CAREER PATH

World of opportunity

Training as a chartered accountant opens doors – to varied careers and flexible working – says Mercer & Hole director ***Tania Phillips***

What attracted you to training as an ACA?
I completed a business degree at the University at Exeter, which included accountancy, economics and statistics modules. The great thing about the ACA qualification is it opens a lot of doors. You can stay in-practice in audit or tax, move in-house to work in a finance team, or go into other areas such as corporate finance – and you don't have to be based in London. I joined the London audit team at what was Crowe Clark Whitehill knowing I had three years to get a better idea of what I'd use my qualification for.

And then the move into corporate finance?
After qualifying, I did a year in audit, which included a four-month secondment to Crowe Horwath in Chicago – a great experience. I loved networking, and meeting new businesses and people, so I knew an in-house role wasn't for me. Corporate finance sounded really interesting, and when an opportunity in the Crowe transaction services team came up I grabbed it. I worked on AIM IPOs as reporting accountant, and financial due diligence for a broad range of transactions. I worked on the AIM flotation of AB Dynamics in 2013 – a great transaction that has been a long-term success.

And you took a sabbatical?
One of the great things about the chartered accountancy qualification is that once you have it, you have it forever. If you want to travel or start a family, you can do it, and return to work. I spent nine months travelling solo around South America.

I joined RSM's capital markets team in 2015, working on IPOs – long-form reports, working capital reports, admission documents and prospectuses. I loved being back networking and the thrill of when you complete, being on the balcony at the stock exchange.

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Whilst still at RSM I went on maternity leave, and then moved from London to Oxfordshire. After the move, I worked part-time at a small firm in Oxford, Shaw Gibbs, focusing on company valuations.

And then you moved back to full-time corporate finance?
When Covid happened, the whole world changed – especially for me, as I had twins in July 2020. The opportunity to join BDO in Reading came up and although a lot of that was working from home, it got me back working for a bigger firm. We completed a £500m+ fundraise for Aston Martin – such an iconic brand. In 2023, we moved to Buckinghamshire, but the commute was a challenge. I joined Mercer & Hole as an associate director. The clients and the culture are very different to BDO.

What is your current role?
I was promoted to corporate finance director at the end of 2024. I head up transaction services and Kevin Paget heads up M&A advisory. The team below us work across both transaction services and M&A. Between us, we manage, coach and mentor the team. We ensure work is distributed fairly so they get a real breadth of experience and see all sides of corporate finance work. So juniors work on due diligence, but also on completion accounts or SPAs and transaction structuring. We also get them involved in pitches and fee quotes. My career is so rewarding, and I love passing my experience on to junior staff.

Our clients are small-medium owner-managed businesses, mostly local, in Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. Deal values are varied but generally small. I manage the client relationships and building our pipeline.

And your future ambitions?
To progress to the next stage of my career, the key focus is building a solid pipeline and strong relationships with clients and contacts. A steady flow of work enables us to become more efficient, build a more scalable business, and create the capacity to develop and retain talented people. Mentoring junior colleagues is something I find most rewarding. I am passionate about helping the next generation build successful careers in the profession.