

Lara Akinboye, CPA, CFE, CMA

“Success is the sum of small efforts – repeated day in and day out.” – ROBERT COLLIER

Lara Akinboye approaches her goals with the quote above in mind. Lara is senior advisor at Durbin Bennett Tax Advisors Inc. in Austin. We recently caught up with her to learn more about her background, the path she took to become a CPA, why her volunteer work with TSCPA is so important, and more.

Where were you born and where did you grow up?

I was born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria. The city of Lagos, which derives its name from the state, is lively and thrives on lots of activities. The hustle and bustle lifestyle on the mainland, where I grew up, can be compared to New York. Growing up in Lagos was fun and exciting. Kids came up with innovative ways to play outside with friends, such as creating makeshift goal posts out of bricks to play soccer on sandy streets. Neighbors treated one another like family and believed the saying that it takes a village to raise a child.

Nigeria has a warm climate, so my first winter in Tennessee was definitely a culture shock. I moved to the United States in 2009 to attend college at Lee University with a double major in accounting and business administration. I graduated in December 2012 and passed the CPA exams the following year. After a few years of working in Tennessee, I moved to Texas in January 2016 to join Durbin Bennett and became involved with the Austin Chapter after my license reciprocity went through.

Tell us about your family.

I am the second of four girls, which meant my dad was definitely outnumbered when it came to “important” household voting decisions, including how or where to celebrate the next birthday party. Education was very important in our household, because my mom was a teacher. We started school at a very early age, so I was younger than most of my classmates.

My mom also operated a retail store. Whenever I was home for a long holiday in high school, I would go with her to the store and perform inventory counts and reconcile the physical counts to the records kept by the sales associate. I think that was my first real-world



accounting experience. I often joke that my true accounting experience predates my official resume. I have not started my own family yet, but I plan to someday. At this time, I am exploring Austin and building my professional network.

How is being a CPA different from how you imagined it would be?

The CPA profession thrives on networking. Being a part of TSCPA has exposed me to a large network of people, who are working in different sectors of the economy. Students often have the misconception that the CPA is limited to public practice; however, the

possibilities are endless – one could work in industry or government.

Furthermore, advocacy is very important for the profession. The Texas State Board of Public Accountancy has policies in place to protect the integrity of the profession, such as the ethics and compliance requirements to ensure CPAs are held to a higher standard. TSCPA not only keeps members informed, but also acts as a voice on legislative matters that could affect the future of the profession.

What advice would you give students who aspire to become CPAs?

Write down your goals and work diligently to achieve them in a set timeline. The journey to becoming a CPA goes beyond just passing the exams; it is everything in-between and afterwards. I was working full time when I studied for the exam, so I had to make a reasonable study plan within the confines of my busy schedule and be self-disciplined enough to stick to it.

The certification is the culmination of the efforts put in throughout the process. The entire process can be daunting to some, but if one treats the exam like a series of small tasks rather than a big mountain that one has to climb, it will be much easier to achieve one’s goal, which is what I did. Each day, I woke up with the mindset that if I study for a few hours today, I will be one step closer to being a CPA. The discipline and diligence with which one studies for the exam will shine through in how one approaches the job and life responsibilities.



Why is volunteering in TSCPA and your community so important to you?

Serving the community has been ingrained in me since I was a college student. Lee University emphasized the importance of benevolence and provided a lot of opportunities for students to give back to the community. For example, the accounting department ran the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program every year



during tax season and encouraged the upperclassmen to participate. I volunteered for two years. That experience exposed me to tax and prepared me for my job as a tax accountant after graduation.

When I moved to Austin, I was very excited to actively get involved in my local TSCPA chapter so that I can continue to give back to the community. I expressed my interest by actively participating in events and the chapter followed up with lots of opportunities for me to serve and lead. I participate in student outreach programs and events involving young professionals at the chapter, because I think it is important to communicate with the next generation of CPAs by sharing my journey while answering their questions and promoting the profession.



Who is or was your role model and why?

I have had several mentors throughout my career. People have stepped in for various reasons mostly because of my positive attitude and willingness to learn. However, the person who solidified my CPA path was one of my college professors, a CPA who not only encouraged me to aspire to be greater, but also stepped in to evaluate my progress from time to time.

What do you like to do on weekends or when you're on vacation?

I was drawn to Austin partly because of the live music scene. During non-busy season, my weekends often consist of music-related events, volunteering and mingling with other young professionals through groups such as the Austin Young Chamber and Texas Young Professionals.

My favorite vacations are trips involving family or close friends. I was fortunate to have a great group of friends from college who have now become like family. We kept one another grounded while in school, so it's only natural that we stuck together afterwards. Although we all live and work in different parts of the country now, we plan a few trips together every year to catch-up and celebrate our latest achievements. ❁