



# The best career advice I ever had

We asked accountants at the top of their profession what was the best piece of career advice they were given by their mentors and bosses – and what piece of wisdom would they pass on to the next generation.

As a manager, don't take on the hardest work tasks



Gay Coley

**Director of Public Programmes**  
Royal Botanic Gardens  
Kew  
Qualified at Touche Ross  
(now Deloitte) in 1985

I was running my first big audit team during my training contract. The partner in charge came to see the progress we'd made in the first week. I was proud of myself for tackling the most complex tasks. But he said: 'When you're the manager the biggest error you can make is thinking that you have more technical competence than the rest of the team.' If you don't delegate the most difficult task, you can't manage your team properly.

Prioritise well



Zayd Maniar

**International Liaison Partner**  
Horwath Mak  
(part of Crowe Horwath)  
Dubai  
Qualified at Shipleys in 2005

An ACA lecturer once said to me: 'The ACA is no disco.' He taught me to take a structured approach and to prioritise. Even today, when I arrive at my desk in the morning, there's plenty to do but it's important to prioritise. Don't spend the whole day working on one file, and then end up having to tell another client you didn't look at their file at all.



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Don't just take problems to managers – suggest solutions



**Josie Gowler**

**Chief Financial Officer**  
Office of the Police and  
Crime Commissioner  
Cambridgeshire  
Qualified at Deloitte in 1998

When I became financial controller for a £20m division of a consulting company in my mid-twenties, the group head advised me: 'Never walk into my office with a problem. Bring me a solution. I may not agree but your idea will be a starting point.' It was great advice and 90% of the time he did take up my suggestion. Now I'm chief financial officer, I encourage my staff to follow the same principle.

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Think of your career path as a climbing wall, not a ladder



**Liz Bingham**

**Managing Partner for Talent UK and Ireland**  
EY  
Trained with BDO

The best piece of advice I ever received was from my mum, who said: 'If you aim for the moon you might hit the top of a tree.' I would add to that by encouraging individuals to think of their career as a climbing wall, not a ladder. Some of the holds might appear out of reach and sometimes you have to go sideways, but there is always a path to the top.

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Arrive early



**Andy McLaren**

**Private Sector Partner**  
Beever and Struthers and a former  
Officer in the Merchant Navy  
Qualified at Kidsons in 1995

One thing that has always stayed with me from my time at sea is punctuality. If you don't arrive on time, it's symptomatic of a lack of professionalism and respect. I worked on a lock system at sea – you turned up 10 minutes early for your shift and did the changeover in the other person's time. I still turn up early for meetings.

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Be yourself in the office



**Sophie Bevan**

**Partner and National Head of Retail and Wholesale**  
BDO  
Trained at HW Fisher & Co  
Qualified in 1990

I was always told by my senior manager when I qualified: 'Be yourself. Being authentic is much more professional – and endearing – than putting on a front.' As a woman in a predominantly male environment, that gave me the confidence to embrace my strengths rather than my differences with male colleagues. Authentic leadership is the best way to gain respect and get the most out of your team.

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## Take on the tasks that scare you



**Andrew Ratcliffe**

**Audit Engagement Partner at PwC**  
Former Chairman of PwCs Global Board  
President of ICAEW  
Qualified at Coopers & Lybrand  
(now PwC) in 1980

A partner in my firm told me when I was thinking about taking on a new opportunity: 'The most rewarding things I've ever done scared me to death to begin with.'

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## Attention to detail is crucial



**Shakti Moti**

**Academic Head**  
Grant Thornton  
Mauritius  
Qualified at Flemings in 2012

A partner at the firm where I was training told me about the importance of paying attention to detail because this is how you make clients respect you. This may also help you put into words what clients think. You are not just an accountant, you are a business adviser.

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## Networking is for the long term



**Oliver Wright**

**Senior Manager**  
PwC North West  
Qualified at PwC in 2006

When I was approaching qualification, I felt under pressure that if I went out to network with a firm, or a group of individuals, I had to deliver work on the back of it. A partner said: 'Don't worry just build a network. Who knows where your contacts will be in a few years' time.'

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I was assigned to the audit of a van rental when I wanted to work with media clients. But I was noticed and got an offer to join a high-profile media client.

## Every job is an opportunity



**Michael Walby**

**Director of Professional Qualification Training**  
KPMG  
Qualified at KPMG in 1998

During my first year at KPMG, an insightful manager told me: 'Every opportunity has the potential for growth.' I was assigned to the audit of a van rental company – not appealing for someone who wanted to work on media clients. But it was a pressurised job where I learned the importance of planning and project management. My newly-learned skills were noticed and led to an offer from the engagement manager to join the audit of a high-profile media client.

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Don't chase promotions and cash. If you add to the skills, promotions will follow



**Surya Subramanian**

**Group Chief Financial Officer**  
Emirates NBD Group  
Dubai  
Qualified at Ford, Rhodes,  
Parks & Co in 1984

There's always a job in another organisation that will pay more or seems better than your existing one. But most people don't ask themselves if it adds to the value of their CV. Back in the early 1990s when I worked for Standard Chartered Bank, we had a regional CFO who said: 'Learn all you need to learn and promotions will follow.'

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