FINALLY BE AN ACCA MEMBER

Q What made you first choose a career in accountancy?

The main reason I opted to become an accountant was the empowering choice I felt it could give me on how I wanted to live my life. I knew it would offer infinite possibilities on being able to take up roles anywhere in the world. Consequently, the core set of skills and knowledge that I have gained means I can work in a variety of sectors – for example, banking, private equity, working in practice or as a management accountant in other industries. My skills also provide a great foundation for working for myself and being my own boss – not only in an accountancy role, but in any given workplace scenario. These factors, coupled with the mental stimulation and my personal development, complement what I want out of a career. Also, I was aware that it would financially recompense me sufficiently to lead the life I want.

Q Why did you choose ACCA?

Studying for the ACCA Qualification was a simple decision. It was the most popular qualification to have when entering the finance industry in Guernsey when I was starting out. For me, it was the qualification that appeared to have the highest status and recognition among people within the profession – not just locally, but globally too. It was



also – very importantly – the qualification my employer wanted me to achieve and to finance on my behalf.

Q How did you approach the PER and answering the challenge questions?

In the beginning I created a PER file, into which I detailed the criteria of each performance objective for quick referencing. The ACCA website proved a useful resource in accessing this information, and I set about filing the content into different sections so that I could read through all the paperwork thoroughly. I also set up a diary that helped me to monitor my PER progress.

My manager acted as my workplace mentor, and the plan was to schedule in half-yearly reviews during which we could focus on my performances towards meeting each objective and think about setting new tasks to help me complete more. In preparation for these meetings, I would read through all the material relevant to each performance objective, and record details of any experience I may have attained towards meeting any objectives since the previous review. Not only did this provide more insight into my progress, it also allowed me to document the experiences I had undertaken while they were still fresh in my mind. This document became the foundation for my approach to answering challenge questions and proved a valuable source to which I would refer constantly.

I found the [*Answering Challenge Questions*](#) guide on the ACCA website really useful. It provides example answers to the challenge questions for 10 different objectives, which gave me more of an idea of what I

'I FOUND THE *ANSWERING CHALLENGE QUESTIONS* GUIDE ON THE ACCA WEBSITE REALLY USEFUL IN MY APPROACH'

was aiming to achieve. It also helped me when writing up my answers.

Once I had recorded my challenge question answers in *My Experience* I submitted them to my mentor for review.

Q How did you go about finding a workplace mentor?

Choosing my workplace mentor again was easy. The company I work in is small and there was one official training manager.

Q Do you have any advice for students who are currently trying to find a workplace mentor?

Yes. I would say to them it is hugely beneficial to pick a mentor who is in a position to tailor the work you carry out because you need exposure to a wide variety of activities, especially when attempting the four option objectives. It helps if your mentor is someone who can actively monitor your performance as well – a line manager, or someone in a similar position, would be ideal. If you are fortunate enough to have the choice of a few candidates, I would strongly advise you to select one who is genuinely interested in helping you succeed, has a good temperament and can set aside sufficient time to help you progress with your PER.

Q Would you consider being a workplace mentor in the future?

Yes, I definitely would. I personally feel it would be rewarding and a privilege to help an individual develop into a well-rounded finance professional and achieve their full potential.

Q What was your experience of the transfer to membership process and how did you feel when you finally became an ACCA member?

Once I had passed all my exams, completed the Professional Ethics module and signed off my PER, I applied for membership via the ACCA website.

The moment I discovered I had been admitted to membership still puts a smile on my face. The first clue was seeing a letter addressed to me with the ACCA letters after my name. I opened the envelope and discovered I was officially professionally qualified. I was literally beaming! I let it all sink in slowly and kept returning to the letter to make sure I had read it correctly. I even phoned ACCA to confirm that I was definitely now a member and that I could tell everyone the good news! I then went out to dinner to celebrate.

Q Since becoming a member, what impact has this had on your career and what benefits has membership brought you?

It is too soon to see any major impact membership has had

on my career to date as I have only recently qualified. However, there is no doubt that, now I am qualified, my career will progress to a new level.

Being qualified means that my clients can be assured of my capabilities. In addition to this, when they come to the office to have papers certified for compliance purposes, for example, I am now able to carry out this task rather than having to defer to a colleague. Also, I can assist friends and family when they need items certifying.

Q What are your future career plans/objectives?

My future plan is to keep building on the experience and knowledge I have attained. I plan on doing this by maintaining my technical knowledge through ongoing courses and putting myself forward for opportunities that allow me to advance my current capabilities. I have no intention of standing still. I look forward to gaining extra responsibility and challenges to keep me stimulated in my career.

ANSWERING CHALLENGE QUESTIONS: MY TIPS

- ❑ The three challenge questions for each objective are often related to each other. I would find that my answer to the first question would be relevant to the second question, and both answers again, in turn, relevant to the third question. To save time, and make sure I could provide answers that would link in appropriately across all three, I read the questions first and gave an example that could be discussed over all of them.
- ❑ Write up your challenge question answers in Microsoft Word before inputting them into *My Experience*. Doing this allowed me to keep an eye on my word count and provided an opportunity to check my spelling and grammar.
- ❑ Re-read your answers before submission. My initial drafted answers seemed fine, but they did not make as much sense when reading them through again a few days later. Some of the specifics needed further explanation and there were mistakes I had originally overlooked.

WHAT IS THE RIGHT ATTITUDE TO TAKE TO WORK?

BRINGING THE RIGHT ATTITUDE INTO THE OFFICE WILL HELP YOUR CAREER PROSPECTS. WE SHARE SOME DOS AND DON'TS

While it may seem obvious, displaying a positive and proactive attitude towards your work is absolutely vital for a healthy career progression. It can even be considered as a promotional tool in the workplace.

It is sometimes said that the world can be divided into two sets of people – those who are positive and provide energy and those who are negative and drain energy away.

The same rubric can be applied in the office environment – we all know the names and faces of those who are team players and work to the common good, but we are also only too aware of colleagues who have an adverse effect on staff morale.

Does it matter which broad group you belong to? Does being positive in the office involve major changes to your personality and is it even possible to change your behaviour if you are a natural shrinking violet?

It certainly does matter what group you belong to. A can-do, positive attitude can often result in a more enjoyable and efficient working environment. It is important to remain positive, even in stressful situations. This trait will be especially useful around month-end and more pressurised periods, when accountants are expected to perform within tight deadlines.

Phil Sheridan, managing director of Robert Half UK, says: 'The truth is that having a positive attitude is fundamentally key to success in today's collaborative and team-based work environment. The days when everyone got on with their own work tasks and were measured simply by the efficiency with which those tasks were completed have long gone.

'Instead, groups of people are brought together to share tasks – and those who react positively with a can-do attitude are those who

are regularly chosen for the most interesting challenges. This doesn't mean changing your personality and putting on an act – with a few small adjustments you can affect the way that people view your role in the office.'

A positive, can-do attitude is also one of the keys for building relationships at work. If there is a group meeting you are interested in, volunteer to get involved and speak up if you have something to contribute. Expressing your ideas will help you build new connections with colleagues as well as showing that you are keen to be a part of the wider team.

Another tip for forming new relationships as a trainee is to make yourself noticed – ask questions and show an interest in what others do in your department, as this will help you discover the right contacts to assist you with projects going forward.





It is important you don't become too relaxed around your peers, however. Always adopt an appropriate level of friendship with colleagues and try to avoid office politics. Resist the temptation to gossip and spread negative news about colleagues – it is far better to be known for your ability to be fair and as someone who doesn't take sides.

You can even take this stance one step further by finding something pleasant to say about your colleagues when you see them – but it has to be genuine. Positive feedback can encourage a colleague to reach their full potential and you will have contributed to that, a fact that will be noted.

Nicholas Kirk, senior managing director at Page Personnel Finance, says: 'First impressions count, so don't be overly confident or pushy, choose the right time to ask questions

ASK QUESTIONS AND SHOW AN INTEREST IN WHAT OTHERS DO IN YOUR DEPARTMENT

and make a conscious effort to introduce yourself to colleagues.

'In some cases it may even be beneficial to set up a meeting so you can properly introduce yourself, and don't forget to bring some prepared questions along to get the most out of the time.'

TOP TIPS: DEVELOPING THE RIGHT ATTITUDE AT WORK

VOLUNTEER

Don't wait to be asked to take on extra work – instead, keep your ears and eyes open for opportunities to support your team.

LOOK FOR IMPROVEMENTS

How could the office environment or your team's processes be enhanced? Good ideas are always welcome, no matter what the source.

TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Be known for a particular skill or even for arranging team social events – you will be valued by your team as someone who cares and wants to make a difference.