

# Chapter Presidents Discuss Business, Industry and Education Careers

By Rhonda Ledbetter | TSCPA Chapter Relations Representative

In this issue, we spotlight the current chapter presidents who work in areas other than public practice. They are in widely varied fields: one is in the finance department of a privately held company providing industrial construction services, one owns an accountant recruiting firm and one is a faculty member in the school of business at a large public university.

Those participating are, in alphabetical order by last name:

**Art Agulnek**, CPA-Dallas;

**Mark Goldman**, CPA-San Antonio; and

**Jeff Smith**, CPA-Corpus Christi.



**Art Agulnek**  
CPA-Dallas



**Mark Goldman**  
CPA-San Antonio



**Jeff Smith**  
CPA-Corpus Christi

## CPA Career, Job Responsibilities

Along the way, they have gathered a wealth of knowledge through:

- public accounting at a very small firm;
- contract work for the Resolution Trust Corporation after the savings and loan crisis of the 1980s;
- the accounting department at a company that operates convenience stores; and
- a Big Four firm, with extensive international travel.

In addition to developing their work skills, they had other experiences that shaped their careers. One person stated that his first accounting job was working for his father's CPA firm, starting in high school. By the time he was in college, he was working directly with clients. He left his principles of accounting II class early one day to accompany one to the bank and help complete an application for a line of credit. He felt odd being 20 years old, working with the banker as an equal professional. But the visit was a success.

There was also the shirt-and-tie lesson. Early in his career, one of our story participants had to personally deliver some financial

information back to a client's office. Because it was a quick trip, the CPA hadn't dressed for the occasion and was still wearing a t-shirt and jeans. The client didn't say a word, but the young accountant could feel the awkwardness of the moment. He resolved that would be the last time he wouldn't dress professionally for work, no matter how short the day was going to be for him.

One adventure involved a staff member's trip to an African nation that started smoothly enough. However, while he was there, a revolution erupted and the airport was closed, leaving him stuck for a week. Another adventure, in a developing nation, resulted from taking a cab (despite repeated warnings not to do so) when the prearranged driver didn't show up to go to the airport. They careened down dark, narrow streets, with the CPA terrified it was his last ride on this Earth. He was so happy to get to the airport that he gave the driver an extra \$50 ... not knowing that giving the U.S. money violated the country's currency exchange rules and could have subjected him to spending time in jail.

Discussion included variations upon a busy season. At the company in industry, it's the beginning of January for calendar year-end processing. The end of the fiscal year brings a crunch for the financial reporting. For accounting recruiting, the busiest seasons are January-April for hiring in industry and October-December for public accounting. Work compression comes during December and May at universities. Final papers are due, and exams must be prepared and graded.

## Work/Volunteer Skills and Chapter Involvement

The conversation turned to the skills that have helped in the volunteer arena. Learning to think like a leader rather than simply a member was cited. Another explained that being involved in a small company provides an opportunity to be involved in all aspects of corporate accounting. Having those different perspectives enables leaders to look at issues from several angles rather than having only one perspective.

Chapter involvement came in a variety of ways. One person started by volunteering for the committee promoting involvement in education. That led to chairing the committee, then service on the chapter board, then positions at the state level of TSCPA before being tapped as president. Another began by attending member involvement committee meetings, a springboard for participation in the chapter. He took on additional responsibility in holiday season toy collection efforts and moved up to co-chairing the committee. That led to the chairmanship of another committee and then election to the chapter board.

## Career Rewards and Challenges

Participants talked about the most rewarding part of their career. Smith enjoys being able to work with both entry- and upper-level



accountants, which in turn adds to his own knowledge. He also enjoys facing new challenges in an evolving business environment. Goldman feels that recruiting is a combination of human resources consulting and business development activity. He helps employers accomplish more by filling positions and helps professionals find fulfilling jobs in the process. Agulnek explains that, at a multinational firm, he traveled around the globe. He finds satisfaction in leveraging that during classroom discussions about opportunities in the CPA world. He also relishes mentoring students and providing career guidance through the internship program.

Like other professionals, those in the group face career challenges. There is never a perfect balance to supply and demand in accounting. At times, there aren't enough people to fill the jobs and at others there aren't enough jobs for the qualified candidates. Another hurdle is keeping up with changes brought about by advances in the technologies that provide easy access to a global market. It requires frequently updating software and hardware to improve efficiency and dealing in a global marketplace rather than a small-scale market.

### **The Next 10 Years for CPAs Working in Industry**

Looking ahead, data analytics was specified as the big thing in the next 10 years that will be a game-changer for CPAs working in industry. So much work on developing trends and consumer preferences is in progress, and so much can be done with the data that business has never had the opportunity to do before. It will be a big hill for CPAs to climb.

Another said that the biggest challenge will be the same for CPAs working in industry and those working in public accounting: the difference in work expectations between those nearing retirement and those who have recently entered the workforce. Most in the millennial generation have a different view of what a successful career and a successful life look like, as compared to older generations. Flourishing businesses must adapt their work culture. Those that do will be in a better position to compete for talent and, therefore, will have a better chance of thriving in the marketplace.

The third challenge is the turbulent environment arising from uncertainty regarding reporting standards. What will they be in 10 years? What information will no longer be necessary or will not be as important as it is today, and what will explode out of nowhere?

What outside influences will change the focus of tomorrow's CPAs in business and industry?

### **Advice to Students Considering a Career in Accounting**

The final topic was the advice they would give to students who are considering a career in accounting. Agulnek explained: "We start with the fact that the CPA certificate makes them more valuable in the marketplace. Then, when I talk to my classes about what employers look for during the hiring process, I tell them it's about more than grades – it's 'what have you done to become a leader.' I urge them to choose the company they're most comfortable with, not just the one with the highest pay. Find one where you can connect with the people in your interviews." He added: "Then give yourself a two-year period and get some experience. See what you enjoy doing and focus on that."

Goldman's advice was: "Decide very early that you are going to become a CPA. Don't look at your bachelor's or master's degree as the finish line. Instead, decide that it's when you complete your CPA certification. The cruel irony about the CPA certificate and your career is that the time when it is easiest to pass the exam, right after you have graduated, is also the time when it might seem to mean the least in terms of your career advancement." He continued: "As you proceed a few years into your career, then being a CPA has much more impact on your potential to advance; yet this is when it becomes much harder to pass the exam, because the information is not quite as fresh in our minds and we have developed a niche in one field or another. Make a conscious choice very early that passing the exam is the only option."

Smith suggested: "Make an effort to network with your peers in school, your professors and CPAs in several fields. Ask questions and talk with the 'veterans' about their experiences. Have an open mind and consider a variety of paths for an accounting career rather than focusing on only one. Participating in internships with CPAs, at different types of employers, is a great way to get a close-up look at what it would be like to focus in those areas down the road. Be prepared to work hard ... but be sure to enjoy what you do." He closed with: "Be involved in your TSCPA chapter! Look at the activities and find a way to expand your network by participating." ■