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Hello, and welcome to a series of podcasts brought to you by Accounting and Business Magazine. In this series, we'll be exploring current trends affecting the profession and how the professional accountant can respond to these changes. We speak to experts, including ACCA members from a range of fields, to bring different perspectives and practical advice.

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Hello, I'm Monique McKenzie, Global PR Officer at ACCA. Today we're talking to Poppy Brimson, financial controller and passionate young ACCA member, about the evolving nature of the professional accountant's role, what this means to her as a recently-qualified accountant, and how she approaches this landscape of change. Welcome, Poppy.

00:54

Hi, Monique.

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So we know that we're operating in an ever-changing environment, a situation that has been further exacerbated by the pandemic. Can you tell us how you view this moving picture with regards to your future career as a professional accountant?

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Of course. It's really clear that the pandemic's had such an impact on businesses, but I've found that it's actually provided quite a good opportunity for us as accountants to learn, which will help us in our future career. For example, the working environment has obviously shifted online, because we've all been forced to work from home. But this has provided the opportunity to use technologies that we might not have used before. It's provided a really good opportunity for us to become more efficient and to take advantage of those things. I imagine that these working practices will probably stay after we can go back to offices, things like remote auditing, something which you probably wouldn't have come across before, but which is probably here to stay in some respects. I've found that it's been quite difficult as an accountant to stay positive all the time. But it's been really important that we do embrace the changes that have been thrown our way. We've obviously been forced to work from home, as I've mentioned, and it can be lonely, and I'm sure lots of other people have felt this way. You don't have your team around you any more. But, equally, we have been able to be more flexible in our working approach, working from home and doing flexible hours. I don't think these things were really thought of in every business before. But now, going forward, there's this opportunity for people to take advantage of those things. I wouldn't be surprised if it became more normal in the business environment.

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Personally, as well, it did bring about a new job opportunity, which was really exciting. At the start of 2020, I never would have thought that, a year later, I'd be starting a new role. It's really made me think and realise that my career wasn't mapped out in the way that I thought. I always assumed that I'd stay

in practice and work my way up there. But it just shows how quickly things can change and how you really need to be flexible and take advantage of opportunities as they arise. You just never know what's around the corner or what's going to be presented to you. So it's important to stay flexible. I have found that accountancy has so many different applications, having met lots of people who are on my exam courses and other ACCA members. It just makes you realise that you don't necessarily have to be an accountant. If I really wanted to, I know I've got the knowledge and transferrable skills to go and do something else, start my own business, move into other industries. I don't have any intention of doing that. But it's nice to know that you have the skills to do so.

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Definitely true. Do you have a particular end goal in mind, to be CEO or CFO of a company, for example? How might you work towards this? What does success look like for you?

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If you'd asked me this a year ago, my answer would have been very different to now, purely because I've now changed jobs. I used to be in practice and now I've moved into industry. To be honest, it was something that I never thought I do. I thought my career would be in practice, and my end goal was always to become an audit partner, because I worked in audit. But now, having been in industry for a couple of months, I'm really enjoying it and now I'd love to be a finance director one day, which again just shows that, with accountancy, there are lots of different routes I could go down in order to achieve a successful career. I do know that there's lots I need to do in order to achieve this goal. It's obviously a difficult job being a finance director, and I know that I need to stay up to date with my knowledge, but really just gain as much experience as I can, and only time will give me that experience.

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I'm trying really hard and I am constantly learning new skills and gaining new areas of knowledge in my role. I'm learning things every day. Working in a business is very different to working in practice. Although there are lots of transferrable skills and there are some similarities, it's obviously a completely different job. I'm really enjoying it, but I appreciate that there's lots to learn in order to become a finance director. I know that I need to keep learning and developing over the next few years.

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Everyone has their own personal goals. But my personal career goal has always been to achieve my end goal before I was 30. So I'd like to think that I'm on track to do that. But I also think it's really important to be happy in your career and the role you're doing. It's so much easier for me to do a job that I love. It makes you want to go to work, it makes you want to work harder and achieve things for the business that you're working for. It keeps me really motivated. So yes, I think it's really important to enjoy whatever role it is that you're doing. And I certainly do.

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As you continue to learn within your career, how will you ensure that you keep yourself relevant and up to date?

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As I say, continuous, ongoing learning is one of the main ways that I can stay up to date. I know there's so much to learn from the business and from my day job but, equally, there's so much available online that I can do personally in order to make sure that I do stay up to date. There are lots of different websites, but I've personally found that ACCA provide lots of really useful learning material, you're often getting emails with lots of useful bits. Although I must admit I don't read all of it, there are some really useful pieces of information that I would recommend taking advantage of, because there's always something new to learn, and anyone can learn new things. I also think that speaking to others about their experiences, learning from them, is another really good way that I'm going to learn and develop. At the business that I'm in, there are lots of people who have been there for a number of years, they have really good experience of the company and their processes. For me, just continuing to talk to them is going to be a great way to learn things about the business that I didn't know before. I'm definitely someone who asks lots of questions. So I'd say don't be afraid to ask too many questions. Asking the right questions is a great way of learning, and people will appreciate that you want to learn and you're trying your best to help the company. When I was in practice in particular, I found that networking was a great way to learn about other sectors and industries. Even though I've moved into industry, it is something that I do want to keep doing. Once we can attend networking events again, I definitely want to go. You meet so many people, I've met so many great people from all different sectors and professions. And I've made some really good friends. Again, I'm an accountant, but I've met lots of people who are solicitors and financial planners, and there are things that you can learn from them. Although it's not directly relevant to your role, you learn really good pieces of information that might help you at some point in your career.

08:19

What are the challenges you face in keeping yourself up to date in this dynamic marketplace?

08:26

I think the last year has shown how important it is to be on top of lots of things. It's really shown that there's new places and areas that we'll be able to learn in. But keeping on top of things like cash flows and contingency planning and having technology in place are things that people might not have necessarily thought about before. But the last year has shown how important these things are. It does also show what a challenge life in the business world can be, because you can't always predict what's going to happen. So it's definitely a challenge not being able to predict those things. But things like contingency planning and having relevant technologies in place are probably things which businesses will have in place going forward, so that we can be better equipped should any other challenges be thrown our way. Things like Brexit are also quite challenging. It obviously went on for a while. And lots of things changed with regards to the borders at the start of January, which is when I joined industry from practice. So it definitely threw lots of challenges my way quite early on in my role, but it's been really good, because I might not have come across this kind of stuff if I hadn't moved into industry. Again, it's just been a really good place to learn things that I might not necessarily have learnt before. One of the other challenges is technology. Although it's great and it provides an opportunity to improve processes and become more efficient, it's always changing.

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There are always new products out on the market. It can be quite daunting, because there is so much available that you can use and so much that you could take advantage of. But, from a personal perspective, I think that you just don't know what might happen or how your career might change or how your personal life might change. So that is a personal challenge. Although you think you're on one path, from a career perspective, you never quite know what life's going to throw your way, what opportunities may arise that might completely change your career path. So much has changed in the last year. And I do think that it will continue to change in the next few years, in particular in relation to technology. For now, I think it's really important for me to stay positive, embrace changes, and just keep learning and developing, trying my best, taking things as they come and approaching challenges as they arise.

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Of course. Do you think young members are well equipped to manage those uncertainties that you've mentioned?

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Yes, I do think young members are well equipped. Lots of us grew up with technology, we had lots of technology around us at school. So that kind of thing is sort of second nature to us, and we're able to use and apply that in our jobs. But obviously, we are new and young in terms of experience, so there are going to be lots of things that we're going to need other people to help us with. I know that ACCA has the mentoring scheme, which I've taken advantage of. And that's been a really good way to gain knowledge and experience from other more experienced members. That's another way that young members can make sure that they are better equipped to manage uncertainties. But, equally, as I've mentioned before, you don't necessarily know what's around the corner. You can be as well-equipped as possible, but you just don't know what life's going to throw at you. So sometimes you've got to manage those uncertainties as they arise.

12:09

We're out of time, so I just want to thank you very much, Poppy, for participating today.

12:14

No worries at all.

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We hope you enjoyed this podcast. If so, please like, subscribe and share it with colleagues who might also find it useful. For more insights from Accounting and Business Magazine, visit abmagazine.accaglobal.com.

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