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ACCOUNTING CAREERS

Spring 1992

Accounting profession addressing family issues in the workplace

The accounting profession is often perceived as offering little flexibility when it comes to assisting employees in balancing job responsibilities with family obligations.

Over the past few years, however, the profession has been making gradual strides in addressing issues like flexible work schedules, parental leave, and child care. A number of CPA firms and other organizations employing CPAs have updated or are revising their human resources policies to address family issues in the workplace.

Recently, *Accounting Careers* contacted employers in the profession to find out about specific programs they have established to help employees balance career and family. From the largest firms to small firms to non-public practice, we found some interesting examples of programs that are working:

■ *Alternative work arrangements.*

A growing number of employers offer alternative work arrangements. Many employees need to work flexible schedules because of child-rearing obligations, educational purposes, or to care for a sick family member. The types of schedules range from full-time with adjusted hours or days to part time to seasonal work.

Veatch, Rich & Nadler, a 40-person firm in Northbrook, Illinois, has several women with children working on a part-time basis. For example, an audit senior had her first baby a year ago and has since been working a four-day week. Pearl Krieps, director of administrative services, says that employees of other firms in the area are aware of the firm's

flexible programs. As a result, Krieps says she often gets unsolicited resumes from people who want to move from a full-time to a part-time schedule.

BDO Seidman's flexible work schedule policy allows staff with two years experience with the firm to vary the amount of hours they work or vary the time period during which they put in their hours, according to Warren Holmes, national director of human resources. For example, individuals may select a full-time, regular schedule with no overtime, a part-time schedule (at least 24 hours a week), or an hourly schedule (less than 24 hours a week). Full-time variations include a regular schedule (five days a week @ eight hours a day), a compressed schedule (four days a week @ 10 hours a day) or a concentrated schedule (60 hours a week during busy season and 20 hours a week during the summer).

McGladrey & Pullen has successfully experimented with flexible schedules for 68 professional staff and managers in 30 of the firm's 70 offices around the country. According to Bob Hickman, national director of human resources, the key to success lies in the "flexibility" of an organization's human resources policy. "You need to take each situation on an individual basis," he says.

- *Leave of absence programs.* Sometimes there is a need for employees to take an extended time off from their work obligations in order to tend to family matters or other personal concerns. As such, many employers offer leave of absence programs.

One firm with an innovative leave of absence program is Grant Thornton, which allows individuals to take unpaid leave during the slow season (typically the summer) while retaining their benefits. The program provides for up to 120 days unpaid leave for all professional and administrative staff throughout the firm's 50 offices nationwide, according to Sandra Knipp, national director of personnel. She adds that the program is used mainly by female staff with small children.

Virchow, Krause & Company, a regional CPA firm headquartered in Madison, Wisconsin, has an extensive child-rearing leave policy which is separate from the disability leave women typically take when they have a child. "The policy allows women and men the opportunity to take time off before or after the birth or adoption of a child," explains Linda Bohman, personnel director.

While a large percentage of employees participating in alternative work arrangements and leaves of absence are female, it's important to note that a growing number of male employees have embraced these programs. For example, at CIGNA Corporation in Hartford, Connecticut, a male employee in the financial area took unpaid parental leave. "People admired him for his commitment to family," explains Patricia Pape, assistant director of human resources for the financial, systems, and marketing divisions. She adds that the employee was recently promoted.

■ *Child and elder care programs.*

With two-income families the norm, child care is a key concern for employers and employees alike. A typical child care program could range from

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FOCUS ON:

Tom Pickard, FBI Section Chief— Vouchers & Payroll

A significant growth in white collar crime over the past decade has created an increased demand within the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for accounting professionals. Nearly 1,300 CPAs and accountants are FBI special agents (out of a total of about 10,400), working on assignments ranging from the “accounting-specific” (e.g., the savings & loan crisis) to computer crime to fugitive manhunts. Tom Pickard, CPA, has enjoyed this diversity for the past 17 years, having worked his way up to a position in which he is responsible for, among other things, payment of every item purchased by the agency worldwide. Tom, who works out of FBI Headquarters in Washington, D.C., oversees a staff of about 190 employees in the vouchers & payroll section. Recently, he was interviewed by John Daidone, editor of *Accounting Careers* and a manager in the *Academic and Career Development Division*.

DAIDONE: What are some of your responsibilities as section chief — vouchers & payroll?

PICKARD: Basically, I oversee the payment of all items purchased by the FBI. These items can range from guns and bullets to cars and gasoline to office furniture and office space. Confidential expenditures (e.g., paying informants) are also part of the operation. In addition, I oversee the payroll operation for all 22,000 FBI employees worldwide.

DAIDONE: Describe your career path. Was the FBI your first job out of college?

PICKARD: No. My first job was with Touche Ross (now Deloitte & Touche) in New York City. I worked there for about three years and then decided to apply to the FBI. Although I enjoyed the work in public practice, I felt I needed more excitement. The FBI has given me an opportunity to participate in arrests, raids, search warrants, complex financial investigations, and to travel throughout the U.S.

DAIDONE: What happened after you applied to the FBI?

PICKARD: I entered and completed the 16-week special agent training program in Quantico (Virginia) and was assigned to the FBI office in New York City. The first few years there I worked on cases involving bank robberies and fugitives from justice. I also served on a squad which was responsible for investigating government fraud. This squad would investigate, for example, bribes of government officials and kickbacks for obtaining government contracts.

DAIDONE: Did your accounting experience help you much while working on this squad?

PICKARD: Definitely. Because many of the cases I worked on involved white collar crime, I couldn't have investigated them without a thorough knowledge of accounting and business practices.

DAIDONE: Could you give a specific example of how accounting has helped you in your work as a special agent?

PICKARD: Sure. Around 1979 I was assigned to the Washington office as an undercover agent in the ABSCAM case. You may be familiar with it. The case involved eight Congressmen and other government officials who were ultimately indicted for accepting bribes to introduce immigration bills on Capitol Hill.

DAIDONE: What was your specific role?

PICKARD: I acted as the chief operating officer for two large construction firms in the Washington, D.C. area. These firms served as “front” companies for our operation. Our strategy was to make it appear as if our primary investors were Middle East businessmen. Our role was to approach those government officials who we had evidence were “on the take” and inform them that these businessmen were seeking permanent residency in the U.S. In some cases, the government officials would ask our undercover agents for \$50,000 to introduce immigration legislation.



DAIDONE: *How did your accounting background help you on this case?*

PICKARD: When I was at Touche Ross, I had completed a few audits for construction companies. The FBI was impressed with my experience in this area and selected me to head the operation. In addition, because the sting operation lasted a year-and-a-half, I had to make sure that the business maintained a steady flow of construc-

tion projects in order to avoid suspicion.

DAIDONE: *Tell me about some of your other assignments.*

PICKARD: Back in 1985–86, I supervised the investigation of the Wedtech company in The Bronx. Once again, this was another big case that was heavily reported in the media. Wedtech was a small business contractor that did work for the Department of Defense (DOD). We suspected that Wedtech was defrauding the DOD and paying bribes to certain Congressmen. Our investigation involved examining Wedtech's books and records and determining how the company defrauded the government and generated cash to pay bribes.

DAIDONE: *Have all of your assignments involved accounting work?*

PICKARD: Not necessarily. The FBI encourages agents to work on a variety of assignments. For example, I was involved in a joint task force of the FBI, Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), and

the New York City Police Department formed to investigate the murder of an undercover DEA agent on Staten Island in 1989. At the time, the DEA agent had been meeting with a member of an organized crime family to purchase cocaine. My role was to supervise the FBI agents on the task force. About nine months into the investigation the agent's killer turned up dead. We prosecuted those individuals who had been harboring him.

DAIDONE: *Let's switch gears and discuss your education. Is your background in accounting or law enforcement?*

PICKARD: My undergraduate and graduate work were in accounting. I have a bachelor's degree in accounting from St. Francis College in Brooklyn and a master's degree in taxation from St. John's University in Queens.

DAIDONE: *Do you have any recommendations for accounting students wishing to pursue a career as an FBI agent?*

PICKARD: I think it's important that students get their degree from an accredited accounting institution and get their initial work experience in public accounting. They should also be physically fit since they are required to pass our physical exam before becoming agents. Finally, they should enjoy people contact since they will meet a wide variety of individuals in their work, from the boardrooms of the Fortune 500 to the homeless.

Note: Supervisory special agent Steve Markardt of the FBI Press Office in Washington says that students interested in pursuing a career as an FBI agent can be assigned anywhere in the country. They are typically assigned to a small city first before being sent to one of the FBI's "Top 15" cities (e.g., New York City, Chicago). He adds that accounting students may not necessarily use their accounting skills on their first job. Students interested in an FBI position should contact the applicant coordinator in their local FBI office.

Profession helps employees balance career and family

(continued from page 1)

an on-site facility to a referral service to emergency child care provisions. Another major concern, though not as widely publicized, is elder care. As the average lifespan for Americans increases, many employees are taking responsibility for the care of their parents and other relatives.

A number of employers we contacted offer some type of child or elder care program. For example, Price Waterhouse subscribes to a dependent care counseling and referral service that enables employees to obtain information about child and elder care facilities nationwide. KPMG Peat Marwick has a busy season daycare program which provides on-site child care for employees who need to work weekends in the office.

Ernst & Young participates in a program in the New York City metropolitan area in which emergency child care is provided for employees' children who are ill. Child Care Inc., a child care resource and referral agency, manages the program and identifies the child care providers in the area. If an employee's child is sick, the parent simply calls the provider assigned for his or her area and a certified care giver comes to the employee's home to watch the child. Employees can use the service free of charge for up to three days at a time, and a maximum of 50 hours a year.

- **Employee assistance programs.** Employees often experience stress and anxiety when trying to balance family obligations with their work. Some firms we contacted offer programs to

specifically address these concerns. Coopers & Lybrand's Chicago office provides periodic work and family support group meetings so employees can share concerns.

Opinions vary as to what job environment is best for individuals looking to balance career and family. Some feel that a greater effort is being made outside of public accounting. But as this article indicates, many strides have been made within CPA firms. A number of the larger firms have or are establishing written policies regarding issues like flexible work schedules and leaves of absence, while "personal" attention to individual needs is becoming more common at the small-firm level. The bottom line is that employers are increasingly realizing that the needs of the workforce of the '90s are much different than the needs of previous generations.

CPA exam will emphasize writing skills

Candidates planning to take the Uniform CPA Examination in 1994 can expect an exam which will be shorter in format (two days rather than two-and-one-half); reflect a greater emphasis on the auditing, government, not-for-profit, and tax areas; and stress an important new feature, the grading of writing skills, among other things.

Writing skills will be tested on three of the restructured sections: Business Law & Professional Responsibilities, Auditing, and Financial Accounting & Reporting—Business Enterprises. About 20 to 30 percent of these sections will be devoted to essay responses, and at least two responses from each of these sections will be graded for writing skills. Graders will be looking for various criteria in the essay responses, including:

- **Coherent organization.** Ideas should be arranged in an order that is logical and easy to follow.
- **Conciseness.** Candidates should express themselves in as few words as possible.
- **Use of standard English.** Spelling, diction, punctuation, and proper word usage should follow the norm used in most publications.
- **Appropriateness for the reader.** Some essay questions may ask the candidate to prepare a document for a certain reader (e.g., a client or colleague). The answer should take into account the reader's background, knowledge of the subject, interests, and concerns.

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150-hour graduates discuss benefits of the requirement

The 150-hour education requirement for students planning to take the Uniform CPA Examination is rapidly gaining acceptance nationwide.

As of March 1, 19 states have passed 150-hour legislation, and a twentieth, Arkansas, has changed its state board regulations to mandate 150 hours of education as a condition to take the CPA exam. The 19 states that have legislated change are Alabama, Alaska, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and West Virginia. While the date the law goes into effect varies from state to state, it is presently in effect in Florida, Hawaii, and Utah, with Tennessee the next state to come on board (effective date: April 14, 1993).

The 150-hour requirement from two graduates' perspective

Accounting Careers recently spoke to two accounting graduates from the University of Florida in Gainesville to get their point of view on the 150-hour requirement. The requirement, which went into effect August 1, 1983, calls for a bachelor's degree plus at least 30 hours.

Barbara Rinde, senior consultant for Deloitte & Touche in Tampa, received her bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of Florida in December 1984 and her master's degree in accounting in August 1986. She took the exam in November 1986 and passed on her first try.

"The 150-hour requirement helped me because there was certain material covered on the exam that I didn't get in my undergraduate courses," she explains.

The university's master's program offers three tracks: financial/auditing, systems, or tax. To acquire her master's, Rinde

chose the financial/auditing track, taking such courses as accounting concepts and reporting standards, accounting and auditing for specialized industries, and financial accounting issues and cases. Rinde also took courses in tax, business law, technical writing, public speaking, and psychology, among others.

Ken Cornell, a staff accountant with Ernst & Young in Atlanta since September, acquired his master's degree in accounting and passed the exam in May 1991. Cornell had previously taken the exam in May 1990 and didn't pass any parts. He attributes his success the second time around to the additional education.

"The technical knowledge I acquired from the 150-hour requirement made me much more competent and gave me greater confidence," Cornell says. "I went from memorizing rules to dealing with issues."

Cornell notes that the courses he took to get his master's degree were much more oriented to "group" projects. "We were given an issue, we'd research it, and then give our side," he explains. Cornell's course load included classes in corporate taxation, business valuations, foreign currency, computers, technical writing, and speech, among others.

Rinde and Cornell have differing viewpoints on whether the 150-hour requirement should be made uniform throughout the nation. Rinde is a strong proponent for a uniform requirement, noting that at a national firm like Deloitte & Touche, clients would prefer that CPAs in various offices have the same level of education.

Cornell, on the other hand, says getting his master's in accounting was a decision he made. "It wasn't something I had to do . . . I wanted to do it."